

Adventism in Samburu County

LAZARUS LESARON LELENGUIYA

Lazarus Lesaron Lelenguiya is executive secretary of Central Rift Valley Conference, Kenya.

Samburu is a semi-arid county in northern Kenya primarily inhabited by the Samburu and Turkana people. Samburu county covers an estimated area of 21,000 square kilometers (8,000 square miles) stretching north from the Wuaso Ng'iro River to the south of Lake Turkana. The 2019 national census determined the population of Samburu county to be 310,327.¹ The Samburu are semi-nomadic pastoralists related to the Maasai.² The strong Samburu culture presented serious challenges to the spread of the Christian faith with some of the early missionaries making very few converts.³ The main town in Samburu county is Maralal which is 356 kilometers north of Nairobi. This serves as the county headquarters. Other towns include Baragoi, Archer's Post, South Horr, Wamba, Lodosoit, and Kisima. The county is classed as semi-arid with insecurity and cattle-rustling being some of the problems encountered there.

The Coming of Adventism

Adventism came to Samburu county through a police officer named Samuel Keroti Moindi who was posted to Suguta Marmar by the Kenyan government in 1974. When he arrived, he found out that the Adventist Church did not exist in that expanse and he and his family began to strategize how to establish an Adventist presence. He started by using his children to invite their school and neighborhood friends to their home on Sabbaths. They held Sabbath services in their home and their visitors enjoyed their company and the nice food they shared together.

Moindi came to Samburu at a time of great drought which led to scarcity of food. To sustain his Sabbath programs, he decided to request his Kisii community to assist him with food to share with the Samburu community. The food program earned him many friends and contacts. The way opened for him to talk to the locals because friendship was now established and he was able to win about 25 Samburu men, women, and youth who, along with the children, became the first Samburu converts. The first Samburu Adventists were from the Lelekoiten family, the Lepiile family, the Leshok family, the Lenantet family, and the Leshorono family. They were baptized by Pastor Fredrick Wangai when he went to witness the work of God in Samburu, and he organized a church in 1983 with a membership of 29. Pastor Fred Wangai was the stewardship and development director for the Eastern Africa Division.⁴

The first district pastor sent to Samburu was Joseph Ngunjiri Muriithi. He swiftly adopted the peoples' culture and they loved him. In 1984 he was transferred to Maralal within the same territory, leaving the congregation at Suguta Marmar without a pastor. This brought about a drop from 175 members to about 25 members.

The Church in Maralal

The Adventist Church was established in Maralal in 1982 with 17 members and later was organized into a church from the Suguta Marmar Church in 1984 with a membership of 80. Maralal, which is about 40 kilometers north of Suguta Marmar, was the largest town and the district headquarters at that time. It is currently the county headquarters. Most of the members there were government workers who found a place of worship in this church. Some of the Samburu youth who converted to Adventism in this church included Daniel Lantano Lenabaala and his brothers, together with their mother, who has remained for many years a faithful follower. Others include Joseph Lokitano Erobon, with his brother Senteu, and Lazarus Lesaron Lelenguiya, among others. The first Samburu to attempt to become a pastor was Daniel Lenabaala, but in the process, he dropped out, leaving Lazarus Lesaron Lelenguiya as the first Samburu pastor.

The Spread of the Work

The work continued to spread to Kisima Center and a Sabbath School was started there by Pastor Wilson Githinji in 1986 after a successful evangelistic campaign conducted there that year. Later, Missionary Volunteers to the unentered areas sent a Samburu by the name Robert Sairi who assisted the Sabbath School in building the membership. The Sabbath School dragged along for many years with many ups and downs until 2017 when a Maasai from Narok, Gideon Longoi Tenkeet Ole Meingati, was posted there by the Mara Vision Outreach working in Maasai Mara. He became involved in evangelism work and soon opened a Sabbath School in Ng'amata, assisted by other Maasai pastors. They also opened Sabbath Schools at Poro, Loosuk, and Kirimom.

In 1995 Lazarus Lesaron Lelenguiya opened a Sabbath School in Baragoi town with three members. These were Lazarus Lelenguiya and teachers Samuel Ogochi and David Njagi. The church grew to some 22 members but due to cattle-rustling, the Sabbath School stagnated for many years until the East Africa Union became involved in 2005. The union conducted an evangelistic campaign, erected a temporary church structure, and sent a lay pastor named Peter Tebanyang. The Sabbath School has struggled a lot and currently there is hope that it will be organized into a church soon, since it is far from the mother church in Maralal.

Further Growth

In 2002 the Central Kenya Conference sent Pastor Haggai Ogoti who opened another branch Sabbath School at Wamba Market Center in Samburu East, 108 kilometers from Maralal. The church grew with lots of challenges, with yet another Sabbath School being established at Archer's Post with the assistance of the Isiolo Central Point

Church in 2005. The Sabbath School at Archer's Post, 165 kilometers southeast of Maralal, grew into a church in 2008 with a membership of close to 35 members. Most the people there are government workers, merchants, local persons, and workers in the tourism industry. Another church was opened about 20 kilometers from Archer's Post with the assistance of the Central Kenya Conference leadership. They put up a school between 2016 and 2017. The Adventist church is today flourishing in both the eastern and western parts of Samburu county, leaving the north struggling. Currently the church is progressing with the support of the Central Rift Valley Conference managing the larger part of Samburu west and north while the Central Kenya Conference is managing the eastern parts of Samburu.

SOURCES

2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census, Volume I: Population by County and Sub-County. Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. November 6, 2019.

Holtzman, Jon. *Samburu*. New York: Rosen Publishing Group, Inc., 1995.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1983.

NOTES

1. *2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census, Volume I: Population by County and Sub-County*, Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, November 6, 2019.
2. Jon Holtzman, *Samburu* (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, Inc., 1995), 9.
3. *Ibid.*, 56.
4. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1983), 87.

encyclopedia.adventist.org is an official website of the [Seventh-day Adventist World Church](#)

© 2020 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 12501 Old Columbia Pike Silver Spring , MD 20904 USA 301-680-6000