



LDS Growth Case Studies

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Prospective LDS Outreach among the Fulani of West Africa

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Overview

Originating in modern-day Senegal, the Fula or Fulani are a traditionally Muslim people scattered throughout West Africa. Fulani populations primarily populate the Sahel - a semi-arid region between the Sahara Desert to the north and the savannahs and forests to the south - from Sudan to Senegal. Fulani significantly vary in lifestyle throughout Africa from nomadic pastoralists to city dwellers.^[1] There are no reliable population estimates for the Fulani. Experts estimate that their numbers range from as few as six million^[2] to as many as 20 million.^[3] The Fulani have occupied the highest strata of society in several West African nations for centuries and continue to play a central role in local government, business, Islamic studies, and education. Most converted to Islam in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Today the Fulani are homogenously Muslim and most actively practice their faith. Music, art, and animal husbandry comprise important aspects of Fulani culture.^[4] As of late 2012, the LDS Church did not report organized proselytism efforts targeting the Fulani and appeared to have few if any Fulani converts worldwide.

This case study reviews the population distribution of Fulani throughout Sub-Saharan Africa and identifies opportunities, challenges, and future prospects for LDS growth. A comparative growth section examines LDS efforts to reach other homogenously Muslim peoples in Sub-Saharan Africa and highlights successes of Protestant groups evangelizing the Fulani in recent years.

Population by Country

Below is a list of the 17 African countries with sizable Fulani populations. The names of any of the nine Fulani sublanguages spoken are listed for each country provided with estimated number of speakers and year each estimate was made. Traditional lifestyle for each Fulani group is also provided. Data was retrieved from www.ethnologue.com.

Benin

Borgu Fulfulde (280,000 - 2002) - pastoralists

Western Niger Fulfulde (30,000) - pastoralists

Burkina Faso

Western Niger Fulfulde (750,000 - 1999) - pastoralists

Cameroon

Adamawa Fulfulde (669,000 - 1986)

Nigerian Fulfulde (no estimate available)

Central African Republic

Bagirmi Fulfulde (159,000 - 1996)

Chad

Adamawa Fulfulde (148,000 - 2006)

Bagirmi Fulfulde (24,000)

Nigerian Fulfulde (no estimate available)

Gambia

Pulaar (295,000 - 2006)

Ghana

Maasina Fulfulde (7,300 - 1991); nomadic pastoralists

Guinea

Pulaar (24,000 - 1991)

Pular (2,550,000 - 1991)

Guinea-Bissau

Pulaar (265,000 - 2006)

Mali

Maasina Fulfulde (1,000,000 - 2007); nomadic pastoralists

Pulaar (175,000 - 1995)

Pular (50,000 - 1991)

Mauritania

Pulaar (192,000 - 2006)

Niger

Central-eastern Niger Fulfulde (450,000 - 1998)

Western Niger Fulfulde (450,000 - 2007)

Nigeria

Adamawa Fulfulde (exact number unknown)

Borgu Fulfulde (exact number unknown) - pastoralists

Nigerian Fulfulde (1,710,000 - 2000)

Senegal

Pulaar (2,740,000 - 2006) - semi-nomadic pastoralists

Pular (150,000 - 2006)

Sierra Leone

Pular (178,000 - 1991) - city dwellers

Sudan

Adamawa Fulfulde (90,000 - 1982)

Togo

Borgu Fulfulde (48,200 - 1993) - pastoralists

A map of these data can be found [here](#).

Opportunities

Translations of a couple LDS materials into two Fulani languages is a significant accomplishment for the Church as there have been few if any Fulani Latter-day Saint converts since the Church's establishment in West Africa. The Church has translated two materials (Gospel Principles [old edition] and the Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith) into two Fulani languages but does not specify which languages these are, identifying one as "Fula" and the other as "Futa." Futa-designated materials appear translated in the Pular language whereas it is unclear into which Fulani language Fula-designated materials are translated. Missionaries and members can utilize these materials when sharing the gospel with Fulani friends, neighbors, and acquaintances to facilitate understanding and improve prospects for Fulani to gain a testimony of the Church.

The Church maintains an official presence in seven of the 17 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with indigenous Fulani populations, namely Benin, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo. Political and societal conditions are favorable for Christian proselytism in all Fulani-populated areas of these seven countries except Nigeria. Fulani populations in Sierra Leone offer the most realistic opportunities for LDS outreach in the foreseeable future as many dwell in cities where formal missionary activity occurs and congregations operate. Any prospective Fulani-targeted missionary activity in other countries will require the introduction of the Church into areas traditionally populated by Fulani or searching out city-dwelling Fulani living outside their traditional areas.

Most Fulani live in areas where there are no government restrictions on religious freedom. 15 of the 17 African countries with sizable Fulani populations have no restrictions on Christian missionary activity. Other Christian groups have taken advantage of these opportunities to evangelize the Fulani wherever possible. The LDS Church has the rare opportunity to extend outreach in most areas of Sub-Saharan Africa with Fulani populations in a culturally appropriate manner such as through humanitarian and development work and member-missionary activity.

The influential nature of the Fulani in many West African nations poses a major opportunity for growth if the Church can baptize and retain Fulani converts. The overrepresentation of Fulani in government positions, business, and trade has perpetuated the expansion of Islam in the region over the past two centuries. The influence of the LDS Church in the region may increase if even a small number of Fulani join the Church, remain active, and continue to retain their socioeconomic status.

Challenges

The Fulani exhibit strong ethnoreligious ties to Islam and have staunchly resisted Christianization and evangelization efforts for centuries. Only recently have Protestant Christians reported small numbers of Fulani converts in a few countries such as Benin and Burkina Faso. The small successes of Protestant groups among some Fulani peoples suggests that the LDS Church can achieve similar results if missionary activity and church planting are properly pursued. Latter-day Saints have not developed any missionary resources tailored to teach investigators with a Muslim background. Effective gospel teaching for Fulani investigators will require adapting the missionary lessons to the understanding of Muslims, build upon similarities in beliefs and teachings between the LDS Church and Islam such as the importance of daily religious practice and the centrality of family in society, and provide assurance and social support for converts that face ridicule and ostracism for becoming a Christian.

The Church does not have a presence in countries where the majority of Fulani reside. Of the seven countries with over half a million Fulani, five do not have an LDS presence (Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Senegal). In countries with an LDS presence, most Fulani reside in areas hundreds of kilometers away from the nearest LDS meetinghouses and missionaries. For example, Fulani populations traditionally reside in the northern areas of Benin, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo where there are no nearby LDS congregations. In Nigeria, the closest city to traditional areas populated by Fulani with an LDS congregation is Bauchi where there are relatively few numbers of Fulani. Most Fulani in Nigeria reside in the northeast (Adamawa, Borno, Gombe, and Taraba States), and extreme northwest (Kebbi and Sokoto States).

Government-imposed restrictions on Christian proselytism, social abuses of religious freedom targeting Christians, and safety concerns make prospective LDS outreach among Fulani nearly impossible in Mauritania, Sudan, northern Nigeria, and northern Mali. In Mauritania and Sudan, the government strongly opposes conversion from Islam. In Mauritania, only Muslims can be citizens; conversion to Christianity results in losing one's citizenship. In northern Nigeria, violence between Muslims and Christians poses a major safety concern for full-time missionaries and prospective converts. In Mali, the ongoing civil war between the Tuareg rebels and the national government creates an insurmountable barrier to proselytism efforts among the Fulani due to political instability and the implementation of radical Islamist ideologies in rebel-held territory.

Latter-day Saints remain a tiny denomination in Sub-Saharan Africa restricted to only a handful of cities in most countries where there is an official church presence. Among the seven countries with sizable Fulani populations and an LDS presence, only two have LDS congregations established in more than two cities (Ghana and Nigeria). The outreach capabilities of the Church in the region are currently insufficient to reach sizable ethnolinguistic groups with millions of members that traditionally adhere to Christianity, let alone the hundreds of ethnolinguistic groups that follow traditional beliefs and Islam. Only a small handful of ethnic groups in Africa have received a Latter-day Saint gospel witness due to few locations with LDS congregations. The nomadic and pastoralist lifestyle of some Fulani challenge efforts to extend outreach due to remote location in isolated, rural areas and few permanent settlements.

Comparative Growth

The Church has translated proselytism materials into several languages spoken by traditionally Muslim peoples in Africa but does not engage in any overt proselytism efforts among these ethnolinguistic groups. Translations of Gospel Principles (old edition) are available in Bambara, Hausa, Mandinka, Somali, and Wolof and translations of the Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith are available in Afar, Bambara, Comorian, Hausa, Mandinka, Somali, and Wolof. The translation of a few church materials into these languages and two Fulani languages occurred due to the First Presidency's "Every Nation" program in 1986 that sought to translate basic church materials into at least one commonly spoken language for every country in the world.^[5] The Church currently has few if any members among the most populous homogenously Muslim peoples in Africa notwithstanding the diligent efforts to translate a few basic proselytism materials into commonly spoken languages over two decades earlier.

Several Evangelical groups have targeted the Fulani. Specifically targeting lesser-reached and unreached ethnic groups, the Evangelical group SIM reports higher receptivity among the Fulani than ever before. Currently SIM reports six self-supporting Fulani churches and 10 developing churches in Benin and extends Fulani-targeted missionary activity in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Niger, and Nigeria.^[6] Fulani Ministries operates in Burkina Faso, Germany, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom with a multi-faceted approach to evangelize, relieve poverty, and improve education among Fulani people.^[7]

Future Prospects

The outlook for any coordinated proselytism efforts among the Fulani appear remote at present due to nearly all Fulani residing in countries without an LDS presence or in locations distant from cities with a church presence and full-time missionaries assigned. Strong ethnoreligious ties with Islam comprise a major cultural barrier that reduces receptivity and has frustrated past evangelism efforts for many Protestant groups until more recently. With additional cities opening to proselytism, greater mission resource allocation, and increases in active membership throughout the region, prospects appear more likely for a handful of Fulani individuals joining the Church. Mentoring and supporting Fulani Latter-day Saints in proselytism and church planting efforts among their own people will be crucial towards ensuring the establishment of an LDS community that will become self-sufficient and self-propagating.

[1] "Fulani," Countries and Their Cultures, retrieved 3 November 2012.
<http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Germany-to-Jamaica/Fulani.html>

[2] "Fulani," Countries and Their Cultures, retrieved 3 November 2012.
<http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Germany-to-Jamaica/Fulani.html>

[3] "Fulani," www.sim.org, retrieved 3 November 2012. <http://www.sim.org/index.php/content/fulani>

[3] "About Us," www.fulaniministries.org, retrieved 3 November 2012.

[4] "Fulani," Countries and Their Cultures, retrieved 3 November 2012.
<http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Germany-to-Jamaica/Fulani.html>

[5] Williams, Sandra. "In His Own Language," Liahona, August 1988. <http://lds.org/liahona/1988/08/in-his-own-language>

[6] "Fulani," www.sim.org, retrieved 3 November 2012. <http://www.sim.org/index.php/content/fulani>

[7] "About Us," www.fulaniministries.org, retrieved 3 November 2012. http://www.fulaniministries.org/ABOUT_US.htm