

South-East Tanzania Conference

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The South-East Tanzania Conference is one of the four church administrative units of the Southern Tanzania Union Mission.

The South-East Tanzania Conference comprises the government administrative regions of Mtwara, Lindi, and the southern parts of Dar es Salaam and Pwani regions of Morogoro Road moving from the Indian Ocean westward to River Ruvu Bridge, which is on the west of Mlandizi center.¹ South-East Tanzania Conference was organized as a result of splitting the former East Tanzania Conference, which had headquarters in Morogoro Municipality, in 2015. The other resulting entity was East-Central Tanzania Conference.² The secretary's statistical report of June 2019 shows that the South-East Tanzania Conference has 49,744 members in 167 churches and 163 companies.³ The territory occupied by the South-East Tanzania Conference at the time was 66,040 square kilometers (25,500 square miles), which had a population of 7,712,794.⁴

The origins of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) work in this conference are traced to the regions comprising the conference, namely, Dar es Salaam and Pwani together as one parcel, and the Lindi and Mtwara Regions together as another parcel. Although they were reached almost around the same time, the two were approached differently.

Origins of the SDA Work in Dar es Salaam and Pwani Region South of Morogoro Road

The earliest known efforts to spread the Adventist message in this territory started in 1968 by an evangelistic campaign that was sponsored by Magomeni Seventh-day Adventist Church, the first church to be organized in the city of Dar es Salaam. The preacher in the campaign was Elibariki Misheto, who was among the first colporteur pioneers to spread the gospel in Dar es Salaam. The campaign resulted in the formation of a company, which was later organized into Temeke Seventh-day Adventist Church. Initially, the church met in a music and bar hall then known as "Dar es Salaam Development Corporation (DDC) Keko Music Hall." Then the first believers shifted to Xavier School in 1970, which is now known as Kibasila Secondary School. The relocation

came after great chaos at DDC Keko Music Hall that was caused by a collision between worship hours and time for music and dancing accompanied by selling alcohol.

In 1971, the administration of Chang'ombe Teachers College, currently Dar es Salaam University College of Education (DUCE), permitted the church to conduct its worship services at their premises. In 1971 and 1972, the government permitted churches to use public premises for worship services.⁵ The church went back to DDC Keko Music Hall for worship service in 1973.

Temeke SDA Church became an important agency in the establishment of other churches in the city of Dar es Salaam and the Pwani Region south of Morogoro Road. The Temeke SDA Church pioneered churches in Ukonga, Mtoni, Kurasini, Kigamboni, Keko, Utete, Yombo Dovya, Mafia, Ikwiriri, Kibiti, and Nanguruwe.

Origins of the SDA Work in the Southern Corridor

The southern part of Tanzania comprises two regions: Mtwara and Lindi. Mtwara has the following government administrative districts: Masasi, Nanyumbu, Newala, Tandahimba, and Mtwara Rural. Lindi has the following districts: Nachingwea, Liwale, Ruangwa, Kilwa, and Lindi Rural. The Adventist work in the southern part of Tanzania started in the early 1970s. The work entered the southern part of the country with difficulties and was received reluctantly by the tribes of the southern corridor. The major tribes of these regions are the Wamakua, Wayao, Wamakonde, Wamwera, and Wangindo.⁶

The gospel work started in Tunduru district (in Ruvuma Region) in 1972; from there and around the same time, the gospel went to other places such as Newala, Mtwara, and Tandahimba. The main person behind all this work was Pastor David Dobias, a missionary and administrator from the United States of America (U.S.A.). In addition to sending lay pioneers to these places, Pastor Dobias mobilized funds in the U.S.A. and elsewhere to construct church buildings at Mtwara, Newala, and Nachingwea. Those who saw these church buildings would observe that they had a similar architectural appearance.⁷

In 1972 the work in the southern part of Tanzania was put under the supervision of Pastor Joshua Kajula, who was stationed at Lindi, looking after church members who were still in small groups clustered at Lindi, Mtwara, Newala, and Masasi. Kajula served at Lindi station from 1972 to 1973, and thereafter he was transferred to Songea station, where he worked for six months. At the end of 1973, he was returned to Lindi, where he served until 1975.⁸ Serving with Pastor Kajula was a lay evangelist who is remembered by one name, Amalema. This evangelist was stationed at Nachingwea to care for the church members at Nachingwea, Nakarara, Mchauru, and Luatala. At Nachingwea, members met in a residential house that belonged to a member who is also remembered by one name, Pathami. Among the first church members who congregated in the house church at Nachingwea were Elder Chilemba, Elder Kalembo, and Elder Beno. The church at Masasi started in a public building that belonged to the Regional Trading Corporation. Among the earliest believers at Masasi were Elder

Medical Missionary Work as the Right Arm of the Gospel

The Adventist work in the territory comprising the South-East Tanzania Conference was very much strengthened by the medical ministry work. The idea of spreading the gospel through health ministry by establishing dispensaries in Tanzania was promoted by the union mission leadership between 1969 and 1975. The leaders included, but are not limited to, Elder Leonard Robinson (president), Elder, H. Salzmänn (secretary-treasurer), and Pastor Dea Otieno (administrative officer).¹⁰

From 1970 to 1973, Pastor David Dobias, president of Tanzania General Field, and Elder Egdi Mavanza, secretary-treasurer of the field, were at the fore, supervising and financially supporting the construction of the Temeke Dispensary from its inception to its completion.¹¹ In 1973, Mr. Tumaini Enock, a civil servant at Temeke council, was commissioned to find a plot for a permanent church building. The union leadership, with its headquarters at Busegwe, Musoma, joined hands with Mr. Tumaini through Dobias to survey the plot.¹² The construction began with the dispensary, and upon completion in 1974, the building performed double functions—as a dispensary during the weekdays and as worship premises on Sabbath.

On April 7, 1988, the union leadership in Arusha under Pastor Robert Taylor as president took an action to decentralize the medical institutions in Tanzania.¹³ On May 3, 1988, the executive committee of the East Tanzania Field, under the leadership of Pastor Jocktan Kuyenga, president, and Elder Mangi Manento, secretary-treasurer, with its headquarters in Morogoro, adopted the union's action.¹⁴ Immediately, the East Tanzania Field began overseeing Temeke Dispensary. The union, which was based in Musoma, then in Arusha, and Tanzania General Field (later named East Tanzania Field [ETF]) based in Morogoro, financed Temeke Dispensary construction and paid for its major operating expenses, including workers' salaries.

In addition to the Temeke Dispensary, the church leaders founded Mtwara Dispensary in the south-east tip of Tanzania. Early in his work, Pastor Dobias learned that a health facility was necessary to complement his house-to-house outreach strategy in the southern corridor. As a result, in the year 1971, he constructed a dispensary in Mtwara town. During the same year, the Tanzania General Field, in its year-end committee meeting, voted to send Dr. Ellison T. Mujungu to Mtwara to lead the newly established dispensary. Unfortunately, the plan aborted because the regional medical officer did not allow the church to open the dispensary. It did not open until 1978, and at that time, Dr. Mhina was transferred from Temeke Dispensary and assigned to lead the Mtwara Dispensary.¹⁵ This facility has been in continuous operation from its establishment and is currently operated by South-East Tanzania Conference, which comprises the southeastern part of the former Tanzania General Field—the field that supervised the construction of the dispensary in 1971.

In addition to the two medical institutions, the South-East Tanzania Conference runs one primary school, Kongowe Adventist Primary School. There are three other schools: Temeke Adventist Primary, owned and operated by the Temeke Adventist Church; and Heritage Primary School and Heritage Secondary School, owned by an individual church member. All three schools are administered according to the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education. These institutions are actively involved in sharing the three angels' messages. The conference serves all these institutions spiritually by assigning a chaplain to each one of them.

Pastor David Dobias and the Gospel Work in South Tanzania

Pastor David Dobias's contribution to the development of the Adventist work in the southern corridor of Tanzania will never be forgotten. Pastor Dobias, who lived in America at the time of writing this article, served in Tanzania as a teacher, missionary, pastor, and administrator. However, Pastor Dobias is remembered for his work in the southern corridor of Tanzania. The following is a narrative about his work in Tanzania, particularly in the southern part of Tanzania, which is part of the present South-East Tanzania Conference.¹⁶

Before traveling for his furlough and the 1970 General Conference Session in Atlantic City, New Jersey, U.S.A., Pastor Dobias got word from the union headquarters in Busegwe to the effect that the Tanzania Union Executive Committee had voted for him to become a union evangelist for the purpose of opening work in the south of Tanzania. For many years, German missionaries had gone to the Pare Mountains and around Lake Victoria. At that time, there were thousands of Adventists. Furthermore, the Mbeya Station had been operating for many years. Kibidula and Heri Dispensaries were fairly well established. However, there was a strip of land in southern Tanzania—perhaps 800 kilometers (500 miles) long and 480 kilometers (300 miles) wide—with no church. At that time only Pastor John Moses and about 20 members were in the entire territory.¹⁷

While he was in America, Dobias had a choice either to go to southern Tanzania or to stay at home in America. He chose to return to Tanzania. So, Pastor Robinson took him with his son to Lindi and Mtwara upon their return to Tanzania. They stayed temporarily at Busegwe. They did not realize that it was a prohibited area; expatriates were not allowed to live there without special permission. So, he was told to go back and find housing elsewhere. He went to Lindi, but he could find nothing that was acceptable except for a Goan priest's home in Lindi. The family of the Goan priest owned a home on the beach near Lindi hospital. He made friends with the Goan priest, who knew nothing about the Adventists. The Goan priest's bishop was horrified and told the priest not to rent the house to the Adventists, but he did, and Pastor Dobias and the priest became friends. Some years later the Mbeya Conference president traveled to Lindi and met Father Augustine, who told him about his good friend Pastor Dobias.¹⁸

Pastor Ron Spear, then Lay Activities and Sabbath School director of the Tanzania Union, promised Pastor David Dobias 12 laymen if he would go to Lindi. The promise was fulfilled, and Pastor Dobias went to Lindi with 12 untrained laymen. He planted them in different towns—David Chilimba was planted in Mbamba Bay; Lameck

Murungu, in Masasi; Zechariah Sabato, in Nachingwea; and Enock Rwambli, in Mtwara.¹⁹ Other areas where he planted these laymen were Songea, Tunduru (Tunduma?), Newala, Mikindani, and Lindi. These laymen started going door-to-door with Voice of Prophecy (VOP) lessons, collected the answers, and sent them back to Lindi, where Mrs. Dobias corrected them and sent back new lessons for these laymen to deliver. When there was enough interest, Pastor Kajula (who was sent to Lindi with Pastor Dobias) began holding meetings, starting in Newala, where George Mtawanya and a few members lived. They held their meetings in a steel-framed structure covered with canvas.²⁰

That first year, with God's blessings, thousands of VOP lessons, and crusades, companies started in every area, several churches were built, and between 200 and 300 people were baptized. At the time, there was no real transportation between Dar and Lindi during the rainy season, so he made the trip by car to Kibidula, Njombe, Songea, and on around, and then back to Lindi. But later, he was elected as the president of the Tanzania General Field. The Lord blessed the hard work of David Dobias, Joshua Kajula, and the 12 laymen, and thus, the work in South-East Tanzania Conference began.²¹

Organizational History of South-East Tanzania Conference

South-East Tanzania Conference came into being following the split of East Tanzania Conference into two conferences: East-Central Tanzania Conference and South-East Tanzania Conference. The East Tanzania Conference Executive Committee that sat on December 18–19, 2013, voted with one voice to request for the reorganization of the East Tanzania Conference into two conferences. The resolution was sent to the union and later to the division Executive Committee.²²

The need to reorganize the East Tanzania Conference was a result of the growth of God's work in the territory. By December 2014, the East Tanzania Conference had 282 churches, which were organized into 67 districts, and the membership had increased to 53,790. This was 112 percent church growth and a 49 percent membership increase from the previous records available in the East Tanzania Conference executive secretary's office. With such an increase of churches and membership, it had become difficult for the conference officers and departmental directors to minister to the churches effectively; hence, the idea of splitting the conference. With a manageable territory, God's people would be nurtured effectively. Furthermore, the financial status of the conference was satisfactory. The human resource was adequate and devoted. Consequently, on January 6–8, 2015, two conferences were organized out of the East Tanzania Conference: East-Central Tanzania Conference and South-East Tanzania Conference.²³

List of Presidents

The following have been the presidents of the South-East Tanzania Conference: Mark Walwa Malekana (2014–2015); Herbert Ignas Nziku (2015–2018); Steven Bohole Ngussa (2018–)²⁴

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. *Seventh-day Adventist Online Yearbook*, "South-East Tanzania Conference," accessed November 14, 2019, <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/entity?EntityID=53017>.
2. Southern Tanzania Union Mission, Statistical Report, second quarter 2019, Southern Tanzania Union Mission archives, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
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5. "Historia ya Kanisa la Temeke" (Temeke SDA church history), (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), Temeke SDA Church records, Temeke District, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
6. Robert Mitande, "Historia ya Kazi ya Injili Kusini" (History of the gospel work in the south), (unpublished paper, April 2019), personal collection of Dr. Rabson Nkoko.
7. Ibid.
8. "Joshua Kamenya Kajula," Pastor Letta's Official Website, accessed April 9, 2019, <https://pastorletta.adventistafrica.org/joshua-kamenye-kajula>.
9. Ibid.
10. M. Manento, phone interview by authors, March 12, 2019.
11. E. Mujungu, phone interview by authors, March 18, 2019.
12. Minutes of the Temeke SDA Church, 1973, Temeke SDA Church records, Temeke District, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
13. Minutes of the Tanzania Union Mission, action no. 345 of 1988, Southern Tanzania Union Mission archives, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
14. Minutes of the East Tanzania Field, May 3, 1988, action no. 111, South-East Tanzania Conference archives, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
15. Ibid.
16. Pastor David Dobias, e-mail message to Dr. Rabson Nkoko, January 4, 2019. In the e-mail message, Pastor Dobias wrote what he was able to remember of the events that took place 50 years ago.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. David Dobias, "Laymen Spearhead the Work," *World Mission Report* 63, no. 1 (1974), 15–16.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Minutes of the East Tanzania Field, May 3, 1988, action no. 111.
23. Ibid.

24. Authors were witnesses to these facts. At the time they authored this article, Pastor Wilfred Mafwimbo was serving as executive secretary of the South-East Tanzania Conference, and Dr. Rabson Ntambala Nkoko was serving as executive secretary of the Southern Tanzania Union Mission.

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