



LDS Growth Case Studies

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Analysis of LDS Growth in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Overview

Located in southeastern Nigeria and supporting a population of 3.9 million in 2006,^[1] Akwa Ibom is one of the 36 administrative states of Nigeria. Major cities in Akwa Ibom include Uyo, Eket, Ikot Ekpene, and Oron. The population is predominantly Christian and primarily resides in small towns and villages. Akwa Ibom is divided into 31 local government areas (LGAs).

This case study reviews LDS Church growth in Akwa Ibom and identifies successes, opportunities, challenges, and future prospects for growth. A comparative growth section compares the growth of the LDS Church with other nontraditional proselytizing Christian groups.

NOTE: All LGA populations were retrieved from www.citypopulation.de and are as of 2006.

LDS Background

The Church established its first official branch in Nigeria in Akwa Ibom. In 1978, the Church created a branch in the village of Ikot Eyo.^[2] By 1988, there were three districts in Akwa Ibom headquartered in Etinan, Ikot Ekong, and Uyo.^[3] In 1996, the Church created its first two stakes in Akwa Ibom in Eket and Etinan. Additional stakes were organized in Ikot Akpaden (1999), Nsit Ubiu (1999), and Uyo (2001). No districts operated in Akwa Ibom between 2001 and 2008. Since 2008, the Church has organized districts in Ibiono (2008), Ikot Ekpene (2009), Oron (2009), Abak (2010), and Ibesikpo (2010). By year-end 2012, there were five stakes and five districts.

In 2002, there were 54 congregations (30 wards, 24 branches). By 2012, there were 89 congregations (40 wards, 49 branches). Based on the geographical boundaries of 2002, stakes that experienced the most rapid congregational growth during this period were the Uyo Nigeria Stake (12 to 22), the Nsit Ubium Nigeria Stake (8 to 16), and the Etinan Nigeria Stake (9 to 11). Based on the number of mission branches operating in 2002 within the geographic boundaries of districts in 2012, the Church experienced congregational growth in the Oron Nigeria District (0 to 5), Ikot Ekpene Nigeria District (2 to 7), and the Ibiono Nigeria District (1 to 6). The number of congregations was unchanged for the Eket Nigeria and Ikot Akpaden Nigeria Stakes and areas of Akwa Ibom serviced by the Abak Nigeria Stake. Maps displaying LDS stakes, districts, and units in Akwa Ibom are available for [2002](#) and [2012](#).

In 2012, one-quarter of wards and branches in Nigeria were located in Akwa Ibom. At year-end 2012, estimated LDS membership in Akwa Ibom was 29,000, or 0.75% of the state population. Estimated membership was calculated by multiplying the number of units in Akwa Ibom by the average number of members per unit (330) as of 2011.

In 2012, the Church reported at least one congregation in 21 of the 31 LGAs including Nsit Ubium (12), Etinan (10), Uyo (10), Onna (8), Abak (6), Ibiono Ibom (6), Mkpato Enin (6), Eket (5), Ikot Ekpene (5), Ibesikpo Asutan (3), Nsit Ibom (3), Oron (3), Essien Udim (2), Itu (2), Okobo (2), Esit Eket (1), Ibeno (1), Ika (1), Ikono (1), Nsit Atai (1), and Oruk Anam (1).

The Church created its first mission headquartered in Akwa Ibom in 2001 in Uyo. The Church relocated the mission to Calabar

sometime in the late 2000s. The Nigeria Calabar Mission currently administers Akwa Ibom and Cross Rivers States. The Nigeria Calabar Mission Branch services all LGAs in Akwa Ibom without an LDS ward or branch.

Successes

The Church has established a presence in many rural locations in Akwa Ibom State. There are scores of small towns and villages with their own LDS unit; a major accomplishment for the Church considering no other location in Sub-Saharan Africa has as high saturation of LDS units outside of major cities. Some wards and branches in Nsit Ubium, Onna, and Etinan LGAs appear to operate in villages with only a few thousand inhabitants. Rapid church growth in Akwa Ibom stands as an important example of the potential growth that can be harnessed from missionary activity in rural communities, including the formation of districts and stakes notwithstanding lower population densities and often less convenient accessibility compared to urban areas.

The population has exhibited high receptivity to the Church since the Church's initial establishment over three decades ago. Steady numbers of convert baptisms and good convert retention are represented by the number of congregations, stakes, and districts steadily increasing since the Church's establishment in the late 1970s. All stakes have had new units organized or have had branches mature into wards within the past decade. Mission and area leaders have advocated for bringing congregations closer to members and expand missionary outreach as indicated by the formation of five new districts in the late 2000s and early 2010s. Mission and stake leadership have recently conducted rapid, coordinated church planting in some major cities such as Uyo and Ikot Ekpene. For example, in 2012 the number of branches in the Uyo Nigeria Stake increased from two to eight as six new branches were organized. Local members report that virtually all outreach expansion efforts have been highly successful and that these favorable outcomes have further encouraged church planting and the opening of additional locations. In the 2000s and early 2010s, the Church established three new districts (Ibiono, Ikot Ekpene, and Oron) in locations that once had only one or two mission branches. In late 2012, all three of these districts had five or more branches.

Akwa Ibom receives some of the highest saturation of LDS outreach in Sub-Saharan Africa. The average ward or branch services approximately 43,800 people; a smaller population than all but a handful of prominent cities in Akwa Ibom. The average ward or branch in three LGAs (Nsit Ubium, Onna, and Etinan) services less than 20,000 people. The Church created its first branch in Nigeria in Nsit Ubium LGA and has achieved greater outreach penetration than in any other location in Sub-Saharan Africa as the average congregation services 10,590 people; a population nearly as small as the least populated cities in Latin America with an LDS presence. The percentage of Latter-day Saints in the general population may be as high as 3.1% in Nsit Ubium LGA; a percentage higher than any other country outside of Oceania and North and South America. The relatively high percentage of Latter-day Saints in Nsit Ubium and other nearby LGAs has been achieved by high receptivity to the Church, a long-term presence, and strong member-missionary participation. A map displaying the status of LDS outreach and estimated percentage of membership by LGAs in Akwa Ibom can be found [here](#).

The Church has achieved good self-sustainability in meeting its own leadership and mission needs. The presence of LDS congregations in over half of the LGAs of Akwa Ibom and the high degree of outreach in many of these locations has occurred primarily through member-missionary efforts over the past several decades. There has been little if any dependence on full-time missionaries to find and baptize investigators as ordinary members have headed missionary efforts for the majority of the Church's history in Akwa Ibom. All full-time missionaries assigned to Akwa Ibom are black Africans primarily from Nigeria and nearby West African nations. Local church leaders have exhibited devotion and diligence to their responsibilities in the Church.

Opportunities

Lesser-reached and unreached LGAs pose excellent conditions for church growth. The expansion of the Church into previously unreached LGAs in the 2000s yielded steady congregational growth suggesting that similar results will occur if outreach begins into currently unreached LGAs. For example, the Church did not have a presence in Okobo and Oron LGAs in the early 2000s but by 2012 these two LGAs collectively had five branches and one district due to high receptivity, good convert retention, and the willingness of mission leaders to open additional units. In late 2012, there were six LGAs that had populations over 100,000 people and no LDS units operating (Etim Ekpo, Ikot Abasi, Mbo, Obot Akara, Ukanafun, and Uruan). Three of these LGAs (Ikot Abasi, Obot Akara, and Uruan) appear most favorable for missionary activity due to close proximity to LGAs with a sizable church presence, namely Mkpato Enin, Ikot Ekpene, and Uyo. Full-time missionaries already stationed in these LGAs and local church leaders may be utilized in commencing initial proselytism efforts and heading the establishment of dependent units and branches. It is likely that each of these three unreached LGAs have multiple Latter-day Saints and former investigators that could provide important support for opening congregations and developing leadership.

Lesser-reached LGAs provide greater opportunities for church growth than unreached LGAs as lesser-reached LGAs already have at least one LDS unit operating. Some of the most impressive congregational growth in Akwa Ibom during the 2000s occurred in LGAs that were lesser-reached in the early 2000s such as Ibiono Ibom where the number of units increased from one to six. The establishment of at least one congregation provides greater opportunities for growth in lesser-reached LGAs compared to their unreached counterparts because there are small numbers of active members who can be utilized for instilling self-sufficiency in leadership and member-missionary activity. Lesser-reached LGAs that may present some of the best opportunities for future growth include Essein Udim, Ibeno, Nsit Atai, Ika, Itu, Esit Eket, and Okobo.

There is little linguistic diversity in Akwa Ibom State compared to other Nigerian states, requiring few if any accommodations for

language needs between ethnolinguistic groups. English use as a second language is widespread and reduces the need for language-specific outreach for individual ethnolinguistic groups. Most the population speaks Anaang or Ibibio as a first language but the Church has not translated materials into either language due to widespread proficiency in English. There appears little need for translating materials and scriptures into these languages as other major Christian groups in the region do not translate scriptures or church materials into these languages.

The status of religious freedom in Akwa Ibom State has favored LDS Church growth due to the strong influence of Christianity on society and few instances of societal and government abuses of religious freedom. Opportunities for growth remain excellent due to more stable sociopolitical conditions in Akwa Ibom than in many other Nigerian states. These conditions have reduced emigration and the relocation of active membership to elsewhere in the country. The Church has experienced challenges achieving growth in other states due to ethnoreligious conflict and violence such as in Jos and western Nigeria.

Challenges

Rural areas present unique challenges for missionary activity and church planting due to lower population densities that require greater numbers of congregations to effectively reach populations. Difficulty accessing some rural locations such as in Udung Uko and Eastern Obolo LGAs may dissuade outreach for years or even decades to come. Coastal areas and areas near the Cross River delta appear the most difficult to reach due to low sea level and distance from mission headquarters in Calabar.

Kidnappings, assassinations, and discrimination pose safety concerns to ordinary members and full-time missionaries. The Church has had full-time missionaries kidnapped before in Nigeria and must carefully assess safety and societal conditions before opening new locations to missionary work. Political instability in Nigeria as a whole has reduced economic development and exacerbated corruption.

High receptivity to the Church and limited mission resources have historically prevented mission leaders from effectively expanding outreach in other locations in the world. For example, mission and area leaders discouraged the opening of additional cities to missionary activity in some African countries such as Sierra Leone and Liberia due to high receptivity and administrative challenges in currently opened cities. In Brazil, the Church has experienced moderate to high receptivity in most locations but continues to have over 400 cities with over 20,000 inhabitants without an LDS presence. The Church in Akwa Ibom has achieved considerably better outreach expansion than these examples but still runs the risk of delaying outreach expansion efforts into lesser-reached and unreached LGAs due to good opportunities in LGAs with a well-established LDS presence. Failure to sustain outreach expansion efforts in Akwa Ibom will likely result in diminished church growth as mission resources are continuously channeled into locations that have received outreach for decades meanwhile leaving unreached areas untouched. Limited available mission resources in Nigeria are attributed to societal and political conditions prohibiting the assignment of North American proselytizing missionaries, but in turn these restrictions have encouraged better self-sufficiency and self-sustainability of regional mission resources.

Comparative Growth

No other rural area in Sub-Saharan Africa has as widespread of an LDS presence as Akwa Ibom. Of the approximately 30 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with an official LDS presence and assigned full-time missionaries, only four (Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, and Nigeria) have multiple congregations that operate in rural locations. No other administrative division in Sub-Saharan Africa has close to as high of an estimated percentage of Latter-day Saints in the general population as Akwa Ibom. Countries that have the next highest percentages of Latter-day Saints in a specific administrative division include Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe. No other administrative division in Sub-Saharan Africa has had as many new districts organized within the past five years as Akwa Ibom. The only other locations in Sub-Saharan Africa that have had a permanent LDS presence since the late 1970s include South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Ghana.

Other proselytizing Christian groups have a visible presence in Akwa Ibom. Evangelicals have a widespread presence and are a large minority. Jehovah's Witnesses maintain a significantly larger presence in Akwa Ibom than the LDS Church. Witnesses report approximately 622 congregations and a presence in all 31 LGAs in Akwa Ibom. Witnesses operate more congregations than Latter-day Saints in all LGAs except Etinan. In early 2013, the number of Witness congregations by LGA totaled 99 in Uyo, 48 in Ikot Ekpene, 44 in Eket, 37 in Ikono, 35 in Ini, 26 in Ibesikpo Asutan, 25 in Itu, 24 in Oron, 23 in Ikot Abasi, 21 in Ibiono Ibom, 18 in Mbo, 17 in Abak, 17 in Essien Udim, 17 in Nsit Ibom, 16 in Nsit Ubium, 16 in Obot Akara, 15 in Ika, 15 in Uruan, 14 in Esit Eket, 14 in Mkpato Enin, 14 in Oruk Anam, 10 in Nsit Atai, 10 in Okobo, 10 in Ukanafun, 9 in Etinan, 9 in Onna, 5 in Etim Ekpo, 5 in Ibeno, 5 in Urue-Offong/Oruko, 3 in Udung Uko, and 1 in Eastern Obolo. The Seventh Day Adventist Church reports a significantly smaller presence in Akwa Ibom than the LDS Church or Jehovah's Witnesses. In 2010, Adventists reported 7,273 members, 16 congregations, and 54 companies in Akwa Ibom and Cross River States combined.^[4] The Church of the Nazarene maintains a few dozen churches in Akwa Ibom State.^[5]

Future Prospects

Steady congregational growth, recent church planting in the Uyo Nigeria Stake, and the organization of five new districts within the past five years suggest that the Church is poised to experience moderate to rapid growth for the foreseeable future. Within the next five years, districts in Abak and Ikot Ekpene may mature into stakes and some stakes may divide to create additional stakes or districts such as the Uyo Nigeria Stake. Based on growth trends over the past decade, the Church may organize new

units in lesser-reached LGAs and in a few currently unreached LGAs. Due to over 100 units within its geographic boundaries, the Nigeria Calabar Mission may divide to create another mission headquartered in Akwa Ibom.

[1] "NIGERIA: Administrative Division," www.citypopulation.de, retrieved 12 January 2013.
<http://www.citypopulation.de/php/nigeria-admin.php>

[2] "News of the Church," *Ensign*, February 1980.
<http://lds.org/ensign/1980/02/news-of-the-church/nigeria-and-ghana-a-miracle-precedes-the-messengers>

[3] "Nigeria marks twin milestones," *LDS Church News*, 21 May 1988.
<http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/17494/Nigeria-marks-twin-milestones.html>

[4] "South East Conference (2005-Present)," www.adventiststatistics.org, retrieved 12 January 2013.
http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldID=C10418

[5] "Nazarene Church Data Search," retrieved 12 January 2013.
<http://app.nazarene.org/FindAChurch/results.jsp?n=&c=&y=NI&s=&z=&l=&SearchChoice=>