

**MISSIONS ATLAS PROJECT  
AFRICA  
THE GAMBIA**

**Snapshots Section**

**Country Name:** Republic of The Gambia

**Country Founded in:** February 18, 1965

**Population:** 1,688,359

**Government Type:** Republic

**Geography/location in the world:** The Gambia is a small West African country that is surrounded by the nation of Senegal. Its geographic coordinates are 13 28 N, 16 34 W. It was once united with Senegal in a federation but later chose to separate.

**Number of people groups:** 18

**Picture of flag:**



**Religion Snapshot**

Major Religion: Muslim 90%

All religions and % for each: Christian 9%, indigenous beliefs 1%

Government interaction with religion: The government is generally tolerant of Islam and Christianity. At official meetings, often one prayer will be offered by a Muslim and one prayer will be offered by a Christian. Missionaries are allowed to enter the country. Religious instruction is permitted.

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90099.htm>

## Country Profile

### Basic Facts

**Country Name:** Republic of The Gambia

#### Demographics:

The estimated population of The Gambia is 1,688,359.

Children up to fourteen years of age account for 44.1% of the population. There are 373,831 male children between the ages of newborn to fourteen years of age. There are 370,397 female children between these same ages. Adults between the ages of fifteen and sixty-four years of age account for 53.2% of the population. There are 445,365 males in this age category and 452,311 females. In the last age category, sixty-five years and above, there are 23,582 males and 22,873 females. This 65 and over group accounts for 2.8% of the population. The median age for males is 17.6 years, and the median age for females is 17.9 years.

The birth rate is 38.86 births for every 1,000 people. There are an estimated 5.21 children born to every woman. The infant mortality rate is 70.14 deaths for every 1,000 live births. The death rate is 11.99 deaths for every 1,000 people. The life expectancy for the total population is 54.54 years. The life expectancy for males is slightly lower at 52.68 years while the life expectancy for females is slightly higher at 56.46 years.

There are approximately 18 different people groups in Sierra Leone. Ninety-nine percent of the population come from indigenous African peoples. Only one percent of the population is non-Africans. Approximately, forty-two percent of the population come from the Mandinka people while eighteen percent come from the Fula ethnic cluster. An additional sixteen percent come from the Wolof people while ten percent are from the Jola people. Four percent are from the Serahuli people while the remaining four percent come from other types of African peoples.

The risk of infectious diseases is very high. Travelers should be aware that bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever may all be contracted from polluted water or food. Schistosomiasis can be contracted from the water. Other risks include: dengue fever, malaria, Crimean-Congo hemorrhagic fever, and yellow fever. Meningococcal meningitis has also been diagnosed in some areas.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ga.html>

#### Language:

English is the official state language. However most people use their own ethnic tongue plus one of the major trade languages. Mandinka, Wolof, and Fula all function as trade languages. Arabic is familiar to Muslim clerics.

#### Society/Culture:

Visitors should be cognizant of the importance of greetings in Gambia. Different times of day require different types of greetings. Even when a visitor is in a hurry or only wants to ask a single question, the proper greeting etiquette must be followed. Visitors that do not follow the proper protocol will be thought rude.

Gambians use greetings as a way of showing respect for their fellow man. Gambians only refuse to greet a person when they are displeased. Younger people should always speak first when meeting an older person. Also, the younger person should not look directly into the eye of the older adult. Then, a visitor needs to say "hello" in English or "salaam alekum" in Arabic. This Arabic phrase is translated: "Peace unto you." The respondent should say, "malekum salaam." Following this response, the first person will ask if the other conversant has spent the day or night before in peace. The second person always answers that they have been at peace.

The first person should call the second person by the family surname. If this name is not known, the first person can politely ask. The visitor should ask about the person's own health as well the person's immediate and extended family. Asking from where someone originates is also considered polite.

Men will usually shake hands with other men but should not normally do so with women. Traditionally, among Muslims, men do not ever have any type of physical contact with women to whom they are not married or related. Furthermore, even if a person is meeting a wife or other female relative, touching is avoided. In this predominantly Muslim culture, public displays of affection are not tolerated. If a person is seen in a group or from a distance, two hands raised together will suffice as a greeting. Also, if a person is engaged in completing a task or in the process of eating, they may choose to offer the visitor an elbow to shake instead of a hand. This is normal in Gambia. When a conversation comes to completion, a person will simply say, "I am going." Usually, a person will send words of blessing to family members of the other conversant.

Breakfast is often just leftovers or fruit and is eaten quickly. Lunch is also usually a small meal. However, the evening meal is an important time when families gather together. Women, men, and children will segregate as they settle down around a communal bowl. Talking to children during a meal is considered ill-advised and impolite as parents feel that talking could lead to choking. Children are also taught not to talk to each other as talking to another person is often considered to be a thoughtless and disrespectful way to treat your host or family members.

Anytime a visitor comes, he or she will be invited to join the family if they are eating. In fact, the host may be quite insistent. The visitor may wish to partake of the meal or may wish to refuse. To refuse is socially acceptable but the visitor should not proceed to sit down by the communal bowl unless he or she is ready to eat. Rather, the visitor should leave the eating area and wait until the meal is finished if he or she does not wish to eat at that time.

Gambians are often superstitious and fear the "evil eye." Thus, they do not feel comfortable with a stranger or even a friend observing them while they eat. If leaving the eating area is not possible, the visitor should avoid looking directly at the family members who are eating. Rather, the visitor should, if possible, begin to work on another activity so that the

Gambians can obviously see that the visitor's attention is engaged in completing the task. This will allow the Gambians to feel comfortable as they finish their meal.

When a visitor decides to join the family for a meal, there are several other important customs to note. First of all, visitors should wash their hands and remove their shoes before sitting down to eat. Then, the host usually blesses the meal with the Arabic phrase "bisimillah." After this the host either stirs his hand in the pot in order to bring the stew to an acceptable temperature or distributes the meat and other vegetables to each person. The host will be the first person to take a portion from the bowl. After that, others can eat too.

Each person will have a specific section of the communal bowl to eat from. There are not visible dividers for these sections. A visitor will just need to observe how much space each person is allotted by watching other group members. The right hand is used to dip into the bowl. Often a visitor will be offered a spoon, but visitors should not ask for one. A visitor must be careful to refrain from using the left hand as it is not considered clean—even if the visitor has washed the left hand earlier.

The visitor should also be very careful not to rock the bowl because the Gambians have a superstition that a person will develop a stomachache if the bowl moves. Any food that is dropped is put to the side—sometimes on the lid of the bowl. The pieces are never returned to the bowl. The family and visitors will eat their fill and then will lick their hand as a sign that they have finished eating. Complimenting the host on the sweetness of the food is considered a polite way of expressing appreciation.

Occasionally, a Gambian will wish to honor a visitor and may put the visitor in a separate dwelling to serve food. When this happens, the visitor should not show alarm but rather graciously accept this special honor.

Food is most often served with some type of sauce. Rice is a common food among many people groups. Different types of fish or indigenous vegetables like okra, tomatoes, or onions are also food staples. Gambian families usually do not eat other types of meat. *Fufu* is a dish prepared with cassava and palm oil that many people prefer to eat. Another popular dish is called *domoda* which is a special stew made from peanut paste, rice, and vegetables.

Clothing styles vary throughout Gambia. In the cities, people generally wear clothes that would be similar to U.S. or European styles. In rural areas, people may choose to wear traditional clothes or U.S. or European styles. Traditional clothing is usually made to fit more loosely for both men and women. Women will wear some type of headscarf although the scarf does not necessarily have to cover their entire head as in other Muslim cultures.

Hair styling is an art form and may be very elaborate—especially for social events like weddings and funerals. Men may also choose to wear some type of hat during festivals or religious ceremonies.

While in the United States modest women always make sure that their chest is properly covered, modest women in Gambian never wear clothing that would reveal their thighs. Thus,

women never wear pants. Some Gambian women will choose to remain bare-chested inside the family compound. Revealing chests is not impolite in Gambia but is usually only done by women for convenience sake when nursing their babies.

The family is the central social unit of Gambian society. However, this family unit is different from most American or European family units. The extended family plays an extremely important role in the life of every Gambian. While this familial influence is decreasing somewhat in city areas where young people are adopting more Westernized ideologies, the family unit in rural areas still is a powerful force.

Extended families usually live together in one giant compound. The oldest male of a lineage, which is usually the grandfather unless he has died, leads the family in all major decisions and will represent family interests before the village leader. Usually these clan heads form an advisory council for the village leader as well. Grandmothers will help with birthing and initiation ceremonies for the women of the clan. She will also oversee the work done by the women in the compound and prepare bodies of women who have died for burial.

Mothers and fathers also play important roles in the lives of their children. Fathers will follow the orders of their own fathers and will submit to the authority of the clan leader—even if those orders contravene their own ideas. Fathers are the breadwinners for wives and children. They will also arrange marriages for their daughters and sometimes their sons. Fathers will take their sons to the place in the bush where they will learn about traditional value systems. This time in the bush occurs right after the circumcision ceremony when a boy reaches adolescence. Mothers will teach girls the skills needed to manage a household well. They will also cultivate their own gardens and perhaps work in the fields that their husbands have cultivated.

Children are taught to follow the instructions of their parents, aunts and uncles, and grandparents. For example, maternal uncles may exert influence on behalf of their nephews in marriage negotiations. Also, aunts from both sides of the family will train the children during adolescence about important familial and clan customs. Because of the emphasis of the importance of family, anyone who has money is expected to share it with family members or other relatives.

Because of the extended family relationships, visitors may want to be cautious in making assumptions as to how each person is related until they become better acquainted with each individual. When a child is unruly, the visitor can speak to the parents to let them know that the child is misbehaving.

While in urban areas, there is a rise in delinquency related problems, most children in rural areas still respect the wisdom and value of their elders. Although alcohol is forbidden in Muslim culture, some youths try alcohol or drugs. Marijuana is usually the drug of choice for addicts as it grows well in the Gambian climate.

Fathers can have up to four wives living in the same compound. Each wife and her children will live in a separate area of the compound. The father will visit the wife and children

when he wishes. Usually the oldest wife of a man will have more prestige and power than the other wives.

[http://www.smc.edu/gambia/GambiaHB/pdf/12\\_2002Gambia\\_culture.pdf](http://www.smc.edu/gambia/GambiaHB/pdf/12_2002Gambia_culture.pdf)  
*Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life Volume 1 Africa*

### **Government:**

The Gambian government is a republic. There are five administrative divisions, but the capital city of Banjul is given a special governmental status too. The five divisions include: Central River, Lower River, North Bank, Upper River, and Western.

The current constitution became effective in 1997. The law system comes from a mixture of traditional English law, Islamic law, and customary law. The government does accept compulsory ICJ jurisdiction with reservations. There is a national supreme court and local leaders generally serve as unofficial judges among the different people groups. People will often seek help from traditional leaders before approaching government officials.

President Yahya A. J. J. Jammeh serves as both the chief of state and the acting head of the government. The President serves for five year terms which are continually renewable. The president is assisted by the vice president and cabinet. The president chooses the cabinet members. The current president came into power after serving as the head of a military junta which had previously controlled the country. The last presidential election occurred in 2006. President Jammeh received 67.3% of the vote. Ousainou Darboe won 26.6% while Halifa Sallah gained only 6.0% of the voter's approval.

There is a unicameral National Assembly which serves as the primary legislative body. There are a total of fifty-three members. Five members serve at the pleasure of the president while the others are elected by the people. The last elections were held in 2007. The next elections will occur in 2012.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ga.html#Govt>

### **Economy:**

Like many other West African countries, Gambia faces several economic challenges. The GDP for 2007 was \$1.338 billion. That averaged out to about \$800 per person. The GDP real growth rate was only seven percent. Agriculture comprised about 32.8% of the GDP while services accounted for 58.5% of the GDP. The remainder of the GDP (8.7%) came from industrial work. The number of people living below the poverty line is unknown. The external debt is \$628.8 million while \$58.15 million was received in international aid in 2005.

Gambia has many imports and exports. Exports bring about 147.7 million. Export products include: peanut products, fish, cotton lint, palm kernels, and re-exports. Gambia's export partners are the US, India, the UK, Indonesia, and France. Imports cost Gambia about \$276 million. Imports include: foodstuffs, manufactures, fuel, machinery and transport equipment. Gambia's import partners are Italy, China, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, Brazil, and the Netherlands.

The labor force in Gambia is 400,000 people. The unemployment rate is unknown but some economists speculate that it is quite high. About seventy-five percent of the labor force are involved in some type of agricultural pursuit. Agricultural products may include: rice, millet, sorghum, peanuts, corn, sesame, cassava, or palm kernels. Peanuts are the most popular crop to grow. When the world market fluctuates in peanut sales, the economy of Gambia weakens. Another 19% are involved in some type of industry related job. People in an industry related job may process peanuts, fish, or help prepare animal hides. Others may be involved in some aspect of the tourism industry or do woodworking or metalworking. Tourism is a growing aspect of the economy. The British like to come to Gambia to enjoy the beach or to engage in bird watching. Still others produce clothing or beverages. The remaining six percent of the labor force work in some type of service related job.

Many people need better access to medical care and a hope for economic gain. Young people who have the opportunity to leave Gambia often choose not to return because of better economic opportunities offered elsewhere. Because of the dependency on peanuts and due to the large amount owed in international debt, the economy of Gambia could be considered somewhat unstable. Humanitarian aid organizations usually attempt to offer better schooling opportunities or access to better medical care. Also, UNICEF has been attempting to help women start their own businesses so that they can help their families become more economically stable. HIV/AIDS victims often need various types of assistance too.

Foreigners visiting Gambia are usually greeted warmly. As has been noted above, the tourism industry is growing. Visitors should be prepared to be charged more in local markets. Haggling is sometimes permitted but must not be done in excess so that the market owner will not feel insulted. Beggars will also approach visitors and ask for money. Visitors can politely but firmly reject the beggar or choose to give the person some money. If a visitor chooses to give money to one beggar, more people will approach and also ask for money. Visitors should refrain from displaying large amounts of cash or flashy, expensive electronics. Such displays only invite criminals to victimize visitors. Westerners are generally thought to be rich and could be targets for criminals unless precautions are taken.

### **Literacy:**

The literacy rate for the total population is 40.1%. For males, it is significantly higher at 47.8% while the literacy rate for females is just 32.8%. Children may attend a school if their parents permit, and funding for books and school uniforms is available.

Muslims usually send their sons to Koranic schools that are run by a local Muslim cleric. Instruction at Koranic schools is not only more popular with parents because of the emphasis on religious instruction but also because the instruction usually occurs early in the morning or after sundown so that school doesn't interfere with the boys' ability to help their fathers in the fields.

Girls are much more likely to be kept at home to help the mother and prepare for marriage. However, UNICEF is working to improve the ratio of girls who attend school by encouraging and educating mothers through the establishment of Mother's Clubs. These clubs help women start their own small businesses so that the women will have money to help send

their daughters to school. Also, the clubs teach mothers the importance of education so that mothers will encourage their husbands to delay the initiation of marriage contracts until the girl becomes older.

Girls receiving an education are being encouraged to train as doctors or midwives in order to help with the problem of overcrowded hospitals. They may also wish to train to be teachers. More female teachers are needed in a country where most teachers are male.

If a student gets to study at a university, he or she must usually go abroad. Often once the student has left Gambia, he or she doesn't return because higher paying jobs are more readily available in Europe or in the U.S.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ga.html>

<http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/gambia.html>

### **Land/Geography:**

The Gambia is a small West African country that is surrounded by the nation of Senegal. Its geographic coordinates are 13 28 N, 16 34 W. It was once united with Senegal in a federation but later chose to separate. Gambia is actually one of the smallest West African countries. Its total area is only 11,300 sq km. Land covers 10,000 sq km while water takes 1,300 sq km. It has 80 km of coastline. The land close to the river consists of mangrove swamps, but further inland it changes to savanna.

The Gambian climate is very tropical. In June, the rain begins to pour signaling the start of the wettest part of the year. This will last until some time in late October. Around the beginning of November, the dry season will begin. This will last until late May. Temperatures generally range from about sixty-five degrees to about ninety degrees but may reach up to one hundred degrees. The *harmattan* wind blowing in from the Sahara generally causes the temperatures to rise higher.

The Gambia River is the major waterway in Gambia and is approximately 684 miles in length. It begins somewhere in the Fouta Jalon and winds through Senegal before entering Gambia. The upper part of the river has a very narrow channel, yet even here the ocean tides affect the currents. The middle part of the river has problems with silting. In fact, the river was once navigable as far as Kuntaur which lies 150 miles inland. However, because of silting, ocean-ready boats can only go as far as Kau-ur, which is only 120 miles inland.

Drought has been a major problem in this area. The cutting down of trees along the banks of the river has led to deforestation issues and soil erosion. Also, clean drinking water is sometimes hard to find. The lower river ascends from the ocean as an estuary that at its mouth is about eleven miles in diameter. Fresh water and salt water intermingle in different areas. Because of the mixture of the two waters, many different types of fish inhabit the waters.

<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0107560.html>

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ga.html#Geo>

[http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia\\_761571438\\_2/Gambia.html](http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761571438_2/Gambia.html)

### **History**



The first Europeans to land in Gambia were the Portuguese. The British ultimately won control of the area, though, and in 1783, France and Great Britain agreed to territorial rights over the Senegal and Gambia Rivers in the Treaty of Versailles. Different British trading interests established posts in The Gambia, and slavers bought slaves to ship to the West Indies. However, with the abolishment of the slave trade by the British government in 1807, the navy sought to stymie the slave trade. They were somewhat unsuccessful, but they did manage to slow the traders' efforts. A military colony, established at Bathurst that later came to be called Banjul, served as the base for navy activities in the Gambian River.

Alex Haley traced his genealogical record back to an area of Gambia. He wrote the book *Roots* about his ancestor. Today there is a museum that explains the harsh realities of the slave trade. Local villagers who are supposedly genetically linked to Haley's ancestor will come and visit with tourists who wish to learn more about life in Gambia.

The government of Sierra Leone oversaw British interests in Gambia until 1843 when Gambia received a charter to become a crown colony. However, in 1866, the control reverted to the government in Sierra Leone. The French and British governments in 1889 settled Gambia's final boundaries, and Britain began ruling over the interior of the country about 1902. However, the British used local chiefs to oversee the people. The chiefs would simply report back to British authorities at Banjul.

After World War II, Gambia began to move towards independence. Full recognition as a member of the British Commonwealth was granted on February 18, 1965. Then, in 1970, Gambia gained full independence under the auspices of President Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara. His leadership was challenged in 1981, but with the help of Senegalese troops, the coup attempt was quelled. This coup led to the formation of the Senegambian Confederation, a proposal by which Senegal and Gambia joined political and economic forces while still retaining their autonomy to some degree. This Confederation later dissolved in 1989 when the Gambian government decided to leave the Confederation.

In 1994, the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council staged a coup, and Lieutenant Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh began to lead the country. In 1996, with a proposal to return to a more democratic style of government, Jammeh was elected President. He still retains political power today.

### **Christian History**

*All information is taken from World Christian Encyclopedia unless otherwise noted.*

Portuguese sailors brought Catholicism to Gambia early in the mid 1400's but no permanent Catholic mission was established at that time. The first real Christian presence came through the efforts of an Anglican chaplain who accompanied British soldiers in 1816.

A Methodist from Britain came in 1821 to begin work. Wesleyan Methodists later came to work with freed African captives that were being repatriated to Bathurst after having been freed from captured slave ships. Because of the despicable, unsanitary conditions on the slave

ships, most of the freed captives were in extremely poor mental and physical condition. The Wesleyans attempted to help these captives build a new life for themselves.

Hannah Kilham, a Quaker and abolitionist, attempted to establish a girls' school and a school for freed Africans near Bakau around 1823. She also worked to translate and develop literacy materials in indigenous African languages. Her efforts and those of her colleagues were some of the first attempts to create such materials for Gambians. Unfortunately, ill health brought about the death of her colleagues, and Hannah Kilham eventually returned to England and continued working on the materials there. When she later attempted to return to Gambia, she died at sea.

Other missionary efforts from various denominations came somewhat later in Gambian history. Catholic priests came to found their first mission in 1849. In the 1960's, WEC sent missionaries that formed new mission endeavors.

Most of the people still practice folk Islam. However, about nine percent of the total population are listed as Christian adherents. Many of the Christian adherents live in cities—especially the Banjul area. The Aku people along with some Mandingo and Wolof converts form the majority of this Christian population.

## **Religion**

*All information is taken from World Christian Encyclopedia and Operation World unless otherwise noted.*

### **Non Christian**

*Baha'i*—There is a growing interest in the Baha'i faith as an alternative to Islam or Christianity. Statisticians project that as much as one percent of the population could have converted to the Baha'i faith by 2025.

*Islam*—Islam is the predominant religion among most people groups. An estimated 88.80 percent of the people follow Islam. Islam claims some 1,160,000 of the people in The Gambia. Islam reports a growth rate of 3.4% annually.

Many of the people practice a syncretized form of Islam that combines the basic tenets of the Islamic faith with certain cultural practices of the traditional indigenous religions. The influence and scope of Islam is expected to grow stronger in the coming years as more people decide to leave worshipping traditional gods in favor of this more dominant religion.

*Jehovah's Witnesses*—This group began work in 1968. In 2001, there were three congregations and 132 members. There were 290 affiliates. The groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses are increasing at an alarming + 15.5% annually.

*New Apostolic Church*—This group began work in Gambia around 1970. Their headquarters are located in Zurich, Switzerland. In 1995, there were 100 congregations and 3,000 members. There were 5,624 affiliates.

*New Covenant Worship Center*—This charismatic group began in 1988. In 1995, there was one congregation with sixty members. There were eighty-six affiliates.

*Traditional Indigenous Religions*—Each individual ethnic group has their own particular form of ancestor worship. Most traditional religions revolve around a belief in the influence of spirits upon the daily life of people. Most of the traditional religions believe that a supreme being created the world and then left the inhabitants alone. The Serer, Jola, and Bassari people all have very strong ethnic beliefs. Statisticians theorize that the practice of indigenous religions will decrease by 2025. Some religious practices will continue, but this will occur in syncretized settings along side other dominant religions.

Traditional religions claim 6.70% of the people or over 88,000 persons.

*West African Mission Church*—There is not much information about this church group. It started in 1987. It is an independent church. No doctrinal statements could be found. In 1995, there was one congregation with twenty members. There were twenty-nine affiliates.

*Roman Catholic Church*—The Roman Catholic Church in The Gambia reports 15 congregations and over 17,000 members. It is growing at a rate of + 4.6% annually.

The first Catholic missionaries came to stay in 1849. The diocese of Banjul was first erected as a Mission of Sui Iuris in 1931. Later, in 1957, it was elevated to a diocese but was called the Diocese of Bathurst. In 1974, the name was changed to the diocese of Banjul. The current bishop is Robert Patrick Ellison. The bishop emeritus is Michael J. Cleary.

In 2006, there were 24 priests who served 42,400 mass attendees. Thirteen of the priests were diocesan and eleven were religious priests. There were fifty-six parishes. The diocese covers 4,018 square miles. Its mailing address is Bishop's House, P.O. Box 165, Banjul, The Gambia. <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dbnjl.html>

*Greek Orthodox*—This church is part of the diocese of Accra. Most of the members are Greeks or Arabs who have migrated to Gambia through their work in trading. This denomination began work around 1950. In 1995, there was one congregation with about 200 members. There were 400 affiliates.

## **Christian/Evangelical**

*Anglican Church*—British troops first brought the influence of this denomination to Gambia around 1816. It is a member of the Diocese of Gambia and Rio Pongas. John Daly was chosen to be the first bishop of this diocese at its formation in 1935. In 2001, there were six congregations and 850 congregants. There were 3,000 affiliates.

*Historical Dictionary of The Gambia* by David P. Gamble

*Baptist Convention*—This convention started as a mission of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1982. In 2001, there were two congregations and 150 congregants. There were 300 affiliates.

*Christian Missionary Fellowship*—This denomination started as a mission of CAM in 1990. In 1995, there were two congregations and fifty congregants. There were 100 affiliates. Members generally come from the Fulacunda, Mandyak, and Mandinka people groups.

*Church of Pentacost*—This church was begun in 1988 by missionaries from Ghana. In 2001, there were seventeen congregations and 1,000 members. There were 1,400 affiliates.

*Churches of Christ*—American missionaries started the church around 1968. In 1995, there were five congregations and fifty members. There were seventy-one affiliates. This church has influence in the Banjul area.

*Evangelical Church of the Gambia*—This church was started around 1966. It once was part of the Methodist Church, but it separated. It was a mission of the WEC of Great Britain and also the WEK of Germany. In 2001, there were nine congregations and 110 congregants. There were 280 affiliates.

*Methodist Church in the Gambia*—This church began work in 1821. In 2001, there were seven congregations and 1,429 members. There were 2,600 affiliates. Approximately 88% of the congregants come from the Aku people group while six percent comes from the Mandyak people.

*Seventh Day Adventist*—This church was started around 1970. In 2001, there were two congregations and 458 members. There were 850 affiliates.

*Yoruba Independent Churches*—These churches started around 1950. Many of their members are traders or people who have come from Nigeria to find temporary work. In 1995, there were thirty churches and 900 members. There were 1,800 affiliates.

## **People Groups**

### **13225**

#### **Aku (12,202)**

The Aku people live in Banjul. The British resettled ex-slaves in Sierra Leone and eventually some of these former slaves migrated to The Gambia. British administrators would hire the Aku people because they had absorbed British culture and education. They speak a language called Krio, which is a mixture of English and other African languages.

The people of The Gambia are predominantly Catholic, but only 4.5% of the people are evangelical Christians. Most likely, they practice a syncretistic faith that mixes traditional religious ideals and practices with some basic Christian doctrines.

The New Testament was translated by 1992. The Jesus film and other Christian videos are also accessible in their language. Gospel recordings exist.

### **00000**

#### **Arab, Levantine (2,400)**

The Levantine Arabs were originally of Lebanese descent. They speak North Levantine Arabic.

They are primarily Sunni Muslim. The number of evangelicals is unknown. Portions of the Bible have been translated, and gospel recordings are available. The Jesus film is not accessible.

**00000**

**Balanta (32,000)**

The Balanta people speak a language called Balanta-Kentohe. Some alternate names for them include: Alante, Bandal, Balanta, Ganjawo, Belanda, and Kandawo. They belong to the Atlantic people cluster.

The Balanta primarily practice ethnic religions. To them, the creator god is very removed from the daily lives of the people. They will try to worship spirits in the hopes of reaching the supreme god.

Some Balanta are nominally Catholic, and 10% of the people are Muslim. The number of evangelical Christians is unknown. NTM missionaries in Senegal are currently translating and recording the books of Acts and Genesis into the Balanta language; however, no other Bible translations exist. The Jesus film is not accessible either.

The Balante people believe in witchcraft and will often go to the witch doctor for help with their ailments. For example, one witch doctor told the women of one area that they must not wear sandals to work in the rice fields during the rainy season. He proclaimed that all of the people who defied his order would not be able to grow their rice that season. One Christian believer defied his orders and showed the rest of her town that Jesus was more powerful than the witch doctor. Although she wore sandals, her crops grew well.

The Balanta people take funerals very seriously. They are afraid that the person's dead spirit will come back to hurt the folks that prepared the funeral if the spirit is displeased with the arrangement. People place several yards of new material in the grave of the departed person. They also place bowls of food there for the person to eat in the afterlife. The Balanta also believe that the observance of certain rituals will insure that loved ones in the afterlife will be able to enter paradise.

When the Balanta people first build their houses, they have a weak foundation. They take sun-baked bricks and put them into two rows. The bricks are turned sideways, however. Missionaries have used this common architectural concept to explain how Christians must build their lives on a solid foundation---Jesus Christ.

[http://www.ntm.org/senegal/news\\_details.php?news\\_id=3133](http://www.ntm.org/senegal/news_details.php?news_id=3133)

[http://www.ntm.org/senegal/news\\_details.php?news\\_id=3235](http://www.ntm.org/senegal/news_details.php?news_id=3235)

**13226**

**Bainouk (26,224)**

The Bainouk people speak a language called Bainouk-Gunyaamolo. Some alternate names for the Bainouk people include: Banyun Bainuk, Banyum, Banyuk, Loamy, and Elomay. They are part of the Atlantic people cluster.

The Bainouk people are primarily Muslim. They are one of the least reached people groups. In fact, there are no evangelical Christians. Portions of the Bible had been translated by 2003, and gospel recordings can be found. The Jesus film is inaccessible.

Bainouk are very communal people. They love to live and work together as one huge family. Christians face persecution in the form of becoming virtually invisible to their non-Christian neighbors. One example of this is when a Christian tried to build a house. Usually, the building of a house is a community-wide event with everyone pitching in to get the roof up and to help his or her friend and neighbor. When this Christian man started to build a house, he had to struggle to do it with no help. Because of the strong sense of community among the Banyun, this type of peer pressure is extremely difficult to bear. Prayer is needed for the Banyun believers as they strive to stand strong against such fierce peer pressure.

### **13227**

#### **Bambara (6,882)**

The Bambara are descendents of the Mande people and in fact are considered by scholars to be a subgroup of the people. They speak a language called Bamanakan. Other names for this people group include: Kpeera, Noumou, and Bamanakan. The term Bambara was used in ancient times as a name by other people groups. The Bambara traditionally called themselves Banmana.

The Bambara people are predominantly Sunni Muslim, and they practice folk Islam. They are one of the least reached people groups. The use of fetishes and spirit worship is quite common. People go to sorcerers or witches for spiritual help if they experience misfortune. When boys and girls are circumcised, they join secret societies that teach them the practices of their society. Many of these practices are ritualistic and based upon the original animistic religious beliefs of the ancestors of the Bambara people.

The Bambara highly value the traditions and customs of their family and social groups. It is very difficult for individuals to believe in Christ against the strong pressure of their families and friends. The number of evangelical Christians is unknown. The complete Bible has been translated, and the Jesus film is available. Gospel recordings and radio broadcasts can also be heard.

The Bambara men have complete control over the women. Marriages are arranged by the families of the bride, and she and her children are considered the property of the husband. Marriages contracts are made for the mutual advancement of the families and the community—not the choice of the bride. Men may take up to four wives. Most of the time extended families will live together in a single compound. It is very important for a man to have multiple wives as having wives is seen as a sign of prosperity. Female circumcision was routinely practiced until

recently. While the practice is still very prevalent among the Bambara, some progress has been made to stop the circumcision.

The Bambara are farmers and hunters. Their life and customs are heavily influenced by their economic choice of livelihood. While the Bambara have different types of livestock, they will leave their herding to the Fulani so that they can focus on their crops.

The society of the Bambara is stratified into three major groups—the Komo, the Kore and the Ntomo. The Komo are the elders. Each group has different types of head dresses that signify their level and importance. These head dresses are made by talented craftsmen. Statues and other important religious objects are also hand carved by the artisans of the Bambara.

Most Bambara villages could have up to 600 inhabitants. Each household is called a gwa and is made up of large extended families. Sometimes as many as sixty people can live in one household. The members all usually engage in the same type of trade—either farmers or artisans.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bamana\\_tribe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bamana_tribe)

<http://www.fbchsv.org/missions/global/bambara.html>

<http://www.africaguide.com/culture/tribes/bambara.htm>

## **13228**

### **Bassari (131)**

The Bassari people speak a language called Bassari. Some alternate names for the Bassari include: Ncham, Boin, Tenda Basari, Tobota, and Tenda Boeni. They are part of the Atlantic people cluster.

Most of the Bassari people live in small villages of 100 people or less. These villages are often hard to reach because the flooding during the rainy season turns the dirt roads to impassable quagmires. The land has a very harsh environment. During the dry season, the trees may lose all of their greenery and the water holes could dry up. Most people depend on creeks or very deep hand dug wells for their water source.

The traditional Bassari home is made of mud walls and a mud floor but the roof is made of bamboo rafters and grass. Wealthier Bassari men can sometimes afford to build houses with handmade concrete blocks. These houses are square in shape. The roofs of the concrete houses are still made of tightly woven grass. The Bassari are well-known for their well constructed roofs. In addition to their houses, the Bassari usually have a pen for the cattle, a barn made of bamboo, and a chicken coop. The barn serves as shelter for the goats at night.

The Bassari are primarily farmers and herders. Cattle, goats, and chickens are important commodities for the Bassari. Goats, chickens, and some fish provide meat for the Bassari. Rice and millet are staple crops of the Bassari. They also grow honey to use and sell.

Bassari women are expected to cook and keep house. The Bassari girls are taught all of the chores at a very young age so that they can help their mothers with the food preparation and with the other daily necessary chores. Cooking is often done over an open fire when the weather

permits. Women highly prize plastic buckets because they are useful when washing clothes and dishes. Most of the time clothes and dishes are washed without the benefit of soap because the soap is too expensive.

The Bassari were approached by Muslim adherents who tried to force them to accept Islam as their dominant religion, but the Bassari strongly refuted the Muslims and retained their animistic beliefs. Because of their refusal to convert to Islam, the Bassari lost many opportunities for economic and political advancement. Today less than 100 Bassari are Muslim.

The Bassari primarily follow traditional ethnic religions. Because of their wish to withstand the pressure of the Muslims, the Bassari have clung strongly to their animistic ancestral beliefs. Men will sacrifice a rooster on a special rock near a shrine in order to petition the spirits. Men may also present a grain offering to the spirits in the hopes that they will have a good harvest.

Only .15% of the population are evangelicals. The Bassari are more open right now to other religious beliefs than they have ever been. They desperately need missionaries to go and teach them about God. The people that are believers need strong Bible teaching. The new believers have a daily struggle not to return to animistic beliefs because of their lack of real Biblical knowledge. The New Testament has been translated and gospel recordings are available. The Jesus film is currently inaccessible.

<http://www.crfmedia.com/Video-WA/index.htm>

#### **00000**

#### **British (1,600)**

The British people live in many different countries throughout the world. These expatriates serve in various jobs. The number of evangelical Christians is unknown.

#### **47049**

#### **Deaf (7,768)**

Deaf people are scattered throughout different ethnic groups in Gambia. They don't have a national sign language. Probably most of the deaf are Muslim.

#### **00000**

#### **French (700)**

The French living in Gambia are mainly expatriates that live there and work for various foreign companies. The number of evangelical Christians is unknown.

#### **13229**

#### **Fulacunda (231,210)**

The Fulacunda are part of the Fulani people. They speak a language called Pulaar, but their primary dialect is Toucouleur. Some alternate names for the Fulacunda include: Fula Forro, Fula Jeeri, Fula Toro, and Fulbe Jeeri. The Fulacunda people are Fulani that intermarried with



the neighboring Mandingo peoples. However, the people's customs reflect the Fulani culture more than the Mandingo culture.

The Fulacunda are a Muslim people group. They primarily are Sunni, but they practice folk Islam that is a mixture of Islamic traditions and animistic beliefs in sorcery and spiritism. They are considered to be a least reached people group. Less than one percent of the population are evangelical. Bible portions have been translated. The Jesus film, gospel recordings, and a radio broadcast are also accessible. Still, it is very difficult for a Fulacunda to break with the traditions of their ancestors and become a Christian. Much pressure is put on new Christians to return to the Islamic faith.

Like many Muslim cultures, the Fulacunda practice polygamy. Marriages may be arranged for men and women at birth. Traditionally, the man may be engaged to his father's brother's child. After the first marriage, other marriages can then be contracted by the man himself. A man will set up individual huts for each of his wives.

Before woman marries, she is under the firm authority of her father's family. After her marriage, she must strictly follow the orders of her husband. Husbands may engage in extramarital affairs, but women must remain steadfast.

Divorce rates have actually increased in recent years. When divorce does occur, the woman must return to her father's family. Men generally want to have many children as this is a sign of power. However, the same men don't always have the economic means to care properly for a large number of children.

Family is extremely important to all Fulacunda people. Most families live in clan groups. The clans decide the beliefs of the family. To leave the protection of the clan and the nuclear family is very difficult.

The duties of the men and women are strictly divided. The men will either take care of the herd animals or have some other type of livelihood that brings in money. The women will tend to the children and the housework. They will also care for small livestock and must find water for their families. Sometimes they will take different types of milk products to sell at the local markets.

Visitors are highly honored by the Fulacunda. Usually guests will be treated to a special tea service. Visitors should never be in a hurry when they visit the Fulacunda because this people group has a very different sense of time than most Westerners. Westerners should also know that women must be very modest in public. Sometimes women are allowed to take off certain parts of their blouses in the privacy of their own homes so visitors should make sure to make their presence known carefully.

**00000**

**Greek (300)**

The Greeks living in Gambia are usually there working for a foreign company. They speak Greek. The number of evangelical Christians is unknown.

**00000**

**Hausa (8,100)**

The Hausa are originally from Nigeria. They are the largest ethnic group in Africa. They speak a language called Hausa. The Hausa language is a major trade language in West Africa, and many different people groups have adopted not only the Hausa language but also many of the Hausa customs and beliefs. Some alternate names for this people group include: Adarawa, Arawa, Arewa, Fellata, Hausa Fulani, Hausa Ajami, Maguzawa, Hausawa, Soudie, Kurfei, or Tazarawa. .

The Hausa are 99.9% Muslim. About 150 years ago, Muslim missionaries came to Hausaland and succeeded in converting the Hausa to Islam. They are considered one of the least reached people groups. The Bible has been translated into the Hausa language, and the Jesus film is accessible. Gospel recordings and radio broadcasts can also be found. Hausas that do convert to Christianity face severe persecution in the form of shunning and betrayal by non-Christian family members. Since a Hausa's identity is tied to his family and clan, the emotional and physical persecution is extremely hard on new believers. The number of evangelical Christians is unknown.

Oral legends among the Hausa state that the people are descended from a man called Bayajida who killed a snake that threatened the village thereby winning the hand of the queen. The sons of Bayajida founded Hausaland. The Hausa once ruled themselves but were later conquered by many different ethnic groups, the last being the Fulani.

The Hausa may be involved in many different types of work. Many in rural areas are farmers who grow traditional crops like millet or rice while others are traders or professionals. Markets are very important gathering places for men to come and discuss issues facing the village. Women will be expected to make different types of items to be sold at the market.

Men may marry more than one wife, and girls are promised in marriage by age 12 to 15. Women are expected to care for the children and attend to household duties. Divorce is a societal problem, but many women will remarry because society expects them to do so. Extended families are usually very influential in rural areas. Males and females will both be expected to listen to their elders.

<http://www.global12project.com/2004/profiles/clusters/8035.html>

<http://www.sim.org/pg.asp?pgID=2&fun=1>

<http://www.joshuaproject.net/peopctry.php?rop3=103733&rog3=UV>

**00000**

**Igbo, Ibo (4,800)**

The Igbo can trace their origins back a thousand years to this area. Socially, a council of elders shares the power decisions. Polygamy is seen as a sign of wealth while monogamy is considered the sign of poverty and a social embarrassment.

Most claim to be Christians, but many still hold to the traditional belief in Chukwu Okike or Chi, the great creator god. Ancestor worship and spirit worship is also prevalent including spirits associated with the rivers and villages.

The number of evangelical Christians is unknown. Portions of the Bible were first translated in 1860, with the first New Testament completed in 1900 and the entire Bible finished in 1906. A recent version was published in 1988. They do have access to the Jesus film as well as Christian radio broadcasting.

<http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/toc/people/Igbo.html>

### **13230**

#### **Jahanka (3,308)**

The Jahanka people can be found throughout West Africa and are often called the Holy Men of Africa because so many of the Jahanka men are Islamic clerics. These clerics often travel from one place to another with different followers moving with them. They will also settle in villages and teach Quranic schools. Some may even have farms although these farms are most often worked by young boys in exchange for Quranic teaching.

Heritage is very important to the Jahanka. They trace their lineage back decades. They probably originated from four different groups of Soninke peoples. The Jahanka believe that they originated from a place on the Niger River in Mali. Scholars believe that they spent some time during their formation as a people around Jahaba on the Mali-Senegal border. During the fifteenth or sixteenth century, there was a very powerful Islamic cleric named al-Hajj Salim Suwari who strongly influenced the belief systems of the Jahanka. The reason that the Jahanka are so highly respected today as religious clerics is because they are the keepers of Suwari's teachings and divination practices.

Suwarian Islamic beliefs differ in some very important ways from mainstream Islamic teaching. First of all, a high emphasis is placed on divination and the making of charms. Clerics also practice medicine. The most important difference is the Suwarian refusal to practice jihad. They are very apolitical people. They believe that life should be devoted to study and prayer.

The Jahanka people live in the midst of the Mandinka people group and have actually adopted many of their social customs. They may often use Mandinka as an every day language although they also use a Soninke language too. The language that many people call the Jahanka language is actually a mixture of Arabic and a Soninke language.

Marriage ties are very important in the Jahanka culture. Marriages, as in many Muslim cultures, are arranged by the parents. They very carefully match their daughters to Jahanka males. This practice may cause girls to have to move hundreds of miles from the home of their birth when they marry. Jahanka communities are tied by these alliances because the ties formed by the marriages remain strong throughout several generations. Jahanka males may occasionally marry outside of their own ethnic group but this is only done once. With an average of four wives per male, this practice does not make a huge impact on the genetic lineage of the Jahanka clans.

Jahanka villages have very set social structures. Clans live in the same area of the village but are subdivided into groups called sos. The sos are made of people who are all descended from the same common ancestor. Each so is further divided into lus which are the basic extended families of a single male patriarch and his sons and their families. The so leader will parcel out money that is derived from gifts to the clerics and from any trading that is done. Groups will also have special economic designations. There is, of course, the cleric group. There can also be clans of artisans, clans of merchants, and even a slave class. Before the government outlawed slavery, the number of slaves that a family possessed was seen as a sign of their prestige and wealth. (Slave clans technically don't exist any more, but descendents of former slaves may still live apart from the free-born in a village. It's important for westerners to remember that genealogies can be traced back for generations in the Jahanka culture because of the very strict marriage ties. Although culture is changing with the modernization, ancient social ideas may remain theoretically in place.)

All Jahanka males attend Quranic schools led by a prestigious Jahanka cleric that has trained for years in Suwarian magic. Other ethnic groups may also send boys to these schools to receive the specialized Quranic education. The boys that travel from great distances will stay with host families in the village and will become a labor source for the village since they will pay for their schooling by tilling the fields of the host and the Quranic clerics. Boys strongly wish to get higher levels of education so that they can become prestigious clerics. Usually, only a very few select students (including those direct descendents of the present cleric) will get to study the advanced Quranic texts and the very secret Suwarian practices. Girls are not allowed to attend school. They must learn household chores and how to be good wives and mothers. They will also work in the fields.

The Jahanka clerics are well-known for their medicinal practices. Sometimes people will travel great distances to be treated by a specialist. The medicines are largely based upon herbs that can be found in the Senegambian area. Magical amulets are also used for healing.

The Jahanka do not respect loud, boisterous people. They believe that it is extremely important to be quiet so that one can focus on prayer and study.

*From Muslim Peoples by Weekes*

## **42193**

### **Jola (71,698)**

The Jola or Diola people are one of the largest ethnic groups living in the Casamance area. They are divided into several different subgroups as different clans migrated and separated. Most speak many different dialects now. In Gambia, they live in the Southwestern districts. Some alternate names for this people group include: Kujamataak, Kújoolaak Kati Fooñi, Jola-Fogny, Diola-Fogny, or Yola.

The Jola that live in rural areas are primarily farmers. Several of the subgroups that live near the ocean in the wetlands grow rice with specialized techniques that were developed over several centuries. The Jola built special irrigation dikes to catch the rainwater near the coast so

that they could have water to grow the rice. Usually both men and women work in the rice paddies. During the early part of the twentieth century, the colonial government encouraged the Jola to grow peanuts. They grew the rice to eat and the peanuts to sell. With the decline of the peanut market, the people have needed to diversify their crops.

Before there was easy access to modern roads, most Jola children lived in the same village as their parents and ancestors. The Jola were and still are very family oriented. They live in a patrilineal society where a nuclear family consists of the grandfather, his wives and children, his son's wives and children, and any unmarried women of the family. Each nuclear family also tends to live close to extended family members. Most of the Jola villages would have anywhere from 200 to 2000 inhabitants. There was no main leader until the colonial days, however. Usually a group of older men would serve as advisors.

As a group, the Jola are very strong Muslim. The Jola began accepting the Muslim faith in the late 1800's. Muslim traders would come and sell goods in the market and also talk about the glories of Islam. A *marabout* from Mauritania named Sharif Mahfuz also evangelized the Jola. Most Jola don't follow a specific *marabout*, but they do belong to the Sufi tariqa. The Jola will also keep certain beliefs and traditions from their animistic past. Most young boys go through an initiation ceremony called the *bukut* where they go on a retreat and are taught about important Jola ideals. Some Jola will also still visit the animistic shrine called the *sinaati* when they are ill.

Because of the importance of familial ties, people who are interested in Christianity often find it very difficult to actually convert. They will usually listen respectfully without changing their religious opinions. The number of evangelicals is unknown. As early as the late 1400's, one leader had converted to Roman Catholicism. However, growth efforts remain slow. Some mission agencies are attempting to work among the people. Portions of the Bible had been translated into their language by 2000. The Jesus film and other Christian videos are accessible. Gospel recordings exist.

## **00000**

### **Kasanga, Haal (500)**

The Kasanga people are found in Senegal, Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau. They speak a language called Kasanga. Some alternate names for this people group include: Chamba Daka, Deng, Haal, and Samba.

The Kasanga people are one of the least reached people groups. They primarily practice ethnic religions, and the number of Christian adherents is unknown. The number of evangelicals is also unknown. The Bible has not been translated into their language, and the Jesus Film is inaccessible. Gospel recordings exist.

## **13224**

### **Khasonke (1,653)**

The Khasonke people live in Senegal, Gambia, and Mali. They are descendents of the Mande people and speak a language called Xaasongaxango. Some alternate names for the Khasonke include: Xasonga, Kassonke, Kasonke, Kasson, Kasso, Xaasonga, Xasonke, and Xaasongaxang.

The Khasaonke are one of the least reached people groups. They are predominantly Sunni Muslim. Less than 1% of the population are evangelical. Some portions of the Bible have been translated, and gospel recordings are available. The Jesus film is not yet accessible.

The Khasonkes are primarily farmers although they also have various herd animals as well. Usually they get Fulani men to watch the herd animals while they work hard to eke a living out of the soil. They grow crops like millet and sorghum. Men, women, and children all work diligently in the field. Women are also responsible for the household chores and cooking. The only day that they rest is on Monday that is market day. All adults—even senior adults are expected to be married. Familial pressure is very great among this people group.

[http://www.global12project.com/2004/profiles/p\\_code4/1822.html](http://www.global12project.com/2004/profiles/p_code4/1822.html)

### **13237**

#### **Mandinka (610,522)**

The Mandinka people live throughout Senegal, Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau. Their villages spread out through most of the western part of Gambia. They speak a Manding language called Mandinka. Some alternate names for these people include: Mandingue, Mandingo, Manding, Mandé, and Socé.

The Mandinkas primarily practice a form of Sunni folk Islam. Centuries ago Muslim traders came to the great Mali Empire from whence most Mandingo peoples originated and converted the Mandingos to Islam. Most modern Mandinkas really don't have a firm grasp on deep Islamic thought. Rather, they follow the outer rituals like circumcision and going to the mosque. However, they will also still consult *marabouts* for amulets or other types of magical helps. They may also sacrifice chickens in order to appease the spirits.

About .10% are evangelical Christians. They are considered to be a least reached people group. The New Testament has been translated, and the Jesus film is available. Gospel recordings can also be found.

The family unit is very important in Mandinka life. The father is the supreme authority of the family. Marriages may be polygamous for men. Their fathers arrange girls' marriages for them.

There are three distinct social strata too. Artisans are greatly respected and held in great awe for their talents. The other two classes are freeborn. In the past, there was also a slave caste.

The Mandinka people are farmers but men may work at other part time jobs too. Women generally stay and home and take care of the children. Life is hard because of continual droughts. Water can become very scarce.

**13238**

**Mandyak (24,931)**

The Mandyak people live south of the Gambia River in the western part of the country. Their villages are scattered over a wide area. They speak a language called Mandyak and are part of the Atlantic people cluster. Some alternate names for this people group include: Mandjaque, Manjaca, Manjaco, Manjiak, Manjacu, Manjack, Ndyak, or Kanyop.

While many of the Mandyak in Senegal are Muslim, the Mandyak people that live in Gambia predominantly practice ethnic religions or are Roman Catholic. In fact, the Mandyaks of Gambia have not shown much interest in Islam in the past. Only .027% are evangelical Christians. There is a radio Bible program that airs in their own language. Portions of the Bible had been translated by 1968. The Jesus film and gospel recordings are available.

**13239**

**Mankanya (1,519)**

The Mankanya people speak a language called Mankanya. Some alternate names for this group include: Bola, Bulama, Bram, Burama, and Mancanha. They live in Senegal, Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau.

The people predominantly practice ethnic religions although some also attend Roman Catholic mass. The number of evangelical Christians is unknown. The Bible has not been translated into their language, but the Jesus film is accessible. Gospel recordings exist.

**13240**

**Maswanka (1,653)**

The Maswanka people live in Guinea Bissau and Gambia. They speak a language called Mansoanka and are part of the Malinke people cluster. Two alternate names for this people group are Sua and Kunante.

The people are predominantly Muslim. The number of evangelical Christians is unknown. The Bible has not been translated into their language, and the Jesus film is inaccessible. Gospel recordings exist.

**13242**

**Portuguese Creole (16,537)**

The Portuguese Creole speak a language called Upper Guinea Crioulo. They are listed as being predominantly Christian, but only 5.25% of the people are evangelical Christians. The complete Bible had been translated by 1999. Tracts are also accessible. The Jesus film and other Christian videos are available. Gospel recordings exist.

**42196**

**Sereer (38,908)**

The Sereer people live in Northwestern Gambia. They speak a language called Sereer-Sine and are part of the Atlantic people cluster. Some alternate names for this people group include: Serer, Seereer, Serer-Sin, or Sine-Saloum.

At first the Sereer people resisted Muslim efforts towards evangelization; however, during the 1950's and 1960's many decided to become Muslim. The people in Gambia are now predominantly Muslim although some continue to practice ethnic religions or Christianity. Most Muslim and Christian adherents still wear fetishes and believe in the power of amulets. Most have strong ancestral ties. Muslims will wear a picture of the *marabout* that they follow and words from the Qur'an. Christians will wear a picture of Jesus and will wear words from the Vulgate. There are few known evangelical Christians. The complete Bible had been translated by 2008. The Jesus film and gospel recordings are available.

The Sereer are very hard working people. Men cultivate peanuts and millet during the growing season, and after the harvest, they will often go to other areas to work in the cities to earn more money. When the men leave, the women will plant gardens on the fallow fields and raise food for the family. Women usually work all day performing tasks in the field, washing clothes, caring for children, and cooking. Young girls will help their mothers constantly by baby-sitting and doing what other tasks they are old enough to complete. Girls attend school just as boys do. Boys may go to school if there is enough money to send them, but the boys will also help their fathers in the fields. Men who are wealthier will have a horse and cart to take goods to market. Market day which usually occurs once a week is a very important time for socializing and trading.

Familial ties are very important to the Sereer. A son lives with his father, and he will inherit land through his mother's family. His mother's family will arrange his marriage. Most men stay in the village although younger men may go to the cities occasionally. The largest demographic group that goes to the cities is teen-age girls.

## **13244**

### **Soninke (134,236)**

The Soninke people live in the southeastern corner of Gambia. They speak a Mande language called Soninke. They are part of the Some alternate names for the Soninke include: Sarakole, Serahuli, Azer, and Toubakai.

The Soninke people are predominantly Muslim. They were first converted by the Almoravids in the eleventh century. Those Soninke that aren't Muslim usually follow traditional indigenous religious practices. All community life centers around the family and the village.

The Soninke people are very concerned about appeasing the spirits. They believe that each soul comes to the child when the child is named on the eighth day and leave the body each night as the child sleeps. People are concerned that witches might seize the soul of the child. They also believe that the soul will wander around the earth after death until it reunites with the



body. They will ask the *gessere*, the village priest, to help them make the spirits happy. They watch anxiously for the fox and hyena who predict when the New Year should begin.

There are no known evangelical Christians. They are still considered to be one of the least reached people groups. Portions of the Bible had been translated by 2001. The Jesus film is available. Gospel recordings can also be found.

The Soninke have a very strict social structure. Men of the clergy receive training in Arabic. Most of the other men are traders or farmers. Many men today actually leave the village for months and sometimes even years at a time in order to work as migrant laborers in neighboring areas

Polygamy is acceptable among the Muslim, but it is not as widely practiced today because of economic reasons. The prospective groom must pay a bride price that usually consists of clothing that the bride can use for her trousseau and also a payment to the family of the bride. Men have the supreme authority in the household, and elders are looked to for wisdom and advice. Today, though, because many of the men are traveling for months at a time, women are beginning to have a slightly stronger power among the Soninke. Muslim law allows daughters to inherit a small portion from their father's estate.

## **13246**

### **Tukolor (5,304)**

The most popular phrase of the Tukolor is: "To be Tukolor is to be Muslim." The Tukolor speak a language called Pulaar. Some alternate names for the Tukolor are: Futankooobe, Pulaar, Takarir, Haal Pulaaren, Tooroobe, and Toucouleur.

The Tukolor are predominantly Sunni Muslims. There are no known evangelical Christians. The New Testament has been translated, and the Jesus film is available. Gospel recordings can also be found.

Children have many different responsibilities. They are part of a large extended family. Schooling is usually done in English in the public school and in Arabic in the Quranic Schools. The marabouts are very strict as they teach the children the traditional Muslim ways. Mothers and fathers also play an important role in the education of the children. Mothers will teach the girls household duties and the fathers will teach the boys their farming or business responsibilities.

The Tukolor have traditionally been farmers. Generally the household income is around \$150 dollars per year. Many Tukolor men are migrating to cities or other countries in search of better livelihoods.

There is a very strict social strata among the Tukolor. There is an aristocratic class, a middle class composed of merchants and farmers, and a lower class of former slaves. People must understand their social class and act correctly towards people of another social strata.

Marriage cannot take place across caste lines. While polygamy is acceptable, most men will not marry four wives.

### **Missiological Implications**

1. Evangelical Christians and churches should keep The Gambia and its peoples in the center of prayer and concern. These people suffer from the blight of two religions, Islam and Traditional Religion. Neither offers true salvation. The largest of the non-Islamic and not Traditional Religion groups are the Catholics.
2. Evangelical Christians and churches should develop a method of reaching those who practice Traditional Religions (Animism) and train believers in The Gambia to employ the method in reaching the people who remain in the practice of Traditional Religion.
3. Evangelical Christians and churches should develop a method for Sharing the Good News with followers of Islam and teach believers in The Gambia to employ the method in reaching Muslims in the country.
4. Evangelical Christians and churches should work with believers and congregations in The Gambia to concentrate on the peoples in the up-river sections of the nation where witness is limited. Evangelical Christians and churches should stress prayer, evangelism, and church planting among the Mandinka (made known by Alex Haley's *Roots*). This group of over 610,000 practices a form of folk Islam with many rituals from Traditional Religion.
5. Evangelical Christians and churches should also seek ways to help local believers reach the Fulacunda who number over 232,000. This people also follows a form of folk Islam and should be reached.
6. Evangelical Christians and churches should consider ministries of medical, education, and agricultural help in this country where great needs exist.
7. Evangelical Christians and churches should contribute to leadership training, including training in evangelism and church starting, in The Gambia.
8. Evangelical Christians and churches should pray that openness for missionaries continue in The Gambia