



# Overall LDS Growth Trend Case Studies

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## Rapid LDS Growth in Cote d'Ivoire - Summary, Analysis, and Implications for Future Growth

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### Overview

Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) is a French-speaking West African nation inhabited by 23.7 million people. Approximately 82 ethnolinguistic peoples inhabit Cote d'Ivoire. [\[1\]](#) Some of the most prominent groups include the Baoulé, Dan, Bété, Attié, Wè, Fula, and Jula. The GDP per capita for Cote d'Ivoire in 2015 was \$3,300 – six percent of the GDP per capita for the United States. Political stability was only recently established in the early 2010s as two civil wars occurred in 2002 and 2010.

The Church in Cote d'Ivoire has experienced some of the most impressive LDS growth trends in the worldwide Church within the past decade. Since year-end 2012, the LDS Church has reported accelerated membership growth, congregational growth, and national outreach expansion. Annual membership growth rates have held steady at approximately 20% every year since 2013. As a result, the number of members increased from 18,602 at year-end 2012 to 32,258 at year-end 2015. The number of official congregations (e.g. wards and branches) increased from 53 in 2012 to 176 as of October 2016. The number of cities with an official ward or branch more than quadrupled from seven at the beginning of 2012 to 36 in October 2016. These developments stand in stark contrast to the preceding decade from year-end 2001 to year-end 2011 when church membership increased from 6,893 to 16,248, the number of congregations increased from 18 to 42, and number of cities with a ward or branch increased from three to seven. Rapid growth during the early 2010s necessitated the organization of a second Ivorian mission in 2014.

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This case study reviews the history of LDS growth trends in Cote d'Ivoire from 1988-2003, 2004-2011, and 2012-present. Factors that appear to have initiated rapid LDS growth in Cote d'Ivoire in recent years are identified in the analysis section. Opportunities for continued national outreach expansion and church growth in Cote d'Ivoire are evaluated. Prospects for the application of strategies to replicate similar growth outcomes in other nations are explored. Challenges to future growth are examined. The size and growth trends of other proselytism-focused, nontraditional religious groups are summarized. Limitations to this case study are identified and prospects for future growth are predicted.

NOTE: City population data was obtained from the 2014 Ivorian Census.

### LDS Growth Trends

#### 1988-2003

The Church established branches in three cities (Abidjan, Bouake, and Yamoussoukro) within less than five years following the arrival of full-time missionaries to Cote d'Ivoire in 1988. However, no additional cities opened for missionary activity or had branches organized between 1993 and 2003. Essentially all missionary and church growth efforts between the late 1980s and early 2000s concentrated on the establishment of a center of strength in Abidjan due to its large population, good accessibility, and growing LDS membership. Initial missionary efforts in Abidjan during the late 1980s and 1990s yielded good results. The Church in Abidjan reported 13 wards and two stakes in 2000 – only 12 years following the organization of the first branch and the arrival of the first missionaries. Stagnant growth occurred in Yamoussoukro as no new branches were organized during this period. Slow growth appeared to occur in Bouake as a second branch was organized sometime during the 1990s or early 2000s. However, both Bouake branches were discontinued and missionaries were removed from the city in the mid-2000s due to the onset of the First Ivorian Civil War.

Black Africans from Cote d'Ivoire and other West African nations appeared to constitute the majority of missionaries assigned to

Cote d'Ivoire during the late 1980s and 1990s. However, white North American and European missionaries also appeared to serve in sizable numbers until 2004 when all non-Ivorian missionaries were evacuated due to the civil war.

By year-end 2003, the Church operated official congregations in Abidjan (20), Bouake (2), Anyama (1), and Yamoussoukro (1).

## **2004-2011**

The Church organized its first official branches in several additional cities during the 2000s, including Grand-Bassam (2004), Divo (2006), San-Pedro (2006), Ahoutoue (2009), and Bingerville (2009). Progress occurred in locations close to Abidjan (e.g. Ahoutoue, Bingerville, and Grand-Bassam) and in cities located within administrative districts previously unreached by the Church (e.g. Divo and San-Pedro). Consistent with a traditional interpretation of the centers of strength policy, only one branch was organized in each of these locations. Growth in active membership ultimately resulted in the creation of a second branch in San-Pedro (2009) and Grand-Bassam (2010).

Mission leaders focused on the organization of additional branches in Yamoussoukro in an effort to establish a second center of strength in Cote d'Ivoire. In the late 2000s, the Church organized three new branches in Yamoussoukro, including the N'Zuessy 1st (2006), Kokrenou (2008), and N'Zuessy 2nd (2009). The Yamoussoukro Cote d'Ivoire District, the first district to be organized outside of Abidjan, was organized in 2009 due to increases in active membership, the number of congregations, and the size and strength of local church leadership.

Ivorian missionaries and missionaries serving from other French-speaking African nations constituted the vast majority of missionaries assigned to the country during this period. Young elder missionaries from North America and Europe served in small numbers only between 2008 and 2010 due to political instability and safety concerns. Non-African missionaries were again removed from the country in 2010 due to the onset of the Second Ivorian Civil War.

By year-end 2011, the Church operated official congregations in seven cities: Abidjan (29), Yamoussoukro (4), Grand-Bassam (2), San-Pedro (2), Ahoutoue (1), Anyama (1), and Bingerville (1). Approximately 22% of the national population resided in cities, towns, or villages where the Church operated a ward or branch.

## **2012-Present**

Prolific national outreach expansion, rapid membership growth, and significant increases in the number of congregations have characterized LDS growth trends in Cote d'Ivoire since 2012. These achievements were made possible by mission and area leaders more aggressively opening congregations in unreached areas of the country, and further saturating Abidjan and other major cities with additional congregations. Rapid growth has occurred through both organizing new congregations from scratch (church planting) and dividing large congregations into smaller congregations that are more manageable for church leaders to administer (church splitting). The opening of multiple member groups in previously unreached cities follows a church-planting approach to growth pioneered in Eastern Europe during the 1990s and reinstituted in Sunyani, Ghana in 2010. These changes in church growth tactics reflect a revised interpretation of the centers of strength policy, namely one that encourages the steady opening of previously unreached cities to missionary work through the organization of multiple member groups in more populous urban areas. Although this new interpretation of the centers of strength model radically differs from its previous interpretation, the object of church growth tactics remains centered on establishing additional centers of strength, but through an integrative church planting and church splitting approach. The Church has thus far organized its first branches in nineteen previously unreached cities during the 2010s, including Bouafle (2012), Meagui (2012), Bonoua (2013), Aboisso (2013), Gagnoa (2013), Ouragahio (2013), Daloa (2014), Adzope (2014), Soubre (2014), Bouake (2015), Issia (2015), Abengourou (2015), Bondoukou (2015), Akoupé (2015), Duekoue (2015), Azaguié (2015), Lakota (2015), Sassandra (2015), Agboville (2015), Man (2015), Maffere (2016), Bangolo (2016), La Me [Ahoutoue 2nd Branch] (2016), Ayame (2016), Danané (2016), and Ananguie [Adzope 6th Branch] (2016).

Eleven of the nineteen cities where the Church organized its first branch during this period have since had additional branches organized. The Church simultaneously organized multiple branches in two cities where no previous ward or branch operated, such as in Daloa and Gagnoa where six branches and two branches were initially organized, respectively. Mission leaders continued to engage in church planting approaches in some of these locations following the organization of the first branch or branches, such as in Bouafle where the number of branches increased from one to three and in Gagnoa where the number of branches increased from two to three within less than one year following the organization of the first branch or branches in either location. Additional cities where multiple new branches have been created during the past four years include Adzope (four new branches), Bouake (four new branches), Abengourou (two new branches), Aboisso (two new branches), Meagui (two new branches), Agboville (one new branch), Azaguié (one new branch), Ouragahio (one new branch), and Soubre (one new branch).

Progress also occurred in augmenting the number of branches in cities where an LDS presence was established prior to 2012. In San-Pedro, the Church has organized four additional branches since 2013, thereby increasing the number of branches in the city from two to six. In Divo, the number of branches increased from one in 2012 to three in 2013 and five in 2016.

The division of wards with large numbers of active members appeared to be the driving force behind rapid congregational

growth in Abidjan since 2012 as the number of congregations increased from 30 to 91. Unprecedented growth in some wards has necessitated the division of a single ward into three or four separate units within less than 18 months. In some extreme cases, the Church has undergone a one-to-three ward division within less than 18 months since the previous ward division. Church planting efforts have appeared to be utilized in the creation of some new congregations due to the proliferation of as many congregations within so short a period of time. For example, the Church organized three additional branches from a single ward in the Abobo Cote d'Ivoire West Stake in mid-2016. Rapid congregational growth has culminated in the number of stakes in the Abidjan metropolitan area increasing from four to 10 as additional stakes have been organized in Port-Bouet (2012), Abidjan Niangon South (2014), Abobo East (2014), Abidjan Yopougon Attie (2015), Grand-Bassam (2016), and Dokui (2016).

The Church made significant headway in augmenting the size and maturity of local priesthood leadership within cities that have had a more recent LDS establishment. Growth in active membership and increases in the strength, maturity, and size of local church leadership has permitted the Church to organize ten new districts in Gagnoa (2014), San-Pedro (2014), Daloa (2015), Soubre (2015), Divo (2015), Adzope (2016), Aboisso (2016), Bouake (2016), Agboville (2016), and Abengourou (2016).

Only Ivorian and French-speaking African missionaries appeared to serve in the country during this period. Reports indicate that significant increases in the number of Ivorian members serving missions has resulted in the Church in Cote d'Ivoire becoming more than self-sufficient in meeting its full-time missionary needs. In April 2014, the Church announced that the Cote d'Ivoire Abidjan Mission would divide to create a second mission headquartered in Abidjan called the Cote d'Ivoire Abidjan West Mission. A mission branch was also organized in the new mission to administer to members who reside in member groups or outside the geographical boundaries of organized congregations.

Survey data from local members collected in 2016 indicate significant developments regarding the number of convert baptisms, retention rates, and member activity rates. A local member from the recently organized Man Branch noted 100-150 active members, over 40 convert baptisms within the past 12 months, and a one-year convert retention rate of 80-90%. Impressive findings were also noted by a member in Daloa who noted that his branch had between 100-150 active members, a member activity rate of 78%, over 40 convert baptisms within the past 12 months, and a one-year convert retention rate over 90%. A member from another branch in Daloa indicated that his congregation had 80-100 active members, a member activity rate of 70%, over 40 convert baptisms within the past 12 months, and a one-year convert retention rate of 40-50%. Significant numbers of convert baptism were also reported by a member in Aboisso who noted that his branch had between 60-80 active members, a member activity rate of 60%, over 40 convert baptisms within the past year, and a one-year convert retention rate of 40-50%. Similar statistics were reported by a member in Bouafle who indicated that his ward had 100-150 active members, a member activity rate of 65%, over 40 convert baptisms within the past year, and a one-year convert retention rate of 30-40%. Most members who completed surveys in the Abidjan metropolitan area reported 100-200 active members, a member activity rate of 50% or higher, and more than 20 convert baptisms within their congregations during the past 12 months. One-year convert retention rates in Abidjan widely varied by congregation from as low as 10% to as high as 80%. One member reported that the Cote d'Ivoire Abidjan Mission baptized an average of 60 new converts a week. More specifically, this report indicated that the mission baptized an average of 50 baptisms per month in the Adzope Cote d'Ivoire District, 25 baptisms per month in the Agboville Cote d'Ivoire District, and 35 baptisms per month in the Port Bouet Cote d'Ivoire Stake.

By October 2016, the Church operated official congregations in Abidjan (91), Daloa (8), Yamoussoukro (7), San-Pedro (6), Adzope (5), Bouake (5), Divo (5), Abengourou (3), Aboisso (3), Bouafle (3), Gagnoa (3), Meagui (3), Azaguié (2), Grand-Bassam (2), Ouragahio (2), Soubre (2), Agboville (2), Ahoutoue (1), Akoupé (1), Ananguie (1), Ayame (1), Bangolo (1), Bingerville (1), Bondoukou (1), Bonoua (1), Danané (1), Duekoue (1), Issia (1), La Me (1), Lakota (1), Maffere (1), Man (1), and Sassandra (1). Approximately 31% of the national population resided in cities, towns, or villages where the Church operated a ward or branch.

A map displaying the location of LDS congregations in Cote d'Ivoire can be found [here](#).

## Analysis

As previously noted, the Church in Cote d'Ivoire has experienced some of the most rapid growth of any nation in the worldwide Church within the past five years. This section examines what factors have contributed to rapid growth trends that have persisted since 2012.

### Strong Member-Missionary Participation

Good to excellent member-missionary participation constitutes the most important factor that has resulted in rapid church growth in Cote d'Ivoire within the past five years. Senior missionaries noted that one ward in the Abobo area baptized approximately 70 converts in a single year. As no full-time missionaries were assigned to this congregation due to safety concerns in the area, efforts to find, teach, prepare, and retain these converts were solely carried out by local members. Good member-missionary participation among new converts has had a snowballing effect. One member observed that new converts frequently invite their friends to church. The friends of new converts have also shared the gospel with friends and family, thereby accelerating growth and missionary work in many locations. Conferences with regional and international LDS leadership have also appeared to be well attended. A special conference in 2013 presided over by LDS apostle Elder Quentin L Cook had 9,693 in attendance, including 619 investigators.<sup>[2]</sup>

### African Full-time Missionary Force

With the possible exception of small numbers of missionaries from Oceania, the Church has only assigned native African missionaries to serve in Cote d'Ivoire since the removal of North American full-time missionaries in 2010. Cote d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Madagascar, and English-speaking West African nations (e.g. Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia) comprise the primary countries of origin for missionaries assigned to the two Ivorian missions. African missionaries in Cote d'Ivoire present many advantages for effective missionary work. First, the large number of Ivorian members who serve full-time missions within their own country improve the self-sufficiency of the Church in Cote d'Ivoire. As a result, fewer missionaries serving from other nations are needed to sufficiently staff Ivorian missions. Once Ivorian members finish full-time missionary service, they become an important asset to local leadership development in their home congregations and further the growth of the Church in their area. Second, African missionaries from Francophone nations usually demonstrate good fluency in French to adequately teach and proselyte. Thus, little to no language instruction, study, or practice is needed for these missionaries to begin missionary work. Third, many non-Ivorian African missionaries exhibit familiarity with Ivorian culture, society, and standards of living due to similarities in their home nation's culture and society. Fourth, black African missionaries present fewer safety and security concerns compared to non-black missionaries. Members and missionaries in many African nations report that non-African missionaries are often more susceptible to crime and violence. For example, both instances of missionaries who were murdered in West Africa occurred in Cote d'Ivoire and both of these victims were white North Americans.

#### Ivorian Mission Presidents

The Church has only assigned native Ivorian members as mission presidents in Cote d'Ivoire since 2005. Ivorian mission presidents present many of the same advantages to effective missionary work as their young, full-time missionary counterparts. However, native mission presidents provide an even greater advantage than nonnative mission presidents in regards to national outreach expansion and improving the self-sufficiency of the Church. Native mission presidents have appeared more eager to open additional cities to missionary work and organize new congregations in previously unreached locations. Possible reasons for native mission presidents exhibiting a greater focus on national outreach expansion may include a desire to more fully establish the Church in their home nation, personal connections with isolated members in cities where no LDS presence operates, familiarity with local geography and society, and awareness of effective methods to achieve growth that were learned and developed from previous mission presidents or church leaders. Additionally, several mission presidents and their wives have been born in cities where no LDS presence operates today, such as Oume and Dabou. As a result, there may be a stronger desire and interest among these leaders to establish the Church in previously unreached areas.

#### Aggressive National Outreach Expansion

The organization of wards, branches, and member groups in dozens of cities where no LDS presence previously operated constitutes a key catalyst to recent rapid LDS growth trends in Cote d'Ivoire. Compared to only five years ago, a significantly higher percentage of the Ivorian population resides in locations where LDS congregations operate. Several administrative districts in Cote d'Ivoire where no official congregations operated five years ago today have multiple cities with LDS branches or wards today. This achievement has appeared possible only through mission leaders regularly visiting isolated members in these locations, preparing these members for the organization of a member group, and training members for future leadership positions in an official branch. The steady number of cities opening to the Church within recent years suggests that mission leaders have consistently and diligently maintain a vision to identify, visit, evaluate, and prepare additional locations for an LDS establishment. The rate in which the Church organized official congregations in cities without an LDS presence accelerated to one per month during 2015 – an impressive accomplishment considering there were only 15 cities or towns with an official congregation at the beginning of 2015.

The rapid expansion of the Church into previously unreached cities has had a significant impact on overall growth trends. There were 58 wards and branches organized in cities where no official congregations operated prior to 2012, accounting for 32.8% of congregations as of October 2016. If the Church had not expanded into these additional cities between 2012 and 2016, there would be 58 fewer congregations in Cote d'Ivoire than at present. Significantly fewer members may have also joined the Church during this time if the Church had not expanded into these nineteen additional cities. As the average LDS congregation in Cote d'Ivoire had 248 members in 2015, there may have been 14,384 fewer members in the country than at present if no additional cities opened to the Church since 2012.

The proliferation of LDS congregations in individual cities constitutes an equally impressive achievement. There are many noteworthy examples of the Church quickly organizing a large number of wards and branches within a single city. For example, the Church reported eight wards within the Abobo District of Abidjan in 2011, whereas in late 2016 there were 33 wards and branches within the Abobo District. The number of branches in Daloa grew from zero to eight within an approximately two year period between early 2014 and early 2016. The Church established its first branch in Adzope in 2014 and in mid-2016 there were five branches in the city. The Church organized its first branch in Abengourou in March 2015 and two additional branches were organized in the city by July 2015. Mission leaders have appeared to systematically organize additional branches in these and other cities in order to improve accessibility to the Church, further saturate urban areas with congregations, and spur greater growth.

#### High Expectations

High rates of convert baptisms, rapid national outreach expansion, the proliferation of congregations in many cities, and often

good member activity and convert retention rates indicate that ordinary members, local church leaders, and mission leaders all appear to maintain high expectations for missionary work. The success of these high expectations appears attributed to an ideal combination of work ethic, enthusiasm to take the gospel further than it has ever gone in Cote d'Ivoire, and member involvement in the finding, teaching, conversion, and retention processes. One church member in the recently organized Man Branch lamented that the Church in Man continues to fall short of its potential and that growth has been limited. This member expressed this opinion notwithstanding the branch reportedly baptizing over 40 converts within the past year and 80-90% of members on branch records regularly attending church.

Ivorian member participation in family history and temple work indicates significantly high expectations and activity. The LDS Church News reported in 2013 that the Cocody Cote d'Ivoire Stake had the highest percentage of adults who have ever submitted family names for temple work in the entire worldwide Church, and that three of the top 25 stakes that have the highest percentage of adults who have ever submitted family names for temple ordinances were located in Cote d'Ivoire.<sup>[3]</sup> Senior missionaries who serve in Accra, Ghana have also reported large numbers of Ivorian youth who regularly attend the Accra Ghana Temple to do proxy baptisms.

### High Receptivity to the LDS Gospel Message

The rapid growth of the Church in Cote d'Ivoire has also strongly depended on high receptivity to the LDS gospel message. The Ivorian population exhibits some of the highest receptivity to the LDS Church and its teachings in nations with an LDS presence. One member indicated that excellent receptivity to LDS proselytism appears attributed to the high degree of religious participation and involvement of most Ivorians. This member also noted that Ivorians tend to be welcoming of missionaries and that it is unusual for missionaries to be rejected. High rates of religious participation in Cote d'Ivoire have also appeared to improve member-missionary participation due to greater interest and acceptance of LDS teachings in Ivorian culture.

### Opportunities for Additional Outreach Expansion

With the recent proliferation of cities with an LDS presence and accelerating membership and congregational growth, there appear many opportunities to perpetuate these growth trends through church leaders continuing to implement the recent interpretation of the centers of strength policy. The most populous unreached cities present some of the greatest opportunities for growth because high population densities maximize the number of people reached by LDS missionary efforts and provide easier accessibility to target populations. This section examines opportunities for additional expansion of the Church in cities with an LDS presence

#### Cities with an LDS presence

Abidjan – 5.05 million inhabitants – one LDS unit per 54,300 people

Many areas of the Abidjan metropolitan area continue to receive little to no LDS outreach, particularly within the boundaries of the Cocody Cote d'Ivoire and Port-Bouet Cote d'Ivoire Stakes. The average ward or branch in Abidjan continues to administer approximately 54,000 people within its geographical boundaries. As the Church has maintain a ratio of one congregation per 10,000-20,000 people within certain cities in Cote d'Ivoire (e.g. Adzope and Meagui) and in other West Africa nations (e.g. Bo, Sierra Leone), it appears feasible for the Church to organize four or five times as many congregations in Abidjan than at present in order to improve accessibility to the Church, spur greater growth, take advantage of high receptivity to LDS proselytism, and more thoroughly saturate the urban population with congregations and meetinghouses.

Bouake – 536,719 inhabitants – one LDS unit per 107,300 people

The Church reestablished official congregations in Bouake 2015. Currently there are five branches that operate in this city of over half a million inhabitants. Conditions appear favorable to double or triple the number of branches in Bouake in order to reduce travel times and spur greater growth. The organization of a member district in June 2016 may provide for accelerated expansion of the Church in the city due to the involvement of local leadership in church administration.

Daloa – 245,360 inhabitants – one LDS unit per 30,700 people

The Church in Daloa organized its first six branches in a single weekend during early 2014 – possibly the largest number of official congregations ever organized by the Church in a city where no official congregations previously operated. Growth warranted the organization of two additional branches in 2016 from the division of previously functioning branches. Good receptivity to LDS outreach may warrant the establishment of several additional member groups or branches in lesser-reached areas of the city.

Yamoussoukro – 212,670 inhabitants – one LDS unit per 30,400 people

The Church has experienced slow, albeit steady, growth in Yamoussoukro in comparison to other major cities in Cote d'Ivoire.



The Church operated only one branch in the entire city for more than 15 years until a second branch was organized in 2006. A church-planting approach to growth may accelerate congregational growth trends and improve accessibility to the Church. The recent establishment of a stake in 2015 and the organization of three new wards in Yamoussoukro in 2016 indicate that growth has recently begun to accelerate. The organization of perhaps as many as six member groups or branches in lesser-reached areas of the city appears sufficient to adequately saturate the city with LDS congregations.

## Cities without a Known LDS Presence

This section identifies several of the most populous unreached cities that appear favorable for the establishment of an LDS presence and church planting efforts. None of these cities had an official ward or branch as of October 2016. However, member groups may operate in some of these locations.

Korhogo – 243,048 inhabitants

The most populous city in northern Cote d'Ivoire and the most populous city in the country without an LDS presence, Korhogo is well connected to other major cities in the country and supports a population of approximately one-quarter of a million people. The Southern Senoufo traditionally reside in the Korhogo area and are 50% followers of ethnic religions, 44% Muslim, and 6% Christian.<sup>[4]</sup> The organization of a member group appears likely due to the large population size of Korhogo. Other prosectism-focused Christian groups maintain a presence in Korhogo. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses reported one congregation in the city as of 2016.<sup>[5]</sup>

Brozra (Bonon) – 92,523 inhabitants

One of the most populous unreached cities by the Church in Cote d'Ivoire, Brozra, or Bonon, is located between Bouafle and Daloa. The Guro primarily adhere to indigenous religions and appear to constitute the majority of the population. Prospects appear highly favorable for an official LDS presence due to accessibility from church centers in Bouafle and Daloa and a significant population. Additionally, the rapid growth of the Church in both Bouafle and Daloa within the past five years suggests that similar trends may occur in Brozra. It is unclear whether nontraditional Christian denominations operate in Brozra.

Sinfra – 80,658 inhabitants

Nearly equidistant from Daloa, Gagnoa, and Yamoussoukro, Sinfra presents excellent opportunities for a future LDS presence due to recent successes with church planting tactics in nearby cities, a population exceeding 80,000 people, and easy accessibility from nearby cities with an LDS presence. Other missionary-focused groups maintain a presence, such as Jehovah's Witnesses who operated one congregation in 2014.<sup>[6]</sup>

Dabou – 61,942 inhabitants

Located a short distance west of Abidjan, Dabou presents highly favorable prospects for future LDS outreach. No other city currently unreached by the Church is as close to Abidjan and supports as large of a population as Dabou. The Adioukrou people traditionally reside in the Dabou area and are 90% Christian.<sup>[7]</sup> These conditions suggest that the Church may simultaneously organize two or three member groups to maximize outreach and spur growth. Other missionary-focused groups operate in the city and report multiple congregations, such as Jehovah's Witnesses who operated two congregations in 2016.<sup>[8]</sup>

Guiglo – 52,544 inhabitants

Guiglo is located in Montagnes District within close proximity to Duekoue where one LDS branch operates. The city is located within the homelands of the Southern We people who are 60% followers of indigenous religions, 25% Muslim, and 15% Christian.<sup>[9]</sup> Recent rapid national outreach expansion in Montagnes District suggests that the Church could easily organize one or two member groups and assign full-time missionaries, especially if there are any LDS families who reside in Guiglo. Other nontraditional Christian groups operate in the city, such as Jehovah's Witnesses who reported one congregation in 2016.<sup>[10]</sup>

Dimbokro – 48,860 inhabitants

Located east of Yamoussoukro, Dimbokro is the eighth most populous city in Cote d'Ivoire without an LDS presence. The Baoulé people traditionally reside in the area and are 55% Christian, 34% Muslim, and 11% followers of indigenous religions.<sup>[11]</sup> Prospects may be favorable for organizing a single member group and a couple full-time missionary companionships, especially if there are any known Latter-day Saints who hold the Melchizedek Priesthood and reside in the city. Other missionary-focused groups operate in Dimbokro and have multiple congregations, such as Jehovah's Witnesses who operated two congregations in 2014.<sup>[12]</sup>

Agnibilekrou – 48,611 inhabitants

Agnibilekrou is located near the Ghanaian border in eastern Cote d'Ivoire between the cities of Abengourou and Bondoukou. The Anyin people traditionally reside in the area and are 55% Christian, 30% followers of ethnic religions, and 15% Muslim.<sup>[13]</sup> Two or three member groups appear likely to be organized in Agnibilekrou due to its sizable population, the rapid growth of the Church in nearby Abengourou, and Christian-majority population. Jehovah's Witnesses reported one congregation in the city as of 2016.<sup>[14]</sup>

Oume – 45,210 inhabitants

Oume is located in Fromager District between the cities of Gagnoa and Yamoussoukro. Most of the population appears to be comprised of the Gban people. The Gban predominantly follow indigenous religions (85%).<sup>[15]</sup> Prospects appear favorable for the organization of a member group due to the city's size and location between Gagnoa and Yamoussoukro. There is no information regarding whether other nontraditional Christian groups operate in the city.

Katiola – 40,319 inhabitants

Located north of Bouake in Vallée du Bandama District, Katiola is primarily inhabited by the Tagwana Senoufo and the Baoule. The Tagwana Senoufo are predominantly Muslim, whereas the Baoule are predominantly Christian (55%) and Muslim.<sup>[16]</sup> Relatively close proximity to Bouake suggests good prospects for the organization of a member group in the near future. It is unclear whether nontraditional Christian denominations operate in Katiola.

### **Other Unreached Places**

Many smaller cities unreached by the Church that were not previously discussed in this case study present good opportunities for growth. Examples of these cities include Gueyo, Tabou, Tanda, and Vavoua. Only one-third of the national population resides in locations where wards and branches currently operate, indicating a significant need to reach the remaining two-thirds of the Ivorian population.

### **Challenges for Continued LDS Growth in Cote d'Ivoire**

Future mission and area leadership reversing recent interpretations of the centers of strength policy poses the greatest challenge for future LDS growth in Cote d'Ivoire. Past experience in many areas of the world illustrates that the successful and efficient policies implemented by one mission president or area presidency can be totally reversed by the next group of church leaders, especially in regards to the maintenance of reasonably high convert baptismal standards and the opening of additional cities to missionary work. Recent success throughout the Africa West Area with mission leaders implementing church planting strategies may persuade future mission and area leaders to continue the implementation and refinement of these approaches. However, instances when church planting efforts have been partially successful unsuccessful may dissuade future leaders from continuing these approaches. Therefore, there is a risk that there will be a return to a church-splitting and more conservative interpretation of the centers of strength policy, which could result in diminished growth.

Long distance to the nearest meetinghouses and economic challenges constitute noteworthy challenges for growth. Local members have identified transportation challenges, poverty, and a lack of economic self-reliance as the primary barriers for the growth of the Church in Cote d'Ivoire. Some converts have appeared motivated to join the Church due to hopes that the Church will help alleviate their basic temporal needs. Unemployment and underemployment also pose difficulties for the Church to be financially self-sufficient.

The Church in Cote d'Ivoire has yet to reach the predominantly Muslim north where even the most populous cities such as Korhogo have never had an LDS presence established. Recent experiences by mission presidents and full-time missionaries serving in predominantly Muslim areas of northern Ghana suggest that moderate growth may occur in these locations due to lower receptivity. However, there have been extremely limited instances of the Church has proselyted in traditionally Muslim areas found in the northern interior of West African nations. It is unclear whether the Church in Cote d'Ivoire has implemented restrictions on teaching Muslims. Additionally, the Church does not have any resources developed to teach LDS doctrines and gospel principles to the understanding of those with a Muslim background. The development of these resources will likely improve receptivity and prospects for future growth if church leaders determine that such specialized resources are feasible and appropriate.

The lack of LDS materials and scriptures into Ivorian languages poses a challenge for missionary work, particularly in small cities, towns, and villages where fluency in French is less common. Local members have at times translated in order for missionaries to teach investigators who do not fluently speak French. Older adults especially struggle with French fluency.

### **Implications of Accelerated LDS Growth in Cote d'Ivoire for other Nations**

Factors that have facilitated rapid LDS growth in Cote d'Ivoire indicate good prospects for similar achievements in many other

nations. This section examines the implication of effective growth strategies in other countries in order accelerate growth.

## Nigeria

A population of 186 million, a significant LDS membership and leadership base, and the translation of LDS materials into several commonly spoken indigenous languages present excellent opportunities for accelerated growth in Nigeria. Only calling native Nigerian couples as mission presidents in their native country can improve the Church's ability to explore and expand outreach due to familiarity with local culture, indigenous languages (e.g. Igbo, Yoruba, Efik, Nigerian Pidgin English, etc.), economic and societal conditions, politics and government, and religious demographics. Nigerian mission presidents will also be more likely than foreign mission presidents to identify personal contacts in lesser reached or unreached areas of the country. There may also be a greater vested interest in helping establish a more widespread LDS presence in their home country, especially considering the large number of cities, both within and outside of predominantly Christian areas, which remain untouched by proselytism efforts. Nigeria also presents excellent prospects for the Church to systematically organize several member groups in newly opened cities for missionary work. The assignment of a single full-time missionary companionship to one or two member groups can help conserve limited missionary manpower while maximizing the potential reach of the Church among areas with large populations. To illustrate this strategy, if the Church determined to formally open the city of Iwo to missionaries, two full-time missionary companionship could be assigned and each tasked to oversee the formation of two member groups that meet in different areas of the city. Missionary living quarters can be doubled as the member group meetinghouse to conserve costs. There appear scores, if not hundreds, of unreached Nigerian cities that appear appropriate for these church planting efforts.

## Ghana

Ghana maintains a population slightly larger than Cote d'Ivoire with nearly 27 million inhabitants. Steady LDS growth has been sustained for many years although the rate of membership and congregational growth has considerably lagged behind the Church in Cote d'Ivoire. Limiting the assignment of only native Ghanaian couples as mission presidents appears warranted to help accelerate growth and improve self-sufficiency. Due to a long-term vested interest in mission outcomes, native mission presidents may maintain better convert retention and more sustained national outreach expansion in central and northern areas of the country where the Church has a very limited presence. There is a significant need to augment the number of Ghanaians who serve missions and native mission presidents may be more effective to work with local stake, district, ward, and branch leaders to help increase the percentage of young single adults who serve. A more aggressive expansion of the Church into central and northern Ghana appears warranted, particularly in regards to the creation of member groups and the assignment of missionaries to currently unreached cities. Prospects appear favorable for church planting efforts to be maintained in major cities such as Accra and Kumasi, and recently reached cities such as Tamale, Bolgatanga, and Aflao.

## Mongolia

There are three million people who live in Mongolia. The Church in Mongolia has experienced stagnant national outreach expansion for approximately one decade although significant expansion and growth occurred during the previous decade. A native mission president may be more effective than a foreign mission president in regards to the expansion of the Church into additional cities and towns, especially in regards to religious freedom restrictions and cultural/language needs. The organization of branches or member groups in lesser-reached areas of major cities may also help accelerate growth.

## India

India's 1.27 billion people remain minimally reached by the LDS Church in less than two dozen cities and towns. A native mission president appears desperately needed due to the complexities of LDS missionary activity in a predominantly Hindu nation that speaks more than a dozen major Indian languages. The Church in India has not organized new congregations in previously unreached cities for approximately one decade despite considerable progress by other Christian denominations during this time. Expansion of the Church into additional areas, a church-planting approach to growth in current LDS centers of strength (e.g. Bangalore, New Delhi, Hyderabad), and proselytism in native Indian languages has tremendous potential to accelerate growth.

## Comparative Growth

Within the past five years, the LDS Church has experienced the most rapid growth of any missionary-focused, nontraditional Christian religious group that operates in Cote d'Ivoire. However, other denominations report a larger presence in Cote d'Ivoire than Latter-day Saints. Evangelicals account for approximately 11% of the national population and report an annual growth rate of three percent.<sup>[17]</sup> Jehovah's Witnesses operate congregations in approximately twice as many cities and towns as the LDS Church. Witnesses reported 5-6% annual growth in the average number of publishers (active members who regularly engage in proselytism) within the past three years. The number of Witness congregations has increased from 247 at year-end 2013 to 293 at year-end 2015. Approximately half of Witness congregations operate in the Abidjan metropolitan area. Significant outreach has occurred in more than a dozen indigenous African languages. Witnesses operate congregations that conduct services or hold some meetings in many indigenous African languages including Baoule (33), Twi (10), Ewe (9), Jula (9), Attié (7), Guéré (4), Yacouba (4), Abbey (2), Anyin [Indenie] (2), Anyin [Sanvi] (2), Dida [Lakota] (3), Gouro (2), Senoufo [Cebaara] (2), Gban (1), and Ebrié (1).<sup>[18]</sup> Seventh-Day Adventists have reported relatively slow growth in Cote d'Ivoire within the past five years. The



number of churches and companies remained unchanged between the years 2008 and 2014 at 60 and 88, respectively. The number of Adventist baptisms a year has also remained steady at between 350 and 550 between 2006 and 2014.<sup>[19]</sup> The Church of the Nazarene reports 189 churches<sup>[20]</sup> and approximately 12,500 members in Cote d'Ivoire.<sup>[21]</sup> Nazarenes have reported slow membership growth in recent years.

## **Limitations**

Reports from missionaries currently serving or who have recently served in Cote d'Ivoire were unavailable during the writing of this case study due to extremely few African missionaries maintaining websites, blogs, or social media sites. Several reports were utilized from local church members or leaders. No confirmation was available regarding the process of opening member groups in previously unreached cities and whether full-time missionaries participated in this process. The Church in Cote d'Ivoire does not publish the number of member groups or the locations where member groups operate. The number of member groups that currently function in the country is not available to the public.

## **Future Prospects**

The outlook for continued growth in Cote d'Ivoire remains highly favorable, namely the ongoing rapid proliferation of new congregations and the establishment of congregations in additional cities and towns. The organization of a second mission in 2014 has appeared to play a direct role in the proliferation of LDS congregations in previously unreached cities. This greater mission infrastructure may accommodate larger numbers of missionaries serving within the country and maintain accelerating membership and congregational growth trends; however, sustained and rapid "real growth" will hinge on church leaders maintaining reasonably high convert baptismal standards, the continued implementation of the recent interpretation of the centers of strength policy, and the population sustaining strong receptivity to LDS missionary efforts. If the Church continues to maintain annual congregational growth rates of 30% or more a year, the number of official congregations in Cote d'Ivoire may reach 200 in 2017, 300 in 2020, 600 in 2022, and 1,000 in 2024. Similarly, if annual membership growth rates continue to be maintained at 20%, church membership may reach 50,000 in 2018, 100,000 in 2022, and 200,000 in 2025.

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