



# Reaching the Nations International Church Growth Almanac

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

## Botswana

Population: 2.16 millions (#145 out of countries)

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### Geography

**Area:** 581,730 square km. Botswana is landlocked in Southern Africa and borders Zimbabwe, South Africa and Namibia. The Kalahari Desert covers most of the country. The climate is semi-arid and the geography consists of flat plains. Grasslands and savannahs are also found and support a large amount of wildlife. Several rivers flow through or on the border of Botswana. Desertification and overgrazing are great environmental concerns. Administratively, the country is divided into nine districts and five town councils.

**Population:** 1,990,876 (July 2009)

**Annual Growth Rate:** 1.937% (2009)

**Fertility Rate:** 2.6 children born per woman (2009)

**Life Expectancy:** male 61.72, female 61.99 (2009)

### Peoples

Tswana: 79%

Kalanga: 11%

Basarwa: 3%

Other: 7%

Population density is highest in eastern Botswana, where the Tswana are found. Tswana form the majority, yet most Tswana live in South Africa. Kalanga are found in northern and northeastern Botswana along the border with Zimbabwe. The Basarwa, or Bushmen, live in the rural, arid areas which occupy most of the country. Other ethnicities include small tribes which live in the Kalahari Desert or Europeans.

**Languages:** 29 languages are spoken in Botswana. The national language is Setswana, or Tswana, (78.2%) and the official language is English (2.1%). Other widely spoken languages include Kalanga (7.9%) and Sekgalagadi (2.8%). Other and unspecified languages make up 8.6% and 0.4% of the population. The only language with over one million speakers is Tswana (1.07 million).

**Literacy:** 81.2% (2003)

### History

Conflict between the Tswana and the Ndebele helped facilitate the protection of the territory for the Tswana by the British in the late 19th century. Named Bechuanaland, the British protectorate originally included additional territory in Southern Africa. Independence was achieved in 1966 and was followed by decades of economic development. By the 1980s Botswana had one of the highest life expectancies in Africa. The spread of the HIV/AIDS has decreased life expectancy in recent years. Economic growth and little ethnic violence have turned Botswana into one of the most successful African nations despite its landlocked location and small population.

### Culture

Much of the traditional African culture has been preserved in Botswana despite British colonialism. Basket making, pottery, literature, and music are rich in local culture. Unlike many African countries, polygamy is not widespread.

### Economy

**GDP per capita:** \$13,900 (2008) [29.6% of US]

**Human Development Index:** 0.694

## **Corruption Index: 5.8**

Economic growth in Botswana has been among the most rapid experienced worldwide since the 1960s. Since independence, the country has transformed itself from one of the poorest to a middle income economy. Growth rates in GDP have been over five percent until the late 2000s. Success in the economy has resulted from low levels of corruption and good government management of the economy. Botswana may have the lowest rates of corruption in Africa. The economy is diversified to exploit natural resources, such as diamonds, and expand its services through tourism of its national parks. Unlike most African countries, agriculture only constitutes 1.6% of the GDP. Industry accounts for 52.6% of the GDP, most of which is from mining, and services accounts for 45.8% of the GDP. Diamonds are the largest export, but the export of copper, nickel and other minerals also occurs. High HIV/AIDS rates may hurt future economic growth.

## **Faiths**

Christian: 71.6%

Badimo: 6%

Other: 1.4%

Unspecified: 0.4%

None: 20.6%

## **Christians**

### **Denominations Members Congregations**

Catholic 80,000

Seventh-Day Adventists 28,874 87

Jehovah's Witnesses 1,749 39

Latter-Day Saints 1,305 4

## **Religion**

Wide diversity in religion exists in Botswana, which includes Christianity, indigenous religions such as Badimo, Islam, Hinduism, and other religious movements. Most are Christian and are Anglicans, Methodists or belong to the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa. The 2001 census found that around 20% of Botswana do not have a religion.<sup>[1]</sup> This may be due to the rise of secularism resulting from economic prosperity.

## **Religious Freedom**

### **Persecution Index:**

The constitution protects religious freedom which is also upheld by the government. Open proselytism is permitted<sup>[2]</sup>.

## **Major Cities**

### **Urban: 60%**

Gaborone, Francistown, Molepolole, **Selibe phikwe**, **Maun**, **Serowe**, **Kanye**, **Mahalapye**, Mochudi, **Mogoditshane**.

The ten largest cities are listed in descending order by population. Cities listed in bold do not have a LDS congregation. Currently four of the ten largest cities have a Church presence. 36% of the population of Botswana lives in the 10 largest cities.

## **Membership Growth**

### **LDS Membership: 1,305 (2008)**

The first known members in Botswana arrived in 1983 after joining the Church in the United States. In 1990 the only members in the country were two Peace Corps workers, a missionary couple and two Botswana families. Both families joined the Church in the United States and later returned<sup>[3]</sup>. Official government recognition was granted in August 1991. Botswana was dedicated for the preaching of the Gospel in 1992 by Elder Richard G. Scott. By this time there were 160 members in the country<sup>[4]</sup>. Seminary was started the same year<sup>[5]</sup>. Members traveled in 1996 to Johannesburg, South Africa for a regional conference<sup>[6]</sup>. Membership grew to 365 in early 1997<sup>[7]</sup>.

At the end of 2000 membership reached 800. Membership reached 1,000 in 2002 and stood at 1,270 by the end of 2005. Membership growth began to slow dramatically, increasing to 1,302 in 2007 and to 1,305 by the end of 2008. Membership growth rates fell from 6% to 12.5% a year from 2000 to 2006 to less than 2% a year since 2006.

## **Congregational Growth**

### **Wards: 3 Branches: 3**

The first group created in Botswana was in Gaborone in June 1990. The group was created with the arrival of the first missionaries; a senior couple from the South Africa Johannesburg Mission<sup>[8]</sup>. The group became a branch in August 1991. A second branch was created in March 1992. The first district was created at the same time, which included both branches<sup>[9]</sup>. A third unit was added shortly thereafter in Lobatse<sup>[10]</sup>. In 1995 when the Roodepoort South Africa Stake was created, the Gaborone Botswana District was discontinued and assimilated into the new stake. None of the branches became wards at the time. The branches included the Gaborone 1st, Gaborone 2nd, and Lobatse Branches.

Botswana was included in the Africa Southeast Area when the Africa Area was divided in 1998. By the end of 2000, both of the branches in Gaborone became wards and were renamed the Gaborone West and Gaborone Broadhurst Wards. Two branches were created in 2003, one of which was in Francistown, but both were discontinued in 2004. A branch was recreated in Francistown in 2005 which reported to the mission in Johannesburg. A group began functioning in Molepolole in 2008 and later became a branch in 2009 that reported to the mission in Johannesburg. The branch was later included in the Roodepoort South Africa Stake. A third ward was created in the fall of 2009 in Gaborone. The new ward was designated as a young single adults (YSA) Ward, named the Gaborone West 2nd (YSA) Ward. The new ward became the first YSA ward ever created in Africa and the second YSA congregation created on the continent.

Missionaries serving in Botswana are organized into one zone. Eight sister missionaries were serving in Botswana in late 2009. The city of Mochudi, northwest of Gaborone, gained a Church presence and was opened for missionary work in

November 2009. Francistown was also opened for missionary work in the fall of 2009 with the placement of a senior missionary couple.

### **Activity and Retention**

Activity and member retention appear average to high in Botswana. The average number of members per congregation increased from 297 to 326 between 2000 and 2008. However, the creation of the Molepolole Branch and Gaborone West 2nd (YSA) Ward in 2009 indicate that activity and retention have stayed constant or improved. Sacrament attendance reached 70 people both in the Francistown Branch in September 2009 and the Molepolole Branch in July 2009. The three wards in Botswana likely have over 100 attending weekly. Active membership in Botswana may be as high as 600, indicating activity rates are around 45%.

### **Language Materials**

**Languages with LDS Scripture:** English, Setswana

The Book of Mormon, many hymns and a limited number of Church materials for priesthood, Relief Society, Sunday School, and missionary work have been translated into Setswana. No other LDS scriptures are translated into Setswana. No Church materials have been translated into Kalanga or other native languages in Botswana.

### **Meetinghouses**

The first Church built meetinghouse was completed in 1997 in Gaborone. The meetinghouse was planned only to build the first phase but because of strong membership growth, the second phase was also completed[\[11\]](#). Four or five other meetinghouses are used, many of which are likely rented buildings or spaces.

### **Public Health**

Despite economic prosperity, Botswana faces major health problems due to HIV/AIDS, with 23.9% of the population infected. Only Swaziland has a higher rate of those infected with HIV/AIDS. The virus is commonly spread through illicit sexual relations or drug use, both of which are against Church teachings. Sexual promiscuity among many Batswana is major obstacle for the growth of the Church. Contaminated needles and HIV-positive mothers also contribute to the proliferation of HIV/AIDS. Converts who have the HIV/AIDS are less able to strengthen the Church in the long term due to the disease significantly shorting their lifespan. A population with a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS poses a health threat to missionaries.

### **Humanitarian and Development Work**

Church members from the United States visited and educated health care professionals on neonatal resuscitation techniques in 2006 in Gaborone. Those in attendance for the training included 55 doctors, midwives, and nurses throughout the country[\[12\]](#). Refugee aid and 500 wheelchairs were also donated in 2006, the latter accepted by the first lady of Botswana[\[13\]](#). Helping Hands projects have been held in the country, which emphasize local members and friends of the Church providing service to their communities[\[14\]](#).

### **Opportunities, Challenges and Prospects**

#### **Religious Freedom**

Open proselytism and freedom of religion allow the Church to function in the country unrestrained by local laws.

#### **Cultural Issues**

Immorality and the spread of HIV/AIDS is a serious issue for the Church to address. Those engaged in extra-marital sexual relations are unable to join the Church unless relations are stopped and repented of or potential converts marry.

#### **National Outreach**

The centralized, urban population in the eastern portions of Botswana allows the Church to more easily reach the majority of the inhabitants. The Church's outreach in Botswana saw two periods of rapid growth when the Church was first established in the country and in the late 2000s. By the end of 2009 there was a Church presence in Francistown, Gaborone, Lobatse, Mochudi, and Molepolole. The Church is present in districts and town councils where 42% of the population resides. Outreach in areas where the Church is established is limited to urban centers, particularly outside of Gaborone. The Church only has a presence in one of the smaller towns (Lobatse), which was established in the early 1990s. Rural areas sparsely populated outside of eastern Botswana present a daunting challenge for missionary work, which has been very limited among Christian denominations. Unless local members and mission leadership focus on introducing the Church to rural areas populated by the Basarwa, this ethnic group may not have access to the Church for decades.

Distance from mission headquarters in Johannesburg appears to have left Botswana with less resources and attention than other areas of the South Africa Johannesburg Mission. The border between the two nations has been easy for missionaries to cross, but this likely has resulted with missionaries transferring to and from Botswana too rapidly to more effectively learn local customs and language. Since 2008 the country has experienced greater attention and mission resources evidenced by the opening of new proselyting areas and branches. The long period of no expansion to additional cities and towns may have resulted from the mission focusing on building up established congregations before venturing into unreached areas.

#### **Member Activity and Convert Retention**

Activity and retention in Botswana are reflected primarily with the condition of the Church in Gaborone, where the bulk of the membership resides. Convert retention in Gaborone appears modest due to no increase in congregations between 1992 and 2009. Greater member activity and retention with young single adults contributed to the establishment of the first YSA ward ever created in Africa. The organization of an YSA congregation indicates the strength and activity of the local membership is high enough to fill the callings of both the regular wards in Gaborone and the new YSA congregation. Retention and inactivity may be poorest in Lobatse since there were only around 70 active members after the congregation has functioning in the city since 1992.

#### **Ethnic Issues and Integration**

Ethnic issues in the Church have likely not occurred in Botswana due to ethnic groups separated by geography, little ethnic

violence and the small membership of the Church. Great opportunity exists for growth to occur without the challenges of inter-ethnic violence.

### **Language Issues**

The opportunity is present for the Church to conduct missionary with lesser linguistic diversity than other African nations. Missionaries are usually unable to learn Setswana proficiently because they are transferred to and from other areas in the South Africa Johannesburg Mission. Most missionaries assigned to Botswana in 2008 stayed for six months or less. The lacking language abilities of many of the missionaries serving in Botswana may have lessen the growth of the Church due to problems in understanding between missionaries, members and those learning about the Church. English is widely spoken and likely used by missionaries and members to facilitate communication.

Botswana has a capable, active local membership able to translate additional Church materials and scriptures into Setswana. Setswana is also widely spoken throughout the Northwest Province in South Africa, which indicates the demand for additional Church materials and scriptures to be translated.

Kalanga translations of basic Church materials will likely come forth as more Kalanga-speaking members join the Church in the Francistown area. Currently the Francistown Branch is the only congregation in Botswana that speaks Kalanga. Small numbers of immigrants from neighboring African nations may need to speak English in order to communicate with native membership.

### **Leadership**

Botswana has a legacy of active, qualified leadership. When the first group was created in 1990, both men in the two native families held the Melchizedek Priesthood which they received when they joined the Church in the United States<sup>[15]</sup>. A former bishop of the Gaborone West Ward helped the Church with government relations and remarked that the Church is well respected in Botswana<sup>[16]</sup>. Missionaries have not served from Botswana in more appreciable numbers until more recently.

### **Temple**

Members living in Botswana belong to the Johannesburg South Africa Temple District. Batswana members have utilized the temple well despite constraints of finances, time and distance. In 2001, 28 youth from the Gaborone West Ward attended the temple to do baptisms for the dead<sup>[17]</sup>. Temple excursions likely occur regularly from the wards in Gaborone.

### **Comparative Growth**

Botswana has seen slower growth than most African nations which had the Church first established in the early 1990s. At the end of 2008, Zambia had 2,237 members in 11 branches and the Republic of Congo had about 4,200 members, a stake and 14 congregations. Yet Botswana has seen more rapid growth than Tanzania, which had 915 members in five congregations in late 2008.

Compared to other Southern African nations, Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-Day Adventists have experienced slower growth. Lower membership totals for these and other Christian denominations are partially due to the smaller population of Botswana combined with the large number of denominations presence in the country.

Stronger growth has likely not occurred in Botswana due to the Church focusing on building up strong congregations in Gaborone or from mission resources stretched between South Africa and Lesotho.

### **Future Prospects**

The opening of new branches proselyting areas presents new opportunities for greater membership growth. Slow and steady growth in Gaborone will likely continue, but more rapid growth in membership will likely occur in Molepolole, Mochudi, and Francistown. Rapid growth had begun to occur in Francistown in late 2009, which if continued could lead to additional congregations created in the city and Church materials translated into Kalanga. The creation of a stake for the wards and branches in Botswana appears possible in the coming years. Before the country becomes a stake, additional wards need to be created. Additional wards may be organized in Gaborone, but the branches in Molepolole and Lobatse will likely become wards before a stake is organized.

Due to the small population, a mission will likely not be created to serve only Botswana. The South Africa Johannesburg Mission is very large, with 185 missionaries serving in November 2009. The First Presidency may divide the mission and create a new mission administering to Botswana, Lesotho and South African provinces of Free State and North West due to these regions speaking Setswana and Sesotho, which is closely related to Setswana.

More towns will likely open for missionary work due considering several have opened recently and many more cities and towns between 30,000 and 60,000 people are unreached by the Church. Unreached urban areas nearby Gaborone and Francistown seem most likely to have a future Church presence, such as Selibe Phikwe, Kanye and Mogoditshane.

- [1] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Botswana>
- [2] <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71287.htm>
- [3] <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/20267/Missionary-work-begins-in-Botswana.html>
- [4] <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/22452/Prayers-of-dedication-offered-on-4-nations-in-central-southern--Africa.html>
- [5] <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/22523/Seminary-lays-strong-gospel-foundation.html>
- [6] <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/27515/5000-attend-conference-in-South-Africa-example-of-growth-of-the-Church.html>
- [7] <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/29601/Open-houses-in-Africa-show-rapid-growth.html>
- [8] <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/20267/Missionary-work-begins-in-Botswana.html>
- [9] <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/22452/Prayers-of-dedication-offered-on-4-nations-in-central-southern--Africa.html>
- [10] <http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/contact-us/botswana>
- [11] <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/29601/Open-houses-in-Africa-show-rapid-growth.html>
- [12] <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/49191/Neonatal-training-given-in-Botswana.html>
- [13] <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/49191/Neonatal-training-given-in-Botswana.html>
- [14] <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/51353/Helping-Hands-goes-coast-to-coast.html>
- [15] <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/20267/Missionary-work-begins-in-Botswana.html>
- [16] <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/49839/Botswana-leader.html>
- [17] <http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/40333/Journey-ends-with-baptisms-for-the-dead.html>