

The Sabaot of Kenya

The Sabaot people live on or near the slopes of Mount Elgon. The hills of their homeland gradually rise from an elevation of 5,000 to 14,000 feet. The area is crisscrossed by numerous mountain streams and spectacular waterfalls. Mount Elgon is an extinct volcano about fifty (50) miles in diameter. The Kenya-Uganda border goes straight through the mountain-top, cutting the Sabaot homeland into two halves.

In recent years, the Sabaot people have been forced to drastically change their lifestyle from cattle herding to planting maize (corn) and vegetables because of the scarcity of land. Economically this change was good for the people, because the frequent hunger spells have all but stopped. Socially it has been a hard and traumatic change as the former leaders in the society lost their power, old values were eroded, and drinking homemade beer grew to a destructive level.

The Sabaot people are proud of their cultural heritage. The elders sing with sadness in their voices, using their six-stringed lyre, about the lost glory of their free life as warriors and cattle people. They remember their best cows by name.

The Sabaot do not adapt to change quickly, but most of the children now go to school. That is why the majority of adults have never learned to read. The young, educated people have become the new elite.

Traditionally the Sabaot have always believed in a Creator God. He was good and provided sunshine, rain and life, but he was far away. It was the belief in the ancestral spirits that controlled the daily life of the people and brought them fortune or, more often, misfortune. If sickness struck, sacrifices had to be made to appease the angry ancestor who sent the sickness to avenge some wrongdoing against him.

When the first missionaries settled among the Sabaot in as late as 1981, they were asked, "Why have the missionaries forgotten us?".

Primary Religion:

Tribal Religion

Disciples (Matt 28.19):

1%

Churches:

200

Scripture Status (Matt 28.20):

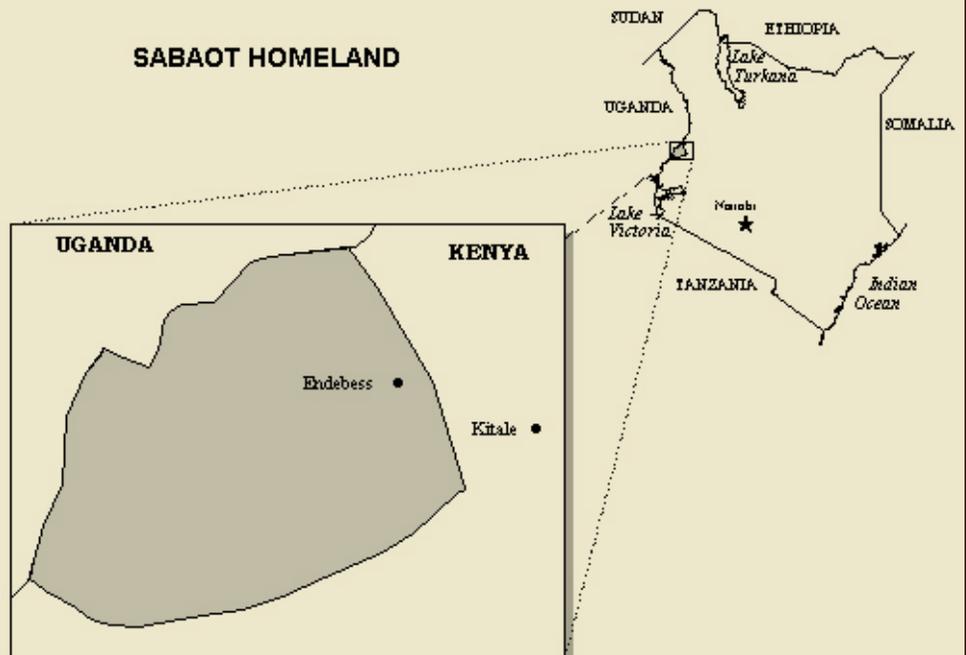
Portions are available

Population (date):

400,000 (1991)



SABAOT HOMELAND



The Sabaot of Kenya

Item Name	Item Note	
Have They Heard The Gospel?		Profile Summary
Call Themselves Christian (%)	5	
Believe In Jesus As God & Only Savior (%)	1%	
Prophet/Good Man, But Not God's Son (%)	10	
Have Not Heard Who Jesus is (%)	10	
Believe Jesus Is A Myth (%)	75	
Number Of Pastors	16	
Comment (Pastors)	16 pastors based on pastor ratio of 1:25,000 and total population of 400,000	
Number Of Missionaries Working	5	
Number Of Churches	200	
Is The Word Of God Translated?	Luke, Mark, Jonah, Ruth, Genesis, Exodus, others in progress	
Translation Medium	Printed and Audio	
Any Hinderance To Scripture Distribution?	There is a widespread area around the mountain with poor roads and no transportation. Distributors go long distances on foot so they cannot carry large quantities of books or cassette tapes. Most older adults are not literate because widespread schooling did not begin until independence in the 1960s.	
Forms Of Gospel Presentation Available (Summary)	The translated Scriptures are being put to traditional music. These recordings are very well received.	
What Kind Of Missionaries Are Needed?	Yes, cross-cultural missionaries are needed for their spiritual, mental and physical needs. Education is available through the government, but having their own language in written form is helping the people to understand a lot better.	
Population All Countries		Group Description
World Population For This People	400,000	
World Population (Date)	1991	
World Population (Urban Percent)	32,000	
Countries Where People Group Lives		Group Description
Country Name	Kenya	
Geography & Environment		Group Description
Location	On or near the slopes of Mount Elgon. The Kenya-Uganda border goes through the mountain top cutting the Sabaot homeland into two halves.	
Country	Kenya	
Ecosystem Type	Semi-tropical	
Geological Type	Mountain Slopes	
Elevation	5,000-10,000 ft	
Climate	Warm climate with a good rainfall.	
Language & Linguistics		Group Description
Alternate Language Names	Sebei (Uganda), Koony	
Attitude Towards Mother Tongue	Indifferent	
Percent Monolingual (%)	10	
Second Languages	90	
Other Mother Tongues Of This Group	SWAHILI	
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Linguistically Related Languages	KALENJIN	
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Literacy		Group Description
Adult Literacy Percentage	50	

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Item Name	Item Note	
Literacy Attitude	Somewhat resistant	
Active Literacy Program	Yes	
Comment (Literacy)	Little material is available for teaching literacy and there is little interest.	
Economics		Group Description
Subsistence Type	Pastoralists	
Average Annual Income	Not known	
Occupation	Farmers who raise cattle and subsistence food crops.	
Income Sources	Sale of crops and animals	
Products / Crafts	Bukantiit, gourds, leather, though rarely for sale.	
Trade Partners	Other Sabaot and Bukusu	
Modernization / Utilities	No electricity, running water, vehicles or roads	
Community Development		Group Description
Health Care (Quality)	Poor	
Diet (Quality)	Fair	
Water (Quality)	Fair	
Comment (Water)	The quality of water varies from place to place.	
Shelter Description	They build thatched roof houses with mud walls.	
Energy/Fuel (Quality)	None	
Comment (Energy)	Human, donkeys, oxen	
Clothing	Quality is poor, expensive	
Transportation	Donkeys on the mountain, bicycles	
Society & Culture		Group Description
Family Structures	In the past the extended family dominated, but this has been weakened due to the shortage of land.	
Neighbor Relations	Rivalry with the Bukusu because of land shortage. The Sabaot have been dominated by the larger Bukusu population.	
Authority / Rule	The chief, the most respected person, is an elder or old man (boontee) who has become wealthy and is a leader in the community.	
Social Habits/Groupings	<p>Young men between 16 and 25 are initiated into the first stage of adulthood when they are taken through instruction in how to care for the household, how to build a house, how to look after cattle, and how to relate to others in the family and community. When the young man is able to do this, he can request circumcision from his father and if his father agrees he is circumcised.</p> <p>The second stage includes the circumcision rite, which enables young men to be considered adults. They are circumcised in age groups, and are considered age males with the people with whom they are circumcised. The young man is not considered to have reached manhood until he is married and has established his own home and has children. They marry into different clans.</p>	
Cultural Change Pace	Medium	
Identification With National Culture	Similar	
Self Image	Depressed	
Judicial / Punishment System	Elders and chiefs	
Celebrations	Naming ceremony (birth) and other family related events	
Art Forms	Music, Sabaot proverbs	
Media	Radio in Swahili, but not in Sabaot; no television or films; some gospel and music recordings in Sabaot; Sabaot newsletter	
Local Language Broadcasting	None	
Attitude To Outsiders	Somewhat receptive	
Attitude To Change	Somewhat resistant	

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Item Name	Item Note	
Youth		Group Description
Labor and tasks (6-12 year olds)	Tending cows, sheep, goats, looking after younger children, fetching water, collecting wood, cleaning the house, resurfacing the floor with cow dung (weekly)	
Youth Problems (Teens)	Girls have children at a young age, making another mouth to feed. They are not really ready for motherhood.	
Youth Greatest Needs (teens)	Health education, water projects, better roads. In the long term, alternate sources of income and upgraded schools.	
Education		Group Description
Language Of Instruction Early Years	Swahili (specific)	
Language Of Textbooks Early Years	Swahili (specific)	
Church Growth		Status of Christianity
Reached Status	Reported	
Christian Clinics/Hospitals	1	
Christian Literacy Centers	1	
Religion & Response		Status of Christianity
Religious Practices & Ceremonies	Traditional religion includes the practice of circumcision, ancestor worship, and naming of children. Christian practice includes a three hour Sunday morning service with a lot of singing and speakers.	
Attitude To Christianity	Somewhat receptive	
Attitude To Religious Change	Somewhat receptive	
Resistance / Receptivity	Open to conversation and listening	
Religious Analogies & Bridges	Some blood sacrifices (e.g. sacrifice of a lamb when twins are born)	
Spiritual Climate And Openness	Open to conversation; They are looking for a solution to the problem of fear and for freedom from the Evil Eye.	
Comment (Religion)	About 1% are Christians. They have a natural tendency towards syncretism.	
Recommended Approaches	Interest and spiritual awareness are being raised as more of the Bible is published and used by Sabaot in church services. The presence of Christians living among them is helping considerably.	
Current Needs	Motivation for literacy Faithful church leaders trained in the scriptures. Mother-tongue preaching and teaching in the churches. Dedicated people to distribute tapes and books.	
Items For Prayer	Pray for: 1. the Sabaot translators and literacy workers; that sickness, finance and family problems will not hinder the work and reduce the amount of translated Scriptures getting into the hands of the people 2. dedicated people to distribute tapes and books (a few men already do this) 3. that more people may be sent, even some Sabaot who have gone away and become Christians 4. motivation for literacy 5. faithful church leaders trained in the scriptures 6. Mother-tongue preaching and teaching in the churches	
Scripture		Status of Christianity
Translation Status	In Progress	
Available Scripture	Portions	
Form Of Scripture Available	Printed	
Scripture Use	4	
Scripture Use	Individuals and some churches	
Comment (Scripture)	Mark, Luke and several epistles, Jonah, Ruth, Genesis, Exodus and Acts are nearing completion in Sabaot (Kenya).	
	The whole New Testament in Sebei (Uganda) is getting the final check before printing.	

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Item Name

Item Note

Missions and Churches

Status of Christianity

Organization Name African Inland Mission

Main Ministry Church Planting

Year Started 1985

Number Of National Workers 2

Organization Name Finnish Mission

Main Ministry Medical

Number Of Expatriate Workers 1

Organization Name Roman Catholic Church

Year Started 1981

Number Of Expatriate Workers 1

Organization Name Church of Christ

Country Of Origin United States

Main Ministry Church Planting

Year Started 1990

Number Of National Workers 2

Number Of Workers Using Local Language 2

Language Used By Workers Sabaot

Christian Literature And Media Status

Status of Christianity

Audio Recordings Available

Translated Gospels are available on tape; songs with bukaantiit; Teaching tape on Jesus and His power over evil spirits.