

Fulani

The Fulani are a people group in several regions of Africa, whose distinctive physical features are similar to people in Egypt, northern Sudan, and Ethiopia. Their tall, lean bodies, light skin, wavy hair, and thin noses and lips contrast starkly to other African tribal groups surrounding them.



Location

Nearly 20 million Fulani are spread across 19 African countries in an area stretching from the shores of Sénégal to the borders of Ethiopia.

History

Some historians believe the Fulani emerged from a prehistoric pastoral group that originated in the upper Nile region around 3500 B.C. As the climate of the Sahara grew increasingly harsh, population pressures drove them to migrate slowly west and south in search of better grazing lands. By the eleventh century the Fulani emerged as a distinct people group in the S n gambia Valley. Over the next 400 years they journeyed back east, but south of the Sahara, which had become an inhospitable desert.

Traditionally most Fulani are shepherds or cattle herders, but over time some settled down and, by the nineteenth century, had established a series of kingdoms between S n gal and Cameroon. The Fulani have myths about how the nomads and settled rulers emerged.

The settled rulers brought Islam to much of West Africa. By about 1810 the Fulani conquered the Hausa, and held much of northern Nigeria in subjection until defeated by the British between 1900-1906. However, the British allowed the Fulani Emirs to continue to rule and this has had a profound political effect on Nigeria.

Culture

A Fulani family needs at least 100 heads of cattle in order to live completely off their livestock. Their herds may also include some sheep and goats. When the number of livestock drops, the family must start farming to survive. Fulani always prefer not to farm if it is possible.



In Burkina Faso, the Fulani are semi-nomadic. They maintain a home base where they also keep a family field. During the rainy season (June-September) they keep their herds near the homestead so they can work in their fields. The main crops they grow are millet, corn and sorghum. When the harvest is complete, the younger men take the livestock to an area where there is a better supply of water and grass to graze. Often they leave with the cattle in December and may not return to the homestead until June when the rains begin to fall.

Fulani in Benin and Burkina Faso are nomads in the north, but mainly sedentary pastoralists in the south. The society of southern Fulani has evolved from one of herdsmen, to one of part-time herdsmen and farmers. In many cases, the Fulani have become educated, influential leaders in settled communities.

Over-population, lack of grazing lands, drought, livestock disease, encroaching farm lands, and government restrictions on Fulani movement are all putting pressure on the traditional Fulani ways of life.

Although the Fulani are considered "backward" by other groups, they see themselves as beautiful, dignified people. They take pride in their distinctions from non-Fulani people.

Terms Defined

Fulani is the term used by the Hausa and most of the tribes in Northern Nigeria to refer to this group of people. *Fulbe* is the term used by Fulani to refer to themselves, with *Pullo* referring to a single person. The terms *Peul* and *Fula* are used in different West African countries, and appear often in the literature to refer to these people.

Fulfulde is the term used by Fulani to refer to their language.

Nomadic is used to refer to those Fulani who do not normally reside in a certain location for longer than 4 months at one time. It also means that they do not live in permanent structures, and that they make their living completely from their animals.

Semi-nomadic is used to denote the group of Fulani who, although they continue to herd cattle, cannot live completely from their animals. This means they must farm. They still do not live in permanent structures, but they stay in one location sometimes for a year or even two before moving. Often, during the farming (rainy) season, the young men are sent away further into the bush with the cattle since it is difficult to herd cattle in an area of intensive farming.

Town Fulani or *settled Fulani* are terms used interchangeably to denote the type of Fulani who reside in a town or a city and live in permanent structures. They may own a few cattle, but make their living off a trade or another sort of job. Often they have lost their ability to speak *Fulfulde*, and speak only Hausa. Often their wives are Hausa women, and they have adopted the Hausa culture as their own and feel completely comfortable in it.

Religion

The Fulani are predominantly Muslim. They first came in contact with Islam as early as the 1500's, but the majority were not Muslim until the 1800's. Amaadu Lobbo Bari helped the chief defeat the Hausa people in 1810. He then defeated the pagan Fulani chief in 1818 and took the title "Prince of the Believers". Then the Fulani converted in mass to Islam. His influence grew and encompassed the whole area of the Fulani people.

Traditionally the Fulani have been resistant to Christianity. However, the New Testament, the *JESUS* Film, and Christian broadcasts are available in their native Fulfulde language. We praise God that Fulani are responding to Jesus now more than ever before.

SIM Involvement

SIM missionaries currently share the message of Jesus' love with the Fulani of Benin, Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Ghana. In Benin, SIM works closely with the Union of Evangelical Churches of Benin (*Union des Eglises Evangeliques du Benin* - UEEB). The UEEB has six self-supporting and ten developing Fulani churches; an active evangelism program that includes radio broadcasts; and a Bible college that has trained Beninese, Nigerian, Malien, Burkinabe, and Nigerien Fulani as pastors.

The good news is that Fulani are responding to Jesus in greater numbers than ever before. Much prayer and intercession are still needed to bring the Fulani to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The challenge is that we do not have enough workers to meet this great response. Pray that the Lord would raise up workers to accomplish the task of evangelism and to disciple new Fulani Christians.

Scripture Availability

SIM praises God for an ongoing, coordinated effort to translate the Bible into all of the dialects of Fulfulde across West Africa. With so many dialects, it's difficult for all Fulani to read and understand the same Scripture translation. For example, even the Cameroonian Fulfulde Bible used in Benin is not understood unless learned as a foreign language. SIM and UEEB have begun a Bible translation project in the most widely understood Beninese dialect with the help of a Fulani pastor.

Urgent Prayer Need

Bingham Academy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, urgently needs a [French teacher](#) to join their staff team in August. Pray that God will provide the right person to meet this need.