



LDS Growth Case Studies

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LDS Growth in East Africa

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Overview

Maintaining an official presence since the late 1970s, the LDS Church in East Africa has recently expanded outreach at an accelerated pace. Progress over the past five years has included the organization of the first branches in Rwanda, Djibouti, and South Sudan, the reestablished a branch in Burundi, the organization of the first district in Ethiopia, the formal introduction of proselytizing missionaries to Burundi and Rwanda, and the creation of new branches and groups in dozens of additional cities, towns, and villages in Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Tanzania.

This case study reviewed the history of the Church in East Africa; summarizes membership growth, congregational growth, and national outreach expansion; analyzes successes, opportunities, and challenges for growth; compares the growth of the LDS Church in East Africa to other sub-regions of Sub-Saharan Africa and with other proselytizing denominations, and predicts prospects for future growth.

NOTE:

Political organizations and geographers differ in defining of what countries comprise East Africa. In this case study, countries considered part of East Africa include Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda.

LDS History

In the 1970s, the Church established its first presence in East Africa as a result of American USAID employees and their families stationed in Nairobi, Kenya. In 1979, the first Kenyans joined the Church and in 1980 the first senior missionaries were assigned to Kenya. Registration with the Kenyan government did not occur until 1991 - the same year the first LDS mission in East Africa was created: The Kenya Nairobi Mission. In Somalia, the Church briefly operated a branch in the early 1980s for foreign members and temporarily held church services for American military personnel in the early 1990s. In Uganda, the Church held small meetings for isolated foreign members as early as the 1960s and established an official branch in 1990 - the same year the first senior missionaries were assigned.^[1] In Tanzania, the Church held its first meetings in 1991. In 1992, the Kenya Nairobi Mission assigned the first senior missionaries to Tanzania and performed the first convert baptisms.^[2] In Burundi, the Church organized a branch in Bujumbura and assigned missionaries in the early 1990s but closed the branch and removed missionaries shortly thereafter due to political instability and violence. In Ethiopia, the Church held its first official church services in 1992, assigned missionaries in 1993, and organized the first branch in 1994.

There were no known efforts to open or reopen additional countries to missionary work until the latter-half of the 2000s. A second mission based in East Africa - the Uganda Kampala Mission - began functioning in 2005 to administer Uganda and Ethiopia. In Rwanda, mission leaders began visiting isolated members and investigators for the first time in 2006 and evaluated prospects for initiating full-time missionary activity. In 2008, the first official branch was organized in Kigali and the first senior missionaries were assigned in 2010. In 2012, the Uganda Kampala Mission assigned the first young full-time proselytizing missionaries to Rwanda. In South Sudan, mission leaders from the Uganda Kampala Mission began visiting investigators and isolated members in 2008. In late 2009, the first official branch was organized in Juba. In Djibouti, the Church operated a group for American military personnel for a couple decades until the group become a branch in 2010. In Burundi, the Church

reestablished a branch and reassigned missionaries in 2010.

Countries in East Africa with a current or past LDS presence include Kenya (since 1970), Somalia (early 1980s-early 1990s), Uganda (since 1990), Tanzania (since 1991), Ethiopia (since 1992), Djibouti (since as early as the 1990s), Burundi (early 1990s-late 1990s, since 2010), Rwanda (since 2008), and South Sudan (since 2009). In late 2012, the Kenya Nairobi Mission administered Kenya and Tanzania; the Uganda Kampala Mission administered Djibouti, Ethiopia, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Uganda; the Democratic Republic of the Congo Lubumbashi Mission administered Burundi, and the Africa Southeast Area administered Eritrea and Somalia. There is no known LDS presence in Eritrea and Somalia.

Membership Growth

In the early 1970s, there were approximately 100 members in East Africa. In mid-1991, the Church reported 307 members in East Africa (258 in Kenya, 32 in Uganda, and 17 in Tanzania).^[3] Membership in East Africa reached 2,400 in 1993, 5,000 in 1997, 8,336 in 2000, 11,068 in 2003, 13,645 in 2006, 19,533 in 2009, and 24,126 in 2011. In 2001, there were 5,508 members in Kenya, 2,975 members in Uganda, 514 members in Tanzania, 421 members in Ethiopia, and 25 members in Burundi. In 2011, there were 10,922 members in Kenya, 10,368 members in Uganda, 1,450 members in Ethiopia, 1,096 members in Tanzania, 200 members in Burundi, 90 members in Rwanda, less than 100 members in South Sudan, and less than 100 members in Djibouti.

Annual membership growth rates in East Africa declined from a high of 122% in 1992 and 1993 to less than 10% in 2002 and from 2004 to 2007. Since 2008, annual membership growth rates have ranged from 10% to 18%.

Congregational Growth

In 1987, the Church reported only one independent branch in East Africa. The number of congregations in East Africa reached five in 1991, 19 in 1993, 22 in 1997, 36 in 2000, 45 in 2003, 52 in 2006, 64 in 2009, and 76 in 2011. In 2001, the number of wards and branches totaled 21 in Kenya, 12 in Uganda, three in Tanzania, and two in Ethiopia. In 2011 the number of wards and branches stood at 39 in Kenya, 22 in Uganda, six in Tanzania, four in Ethiopia, two in Burundi, and one in Djibouti, Rwanda, and South Sudan.

In late 2012, there were two stakes (the Kenya Nairobi [2001] and the Uganda Kampala [2010]) and five districts (Chyulu Kenya [1992], Jinja Uganda [1993], Dar es Salaam Tanzania [2005], Addis Ababa Ethiopia [2009], and Eldoret Kenya [2011]) in East Africa.

A map of LDS congregations as of 2001 can be found [here](#) and map of LDS congregations as of late 2012 can be found [here](#).

National Outreach Expansion

In 1991, locations with an LDS branch in East Africa were limited to only one or two cities in Kenya, one city in Uganda, and one city in Somalia. By 2001, the Church operated independent branches or wards in 12 locations in Kenya (Athi River, Darajani, Eldoret, Ilima, Ivongini, Killi, Kilungu, Kiminini, Kitale, Kyambeke, Nairobi, and Nthongoni), four cities in Uganda (Entebbe, Jinja, Kampala, and Mukono), and one city in Ethiopia (Addis Ababa) and Tanzania (Dar es Salaam). In late 2012, the Church reported an independent branch or ward operating in 24 locations in Kenya (Athi River, Busia, Darajani, Eldoret, Ilima, Kilili, Kiminini, Kisumu, Kitale, Kyambeke, Makutano, Matini, Mautuma, Mbukoni, Misikhu, Mombasa, Mtito Andei, Nairobi, Naitiri, Naivasha, Nthongoni, Nzayo, Ongata Rongai, and Sikhendu), 12 cities in Uganda (Busia, Entebbe, Gulu, Iganga, Jinja, Kampala, Lira, Masaka, Mbale, Mukono, Njeru, and Seeta), four cities in Ethiopia (Addis Ababa, Awasa, Debre Zeit, and Wendo Genet), three cities in Tanzania (Arusha, Dar es Salaam, and Mwanza), and one city in Burundi (Bujumbura), Djibouti (Djibouti), Rwanda (Kigali), South Sudan (Juba). The number of locations in East Africa with a branch or ward increased from three or four in 1991 to 18 in 2001 and 46 in late 2012.

Successes

The concurrent expansion of the Church into unreached areas of countries with a church presence and the opening of previously unreached countries to missionary work comprises the greatest achievement for the Church in East Africa in recent years. Since 2008, the Church established an official presence in Rwanda, South Sudan, and Burundi meanwhile simultaneously accomplishing significant progress opening new groups and branches in previously unreached locations in Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania. Cities, towns, and villages with an independent branch or ward in East Africa more than quadrupled in the 1990s and nearly tripled between 2000 and 2012. However the majority of outreach expansion in the past decade has occurred since 2008. Within the past five years, outreach expansion in Uganda and Ethiopia has surpassed efforts in all other East African countries. In Uganda, the Church opened eight cities to proselytism within five years whereas in Ethiopia the Church expanded its presence from just two cities prior to 2008 to six (Addis Ababa, Awasa, Debre Zeit, Wendo Genet, Shashemene, and Ch'iko) by late 2012. Noticeable progress expanding national outreach also occurred in Tanzania where the Church organized branches for the first time outside of Dar es Salaam in Arusha (2008) and Mwanza (2011).

One of the key methods the Church has achieved accelerated membership and congregational growth in East Africa has been through the process implemented to open cities to missionary activity. Instead of placing full-time missionaries in a city with no known members and no previously operating group or branch, mission leaders have carefully investigated reports of isolated members and investigators to assess conditions for establishing a group and later assigning missionaries to these locations. The delayed assignment of missionaries may appear as a barrier to growth but in actuality has propagated greater involvement of local members to development basic leadership duties prior to any permanent proselytizing presence. This has reduced dependence on full-time missionaries once they are assigned and strengthened local leadership, permitting the maturation of groups into branches. Member activity and convert retention rates are generally moderate to high in East Africa due to less emphasis on quick-baptismal tactics and strict baptismal guidelines that have demanded a certain level of language proficiency to pass a baptismal interview in the national language of each country.

The Church has conducted humanitarian and development work in many areas of East Africa prior to any formal introduction of an LDS missionary presence. Senior missionaries report that these efforts have coincidentally yielded convert baptisms and even the introduction of a church presence into some locations. International church leaders appear to emphasize meeting both humanitarian and proselytism needs in the region resulting in healthy, natural growth in many locations.

Opportunities

East Africa remain among the least reached areas of the world by the LDS Church notwithstanding high receptivity and large populations. Current estimates indicate there are slightly more than one-quarter of a billion people who live within the 10 countries of East Africa. Less than 10% of the population resides in locations where there is an LDS congregation for all countries in East Africa with an LDS presence except for Kenya where 14% of the population is reached. Most urban populations do not live within close proximity of an LDS meetinghouse and present excellent conditions for church planting. If mission and local leaders make coordinated church planting efforts, the Church could potentially experience rapid growth in many of the most populous cities and augment the size and strength of the Church throughout the region. The most populous cities in East Africa provide for high efficiency in missionary work due to large populations concentrated within small geographical areas. The Church has made few efforts to open new congregations in the most populous cities within the past decade.

Swahili is widely spoken as a language for interethnic communication throughout East Africa. There are significant opportunities for the Church to capitalize on the opportunity to utilize Swahili as a proselytism language for several countries in the region. The Church recently changed the proselytism language of Tanzania from English to Swahili to facilitate missionary efforts and gospel comprehension. All LDS scriptures are available in Swahili.

Challenges

There are few languages with translations of LDS materials. In 2012, the only indigenous languages in East Africa with translations of the Book of Mormon (entire book or select passages) included Amharic, Arabic, Kisii, and Swahili. Other languages that had at least one translation of a basic teaching or proselytism material included Afar, Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, Luganda, and Somali. In contrast, the number of indigenous languages with at least 100 speakers totals 120 in Tanzania, 83 in Ethiopia, 65 in Kenya, 64 in South Sudan, 41 in Uganda, nine in Eritrea and Somalia, four in Djibouti, three in Burundi, and two in Rwanda. There are 27 languages spoken by more than one million native speakers in East Africa without translations of LDS materials. Provided with the country where the language is most commonly spoken, these 27 languages include Acholi (Uganda), Borana-Arsi-Guji Oromo (Ethiopia), Chiga (Uganda), Dinka languages (South Sudan), Eastern Oromo (Ethiopia), West Central Oromo (Ethiopia), Dholuo (Kenya), Gamo-Gofa-Dawro (Ethiopia), Gikuyu (Kenya), Gogo (Tanzania), Ha (Tanzania), Kamba (Kenya), Kimiiru (Kenya), Kiwiliwana (Kenya), Lango (Uganda), Maay (Somalia), Makonde (Tanzania), Masaaba (Uganda), Nyamwezi (Tanzania), Nyankore (Uganda), Sebat Bet Gurage (Ethiopia), Sidamo (Ethiopia), Soga (Uganda), Sukuma (Tanzania), Teso (Uganda), Tigrigna (Eritrea and Ethiopia), and Wolaytta (Ethiopia).

Low literacy rates throughout East Africa pose a major challenge for church growth. In 2010, literacy rates were estimated at 87.4% in Kenya, 71.1% in Rwanda, 69.4% in Tanzania, 67.9% in Djibouti, 67.8% for Eritrea, 67.2% in Burundi, 66.8% in Uganda, 42.7% in Ethiopia, 37.8% in Somalia, and 27% in South Sudan.^[4] Illiterate members struggle to fulfill leadership callings proficiently because there are no audio versions of church manuals and many leadership responsibilities require basic reading, writing, and computer skills. Furthermore, employment opportunities are more limited for illiterate members resulting in less income, often lower living standards, and reduced financial self-sufficiency of the Church.

The Church faces the overwhelming task to reach rural areas where over 100 million people live in East Africa. Less than 30% of the population of all East African countries reside in urban areas with the exception of Somalia and Djibouti. If the Church were to operate congregations accessible to half the population in the region, more than half of wards and branches would need to operate in rural areas. As of late 2012 the Church in Kenya had initiated spotty efforts to reach rural communities (Chyulu, Kilungu Hills, and northwest of Eldoret) but in no other East African countries. Thousands of additional full-time missionaries would need to be assigned to each country in order to expand outreach into rural areas utilizing traditional church planting approaches in the LDS Church. Appreciable numbers of local members serving missions are only found in Kenya and Uganda and neither country appears capable of staffing the entire full-time missionary force for these country. The deficit in local mission manpower has necessitated the assignment of foreign missionaries to the region primarily from elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa and North America.

Congregational growth rates in the most populous cities in East Africa are slower than congregational growth rates for most major cities in Southern Africa, Central Africa, and West Africa. Provided with the most current population totals in parentheses, between 2001 and late 2012 the number of wards and branches increased by three in Nairobi, Kenya (4.6 million); two in Kampala, Uganda (2.175 million); and one in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (3.5 million). There was no increase in the number of wards and branches in Addis Ababa (3.2 million). On the other hand, during the same time period the number of wards and branches increased by 24 in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire (4.675 million), 19 in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo (9.6 million); 18 in Johannesburg, South Africa (8 million); 15 in Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of the Congo (1.69 million); 11 in Antananarivo, Madagascar (2.2 million); 10 in Lagos, Nigeria (12.8 million), nine in Harare, Zimbabwe (3.05 million); nine in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe (1.1 million); seven in Mbuji-Mayi, Democratic Republic of the Congo (1.66 million), six in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo (1.7 million), five in Lome, Togo (1.55 million), five in Cotonou, Benin (1.22 million), and three in Yaoundé, Cameroon (2.425 million).

The Church headquarters only two missions in East Africa to service approximately 250 million people. Few mission resources allocated to the region has reduced growth since the Church's initial establishment.

Comparative Growth

No other region of Sub-Saharan Africa is as poorly reached by the LDS Church as East Africa. Among countries with an LDS presence, the percentage of the population reached by the Church is generally 4-8% in East Africa, 10-30% in Central Africa, 10-40% in Southern Africa, and 20-30% in West Africa. On the other hand, the Church has experienced some of its most rapid outreach expansion efforts in East Africa among these four regions of Sub-Saharan Africa within the past five years. Church growth in terms of total congregations and nominal church membership remains extremely small in East Africa compared to other Sub-Saharan African regions. For example, the Church reports fewer members and congregations in East Africa than in Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, or the Democratic Republic of the Congo. East Africa is the only region that does not have a temple announced or operating on the continent and has only two stakes and five districts. Many other African regions experience self-sufficiency or near self-sufficiency in local members staffing full-time missionary manpower whereas East Africa depends on the international Church to meet its missionary needs.

Nearly all nontraditional Christian groups that engage in worldwide proselytism report a larger presence in East African than the LDS Church. In 2011, Adventists reported nearly 130,000 members and 287 churches in Burundi, 526 members and three churches in Eritrea, 186,000 members and 863 churches in Ethiopia, approximately 700,000 members and 4,451 churches in Kenya, half a million members and 1,559 churches in Rwanda, 17,400 members and 46 churches in South Sudan, 415,000 members and nearly 2,000 churches in Tanzania, and almost 220,000 members and 833 churches in Uganda whereas Witnesses reported 10,500 members and 202 congregations in Burundi, approximately 500 members in Eritrea, 9,200 members and 191 congregations in Ethiopia, almost 25,000 members and 540 congregations in Kenya, 20,500 members and 446 congregations in Rwanda, 1,695 members and 38 congregations in Sudan and South Sudan, 16,000 members and 444 congregations in Tanzania, and 5,580 members and 118 congregations in Uganda. These two groups have engaged in church planting in the most populous cities in the region and have experienced marked success. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses operate 60 congregations within the city of Addis Ababa alone whereas Latter-day Saints operate only two branches and two groups.

Future Prospects

Accelerated outreach expansion within the past five years has initiated a new period of growth for the LDS Church in East Africa that has touched nearly all countries within the region that have an official church presence. If current rates of outreach continue the Church will likely operate congregations within several cities of every country in the region except Djibouti, Eritrea, and Somalia. The organization of additional missions appears highly likely within the short term as the massive population remains underserved by only two missions based from within the region. Possible locations where the Church may headquarter new missions include Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Bujumbura, Burundi. A missionary training center (MTC) in Nairobi, Kenya or Kampala, Uganda may be needed to provide teaching to new missionaries and help spur greater emphasis and permanency of an LDS community in the region. The outlook for a future temple in East Africa will hinge on the Church organizing additional stakes within a single major city such as Nairobi, Kenya or Kampala, Uganda but the likelihood of a temple in the region appears poor for the foreseeable future due to low rates of congregational growth in urban areas.

[1] "From a tiny start, Church begins to grow in African nation of Uganda," LDS Church News, 30 March 1991.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/20973/From-a-tiny-start-Church-begins-to-grow-in-African-nation-of-Uganda.html>

[2] "Gospel takes root in Tanzania," LDS Church News, 29 November 2003.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/44749/Gospel-takes-root-in-Tanzania.html>

[3] "Six new missions to be created missions are added in Europe, Africa, Caribbean and U.S.," LDS Church News, 23 March 1991.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/20711/Six-new-missions-to-be-created-missions-are-added-in-Europe-Africa-Caribbean-and>

[4] <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

