

Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

Country reports on the LDS Church around the world from a landmark almanac. Includes detailedanalysis of history, context, culture, needs, challenges and opportunities for church growth.



Namibia

Population: 2.2 millions (#143 out of countries)

By David Stewart and Matt Martinich

Geography

Area: 390,757 square km. Bordering a large section of the Atlantic coast of Southern Africa, Namibia borders Angola, Zambia, Botswana, and South Africa. Most of the country consists of high plateaus subject to an arid, hot climate. The Namib Desert is the most defining geographical feature. Namibia has the second lowest population density in the world after Mongolia. The country is divided into 13 administrative regions.

Population: 2,147,585 (July 2011)

Annual Growth Rate: 0.873% (2011)

Fertility Rate: 2.49 children born per woman (2011)

Life Expectancy: 52.48 male, 51.89 female (2011)

Peoples

Ovambo: 50%

Kavangos: 9%

Herero: 7%

Damara: 7%

Mixed: 6.5%

White: 6%

Nama: 5%

Caprivian: 4%

Bushmen: 3%

Baster: 2%

Tswana: 0.5%

Black Africans make up 87.5% of the population. Half the population is Ovambo and slightly more than a tenth is mixed race or white. Most Black ethnic groups belong originate from Bantu settlers. Nama are the largest Khoisan ethnic group.

Languages: Afrikaans (60%), German (32%), English (7%), Indigenous languages (1%). English is the official language, yet Afrikaans and German are important for communication between ethnic groups and business. Oshiwambo is the most widely spoken native language, with 807,000 speakers. There are no native languages with over one million speakers and Afrikaans is the only second language with over one million speakers.

Literacy: 85% (2001)

History

Khoisan peoples first settled Namibia and Bantu tribes arrived in the 14th century. Namibia became a German protectorate in the late 19th century named South West Africa. South Africa took control starting in World War I. The South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), a Marxist guerrilla group, began a war for independence in 1966. The United Nations struck a peace plan in which South Africa agreed to stop its administration of South West Africa in 1988. Independence from South Africa occurred in 1990 under the name Namibia, named after the Namib Desert. Walvis Bay remained administered by South Africa until integration into Namibia in 1994. SWAPO continues to govern the country.

Culture

Segregation continues between whites and blacks due to inequality of wealth. Whites control most businesses and live separate from black communities. Those living in rural areas are pastoralists or farmers. Namibians are proud of their nature conservancy efforts as Namibia was the first country to have nature conservancy as part of its constitution.

Economy

GDP per capita: $6,900 (2010) [14.6% of US]

Human Development Index: 0.606

Corruption Index: 4.4

The economy is strongly tied to the South African economy due to recent independence. Electricity is supplied from South Arica and the Namibian dollar is set one to one with the South African rand. Whites possess most of the wealth whereas most blacks live in poverty. 55.8% of the population lives on under two U.S. dollars a day. Mining is the most important industry. Namibia is one of the top world producers of uranium and other minerals including zinc, copper, silver, and diamonds. Agriculture employs half of the workforce. Tourism continues to grow. Namibia partially depends on food imports to feed its population. Government has recently begun utilizing its fisheries. Namibia experiences some of the lowest corruption levels in Africa.

Faiths

Christian: 80-90%

Indigenous beliefs: 10-20%

Christians

Denominations Members Congregations

Lutheran 1,054,333

Seventh Day Adventists 17,722 77

Jehovah's Witnesses 1,898 38

Latter-Day Saints 686 2

Religion

Half of Christians are Lutherans. Catholics and Anglicans are other major Christian denominations. Many other Christian groups operate and have smaller followings. Pentecostals are growing rapidly. Some syncretism occurs between indigenous beliefs and Christianity, although not as widespread as in other African nations. Hundreds of years of missionary activity in Namibia have deeply rooted Christianity and kept syncretism to a minimum. The Himba, Herero, and San traditionally practice indigenous religions.[1]

Religious Freedom

Persecution Index:

Religious freedom is protected by the constitution and respected by the government. Government does not sponsor any religious group and seek to treat its citizens equally regardless of religious affiliation. To register with the government, a Church must have 250 members and have operated in Namibia for at least two years.[2]

Major Cities

Urban: 37%

Windhoek, **Rundu**, **Walvis Bay**, **Oshakati**, **Swakopmund**, **Katima Mulilo**, **Rehoboth**, **Otjiwarongo**, **Grootfontein**, **Keetmanshoop**

Only Windhoek has a Church presence. 24% of the national population lives in the 10 largest cities.

LDS History

Few Church members lived in Namibia between the early 1970s and 1990. In 1978, the first missionaries arrived.[3] Elder Russell M. Nelson dedicated Namibia for the preaching of the Gospel in August 1992.[4] The seminary program began in 1995. Many Namibian members traveled to South Africa to hear Elder M Russell Ballard speak in 1996.[5]

Membership Growth

LDS Membership: 686 (2010)

In 1990, there were less than 20 members nationwide. A year later there were 100 people attending church meetings in two branches and around seven convert baptisms a month.[6] By the end of 2000 there were 274 members.

Membership growth rates have widely fluctuated in the 2000s. The most rapid growth occurred when membership increased by 15%. Negative growth occurred once in 2005 when membership dropped by 2.5%. Growth rates typically range from 8-14%. Membership has increased by 20-60 a year since 2000 except for 2005. By the end of 2008 there were 562 members. Most members were blacks in 2009.

Congregational Growth

Branches: 2

The first group was organized in 1973 and met in a home of a church member. A branch was organization in Windhoek in 1983.[7] Missionaries did not establish a permanent presence until 1990 when four elder and a senior missionary couple arrived from the South Africa Cape town Mission. A second branch was created in Rehoboth around this time. A district was created from the Windhoek and Rehoboth Branches in 1991 that and was discontinued the following year.[8]. The Rehoboth Branch was discontinued in the 1990s. In 1998, Namibia was included in the Africa Southeast Area.

A second branch was again created in 2006 in northern Windhoek, named the Katutura Branch. A group of 20 members met in northern Namibia in 2009 for church meetings but likely not as an official group. In late 2009 there were four missionaries serving in the Windhoek branch and six missionaries serving in the Katutura Branch. Missionaries belonged to the Namibia Zone of the South Africa Cape Town Mission.

Activity and Retention

Missionaries estimate that 120-140 members are active among the 300 members in the Katutura Branch. Both branches report a sacrament attendance around 125 a week, indicating that active membership is likely no more than 250 for the entire country or 45% of total membership. In 1991 nearly all reported members were active, evidenced by sacrament meeting attendance sometimes larger than Namibia's membership.[9] Activity rates began falling in the 1990s. Retention for new converts seems average for most African countries, with likely at least 50% of new members retained a year after baptism. Most of those considered less active or inactive live outside of Windhoek in remote areas of the country, especially in the north. Missionaries work regularly on reactivation of less active members. 58 members were enrolled in seminary or institute in 2008. Activity among membership living in Windhoek may be as high as 60-70%.

Language Materials

Languages with LDS Scripture: Afrikaans, English, German

All LDS scriptures are available in Afrikaans, but limited Church materials include the Relief Society Declaration, Gospel Principles and The Prophet Joseph Smith's Testimony. German has all LDS scriptures and a wide selection of Church materials translated. No tribal languages have translations of any Church materials. Several Church members speak Portuguese.

Meetinghouses

The first Church built meetinghouse was completed in 1997 for the Windhoek Branch. The Katutura Branch meets in a school in northern Windhoek.

Health and Safety

Namibia suffers from the fifth highest rates of HIV/AIDS in the world. 15% of the adult population is infected with HIV/AIDS. Limited health infrastructure, a high number of motor vehicle accidents, and high rates of violent crime all present safety concerns.

Humanitarian and Development Work

Church members have provided community service since the 1990s. In 2006, the Church provided measles vaccinations in an effort to eradicate the disease in Africa.[10] Local service has been offered through Mormon Helping Hands projects in recent years.[11]

Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects

Religious Freedom

No government regulations limit the Church's right to assemble and proselyte. The government openly welcomed missionaries upon their return in 1990. Local members have yet to take greater advantage of the freedom of religion provided by their legislation to conduct member missionary work.

Cultural Issues

Christianity's spread throughout Namibia has brought most to a belief in Christ. Few indigenous beliefs interfere with LDS teachings. Differences in wealth and culture may present some challenges to church growth.

National Outreach

The Church's presence is limited to Windhoek, which accounts for half the population living in the 10 largest cities and 14% of the national population. Even among a city with over a quarter of a million people, little outreach is available considering only two congregations function in the city. Full-time missionaries serve in appreciable numbers for a city with a small Church membership. The Church has laid a foundation in Windhoek of two congregations on either side of the city to accommodate more rapid growth. Opportunities exist for converts from unreached areas living in Windhoek to join the Church and return to their hometowns and establish the Church among family and friends.

A large number of less active members already live too far from Windhoek to attend meetings. Due to separation from the rest of the South Africa Cape Coast Mission, Church leadership has likely been reluctant to open other cities to missionary work. Growth in congregations and membership in areas outside of Windhoek must come from persistence to establish the Church in these locations by local membership and from effort by mission and area leadership to open unreached areas.

Member Activity and Convert Retention

Member activity is significantly affected by the distribution of members across a large, sparsely populated country which membership numbers are adequate to sustain congregations only in Windhoek. Member activity and church growth may increase if groups or branches are established in remote locations close to where members live. The dissolution of the Rehoboth Branch may have resulted from poor convert retention or member apostasy, but was more likely due to active members moving away, leaving insufficient infrastructure to maintain church functions. Like South Africa, Namibia may experience emigration issues, particularly with white and wealthier members. This may have been the cause for membership decline in 2005. The other likely cause for membership decline would be updating membership records.

Ethnic Issues and Integration

Tensions between whites and blacks complicate integrating the few white converts into branches which are predominantly black. Membership was likely mostly white when the Church first arrived.

Language Issues

The widespread use of Afrikaans, English and German facilitate missionary work and convert understanding of the Church's doctrines published in these languages. Missionary work in these languages provides the opportunity to reach most of the population and later translate scriptures or materials in local languages as needed.

The earliest members spoke Afrikaans, English and German. Currently Church meetings are likely conducted in English. Several members from nearby African countries stay temporarily and sometimes have difficulty communicating and participating in Church services, speaking their tribal languages or Portuguese (from Angola). Oshiwambo seems the most likely native language for future Church material translations.

Missionary Service

Few local members have served missions and the LDS Church in Namibia depends on foreign missionaries to staff its local missionary needs. Nearly all local members who serve missions are assigned to missions in Africa. Emphasis on youth-oriented outreach and seminary and institute may improve the sustainability and increase the number of members serving full-time missions.

Leadership

Both branch presidencies are staffed by local Namibian members or African members from neighboring countries. Additional congregations in Windhoek do not appear to be limited by a lack of local leadership. Additional branches or groups outside of Windhoek may have not been created due to a lack in leadership in these areas.

Temple

Namibia is part of the Johannesburg South Africa Temple District. Prospects of closer temple to membership appear highly

unlikely due to the small size of membership in Namibia and western South Africa. Temple excursions may occur, but appear infrequent.

Comparative Growth

Namibia has experienced the slowest membership growth in mainland Africa. No other country in Africa has had a continual Church presence since the early 1980s or even the 1990s and has fewer than 600 members with the exception of Mauritius. The Church was established in neighboring Botswana in the early 1990s and today has six congregations in multiple cities, a Book of Mormon translation in a tribal language, and more than twice as many members as Namibia.

Jehovah's Witnesses number a thousand more than Latter-Day Saints and Seventh Day Adventists numbered 17,000 in 2008. Despite the small population, many Christian churches have established themselves and achieved sizeable membership. The LDS Church may have not seen as rapid growth as other Christian churches due to the more recent establishment of the Church as well as the allocation of few resources, as LDS congregations and mission outreach are presently limited to the capital of Windhoek. Local missionary efforts are underdeveloped.

Future Prospects

The outlook for LDS Church growth is positive as membership growth rates have increased and LDS demographics are representative of the general Namibian population, but outreach remains limited to Windhoek. Additional congregations may be organized in Windhoek as the two functioning branches continue to grow in size. Once there are at least three branches, a district may be organized. Additional cities will likely not open for missionary work in the near future. However, groups or small branches are likely to be established in larger cities, such as Otjiwarongo, Rehoboth, Rundu, and Walvis Bay.

[1] "Namibia," International Religious Freedom Report 2010, 17 November 2010. http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148710.htm

[2] "Namibia," International Religious Freedom Report 2010, 17 November 2010. http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148710.htm

[3] "Namibia," Country Profile, retrieved 31 December 2010. http://beta-newsroom.lds.org/country/namibia

[4] Mostert, Mary. "Prayers of dedication offered on 4 nations in central, southern Africa," LDS Church News, 26 September 1992. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/22452/Prayers-of-dedication-offered-on-4-nations-in-central-southern--Africa.html

[5] "5,000 attend conference in South Africa; example of growth of the Chuch," LDS Church ENws, 2 March 1996. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/27515/5000-attend-conference-in-South-Africa-example-of-growth-of-the-Church.html

[6] Newman, Mark; Hagen, Greg. "Namibia: Gospel springs forth in harsh desert land of new African nation," LDS Church News, 5 October 1991. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/21431/Namibia-Gospel-springs-forth-in-harsh-desert-land-of-new-African-nation.html

[7] "Namibia," Country Profile, retrieved 31 December 2010. http://beta-newsroom.lds.org/country/namibia

[8] Deseret News 2003 Church Almanac, "Namibia", page379

[9] Newman, Mark; Hagen, Greg. "Namibia: Gospel springs forth in harsh desert land of new African nation," LDS Church News, 5 October 1991. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/21431/Namibia-Gospel-springs-forth-in-harsh-desert-land-of-new-African-nation.html

[10] Weaver, Sarah Jane. "Measles initiative continues to fight disease in Africa," LDS Church News, 30 September 2006. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/49498/Measles-initiative-continues-to-fight-disease-in-Africa.html

[11] "Blessing Africa with widespread service," LDSChurch News, 4 October 2008. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/54590/Blessing-Africa-with-widespread-service.html