

## The Turkana of Kenya

The Turkana people are the second largest of the pastoral people of Kenya. They occupy the far northwest corner of the nation, an area of about 67,000 square kilometers.

Around 1700, the Turkana emigrated from the Uganda area over a period of years. They took over the area which is the Turkana district today by simply displacing the existing people of the area. Turkana warriors today still take pride in their reputation as the most fearless fighters in East Africa.

The biggest events for life of Turkana are marriage and child birth. Other cultural rituals such as circumcision are completed with little ceremony. The marriage however, may be in process for as long as three years. Subsequent to the payment of bride price, the wife to be is brought into the home of her husband. The wedding ceremony is not performed until after at least one healthy child is weaned.

Adherence to the traditional religion is weak and seems almost nonchalant among the Turkana. Therefore, if the message of Christ's deliverance is introduced to these people, they would accept it wholeheartedly.

**Image  
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**Primary Religion:**

Tribal Religion

**Disciples (Matt 28.19):**

**Churches:**

**Scripture Status (Matt 28.20):**

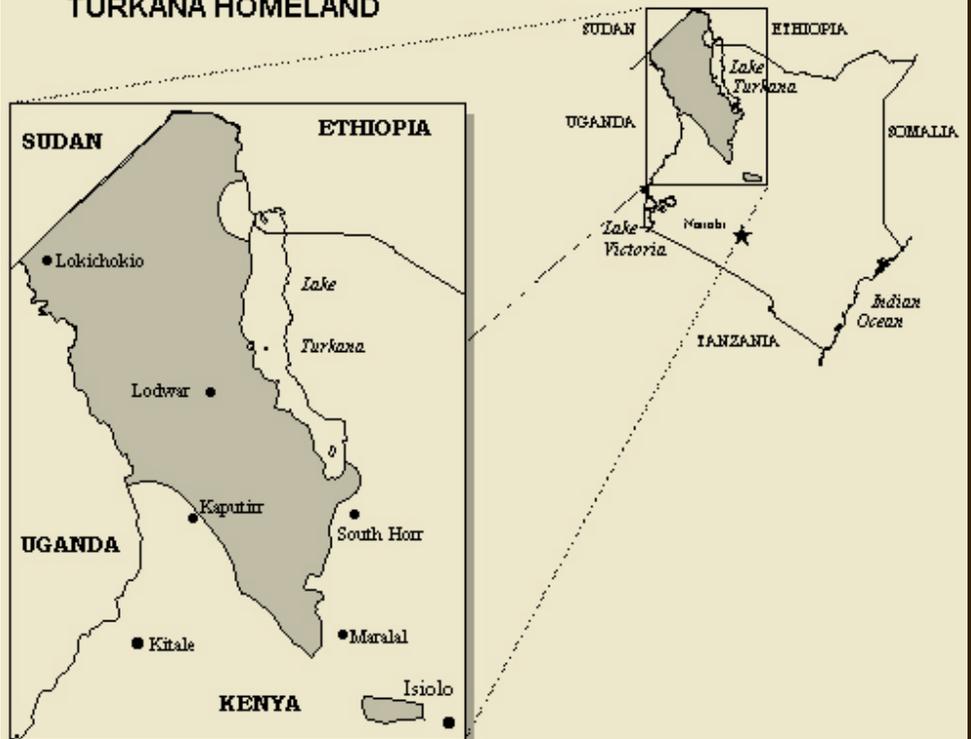
New Testament

**Population (date):**

260,000 (1989)



### TURKANA HOMELAND



# The Turkana of Kenya

Item Name	Item Note	
<b>Population All Countries</b>		<b>Group Description</b>
World Population For This People	260,000	
World Population (Date)	1989	
<b>Countries Where People Group Lives</b>		<b>Group Description</b>
Country Name	Kenya	
<b>Geography &amp; Environment</b>		<b>Group Description</b>
Location	The Turkana primarily occupy Turkana District which lies in the extreme northwest corner of Kenya. It consists of about 64,000 square kilometers which includes 2,000 square kilometers of Lake Turkana. The district represents about one-ninth of the land area of Kenya. The western boundary of the district is the Rift Valley escarpment that is also the Kenya-Uganda border.	
Country	Kenya	
Ecosystem Type	Desert	
Geological Type	Mountain Valley	
Elevation	1,300-5,500 ft.	
Climate	Rainfall throughout the district is uneven and unreliable and often is not even adequate for the life of nomads. The average rainfall along the lake is less than 10 inches per year. Rainfall increases as you move northwest and southwest from the lake to about 20 inches at the northern and southern edges of the district.	
Comments (Geography & Environment)	The potential of an area is based on its rainfall, soil conditions, and climate. Turkana District has a very low ecological potential. It is arid and semi-arid and in many parts only the hardiest of desert plants will grow while other parts are barren.	
<b>Language &amp; Linguistics</b>		<b>Group Description</b>
Alternate Language Names	Bume, Buma, Ngaturkwana, Ngiturkwana, Ngaturkana	
Attitude Towards Mother Tongue	Somewhat receptive	
Linguistically Related Languages	TOPOSA	
Linguistically Related Languages	TOPOSA	
Comments (Related Languages)	Turkana has a 25% overlap with the Samburu language and 23% overlap with Maasai (based on the similarity between a sample of 100 words from each language).	
<b>Literacy</b>		<b>Group Description</b>
Adult Literacy Percentage	20	
Literacy Attitude	Somewhat receptive	
Active Literacy Program	Yes	
Comment (Literacy)	All speak the primary language of Turkana. Most speak the second language of Swahili. School children and educated people speak the third language of English. The exact percentage of literate adults is unknown, but it is low. However, there is a wide interest among the Turkana in learning to read.	
<b>Economics</b>		<b>Group Description</b>
Subsistence Type	Pastoralists	
Occupation	The keeping of cattle, camels, sheep and goats is central to the Turkana culture and all aspects of their social, political, and economic life. The Turkana do practice some simple cultivation consisting of planting a fast growing millet in low spots immediately after the rains. Any wider scale agriculture is impossible because of the climatic and terrain conditions. Fishing has become important as well.	
Income Sources	Because livestock provide their primary subsistence, animals have also become their medium of exchange. Livestock are used in payment for goods such as grain, tobacco, beads, and ironware.	
Products / Crafts	Household and personal articles are largely made from animal by-products: skin for clothing, mats, roofing, sandals, bead mounts, containers, bags, etc; horns for containers; hair and tails for decorations and charms; bones for whippers, rattlers; stomach contents for rituals; and dung for fuel in the fires.	

# The Turkana of Kenya

## Item Name

## Item Note

Trade Partners

All neighboring groups including urban areas (souvenir stores in Nairobi and Mombasa).

Modernization / Utilities

The Kenyan government is developing irrigation systems and electric power.

Comment (Economy)

Livestock also play an important role in payment for bridewealth, compensation for crimes, fines for fathering illegitimate children, and as gifts on social occasions. Livestock raids from other tribal groups or from "ngoroko" (bandits) oblige every herdsman to watch his stock very carefully and to cooperate with neighbors for mutual protection. Often conflicts are caused by the Turkana themselves when they encroach into others grazing areas or they steal additional stock.

## Community Development

## Group Description

Health Care (Quality)

Poor

Comment (Health Care)

The majority of the health care facilities throughout Turkana District are operated by the Christian churches. Churches operate 4 of the 6 hospitals in the district, 6 of the 7 health centers, and 25 of the 27 dispensaries. The Catholic church alone, operates 75% of the health care facilities in Turkana District.

Diet (Quality)

Poor

Comment (Diet)

Livestock are the primary source of food. Cattle, camels, and small stock are all milked and this provides about 80 percent of the Turkana diet (when grass is adequate for stock to produce milk). All the animals are also bled and the blood is consumed alone or mixed with milk or millet. Small animals are also used for meat.

Water (Quality)

Poor

Comment (Water)

Water in highland areas is adequate, but it is semi-arid to arid in the valley, and frequent moves are required. Therefore, Turkana in the valley lead a very nomadic lifestyle.

Shelter Description

Huts made of woven sticks and animal skin roofs are abandoned with each move.

Energy/Fuel (Quality)

Poor

Comment (Energy)

Gas, wood and dung are used.

Clothing

Traditional skins, naked youth, and modified "western" clothing.

Transportation

There is no public transportation.

## Society & Culture

## Group Description

Family Structures

The basic social unit among the Turkana is the nuclear family which consists of a man and his wives and children. Married sons remain with their father, although they become increasingly more autonomous, while daughters leave when they are married and join the nuclear family of their husbands. The unity of the family centers in the head who has inherited the ownership of the stock from his father. Though the family may be scattered over several homesteads, it always continues to be a distinct and corporate group.

Neighbor Relations

With each other they are good, but they are enemies to all neighboring groups with the exception of the Jie. The Jie are traditional allies and folk lore claims a relationship. The Turkana are fiercely independent and cattle raids are carried out against all surrounding tribes creating mutual enmity. The Turkana are feared by their neighbors.

Authority / Rule

Three to five families may cooperate in a neighborhood, but this is constantly shifting as each family relocates by their own decision. Turkana are very independent people.

Social Habits/Groupings

Each male is born into one of two "alternations". If the father is a "leopard", the son is a "stone". These "alternations" have little social significance except as a convenience for forming raiding parties.

Boys are circumcised at the age of 16-20 with minimum ceremony. Then they must wait another 10-15 years for marriage. Girls are usually married by their late teens.

Cultural Change Pace

Slow

Identification With National Culture

Distinct

Self Image

Prestigious

Judicial / Punishment System

There are no formal political leaders or groups capable of taking corporate action. There are no chiefs, no ruling class, and no centralized political institutions. Leadership is confined to the local level and is demonstrated by local influence, but there is almost a total lack of social sanction that compels people to follow. This is consistent with the Turkana independent nature.

## The Turkana of Kenya

### Item Name

Celebrations

### Item Note

Important life events to the Turkana are initiation, marriage, child-bearing, and death. The initiation ceremony takes place when two new age-sets are created. The ceremony is brief and preparations beforehand are minimal. Initiation is the first stage of adulthood for Turkana males and occurs after a good rain season when boys are between 16 and 20 years of age. For the woman, marriage is the first and primary stage of adulthood. Turkana girls are usually married when they are between 15 to 20 years of age. They usually have some say in the selection of an appropriate husband. The wedding itself may take a couple of days and is perhaps the most important event in Turkana social life. There is a ceremony with a lot of dancing and feasting. Child-bearing doesn't have much fanfare in Turkana society, but it represents the second stage of adulthood for the Turkana woman. The death of a nuclear family head is very important because it raises the problem of settling the inheritance. The death of a family head or older person is accompanied by intense mourning. The body is disposed of by burial and often a meat feast will follow.

Recreations

Many and varied activities

Art Forms

Hair and tails of livestock are made into decorations and charms.

Attitude To Outsiders

Somewhat receptive

Attitude To Change

Somewhat receptive

### Youth

### Group Description

Labor and tasks (6-12 year olds)

The homestead is the center of daily activities which revolve around the livestock. Here the family members get food, shelter the animals at night, and graze and water the animals nearby during the day. Turkana girls assist the women with maintaining the compound, preparing food, entertaining friends, and looking after the family. They are also responsible for getting water and gathering firewood. The boys assist the men with herding the animals.

Youth Problems (Teens)

### Education

### Group Description

Primary Schools

57

Primary School Enrollment

20,000

Percent Of Eligible Students Enrolled

65

Language Of Instruction Early Years

Swahili (specific)

Language Of Textbooks Early Years

Swahili (specific)

Comment (Education)

Most of the primary schools are government maintained but also receive assistance from the sponsoring agency, which is a church in 54 of the 55 schools. There are only two secondary schools in Turkana District. Adult literacy among Turkana is very low.

### Church Growth

### Status of Christianity

Christian Clinics/Hospitals

35

### Religion & Response

### Status of Christianity

Religious Practices & Ceremonies

Diviners predict victory in wars and are called upon to assist in health, barrenness, or similar issues. If a male or female is found to be guilty of witchcraft or sorcery, they are killed.

Attitude To Christianity

Indifferent

Attitude To Religious Change

Indifferent

Resistance / Receptivity

Indifferent to religion in general.

Spiritual Climate And Openness

Very little interest in any religion. They are pragmatic survivors.

Recommended Approaches

### History Of Christianity In Group

### Status of Christianity

Year Began

1930

By Whom

Anglican

Significant Events

Church relief for the famine of the 1960s and also 1980 were accepted.

### Scripture

### Status of Christianity

## The Turkana of Kenya

### Item Name

Translation Status

Available Scripture

Form Of Scripture Available

### Item Note

In Progress

New Testament

Printed, Audio and Visual