

People Group Profile: Lele

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https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/19001/GV

Introduction/ History

The Lele are a small group of about 40,000 that belong to the Mande people cluster.

They are also a part of the Maninka, also known as the Malinke people group.¹ Despite being a small group, the Lele speak roughly eight different dialects of the Lele language.² They are located in Guinea, on the western coast of Africa. Most of their history is not recorded, because they pass down information by oral tradition.³

Where are they located?

The Lele people are located in Upper and Middle Guinea, in the Faranah and Nzerekore regions. Their main population centers are Yombiro, Tangalto, and Kassadou.⁴ Middle Guinea is filled with mountains, along with many rivers that run through them. This is where the Niger, Senegal, and Gambia rivers begin, giving way to the prosperous

¹ Joshua Project, "Lele in Guinea," Joshua Project, , accessed March 04, 2017, https://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/19001/GV.

² Wycliffe Global Alliance, "Guinea," Profile: Lele, accessed March 04, 2017, <https://www.wycliffe.net/world?continent=AFR&country=GV&code=llc>.

³ Vansina, J. "The Lele and Their Neighbours." *The Journal of African History* 5, no. 1 (1964): 141-42.

⁴ Wycliffe Global Alliance, "Guinea," Profile: Lele.

farmlands surrounding them. Upper Guinea includes more savannas and plains than mountains. This is where most of the Lele are found, in smaller agricultural settlements in the river valleys.⁵

What are their lives like?

In the Lele culture, men are seen as the head of the lineage. Houses of men from the same clan are usually the ones in positions of authority in each village.⁶ The Lele do have a chief; however, he does not have any political power.⁷

Most of the Lele are primarily agriculturalists, with rice and potatoes being the most common crops. Poor transportation systems and harsh weather often hinder the movement of materials and raise their costs.⁸ Both Lele men and women participate in the farming chores. However, the women usually complete more time consuming chores, such as cooking, cleaning, and child rearing.⁹

⁵ "Guinea," Countries and Their Cultures, accessed March 04, 2017, <http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/Guinea.html>.

⁶ David Levinson, Encyclopedia of World Cultures (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, n.d.), 215-16.

⁷ Vansina. "The Lele and Their Neighbours".

⁸ "Guinea," Countries and Their Cultures.

⁹ Levinson, Encyclopedia of World Cultures.

Traditionally, a Lele woman is part of a polygamous marriage and has about five children, with at least one dying in their early years.¹⁰ The Lele emphasize manners among their children, believing that they represent the difference between man and beast.¹¹ It is uncommon for a Lele child to contradict an adult. Children are raised by their elders in addition to their parents. It is socially acceptable for family, friends, and people in the village to reprimand a child who misbehaves.¹²

What are their beliefs?

The two main belief systems of the Lele are Islam and ethnic religions. 5% of the Lele are Christian, but a little less than 2% are evangelical.¹³ 50% of the population is animistic, while 40% are Muslim.¹⁴ The observance of Muslim holidays and regular prayers are a common occurrence among the Lele. However, Lele women do not generally live in seclusion or wear full coverings as they do in some other Muslim contexts.¹⁵ The Lele's animistic practices have been incorporated into their practice of Islam, making it different than in other cultures.¹⁶ Each Lele community usually has a

¹⁰ "Guinea," Countries and Their Cultures.

¹¹ "Global Prayer Digest," Global Prayer Digest, accessed March 04, 2017, <http://www.globalprayerdigest.org/index.php/issue/day/Lele-People/>.

¹² "Guinea," Countries and Their Cultures.

¹³ Levinson, Encyclopedia of World Cultures.

¹⁴ Joshua Project, "Lele in Guinea".

¹⁵ "Guinea," Countries and Their Cultures.

¹⁶ Ibid.

male and a female religious leader. They oversee religious rituals, including but not limited to circumcision.¹⁷

What are their Needs?

There are few opportunities for Lele children to go to school due to financial constraints. Most of the population, especially women, are illiterate.¹⁸ A few scholarships are available, but they are very limited. Families need financial assistance for both boys and girls to attend school.

Because they are primarily an oral culture, the Lele have not written down their history. They are in need of people to listen to their stories and record them.

Religious syncretism is common among the Lele. They need people to help them contextualize the gospel and to lead them away from blending their beliefs.

Prayer Points

- Pray that God will inspire people to create more audio clips of the Bible in Lele
- Pray that God will bring an end to female circumcision (FGM) among the Lele.
- Pray that churches will reach out to the Lele people.¹⁹
- Pray that Lele children will have more opportunities to attend school and to become literate.

¹⁷ Levinson, Encyclopedia of World Cultures.

¹⁸ "Guinea," Countries and Their Cultures.

¹⁹ "Global Prayer Digest," Global Prayer Digest.

- Pray that someone will learn and write down the Lele's history.
- Pray that the Lele will come to Christ, without syncretism or double conversion.