

The Keoru-Ahia of Papua New Guinea



The Keoru-Ahia people live in Gulf Province. Part of the language area is along the coast and a little inland. The other part is along the banks of the Vailala River. It is only possible to reach the upriver villages by boat, and in a motorized dinghy it takes about a day to get from there to the coast and then a further day to walk along the coast to get to Kerema, the provincial capital. Canoes are an important form of transport for the upriver people. The coastal people also have canoes, which they use to go fishing in the sea.

There are three dialects of Keoru-Ahia. The coastal people and those living a little inland speak the Keoru dialect. One village speaks a dialect called Pairi. The villages upriver speak the Ahia dialect.

Sago is an important staple food, and is cooked in a variety of different ways. It is sometimes mixed with fish, prawns or coconut and cooked inside bamboo. It is also made as a sort of soup or fried like a pancake.

Currently there are Catholic and SDA churches in the Keoru-Ahia area. Most people in the area would claim to be a Christian, but many still believe in their traditional religion. Magic and sorcery are practiced in the area.

The Keoru-Ahia people do not have God's Word in their own mother tongue. A significant number of people cannot understand scripture in any language but their own. The Keoru-Ahia people are proud of their language. One person described it as being 'sweet like honey'.

Primary Religion:
Christianity

Disciples (Matt 28:19):
90%

Churches:
12

Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):
None

Population (date):
6023 (2000)



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Have They Heard The Gospel?

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|---|---|
| Call Themselves Christian Comment | 90% Most people in the Keoru-Ahia would call themselves Christian. |
| Believe In Jesus As God And Only Savior | 5-15% |
| Believe In The Local Traditional Religion | 60-80% |
| Have Not Heard Who Jesus is | 0% |
| Attitude to Christianity | Indifferent |
| Attitude to Religious Change | Somewhat resistant |
| How Have They Responded To The Gospel? | Most people in the Keoru-Ahia area would call themselves Christian. However, many of them do not attend church and still believe in their traditional religion. |
| Number Of Pastors Comment | 3 2 laymen pastors in Catholic church, 1 pastor in Revival church |
| Number Of Missionaries Working Comment | 3 3 priests who visit villages to take Mass about once a month. They are all expatriates. |
| Number Of Churches | 12 |
| Number Of Communities | 34 |
| History of Christianity Significant Events | Year began: 1920 by the Seventh Day Adventist Both the Catholic Church and the Seventh Day Adventist Church established themselves in the Keoru area prior to World War II. The Catholics' work in Keoru began in Araimiri, where there is still a Catholic mission station and a school. Ovahuhu belonged to the United Church until 1994 when their church became independent. Seventh Day Adventist missionaries started their work in the Keoru area in 1923, opening both a church and a school in Velepa. During the mission's early days, it was staffed by missionaries from Fiji and Samoa. The school closed in 1998, but the church remains open. Prior to the establishment of the Catholic Church in the Ahia area, the London Missionary Society (later United Church) and the Seventh Day Adventists established congregations. The United Church left the Keoru-Ahia area because they did not have enough staff and decided to focus their efforts in other areas. A church-planting attempt by the United Church in Kakomiri in the 1990s was unsuccessful, as people chose to remain Catholic. Residents of Kakomiri village in the Ahia area |

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consider themselves Catholic, although they do not attend services. Previously there was a church in Kakomiri, but it was burnt down purposefully, perhaps ten years ago, and no new church has been built. The church at Hepea was less than a year old at the time of the survey. The church in Maelava established in the late 1970s, closed down for a few years, and then re-opened.

Is The Word Of God Translated?

No

Other Forms of Gospel Presentations
Available

The Bible is available in English, Tok Pisin, Hiri Motu and Orokolo which are understood by some, but not all, Keoru-Ahia speakers. There has been a translation of the Catholic liturgy into the Keoru dialect, but it isn't used as it mixes Keoru and Orokolo.

Any Hindrance To Scripture
Distribution?

Lack of scriptures in Keoru-Ahia. Low literacy rates.

Are Cross-Cultural Missionaries
Needed?

There is a need for Bible translation so everyone can have access to God's Word in a language they can understand. Outside help will be needed for this to happen.

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Group Description

Geography & Environment

Some of the Keoru-Ahia people live along the coast and others live inland. There is tropical forest through out the Keoru-Ahia area. Near the Vailala River where some of the Keoru-Ahia people live there are swamps.

Language & Linguistics

Percent Monolingual 20%

Literacy

Literacy Attitude Somewhat receptive

Adult Literacy Percentage 33%

Percent Literate for Men 43%

Percent Literate for Women 22%

Active Literacy Program Yes

Comment

There are elementary schools in the Keoru dialect of Keoru-Ahia which are teaching children to read and write in their mother tongue.

Economics

Subsistence Type Swidden agriculturalists, hunters and sago gatherers.

Average Annual Income Self sustaining

Occupation Sago gatherers and subsistence farmers.

Income Sources Selling betel nut, coconuts, pigs, cassowaries, fish, prawns, garden produce, sago and crocodile skins. Some men work for a logging company in the area.

Products / Crafts String bags

Modernization / Utilities There are generators in some of the villages. There are some canoes with motors. There are some radios, cassette players and at least one television.

Community Development

Health Care Fair

Comment

Some villages are a long way from the nearest aid posts. There are three aid posts in the Keoru-Ahia language area.

Diet Good

Comment

Staple foods are sago, cooking bananas and coconuts. There is also some sweet potato, greens, pawpaws, pineapples, bananas, sugar cane and Malay apples. Sometimes there is fresh fish, shrimps, prawns and wild pig.

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| Water | Fair |
| Comment | Most people collect rain water to drink. There are some wells. |
| Shelter Description | Houses are built on posts, raised off the ground by between one and two meters. Traditionally houses are made with bamboo walls, roofs thatched with sago leaves and with either bamboo or Areca palm. Now there are also some houses made from planks and some houses have tin roofs. Houses typically have between six and seven occupants. |
| Electricity | There are generators in some villages. |
| Energy/Fuel | Fair |
| Clothing | Second hand, western style |
| Transportation | Walking, canoes. Some canoes are motorized. There are also some motorized dinghies. |
| Infant Mortality Rate | 5% |
| Life Expectancy | 65 |
| Community Development Comment | The infant mortality rate and the life expectancy given are the national averages. It seems likely that in reality they are higher and lower respectively in the Keoru-Ahia area. |
| <u>Society & Culture</u> | |
| Family Structures | Patrilineal society. People belong to an extended family within the village. |
| Neighbor Relations | Generally good working relations. Occasionally there are land disputes. |
| Authority / Rule | The council in each ward has the highest authority. Some clans still have a chief, but he doesn't have as much authority as the council. |
| Social Habits/Groupings | People live in villages of between 50 and 450 people. |
| Cultural Change Pace | Slow |
| Identification With National Culture | Similar |
| Self Image | Neutral |
| Recreations | Playing cards, basketball and other sports, canoeing, listening to music, string band, storytelling. |
| Art Forms | String bags, traditional dress, woven mats. |

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Youth

Labor and tasks (6-12 year olds)

Looking after younger brothers and sisters, helping in gardens, helping with household tasks.

Education

Primary Schools

8

Comment

Officially there are eight primary or community schools in the Keoru-Ahia area. However, at the time this information was gathered, not all the schools were functional. There are also eight elementary schools in the area, although, again, not all are functional.

Secondary Schools

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Language of Instruction Early Years

Keoru-Ahia, Orokolo, Tok Pisin, English

Language of Textbook Early Years

Keoru-Ahia, Orokolo, Tok Pisin, English]

Language of Instruction Later Years

English, a little Tok Pisin and Keoru-Ahia

Language of Textbook Later Years

English

Comment

The Keoru-Ahia and Orokolo text books for early years are written and produced by the teachers.

Number of Schools Greater Than

90 % Homogeneous

15

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Status of Christianity

Church Growth

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|----------------|--|
| Total Baptized | 3500 |
| Comment | Everyone in the Catholic areas was baptized as a baby. Only a small number of people in the SDA area have been baptized. |

Scripture

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| Scripture Use | Majority of the churches |
| Reason for Urgent Need of Translation | The people would understand the gospel better in their own mother tongue. There are people, particularly those living furthest up the Vailala River who are monolingual and can not understand the Bible in any other language. |

Missions and Churches

| | |
|--|---|
| Organization 1 | Catholic |
| Main Ministry | Other/Church |
| Year Started | 1900s |
| Number of Adherents | 2600 |
| Number of Congregations | 7 |
| Number of Expatriate Workers | 3 |
| Comment | Priests who visit villages to take mass. They are not based in the Keoru-Ahia area. |
| Number of Local Workers | 2 |
| Number of Workers Using the Local Language | 2 |
| Language Used by Workers | Expatriate workers preach in English [eng] and Tok Pisin [tpi]. One local worker preaches in English [eng] and Keoru-Ahia [xeu] and the other preaches in Keoru-Ahia [xeu]. |
| Organization 2 | Seventh Day Adventist |
| Main Ministry | Other/Church |
| Year Started | 1923s |
| Number of Adherents | 3000 |
| Number of Congregations | 4 |

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| Organization | 3 | Revival Church |
| Main Ministry | | Other/Church |
| Year Started | | 1994s |
| Number of Adherents | | 250 |
| Number of Congregations | | 1 |
| Comment | | Previously the Revival church was part of the United Church, but broke away in 1994. |
| Number of Expatriate Workers | | 3 |
| Comment | | Priests who visit villages to take mass. They are not based in the Keoru-Ahia area. |
| Number of Local Workers | | 1 |
| Number of Workers Using the Local Language | | 1 |
| Language Used by Workers | | Local worker preaches in Keoru-Ahia [xeu]. |