

Greater Bahr el Ghazal Field

WILLIAM KABI OLIVER HINDI

William Kabi Oliver Hindi has been executive secretary of Greater Bahr el Ghazal Field since 2013.

Formerly part of Greater Upper Nile Field, Greater Bahr El Ghazal Field (GBF) was organized in 2012. It is currently a part of the South Sudan Attached Territory (SSAT) in the East-Central Africa Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

The territory of the Greater Bahr El Ghazal Field includes the following states in the country of South Sudan: Lakes, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Warrap, and Western Bahr el Ghazal.

Statistics, as of June 30, 2020: churches 12, membership 12,820, population 3,688,570¹

The field headquarters is located in Wau, the current capital of Wau state. Its base is on the eastern side of the main road of the government's headquarters and Gonia center, in plot no. 62, Block 37, 3 Class, at Nazareth residential area. It is registered at the national level under the non-governmental organizations' Act, 2003²

Geographically, the field, located at the northwestern part of the country, borders Sudan in the north, Central Africa Republic in the west, and internally borders with Greater Equatoria in the south and Greater Upper Nile in the east. It has an area of 210,785 square kilometers (81,384 square miles)³ and a population of 2,722,987, according to the 2008 national census.⁴

Brief History

It took 18 years for the Adventist Church in Greater Bahr El Ghazal region to become a field—from Akot company, which was established by the first missionaries in 1994, to becoming a field in 2012. This growth happened in three stages: first, the establishment of the churches; second, the organization of the churches into districts; and third, the organization of the districts into the field. This growth involves the contribution of many minds, hands, and resources; and, above all, God was behind this growth. The Church in the Greater Bahr El Ghazal region was developed by two fields: Sudan Field (SF), whose headquarters was in Khartoum; and South Sudan Field (SSF), currently Greater Equatoria Field (GEF), which was organized into a section in 1993 led by Capilitan, with its first headquarters in Kaya, and into a field in 2000 with Beat Ordermatt as president.⁵

From the last two decades of the 20th century to the first decade of the 21st century, the country of Sudan was in a war that limited the penetration of the gospel message. It was a time of the civil war between the Rebel Movement (Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army/Movement, SPLA/M) and the ruling "National Congress Party" (NCP)

which went on for 21 years (1983-2005) before the nation experienced peace. The General Conference, Trans-European Division, and Middle East Union were wise to divide the Church in Sudan into two fields based on the political situation. Government-controlled areas became the Sudan Field and Rebel-controlled areas became the South Sudan Field. Still, the Greater Bahr El Ghazal region was shared by these two fields until when it became a field of its own.

Greater Bahr el-Ghazal First Church Planters

Paul Mayol Kuot and Wilson Wani were among the first pioneers and evangelists in the region. They arrived in Akot village in Rumbek East in 1994. These evangelists started the mission with prayer, Bible study, and visitation. They conducted the first public evangelism for 21 days in 1994, after which 35 souls were baptized—the first baptism the region had ever experienced. The newly baptized members formed the first church company in the region.⁶ It did not take long before SSF sent another evangelist, Gabriel Thiep Piol, to Malual-khon in 1998.⁷ After seven years, Sudan Field officially extended the mission by sending two evangelists to the region in 2005. Albino Dok Deng was sent to Aweil,⁸ and John Michael was sent to Wau.⁹ Alivera Isaac, interviewed by William Kabi Oliver on June 15, 2019, said that, apart from the work of those evangelists, some indigenous people from the region accepted the gospel in diasporas such as the Kenya and Uganda Refugee Camps, mainly in Northern Sudan. They later brought the message back home, which contributed to the growth of the Church in the region and, as a result, some churches and companies were established.

Organization into Church Districts (2000-2011)

After the fruitful mission of the first pioneers and members, the church in the Greater Bahr El Ghazal region was organized into districts, at different times, and by two fields. Lakes State was organized into two districts under SSF, which include Yirol, led by Paul Mayol; and Rumbek, led by Nelson Nejib; led by Beat Ordermatt in 2000.¹⁰ Beginning in 2005, the year of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between SPLA/M and NCP, most of South Sudanese, mainly from the northern Sudan, returned home in anticipation of the expected referendum in 2011, according to CPA. This return brought a number of Adventists to the Greater Bahr El Ghazal region, and they established churches and took the message to un-entered towns and villages. And as a result, the church in the northern Bahr el-Ghazal, Western Bahr el-Ghazal, and Warrap states was organized by SF as one district in 2008, led by James Tut with headquarters in Wau.

The following year, Northern Bahr el-Ghazal was created as a district led by Michael Yei Banak; and the mother district was given to William Kabi Oliver.¹¹ William Kabi Oliver Hindi, has personal knowledge as he was one of the field staff in the Sudan Field beginning in 2000, he moved to the Greater Upper Nile Field in 2010, and then he participated in the creation of Greater Bahr el-Ghazal Field in 2012. In 2010 these two districts became part of greater the Upper Nile Field which was created from the Sudan Field, when the Lakes Districts were reunited

into one district and remained under SSF.

Greater Bahr El Ghazal Field is Created

In November 2011 (four months after the independence of South Sudan from Sudan on July 9), the two fields of South Sudan: GEF with headquarters in Juba, and GUNF with headquarters in Malakal, were detached from TED and attached to ECD.¹² Thereafter, ECD decided to call a joint session for South Sudan Fields to reorganize the church in South Sudan. This reorganization brought the creation of Greater Bahr El-Ghazal as the third field with its headquarters in Wau. Also, the Lakes District was detached from GEF and moved to the newly created GBF, according to its geographical position. ECD organized these three fields, which would be known as the South Sudan Attached Fields (SSAF).¹³ GBF began on January 12, 2012, with a membership of 3,474, 12 organized churches, a few companies, three districts, three ordained ministers, and two licensed pastors. It was formed with two administrators: Daniel Ogwok (president) and Philip Odiya secretary-treasurer.¹⁴ This youngest field first appeared in the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook in 2013.¹⁵ In June 2013 the field experienced some changes in administration. Phillip Odiya was released, William Kabi Oliver was appointed as executive secretary, and Stephen Kipkoech Biwott, a missionary from Kenya, was appointed as treasurer. The GBF was still an attached field, together with the two other fields, according to the 2011 arrangement which continued until the birth of SSAT in October 2015.¹⁶

The SSAF session was called by ECD¹⁷ in Juba on October 21-26, 2015, to which ten delegates were sent from GBF. The session was led by the three ECD officers: Blasius Ruguri, Nathaniel Walemba, and Jerome Habimana. The session recommended reorganization of SSAF into South Sudan Attached Territory (SSAT) with headquarters in Juba. Its leaders were Clement Joseph Arkangelo Mawa (president), Daniel Ogwok Ojwan Deng (executive secretary), and Danni Harelimana (treasurer).¹⁸ The leadership of GBF was elected in the same session, as follows: Isaiah Malek Garang Ok (president), William Kabi Oliver Hindi, (executive secretary), and Stephen Kipkoech Biwott (treasurer).¹⁹

The creation of SSAT by ECD motivated more growth in GBF. Unfortunately, the war broke out in Wau, which started from the capital Juba. Thank God for saving the lives of the staff. This political crisis caused a temporary relocation of the field headquarters from Wau to Aweil,²⁰ where it operated for two and half years from July 1, 2016, to November 1, 2018.²¹ This was a difficult time for the operation of the field. Another disturbance was persecution in some parts of the region which included detention, unlawful fines, and close of some churches by the communities consisting mostly of idol worshipers. These two constraints caused some delay in the mission in some areas. Nevertheless, the report of 2015-2016 indicated a growth of membership from 3,474 to 5,995, which was 42 percent, with two additional ordained ministers and two more licensed pastors.²²

Current Statistics

GBF is divided into 17 districts with 12 organized churches and 47 companies apart from Sabbath Schools. These districts are Abyei, Aweil Center, Aweil East, Aweil North, Aweil South, Aweil West, Eastern Lakes, Jur River, Gokrial East, Gokrial West, Rumbek East, Rumbek West, Tonj East, Tonj North, Tonj South, Twic, and Wau. The membership according to the third quarter 2019 was 12,138, which give a ratio of one member per 224 inhabitants. There is a workforce of 53, which includes: five ordained pastors, one credentialed missionary, 17 licensed pastors, eight licensed missionaries, and 22 frontline evangelists.²³

Institutions

The field is blessed by the efforts of the local churches which established ten primary schools, with a population of 957 pupils and 40 volunteer workers, according to the December 31, 2018, report. The names of these Adventist primary schools are Wau, Mapper, Jaac, Athieng-Puol, Domenok, Pamat, Apada, Kuajok, Rumbek, and Tonj SDA Primary School. The field started a vocational school known as Wau Adventist Vocational School (WAVS)²⁴ for the purpose of training local church leaders and church planters. The goal is for every organized church to establish at least a nursery and a primary school for the education of Adventist children and for the mission outreach to unbelievers.

Strategic Plan and Achievements

Despite many challenges and inadequate resources, GBF has a comprehensive strategic plan that covers all areas of operation and is based on ECD's five resources: spirit resource, human resource, financial resource, material resource, and regulatory resource. The plan is to avail, develop, and maintain all these resources for nurturing members, winning souls, development of leaders at all levels, and physical development of churches and institutions. The intention is to double all aspects of growth in every quinquennium. Moreover, GBF has a vision of becoming four fields in the near future. In other words, the plan is to create three additional fields: Northern Bahr el-Ghazal with headquarters in Aweil; Warrap with headquarters in Kuajok; and Lakes with headquarters in Rumbek; while the mother field remains as Western Bahr el-Ghazal Field. The plan has already started by acquiring land in those four regional capitals.

Conclusion

The establishment of GBF in the last 25 years (1994-2019) was not an easy task for those who were involved. It took many people and resources to bring the field this far. Much appreciation is to be given to two divisions of the General Conference, TED and ECD, together with their junior organizations which include the Middle East Union and SSAT for giving birth to and bringing GBF to its current status. Also contributing were the mother fields of Sudan and South Sudan (now GEF), implemented this growth. The creation of SSAT by ECD in 2015 was

a good move in that it brought higher organization leadership closer and contributed to the growth of GBF into more fields and conferences.

Executive Officers

Presidents: Daniel Ogwok Ojwan Deng (January 2012-October 2015); Isaiah Malek Garang Ok (November 2015-present).

Executive Secretary-Treasurer: Phillip Odia Oyet (January 2012-May 2013).

Executive Secretaries: William Kabi Oliver Hindi (June 2013-present).

Treasurers: Stephen Kipkoech Biwott (June 2013-October 2015); Stephen Kipkoech Biwott (November 2015-present).

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NOTES

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6. Paul Mayol, interviewed by William Kabi, June 17, 2019.
7. Gabriel Thiep Piol, interviewed by Isaiah Malek Garang Ok, September 9, 2018.
8. Albino Dok Deng, interviewed by Isaiah Malek Garang Ok, July 10, 2018.
9. Alivera Isaac, interviewed by William Kabi Oliver, June 15, 2019.
10. Paul Mayol Kuot, interviewed by William Kabi Oliver Hindi, September 27, 2019.
11. William Kabi Oliver Hindi, personal knowledge as being one of staff since the creation of Greater Bahr el-Ghazal Field in 2012, and previously staff in Sudan Field and Greater Upper Nile Field.
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13. *Ibid.*, ECD2011-097.
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