



The Boni of Kenya

The Boni are a unique people. They are a remnant hunter-gatherer group living along the Kenyan coast in Lamu District on the mainland. They live in a number of semi-permanent settlements. But many of them are transitory residents, because they practice subsistence, swidden agriculture or live by hunting small game for meat and gathering edible forest products. For purposes of survival, they group themselves into bands that approximately reflect the composition of a household. These bands are small and often very cohesive, because they depend on each other.

There are no clear records of their historical backgrounds. It is said that the Boni, like all other Cushitic people groups, migrated from Sungwaya which is northeast of their present homeland. Some say they migrated with the Somali, Oromo and others. The Boni themselves relate their ancestry to Harar in Eastern Ethiopia.

In the 19th century, the Boni were known as self-sufficient forest hunters who lived in the hinterland of the Lamu archipelago. For the most part, they remained undisturbed, only occasionally making contact with the Somali to the north.

During the colonial era, the Boni began to interact with the Bajun to the south who were against the colonialists. Later in the 1950s, the ivory trade started and the Boni were used by traders as the 'hunting boys' who were paid to hunt rhinoceros and elephants for tusks and leopards for skins.

In the last 30 years, the Boni have faced very difficult times. In 1967, their homeland became a battle field in the war between Kenya and Somalia. Since then there has been a gradual change in the Boni culture, language and social structure.

In the Kenya of today, the Boni people are a vulnerable group, struggling to survive, in search of a new identity. Traditionally they depend on their elders for leadership and do not normally meet for village discussion. Ministry work will meet strong opposition from the Muslim leaders of Lamu.

Primary Religion:

Traditional/Islam

Disciples (Matt 28.19):

< 0.01%

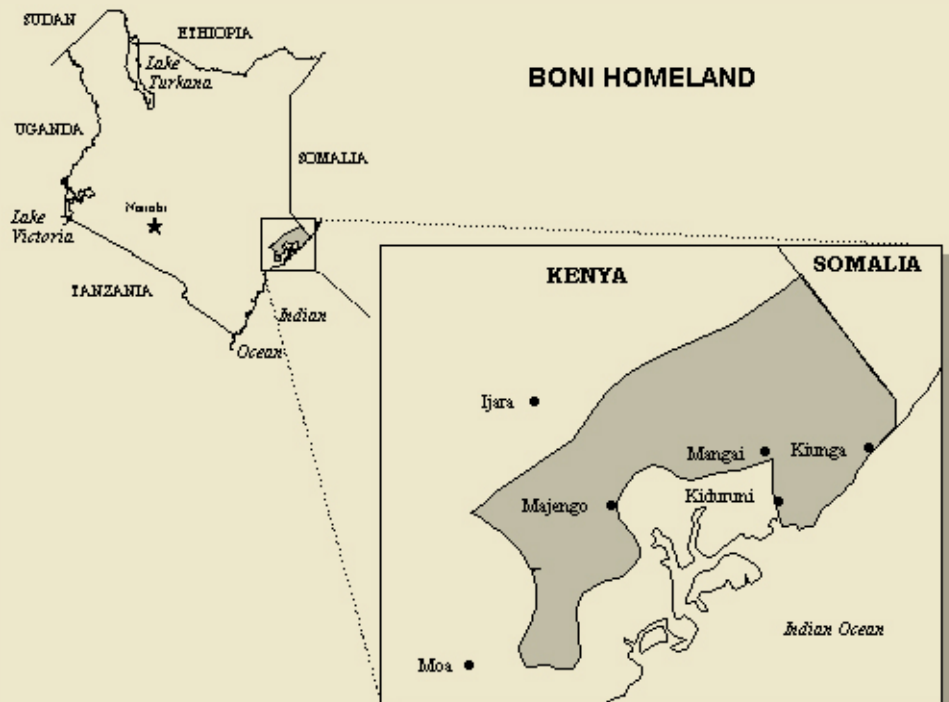
Churches:

Scripture Status (Matt 28.20):

In Progress

Population (date):

7,000 (1997)



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Item Name	Item Note	
Have They Heard The Gospel?		Profile Summary
Call Themselves Christian (%)	<0.01%	
Believe In Jesus As God & Only Savior (%)	< 0.01%	
Prophet/Good Man, But Not God's Son (%)	5%	
Believe In The Local Traditional Religion (%)	98%	
Have Not Heard Who Jesus is (%)	90%	
Believe Jesus Is A Myth (%)	99.9%	
Number Of Missionaries Working	3	
Comment (Number Of Missionaries)	5 missionaries total	
Number Of Communities	11	
Comment (Number Communities)	11 villages (temporary settlements)	
Is The Word Of God Translated?	A Bible translation project is now underway.	
Any Hinderance To Scripture Distribution?	Islamic opposition and illiteracy.	
Forms Of Gospel Presentation Available (Summary)	1. Tape recordings 2. Jesus Film (not recorded)	
What Kind Of Missionaries Are Needed?	Yes. People serving among the tribes of the Lamu District should be well versed in Islam. Opposition from the Muslim community should be expected.	
Population All Countries		Group Description
World Population For This People	7,000	
World Population (Date)	1997	
World Population (Urban Percent)	None	
Countries Where People Group Lives		Group Description
Country Name	Kenya	
Geography & Environment		Group Description
Location	In forest hinterland beyond Lamu, Lamu and Tana River districts; Coast province, Garissa District.	
Country	Kenya	
Ecosystem Type	Scrub Forest	
Geological Type	Coastal	
Elevation	0-200 ft	
Longitude	3S	
Latitude	41E	
Climate	Rainfall varies from 30 inches per year in the south to 20 inches and less as one moves northward.	
Comments (Geography & Environment)	Lamu District has adequate rainfall for cultivation in 4 or 5 years out of every 6 years.	
Language & Linguistics		Group Description
Primary Language	BONI	
Alternate Language Names	Aweera, Aweer, Waboni (Swahili), Bon(Somali).	
Comments (Dialect)	Dialects are Balaa, Kijee, Berera, Safaree, Bodhei, and Kili.	
Attitude Towards Mother Tongue	Very receptive	
Percent Monolingual (%)	70%	
Second Languages	Swahili, Somali	
Linguistically Related Languages	SOMALI	
Comments (Related Languages)	Recently, the Boni have had a lot of interaction with the Somali and have adopted some of their culture, including religion and possibly their language.	

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Item Name	Item Note	Group Description
Neighboring Languages	SANYE	
Neighboring Languages	SOMALI	
Comments (Neighbor Languages)	Also Bajun	
Literacy		Group Description
Adult Literacy Percentage	.1%	
Literacy Attitude	Very receptive	
Active Literacy Program	Yes, Bible translation and literacy	
Publications In Vernacular	Alphabet book, number book	
Economics		Group Description
Subsistence Type	Hunter-gatherers	
Average Annual Income	<1,000 Kenyan Shillings	
Occupation	Little agriculture is practiced, though a few Boni farm to some extent. As a supplementary occupation, the men carve wooden tools and mats which are later sold to neighboring Somali and Swahili.	
Income Sources	There are limited income sources. Honey is often sold. The cash economy does not hold significance to the Boni.	
Products / Crafts	Bushcraft, women following the rains, digging for roots, berries and fruits.	
Trade Partners	There is limited trading with nearby Somalis. Men produce limited numbers of bowls, stools, headdresses, and ornamented combs to trade with Somalis.	
Modernization / Utilities	None	
Comment (Economy)	The majority of the area has poor potential for agriculture because of poor soil, inadequate rainfall, and a large game population (including many elephants and baboons).	
Community Development		Group Description
Health Care (Quality)	Poor	
Comment (Health Care)	No health facility is available to most Boni.	
Diet (Quality)	Poor	
Comment (Diet)	The Boni consume whatever is hunted and gathered. Their diet consists usually of wild fruits, berries and game.	
Water (Quality)	Poor	
Comment (Water)	Fresh water supplies are also hard to find away from the Tana River. The very few wells soon become salty throughout the area. Water is a problem at Pandanguo and Bargoni. At Pandanguo the women sometimes spend most of their day carrying water from far away.	
Shelter Description	The houses are very temporary, circular, dome structures made of thin branches and thatched with palm leaves. The only opening is a small door made of branches tied together.	
Electricity	None	
Energy/Fuel (Quality)	Poor	
Comment (Energy)	Firewood is used	
Clothing	Traditional clothing for women consists of wrapped skirts and shawls. Jewelry is darkly colored bracelets and earrings made of copper.	
Transportation	Transportation is somewhat limited. Rough roads.	
Infant Mortality Rate	Very low	
Life Expectancy	45 years	
Leading Cause Of Death	Poor health	
Comment (Community Development)	There is a government ban on hunting. Many indicate that they would hunt full-time if there was no fear of being caught.	
Society & Culture		Group Description

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Item Name	Item Note
Family Structures	Most homes are occupied by a wife, husband, and their children. There are some men who have more than one wife, and each wife has her own house in which she lives with her children. The husband does not have his own home but lives with each wife periodically.
Neighbor Relations	The Boni are close to the Somali as well.
Authority / Rule	The headman of the village is the final authority among the Boni and is usually the eldest man in the village. The headman serves as an arbitrator but most things are decided by consensus by the elders of the village.
Social Habits/Groupings	Circumcision of both men and women are significant events in the Boni community. Marriage and death is important as well. Traditional attitudes and practices surrounding circumcision are changing slowly.
Cultural Change Pace	Slow
Identification With National Culture	Distinct
Self Image	Prestigious
Judicial / Punishment System	The headman of the village is the final authority among the Boni. Usually the eldest man in the village.
Celebrations	Dancing is important to the Boni. Everyone participates except for the youngest and oldest people.
Recreations	People meet in the shade of large trees so they can sit and converse while some men do wood carvings.
Art Forms	Dancing and crafts
Media	None
Local Language Broadcasting	None
Attitude To Outsiders	Somewhat resistant
Attitude To Change	Somewhat resistant
Comment (Culture)	The traditional, social, and political structures of the Boni have been combined with Orma, Somali, and Islamic traditions long ago.

Youth

Group Description

Labor and tasks (6-12 year olds)	Youth assist with daily activities and chores. Boys assist with hunting and girls assist with gathering and taking care of the family.
Youth Problems (Teens)	Lack of educational facilities and opportunities.
Youth Greatest Needs (teens)	Realization of the importance of education. More effort by the government.

Education

Group Description

Percent Of Eligible Students Enrolled	5%
Language Of Instruction Early Years	Swahili (specific)
Language Of Textbooks Early Years	Swahili (specific)
Comment (Education)	The government has not been able to keep teachers in the area due to the remoteness and the danger from the Somali shifta bandits. There is a negative attitude of the Boni parents toward the secular schools.

Church Growth

Status of Christianity

Reached Status	Reported
Total Baptized	1
Comment (Church Growth)	Sheepfold ministries has started work among the Boni.

Religion & Response

Status of Christianity

Religious Practices & Ceremonies	Traditionally, the Boni had a religion similar to the traditional Somali religion. They believed in one high God. They had a sacred spot set aside as a place of prayer. Special people were designated to handle religious matters.
Attitude To Christianity	Somewhat receptive
Attitude To Religious Change	Somewhat resistant
Resistance / Receptivity	The Boni have been very reserved in all areas of life. Their response to Christian witness in last 10 years has been indifferent and largely antagonistic. In the last three years however, they have shown a willingness to respond.

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Item Name	Item Note
Religious Analogies & Bridges	Islam and the Traditional Boni beliefs
Spiritual Climate And Openness	Hostile
Comment (Religion)	The Boni have in last few years began to show openness to hearing God's Word. They have begun to respond positively to personal evangelism.
Recommended Approaches	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Friendship evangelism2. Community work3. Non-print Scripture materials4. Education5. Health
Current Needs	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Sustainable food sources2. Improved health care3. Availability of educational facilities in their villages4. Strategic outreach programs that meet both physical and spiritual needs
Items For Prayer	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Concerted efforts by the groups doing outreach among the Boni2. Openness of the Boni to the Gospel message as it is proclaimed.

History Of Christianity In Group

Status of Christianity

Year Began	1993
Comments (History of Christianity)	Sheepfold Ministries has begun work among the Boni. Bible Translation and Literacy (BTL) plans to start work in 1995.

Scripture

Status of Christianity

Translation Status	Definite
Available Scripture	None
Form Of Scripture Available	None
Scripture Use	None
Other Forms Of Gospel Available: Literature	No
Other Forms Of Gospel Available: Recordings	Two evangelical tapes
Other Forms Of Gospel Available: Film/Videos	No
Other Forms Of Gospel Available: Radio	No

Missions and Churches

Status of Christianity

Organization Name	Bible Translation and Literacy
Number Of National Workers	2
Organization Name	Karen Community Church
Number Of National Workers	2
Organization Name	Sheepfold Ministries
Number Of National Workers	4
Organization Name	MUPE
Number Of National Workers	2

Christian Literature And Media Status

Status of Christianity

Literature Available	None
Audio Recordings Available	Two evangelistic tapes
Films Available	None
Radio Programs Available	None
Videos Available	None
Audio Visual Available	None