

THE IMPACTS OF EJIGBO BAPTIST DIASPORA IN COTE D'IVOIRE ON
CHURCH GROWTH IN EJIGBO BAPTIST ASSOCIATION 1900- 2013

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the development of Yoruba Baptist Traders in Cote D'ivoire, especially Ejigbo people in Osun State from a historical perspective. This group of lay men and women have been a major instrument in the spread of Baptist Faith in the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire since the 1900s. Among other things, the study investigated how Ejigbo people used economic activities as viable tools in promoting and sustaining indigenous mission activities. The study discussed the history of tithes sharing among sampled selected seven Baptist churches in Cote d'ivoire and the remittance of same to the home churches in Nigeria which has aided the growth of Ejigbo Baptist Association in Osun Baptist Conference. The historical and missiological methods were utilized in this study. First, extensive fieldwork was carried out in Cote d'ivoire and Nigeria among the selected Churches between July 2013 and March 2014. Secondly, interviews were conducted with selected people in selected towns in these two countries to obtain information from those who lived and have been involved in the trading and religious activities in Cote d'ivoire. Other primary materials examined include Church records, minutes of the Executive Committees of the Yoruba speaking Baptist Churches. Moreover, data on Diaspora and relevant articles in learned journals and books were consulted to provide a frame work for the study. The result of this study indicated that the primary reason for their Diaspora adventure was to look for greener pasture beyond the shore of Nigeria. It further revealed the involvement of laity in the propagation of the gospel beyond their cultural land. Baptist as a denomination strongly believes in the priesthood of all believers. This was demonstrated by the Ejigbo Yoruba Baptist in Cote D'ivoire when they started their indigenous worship services, planting of Churches, rotating of Church leadership and other religious activities among themselves. This lingered for many decades until in recent period when they now employs services of trained Baptist Pastors from Nigeria and Ghana. Furthermore, the significant contributions of the Yoruba Baptist Diaspora both to their home Churches in Nigeria and in Cote D'ivoire in terms of financial contributions and building commitments. Their religious and educational impacts among the other Diasporas as well as among the Ivoirians are enumerated. Finally, the study recommended that better working relationship between pastors and former church leaders is needed in Cote D'ivoire. The need for pastoral leadership should be taught in all Yoruba Baptist Churches, this will create opportunities for more effective discipleship, and Church membership training and mission- oriented issues. Also, there is need for faithfulness and proper accountability among Diaspora leaders in terms of remitting tithes sharing. One of the cardinal practices in the Baptist denomination is quarterly accountability, Diaspora leaders should make known to their followers in Cote D'ivoire and to home Churches, how much the tithes shared is and how much they spend on any project. Any material bought should be properly receipted. Sending of tithes shared by Diaspora members to home Churches in Nigeria is highly recommended.

5.2. CONCLUSION

The purpose of Yoruba migrants was to seek for a greener pasture in neighboring countries like Benin, Togo and finally settled in Cote D'Ivoire. Most of these migrants were people of low economic status before migrating to Cote D'Ivoire. The poor economy conditions of Nigeria by then support their decisions. At first these migrants engaged in a short term trading but by and large, majority have become the breadwinners to their respective families and major financial to their home Churches.

Migration plays important role in the advancement of religion, especially the establishment of Yoruba speaking Baptist Churches in Cote D'ivoire. Since around 1929 till date the trading and mission activities of Yoruba Baptist traders, Ejigbo people in particular are worth documented. The Baptist faith allows some freedom of worship in the principle of 'the priesthood of all believers', this provides an enabling environment for group of laity to pioneer and founded churches and assume the leadership of those Churches for some years before extending calls to trained Baptist Pastors.

The Ejigbo Baptist Diaspora are making significant impacts to their home Churches in Nigeria, through the system of tithes sharing which is being remitted to home churches. Through this gesture, home Churches are able to pay pastors' salary and retirement benefits, construction of new Church auditorium, or *pastorium*. Also

some churches are able to engage in multi-staff ministries, purchase of land for new established Churches, procurements of musical instruments and choir ropes. Diaspora financial assistance to home Churches also facilitates purchase of personal cars to some pastors in Ejigbo, a well finished building retirement benefits to some retired pastors who had long served in Ejigbo. One of the retired pastors –Iyin Odetude was personally placed on monthly salary by one of the Diasporas members of a particular Church in Ejigbo. Diaspora impacts are also felt in IBUBA, Educational-mission, and Medical –mission, Evangelism and other mission’s activities within and outside Ejigbo town.

There are some challenges as regards Diaspora contributions to home Churches. This ranges from; unfaithfulness, lack of accountability, dictatorship, mismanagement, diversion for personal use, etc. Nevertheless, if Ejigbo Baptist Diasporas can intensify efforts to overcome the aforementioned problems or challenges, their mode of tithe sharing, remittance and contributions to home Churches will become a model for other Christian Diasporas within or outside Nigeria to emulate. The system was promulgated by lay-men since 1954 for effective church planting in Cote D’ivoire and Church growth in home Churches in Nigeria at Ejigbo Baptist Association in particular. In the mind of this researcher, this is the best in this contemporary time to support home and weak Churches for effective Church growth.

5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Without doubt, the Yoruba Baptist Diaspora in Cote D’ivoire have made tremendous contributions towards the advancement of Christian faith and development of some Churches in Ejigbo Baptist Association in Nigeria. It was stated

that the Global Mission of the Nigerian Baptist Convention joined to complement the efforts of the Yoruba Diasporas on the advancement of Baptist Mission in Cote D'ivoire. Based on the various issues obtained from this research, the following observations are recommended.

1. There is a need for better working relationship between pastors and former church leaders. The need for pastoral leadership should be taught in all Yoruba Baptist Churches, this will create opportunities for more effective discipleship, and Church membership training and mission- oriented issues.
2. The trained Baptist pastors should see the laity who had started the missionary activities in Cote D'ivoire many years ago as partners in progress. They should buried their pride and learn from these Church leaders about the church tradition on tithe sharing, Ivoirian culture, and Diasporas homogenous life. Pastors should not be involved in inordinate spending of Church money; they should protect their image and integrity.
3. The Diaspora Baptist churches should carry the Nigerian Baptist Convention, through the global Missions Board on pastoral calling to any church to critically access the pastors going to lead the Yoruba Baptist Churches in Cote D'ivoire. This will prevent competition between church pastors and the Missionary by the Global board.
4. There is need for faithfulness and proper accountability among Diaspora leaders. One of the cardinal practices in the Baptist denomination is quarterly accountability, Diaspora leaders should make known to their followers in Cote

