

The Dogon of Mali and Burkina Faso



Approximately 800,000 Dogon live in a dry remote savannah area in the mid-section of Mali, stretching into Burkina Faso. Their territory includes a rocky plateau in the West and a sandy plain in the east, separated by a 400-700 meter high sheer cliff. The Dogon built their first villages in caves in this cliff, safe from the slave raids of the Fulani nomads who roamed the area. Isolated and distrustful of outsiders, they grew into a scattering of micro-communities, eventually each with a different language.

Life in the bare rocky cliffs is harsh. In many cases soil for gardens was brought in from the plains below, and pigeon dung collected from the cliff face was used as fertilizer. Since the Fulani have been subdued (since colonial times), the Dogon have spread out from the cliff onto the plateau (where onions have been introduced as a cash crop) and into the plain (where they grow millet.) They also grow rice, sorghum, peanuts, vegetables and raise livestock.

For centuries, the Dogon have resisted Islam. But as society modernizes, they are increasingly deciding that animistic religion is no longer adequate and grudgingly accept Islam, for lack of an alternative. In the few villages where Christianity has been lived out by missionaries, or locals who have become Christians elsewhere, one can indeed see the growth of the Christian faith. For example, in the village of Kani-Gogouna, each week the church community is larger than the week before, and Christians are considering building a bigger church, whereas the mosque is emptying at the same rate.

Primary Religion:

Animism / Islam

Disciples (Matt 28:19):

5 %

Churches:

Perhaps 150

Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):

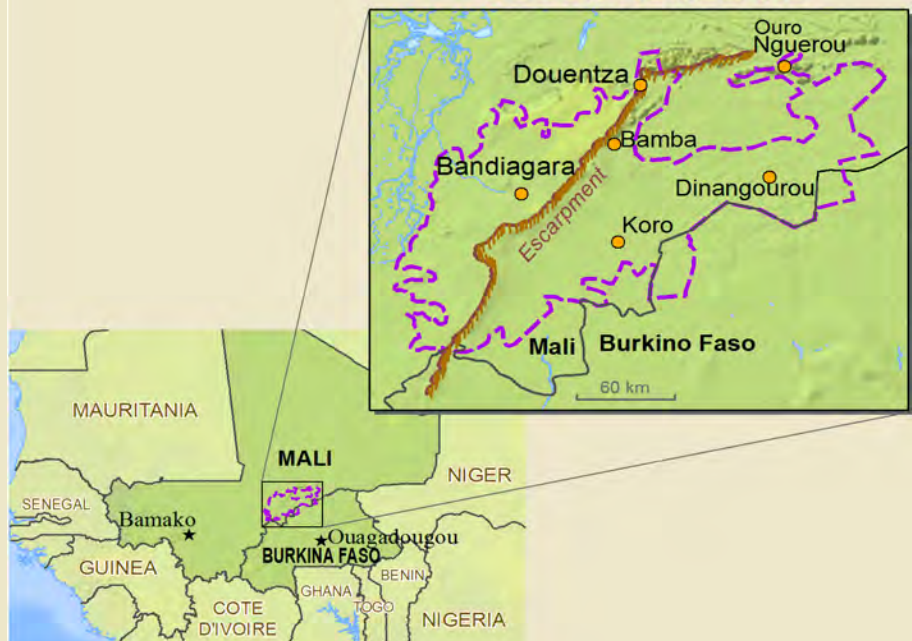
Portions

Population (date):

800,000 (2015)



DOGON HOMELAND



The Dogon of Mali

Have They Heard The Gospel?

1.HAVE THEY HEARD THE GOSPEL?

Pastors to Population: (185), i.e. 1.06 per 1000

Missionaries to Population: none

25% Believe Jesus is the Son of God

10% Believe He is the Son of God and see Him as their Savior

50% Believe Jesus is a prophet, teacher, good man, but not God's son

75% Believe in their local traditional religion

1% Believe Jesus is a myth

15% Have not heard His name

2.HAVE THEY RESPONDED TO THE GOSPEL?

Believer to population: 30,000, i.e. 38 per 1000

In the Sangha and Koro area the church continues to grow. Elsewhere there are fewer Christians.

3.DO THEY HAVE A CHURCH?

Church to population:

Number of communities:

Church to communities:

4.DOES THIS PEOPLE HAVE THE WORD OF GOD TRANSLATED?

The New Testament has been translated into the Tɔrɔ-sɔɔ language, but that is not well understood by many who speak other Dogon languages. The New Testament in the Donno-sɔ language is in use by the Catholic parish center based in Bandiagara since it was published in 1988

5.ANY HINDRANCES TO SCRIPTURE DISTRIBUTION?

Literacy rate: below 15 % (Christians)

It is an oral culture where the majority of the population is not interested in reading.

6.WHAT OTHER FORMS OF GOSPEL PRESENTATIONS ARE AVAILABLE?

Recordings: Yes. Literature: Yes, but few. Films/Video: Jesus film. Radio: One program per week.

7.ARE THEY RECEPTIVE TO CHANGE AND TO CHRISTIANITY?

Yes.

8.DO THEY REQUIRE OUTSIDE (CROSS-CULTURAL) ASSISSTANCE?

No, except for financial help (for example--the translation project).

The Dogon of Mali

Group Description

Geography & Environment

Countries	Mali and Burkina Faso
Location, Mali	The Dogon live mainly in the administrative districts of Bandiagara and Douentza, south of the Niger bend, near the city of Bandiagara, in the Mopti region.
Ecosystem Type	Savannahs
Geological Type	They live in three geological zones, in plains, plateau or in cliffs. An escarpment called the cliffs of Bandiagara stretches for 100 miles (160 km) on a southwest-northeast direction. The cliffs are sandstone and in places are 2,000 feet (600 m) in height. There are about 700 villages with some houses built into the sandstone cliffs that are amazing, spectacular. The cliff dwellings were originally established to defend from invaders forcing people to convert to Islam.
Climate	Sub-tropical; dry season / rainy season; 24-38 C

Language & Linguistics

Names	The Dogon peoples think of themselves as a single people even though they speak a variety of languages that are not mutually intelligible.
Second Languages	A few speak French or Bambara or other languages of their neighbors. Many are monolingual.
Linguistically Related Languages	The Dogon languages are Niger-Congo but not closely related to other languages. Bangime is an exception. It is considered to be a language isolate. There are about 20 distinct Dogon languages.

Economics

Occupation	Onions are grown for profit. Guiding tourists and associated activities are a major income source. Crops grown include millet, rice, peas, sesame and peanuts.
Products/Crafts	Dogons are famous for their masks they carve and wear for dancing and funerals. After used this way they are no longer sacred and are often sold to tourists.

The Dogon of Mali

Society & Culture

Authority / Rule	There is no centralized governing system. The spiritual authority is the Hogan who is elected from among the elders. He goes through a six month waiting period and wears a red hat and an armband with a sacred pearl.
Identification With National Culture	A minority speak French, the official language, that forms the link to the national culture.
Art Forms	Sculture, masks
History Of People Group	Oral tradition associates them with Mande origins. Islamic law in older times put the Dogon and others in Mali in the category that made them outsiders. It was therefore acceptable to make slaves of them. Often males were murdered and women and children taken to be sold as slaves.

Community Development

Water	There are wells and in the rainy season a stream runs between the Niger River and the escarpment which are roughly parallel to each other. Rain is only 20 to 28 inches per year.
Electricity	Most have no electricity.
Transportation	There are trails between villages but no paved roads .

Religion

Religions	The traditional religion is animistic for the majority of the Dogon people. A number have converted to Islam and an even smaller number to Christianity.
Religious Practices/Ceremonies	<p>Dogons know many interesting things about the night sky. They say that they learned their astronomy when some creatures called Nommos descended to earth from the Sirius star system. The Nommos are amphibious creatures who look like both humans and fish. An intriguing legend, according to two French anthropologists of the 1930s is that after arriving the Nommo made a reservoir to live in and "The Nommo divided his body among men to feed them; that is why it is also said that as the universe 'had drunk of his body,' the Nommo also made men drink. He gave all his life principles to human beings." The Nommo was crucified on a tree, but was resurrected and returned to his home world. Dogon legend has it that he will return in the future to revisit the Earth in a human form, according to, Crystalinks, an occultic website.</p> <p>There are various sects among the traditional religion but all worship Amma who is the creator god. They also worship ancestors.</p>

The Dogon of Mali

Status of Christianity

Church Growth

Comment

From mid October to mid December 2013 four young Malian Christians who had finished their studies were trained as Dogon church mobilizers. From January 3 - March 11, 2014 they toured on two motorbikes (3'500 km each) a good part of the Dogon country visiting 129 churches. Apart from a few churches in remote villages where it was unsafe to go and apart from a few churches in the Mopti district near Sévaré/Mopti the mobilizers visited all churches of the Eglise Chretienne Evangelique (ECE).

The four mobilizers took faithfully notes of their church visits with numbers of believers, and what language was spoken in the villages.

Scripture/Literature Status

Comment

Work is underway in three of the estimated twenty Dogon languages—Jamsay, Tommo So and Tomo Kan.

Missions/Churches

Churches

The ECE has 25,000 believers (1/2 of them are children). There are also four churches of the Assemblées de Dieu (AD) in the Dogon area and the Roman Catholic Church (RC). The number of believers in the AD churches is unknown. The RC have around 25,000 believers (1/2 are children).

Church Locations

The RC are around Bandiagara, Bankass/Ségué, Barapireli, and Pel. There was a joint workshop with ECE church leaders and RC people working in Bible Translation in June, 2013.

References

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Pascal James Imperato, Dogon Cliff Dwellers, L. Khan Gallery, 1971.