The Sudest of Papua New Guinea

Sudest is one of Papua New Guinea’s 830 languages. Sudest Island, in Milne Bay Province, is actually a mountaintop in a range that extends far into the ocean to the southeast of Papua New Guinea. It is accessible only by a 220-mile boat trip from the port town of Alotau. Sudest is a tight-knit community of 17 small villages of approximately 100 people each. In this matrilineal society, women carry great influence and are held in high regard.

This translation project began in 1985. Solomon Joshua, a local translator, worked closely with an SIL team, drafting the entire New Testament and parts of the Old Testament.

But just five years before typesetting the New Testament, Solomon died. In 2012 SIL asked The Seed Company to partner with this very small people group to ensure that the project would continue and move to completion. Now they are making all the preparations for the dedication July 5, 2015!

Workers plan to produce audio versions of the New Testament, Bible studies, other related material and portions of the Old Testament. Two denominations are eager to help provide personnel who will help test the drafts and give the team valuable feedback. The churches can hardly wait to have the New Testament and look forward to the dedication and distribution of them in July.
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Have They Heard The Gospel?

History of Christianity

Outside missionaries brought Christianity to Sudest in the 1940s. Today, most speakers are members of one of two major denominations. Christian denominations in Papua New Guinea include Protestant, Independent, Anglican and Catholic.

Almost the entire population has some link to a Christian denomination, but the old ethnic, predominantly animistic religions remain a powerful underlying influence for many.

Religious Practices and Ceremonies

Many have not renounced connections with traditional animistic practices and destroyed their fetishes.

Is the Word of God Translated?

The New Testament is now published and a few Old Testament portions are completed in draft.

Other Forms of Gospel Presentations

Translators plan to produce audio recordings of Scripture, Bible studies and other related material. Translators also hope to invite ethnomusicologists to come and conduct a hymn-writing workshop.

Bilingualism

Only the very old (and not many of them) and the very young are not bilingual in some way. Most would know Misima, some would know Saisai. Then those that have lived off the island for any period of time would know at least some of the language(s) of the area where they lived.

Since the United Church pastors traditionally have been Misima speakers, and refused to learn any Sudest, most adults speak or understand at least some Misima. Catholic Sudest people would in the same way know Saisai, because the Catholic mission is located in a Saisai speaking area.
The Sudest of Papua New Guinea

Group Description

Population all countries

World Population For This People 2,000
World Population (Date) 1987

Geography & Environment

Location On Sudest (Tagula) island in Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea
Climate Tropical rain forests

Alternate Language Names

Sud-Est, Tagula, Vanatina, Vanga

Percent Monolingual 20%
Other Mother Tongues 70% use some English
Comment Some also speak Misima-Panaeati and Nimoa

Linguistically Related Languages

Neighboring Languages 44% cognate with Nimoa

Literacy

Most children go to school. Schools are maintained by the government.

Adult Literacy Percentage 50-70% literacy rate
Active Literacy Program Primary schools are becoming bilingual.
Comment Literature available in Sudest includes poetry, dictionary, grammar and Bible portions.
The Sudest of Papua New Guinea

**Economics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Agriculture, fishing, hunting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income Sources</td>
<td>Sale of sea cucumbers and other ocean products provides enough money for schools, but little else.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Community Development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health Care (Quality)</th>
<th>Medical care is intermittent. Local medical teams patrol the island every few months; when transport is available people on Sudest can get to a small non-doctored hospital to help resolve critical health issues.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diet (Quality)</td>
<td>Good, with food from their own gardens and the jungle, from hunting and from the sea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>Most villages have good water supply, though not always close or easily accessible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter Description</td>
<td>Lots of building materials are present for good house building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy/Fuel (Quality)</td>
<td>Plenty of wood available for cooking and heat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>Usually bought at shops in a larger town.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Society & Culture**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Core family is father, mother and children. Elderly usually live with a younger generation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neighbor Relations</td>
<td>Good relationships with all surrounding language communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority / Rule</td>
<td>Sudest is a matrilineal society; women are highly regarded. Decisions usually by general consensus.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Sudest of Papua New Guinea

Judicial / Punishment System
Social Habits/Groupings  Sudest is a tight-knit community of 17 small villages/hamlets of about 100 or more people each.
Cultural Change Pace  Slower than the rest of PNG
Recreations  Soccer (for men) and Net Ball (for women) Youth groups through churches.
Media  None
Local Language Broadcasting  None
Attitude To Change  To having western things fairly open but not open to changing customs and diet habits.

Children and Youth:

Labor and tasks (6-12 yr olds)  They babysit, cook, gather meat, work in gardens and go to school. At school they provide for themselves for the week, study and care for the grounds and teachers gardens.
Youth Problems (Teens)  There aren’t many unless they’ve been out in the towns. They are quickly brought back to acceptable behavior once in the village.
Youth Greatest Needs (teens)  More opportunities for jobs once they’ve completed their schooling, especially the high grades, like 11 and 12.

Education--Group Description

Teacher To Pupil Ratio  1 to 20?
Language of Instruction  English mostly
Early Years  The children start school at 8 and have to be able to care for themselves since they live in a dorm-like situation for the week and then return to their village on the weekend to see family and get more food.
### Status of Christianity

#### Church Growth

Pastors: usually one pastor per village or several hamlets in groupings

Lay Leaders: Each church would have several appointed or elected lay leaders. In actual situations, every adult in a village church are on committees that service regularly

Bible Schools: There is a Sudest School of Discipleship in Rambuso, at the United Church headquarters for Sudest Island. It was started in 2013, and designed to teach Sudest people to use the Sudest scriptures and apply them to everyday life.

Christian Clinics/Hospitals: There are no Christian clinics or hospital on Sudest Island, but a fine Catholic hospital is located on nearby Nimowa Island.

Christian Literacy Center: There is no Christian literacy center for Sudest.

#### Religion and Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translation status</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Testament has been published; portions of the Old Testament have been translated and are awaiting community testing and consultant checking before finalizing for publication. People from both major denominations participate as translation helpers and reviewers for the Scriptures. Mother-tongue Scripture will give Sudest Christians the tools they need to reach out to those who are not yet convinced of the reliability of the Gospel.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Attitude toward Christianity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Most Sudest speakers are members of one of two major denominations, though many still also practice traditional magic and sorcery.</td>
</tr>
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#### References

There are few if any readily available resources about Sudest. There are some academic studies that are not as easily accessed.