

The Karon of Senegal and The Gambia



representative photo

The Karon are an isolated people living on several islands along the Casamance River straddling the border between Southwest Senegal and The Gambia.

Most of the men are fishermen and farmers, while Karon women tend small gardens to supplement their food supply. Rice is their main staple food, as well as peanuts and millet.

The palm tree is also central to the culture and diet of Karon speakers, They use palm wine for ceremonies; palm oil and fruit in their diet; and palm stalk, branches and leaves for building materials.

The Karon live in mud brick square houses with thatched roofs and are only accessible by boat. Extended families live together in neighborhoods.

Traditionally, every daily activity among the Karon people involves their ancestors: people spill water on the ground for the ancestors before taking a drink; farmers resist improving their agricultural methods for fear of offending them. In reality, the dead control the living. Fears which arise from traditional beliefs need to be addressed.

Karon speakers from both Senegal and The Gambia are working on the translation team, so one of the challenges they still face is the language barrier since the official language in Senegal is French but in The Gambia, it is English. It is also a hindrance that team members may work in Senegal but live in the Gambia, a totally different country.

Primary Religion:

Animism

Disciples (Matt 28:19):

5%

Churches:

Yes

Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):

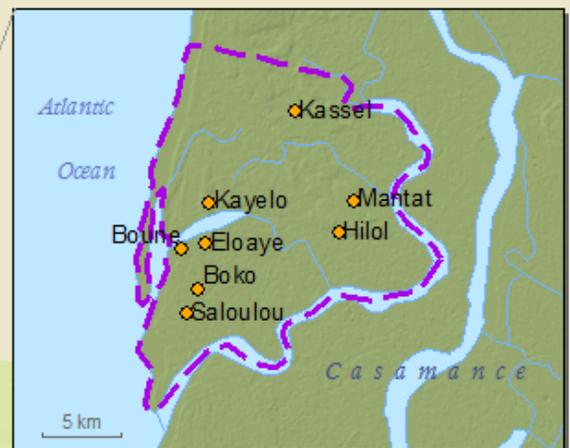
None

Population (date):

16000 (2014)



KARON HOMELAND



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Have They Heard The Gospel?

History of Christianity

Portuguese explorers came in the mid 15th century and introduced the Karon people to Catholicism.

Religious Practices and Ceremonies

The group gathers for major celebrations in the village of Hilol where the king resides. Traditional initiations and rites of passage are practiced, including circumcision for boys. Celebrations are observed at birth, marriage (at the engagement and later when the bride arrives) and death. Catholic and Islamic festivals are observed.. Even those who profess to be Catholic or Muslim are primarily centered around traditional celebrations.

Is the Word of God Translated?

Translation work is in progress

During initial training, potential translation team members were discussing key terms used in Scripture. Recognizing a discrepancy between their statements and traditional practices, someone commented, "If Jesus was the sacrifice for our sins, should we be doing traditional sacrifices?" In the midst of this confusion, a small minority of believers is struggling to stand firm, refusing to get involved in a cultural initiation rite even under family pressure.

Other Forms of Gospel Presentations

Goals are to produce a Christmas story book, including Christmas songs; a printed and audio recording of the Gospel of Luke as well as an updated lectionary of portions from Luke.

Audio Recordings Available

Yes from GRN

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Group Description

Population all countries

World Population For This People	6000
World Population (Date)	1991
Population (Urban Percent)	600

Geography & Environment

Location	in nine island villages north of the Casamance River in southwest Senegal, between Kafountine and Kalisseye Rivers
Climate	9 mo. dry, average min. 22C., average max. 36C, rains June-September.
Comments	The Karon are an isolated people and most can be reached by boat only. Although related to the larger Jola people groups, the Karon are a separate homogeneous unit speaking a language that is unintelligible to the other Jola groups.

Alternate Language Names

	Kalon, Bliss-Kalon
Percent Monolingual	99%
Other Mother Tongues	Mandinka
Comment	Some speak Mandinka and Wolof, but it is unknown what percentage.

Linguistically Related Languages

Gusilay, Fogny, Kasa, Kwatay, Bayot, Jola, Mlomp and others are closely related.

Neighboring Languages

Wolof

Literacy

Adult Literacy Percentage	15
Active Literacy Program	The Catholic school may have a literacy program.

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Economics

Subsistence Type	Agriculturalists
Occupation	Agriculturalists farming rice primarily, also millet and peanuts; some fishing and small animal husbandry. Some men are tradesmen.
Income Sources	Rice, peanuts, commerce, the trades, palm oil, small household products/crafts

Community Development

Health Care (Quality)	Poor
Comment	Highly developed traditional medicine, there may be a main clinic in one of the larger villages across the river, but medicines are in short supply and expensive.
Diet (Quality)	Poor
Comment	Staple foods are rice, peanuts, fresh/dried fish; food supplies are seasonal, and there is often a shortage prior to harvest time, especially if the rains are poor.
Water	Poor
Shelter Description	Mud brick square houses with thatched roof, some with a tin roof. Houses are divided into several rooms, with a separate kitchen.
Energy/Fuel (Quality)	Poor
Comment	Firewood, charcoal
Clothing	Men wear western clothing or African traditional; women - wear a wrap-around skirt with large kaftan over it; children often wear very little, or a small version of adult clothing.

Society & Culture

Family	Polygamous; one husband with several wives all living in one house, with each wife in a separate room. The children all belong to the husband.
Neighbor Relations	work groups are formed where the neighbors all work together in groups of similar ages to farm the land. There is a lot of co-operation for work in the community.
Authority / Rule	The village of Hilol has a king who rules over the whole group.

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Judicial / Punishment System	Judgments are made by the village elders using a social punishment system.
Social Habits/Groupings	Within the village the family unit has central importance, extended families live together. There is no class/caste system.
Cultural Change Pace	Identification with national culture is slow. Integrated self image and prestige.
Recreations	Socializing, dancing and celebrating.
Media	Many have radios, some have cassette players, no TV, newspapers,, film, or videos.
Local Language Broadcasting	None
Attitude To Change	Indifferent

Children and Youth:

Labor and tasks (6-12 yr olds)	children are expected to be productive members of the family. Boys start to shepherd the animals at 7 years old. Girls help with fetching water, firewood, cooking, minding younger siblings, and other household chores at a very early age. Children's work-groups are also formed between families to help in the fields doing weeding, etc.
Youth Problems (Teens)	there was a revolution occurring in 1991 by a rebel movement wanting independence in the Casamance
Youth Greatest Needs (teens) Comment	improved health care, infant mortality is extremely high. general cultural changes can be seen between the older and younger generation.

Education--Group Description

Teacher To Pupil Ratio	50
Language Of Instruction Early Years	French
Comment (Education)	French system, one Catholic school

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Status of Christianity

Religion and Response

Translation status

Although Senegal and the Gambia are predominantly Muslim, there is a tolerance of other religions. Nearly 5% are Christians in the Gambia and slightly more than 6% in Senegal.

Project partners are already poised to implement the new material as soon as it is ready for church services. It will be used in Bible studies, evangelism and discipleship ministries in both countries where Karon communities are clustered. Translated materials will also be made available in digital format for mobile phones and other applications as well as in print.

Attitude toward Christianity

Karon people are indifferent toward Christianity but are open and willing to talk. For a lasting impact, Christians living alongside the Karon people and developing deep friendships will have the best results.