



The Digo of Kenya

The Digo homeland lies between the coast and the eastern slopes of the coastal hills of East Africa from Mombasa, Kenya, south to Tanga, Tanzania. The people mainly live in dispersed family homesteads surrounded by cultivated fields rather than close-knit villages.

Traditional animism has a strong influence on the Digo; people hold singing and prayer ceremonies and wear charms to appease a variety of spirits including both Islamic and ancestral nature spirits. Islam has not changed the traditional beliefs, but its influence is increasing, as evidenced by the increasing antagonism towards Christianity and the change in inheritance. Inheritance used to come through the mother's side of the family, but now comes through the father. Today, being Muslim is part of Digo identity.

Most Digo are subsistence farmers, living on small farms, commonly growing maize, cassava, rice, beans, bananas and coconuts and keeping chickens, goats and a few cows. There is little motivation to improve techniques, because being hardworking is associated with slaves and success is attributed to witchcraft. Unemployment also leads to a lack of motivation to work. Unemployed men often spend their time in the market place talking. Some become involved in drugs and crime, which is a bad example for their children, especially the boys, who then do not learn responsibility or respect for authority.

The first Christians arrived in the 1890s but there has been little response among the Digo in Kenya, probably because of the influence of Islam and traditional animistic beliefs which have been a detriment to material and spiritual progress.

Traditional Digo society is breaking down due to the influence of Islam and the modern world. By making people aware of these impacts, it may be possible to show them the value of the Gospel in changing hearts and reconciling relationships, especially within the family.

Primary Religion:

Islam, Muslim-Animism

Disciples (Matt 28.19):

< 0.5%

Churches:

Scripture Status (Matt 28.20):

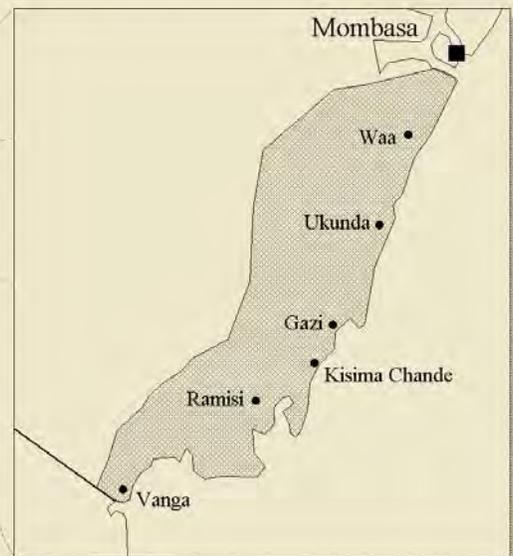
Portions, but bilingual

Population (date):

300,000



DIGO HOMELAND



The Digo of Kenya

Item Name

Item Note

Have They Heard The Gospel?

Profile Summary

Call Themselves Christian (%)	0.5
Believe In Jesus As God & Only Savior (%)	< 0.5%
Prophet/Good Man, But Not God's Son (%)	99.5
Number Of Pastors	6
Comment (Pastors)	1 pastor/evangelist for 50,000 persons
Number Of Missionaries Working	16
Comment (Churches)	Very few churches specifically for Digo
Is The Word Of God Translated?	Genesis was published in 1993 and work is in progress on Luke
Translation Medium	Printed
Any Hinderance To Scripture Distribution?	Since there is so little written Chidigo, few people can read it. There would probably be opposition from strong Muslims.
Forms Of Gospel Presentation Available (Summary)	There are some tapes from Gospel Recordings.
What Kind Of Missionaries Are Needed?	Yes, to help with financial and medical needs.

Population All Countries

Group Description

World Population For This People	300,000
Comment (World Population)	There are a large number living in Likoni, but altogether the percentage in cities is small.

Countries Where People Group Lives

Group Description

Country Name	Tanzania
Country Name	Kenya

Geography & Environment

Group Description

Location	Coastal area and eastern slopes of the coastal hills of East Africa from Mombasa, Kenya, south to Tanga, Tanzania.
Country	Kenya
Ecosystem Type	Tropical Forest
Geological Type	Coastal
Elevation	Sea-level; hills: 1 meter
Longitude	39°
Latitude	4-6°
Climate	Tropical: hot and damp with the long rains in April and May and short rains in November.
Comments (Geography & Environment)	Although the area was once forested, many trees have now been cut down.

Language & Linguistics

Group Description

Comment (Language)	There are several dialects: Ungu, Chinondo, Uмба, Kiconeni, Tsimba
Alternate Language Names	None
Attitude Towards Mother Tongue	Somewhat receptive
Other Mother Tongues Of This Group	SWAHILI
Other Mother Tongues Of This Group	SWAHILI
Linguistically Related Languages	GIRYAMA
Linguistically Related Languages	SWAHILI
Linguistically Related Languages	SWAHILI
Linguistically Related Languages	DURUMA
Linguistically Related Languages	DURUMA
Linguistically Related Languages	GIRYAMA

The Digo of Kenya

Item Name

Comments (Related Languages)

Item Note

Languages in the Mijikenda group are linguistically related.

Neighboring Languages

GIRYAMA

Neighboring Languages

DURUMA

Literacy

Group Description

Adult Literacy Percentage

60

Literacy Attitude

Somewhat receptive

Active Literacy Program

No

Publications In Vernacular

4

Comment (Literacy)

The book of Genesis and an alphabet chart have been published. A Bible was published a few years ago, but not in good Digo. In Tanzania there is a Digo Hymn book. There are plans to begin a literacy program. Some are interested in education, but cannot afford it. The women in particular are illiterate and kept from contact with new information.

Economics

Group Description

Subsistence Type

Agriculturalists

Average Annual Income

Usually low income

Occupation

Most people are farmers on small farms. Those on the coast may be fishers. Some work in hotels or factories.

Income Sources

Mainly subsistence farming. Some need to supplement this, as the shambas do not produce much and are becoming smaller as they are divided among the children who inherit. Harvest yields are also decreased by lack of rain and the presence of wild pigs and elephants, which destroy crops.

Products / Crafts

Roofing for housing, mats and baskets made from grass, spoons and kitchen equipment

Trade Partners

Tourists and those who buy in the markets

Modernization / Utilities

Plastic containers for water and perhaps aluminum pans, if they have enough money. There is not enough money for much modernization.

Comment (Economy)

Craft making is beginning to die out in the area and they now buy products such as clay pots, which they used to make for themselves.

Community Development

Group Description

Health Care (Quality)

Poor

Comment (Health Care)

There are a few clinics and dispensaries in the area. Hospitals are far away, so many cannot afford transport. There is a lot of stealing in hospitals so that medicines are sometimes not available. The Government used to provide financial help for health care but as they do not do this now, many cannot afford to buy medicines. This region has the nation's highest birth rate (the men are adamantly against family planning), highest infant mortality rate, and a high rate of HIV+ infection.

Diet (Quality)

Fair

Comment (Diet)

People eat the products grown on their farms, but many cannot afford different kinds of food and so have only ugali. Wild pigs in the area would provide protein, but it is against Muslim belief to eat them. Coconut, which grows well, is high in cholesterol and can cause strokes and high blood pressure.

Water (Quality)

Fair

Comment (Water)

They are dependent on some streams which are not very near. Water sources are easily contaminated as the same streams are used for washing, cooking, etc. There is a water supply project but it cannot continue unless more funds are provided. If there is not enough water in the area, the pipes and pumps may fail.

Shelter Description

Mud houses with macouti roofing made from branches and straw. Those with more money may have coral and plaster.

Energy/Fuel (Quality)

Poor

Comment (Energy)

Those living where electricity is already connected may have a supply, but the majority use firewood.

Clothing

Western style clothing is common. Women wear kangas over a dress, men may wear a shuka, which is similar to a kanga, but of different material over their clothes. To go to the Mosque, men wear a kan dzu (a long robe), women wear a black dress and scarf called buibui.

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Item Name	Item Note
Transportation	Cars, bicycles or foot
Infant Mortality Rate	Perhaps 40%
Life Expectancy	55-80 years
Leading Cause Of Death	Diseases
Comment (Community Development)	Because land is so important, there are frequent disputes and long-standing feuds over the allocation of land. Many do not have enough land to support themselves because of the tradition of dividing the land between many children. Some earn extra money by fishing in the Indian Ocean or moving to the city for work.

Society & Culture

Group Description

Family Structures	It is most important for a Digo to know how and to whom he is related, because he will be loyal to even distant relatives. There is also support between the families of husbands and wives. The oldest in a house is the head of the household. The divorce rate is high and many women face single parenthood.
Neighbor Relations	The Digos resent those who come to the area from up country and get jobs, especially if they look down on the Digo people. Recently there has even been a killing. Relations with the Durumas are good.
Authority / Rule	The government system is used partly through chiefs and elders, whom the government knows in the villages.
Social Habits/Groupings	Circumcision is common for men and in some places for women as well. There is no traditional age group structure, but there are clans. A person's clan used to be determined matrilineally, but Islam has influenced most Digos to follow their paternal grandfather's clan. Clans used to influence many aspects of life, but today function only at funerals.
Cultural Change Pace	Rapid
Identification With National Culture	Integrated
Self Image	Prestigious
Judicial / Punishment System	Government system
Celebrations	<p>Muslim holidays. Funerals are considered most important for the afterlife of the deceased. Burial usually takes place within 24 hours of death. Then the family get together to decide whether to have a "hanga" (funeral). The hanga lasts three to five days for an adult and throughout this time, no one bathes or wears decorative dress. Everyone connected with the deceased will try to come to the hanga to bring condolences and money to help with expenses. The hanga ends with "kuoga madzi" (washing with water), which was traditionally a time when family members went to the river to wash, indicating the end of the mourning period. Now it is primarily to raise funds to cover the cost of the funeral, with each clan donating something.</p> <p>Traditional and Islamic forms of marriage are practiced among the Digo. Both involve payment of a bride price, usually paid in installments over a number of years. A first wedding usually lasts two or three days and involves feasts, dancing and other entertainment. There may be several thousand guests.</p>
Recreations	Listening to radio; football clubs; Often the men do not have jobs so they sit in market places and talk. For many on shambas there is too much work to allow time for recreation.
Art Forms	Many forms of hand craft are now dying out.
Media	Radio and magazines
Local Language Broadcasting	None
Attitude To Outsiders	Somewhat receptive
Attitude To Change	Somewhat receptive
History Of People Group	<p>The Digo are the second largest of nine coastal tribes known as the Mijikenda (nine cities). It is the only Mijikenda tribe to be almost totally Muslim and the Digo often consider themselves superior to other Africans, especially the neighboring Duruma, the tribe closest to them in language and culture.</p> <p>According to Digo oral tradition, the Mijikenda migrated in the 16th and 17th centuries from a place called Shinwaya in present day Somalia, under pressure from the Galla people. They converted to Islam almost en masse around 1900, possibly to set themselves apart from other Africans and become "middle men" between the Arabs and Africans.</p>

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Item Name

Comment (Culture)

Item Note

Marital instability is very common among the Digo. As peace and harmony are highly valued, it is often seen as better to divorce than to draw the two extended families into a quarrel. The divorce rate has increased since the Digo's conversion to Islam, perhaps because women resent their loss of power under Islamic influence. Many women face single parenthood and it is estimated that nearly half of all births are now illegitimate.

Youth

Group Description

Labor and tasks (6-12 year olds)

Boys help on the shamba and girls help mothers with collecting firewood and water, washing and cleaning. It used to be against their culture for boys to do these jobs, but this tradition is changing.

Youth Problems (Teens)

If men cannot get jobs, they may spend their time in the market places talking, which sets a bad example to their children, especially the boys who then do not learn to be responsible and to respect the elders.

Youth Greatest Needs (teens)

The young people have medical and material needs and should be taught how to live well. Christ is the only real answer to these needs.

Education

Group Description

Language Of Instruction Early Years

Swahili (specific)

Language Of Textbooks Early Years

Swahili (specific)

Language Of Instruction Later Years

English

Language Of Textbooks Later Years

English

Comment (Education)

There are many primary schools, probably one for each village. The number of children enrolled depends on how much money a family has. If they do not have much, they may send only one child to school. The Digo people want not just to be literate, but to have an education which they can see will improve their lives and help them to get jobs. Schools have a Chidigo lesson, but at present, there are no textbooks in Chidigo. One is now being produced.

Church Growth

Status of Christianity

Reached Status

Engaged

Total Baptized

45

Bible Schools

2

Comment (Church Growth)

There are perhaps 350 believers including the Digo in Tanzania. Whether or not they get baptized depends on the policy of the Church they attend. It may be a long time before a person gets baptized, because it involves outward profession of faith. There are many churches and pastors in the area, but most who attend are from outside the area.

There is also a Christian school, run by Norwegians.

Religion & Response

Status of Christianity

Religious Practices & Ceremonies

Going to the Mosque, circumcision, prayer and other Muslim practices.

Animistic practices usually involve the placation of a variety of spirits including Islamic and ancestral, nature dwelling spirits. Specifically, "Kayamba" is a ceremony to call on the help of a spirit if someone is ill and "Mzuka" is a prayer under the big trees to appease the ancestral spirits. There are also sacrifices at graveyards to ancestors and people wear charms and fetishes around the legs to appease or ward off spirits.

Attitude To Christianity

Somewhat resistant

Attitude To Religious Change

Somewhat resistant

Resistance / Receptivity

People often accept that they were born into Islam and do not think that they have the option of choosing their religion. Fewer women than men have responded, possibly because their involvement with spirits has been more intense and harder to break free from. Younger people, who have gone to school, mixed with those of different backgrounds, and have studied Islam as an academic subject rather than a way of life, may be more open to the Gospel. Older people are usually less open.

Religious Analogies & Bridges

Sacrifices for reconciliation to ancestors can be used to demonstrate Christ's sacrifice for us, to reconcile us to God. Charms are supposed to protect from evil spirits, but belief in God protects us from all evil.

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Item Name

Spiritual Climate And Openness

Item Note

Younger men tend to be more open, but most people are not open. If a younger person wants to be a Christian, he or she may be forced to leave home. So although some may be willing to talk, few are willing to make any commitment. Occultism and Islam make Mombasa and the coastal area spiritually oppressive.

Comment (Religion)

Islamic practices are stronger closer to the coast, where there are a number of Quranic schools and many people wear Islamic dress and attend prayer at the mosque regularly. Further inland, however, there are fewer mosques and Islamic schools. Many people there have animistic beliefs and few know what the Quran says or attend a mosque.

Recommended Approaches

At the moment many people are antagonistic towards Jesus. Teaching them in Arabic from the Quran might increase their interest in Jesus as it says that he is a prophet and it is a book which they value. One to one or small group teaching would encourage people to be open without fear of others.

Current Needs

Better health care, improved diet and water supply, education in how to improve their lifestyles.

Items For Prayer

Against the spiritual oppression of occultism and Islam.
For whole families to become Christians so that they can support each other.

History Of Christianity In Group

Status of Christianity

Year Began

1890

By Whom

Lutheran

Significant Events

The first missionaries among the Digo were the German Lutherans working in Tanzania. The Christian Missionary Society worked sporadically among the Digo in Kenya. In 1920, they built a school which led to the conversion of five young men. The work was closed in the mid 1920s, but many of their descendants are at least nominal Christians and some are evangelical.

Comments (History of Christianity)

In the 1990s, Mission Moving Mountains began a village project to meet medical needs and share the Gospel.

Scripture

Status of Christianity

Translation Status

In Progress

Available Scripture

Portions

Form Of Scripture Available

Printed

Scripture Use

4

Scripture Use

Individuals & some churches

Missions and Churches

Status of Christianity

Organization Name

Bible Translation and Literacy

Main Ministry

Bible Translation

Year Started

1984

Number Of Expatriate Workers

2

Number Of National Workers

2

Number Of Local Workers

2

Language Used By Workers

Digo

Organization Name

Lutheran

Main Ministry

Church Planting

Year Started

1985

Number Of Expatriate Workers

4

Number Of Workers Using Local Language

4

Language Used By Workers

Digo

Christian Literature And Media Status

Status of Christianity

Literature Available

None

Audio Recordings Available

Some tapes of Gospel Recordings, which can be used in evangelism.

Films Available

There are plans to work on the Jesus film when Luke's Gospel is translated.

The Digo of Kenya

Item Name	Item Note
Radio Programs Available	Faber radio and Scripture radio sometimes broadcast Christian programs, but in Kiswahili.
Videos Available	None
Audio Visual Available	None