

Kotokoli

Islam was introduced into Togo and to the Kotokoli people in the eighteenth century by the Anufo (Chokosi), a warrior people group. Its expansion was aided by German colonial policy. Sokodé is the historic capital of Islam in Togo. It possesses the first mosque, built in 1820.

Location

The center of the Kotokoli culture is in central Togo with the majority of the Kotokoli living in the city of Sokodé and its 60 or so surrounding villages. Over the years, the population spread out somewhat, causing communities to grow up in both neighboring Benin and Ghana.

Culture

Language: The primary language of the Kotokoli is officially called Tem, yet locally it is referred to as Kotokoli. Tem is the *lingua franca* for central Togo, especially among other Muslim groups. Some Kotokoli speak French, along with dialects of Kabiye.

Festivals: The most important Kotokoli festivals are the Muslim holidays of Ramadan and Tabaski, yet they are fiercely proud of the two traditional Kotokoli festivals—Adosa, the festival of knives where young men use a special potion to protect themselves as they run sharp knives over their bare stomachs, and Gadawo, a women's dance to show off their traditionally woven wrap-around skirts.

Semasi horsemen, dressed in the garb of their warriors from the past, are present at these festivals and other local events. This semasi warrior attitude of fearless fighting exhibits itself still today in the Kotokoli people's strong personality and reputation.

Livelihood: The Kotokoli are primarily a tribal agricultural people, growing corn, millet, rice, beans, yams, manioc, ground nuts, and okra. They keep animals including cows, goats, sheep, and chickens. In more urban areas, they tend to be small merchants. The majority of the taxi drivers throughout the country are Kotokoli.

Modern Accommodations: Some village Kotokoli still live in round, mud brick hut with thatched roofs, but now days, homes in a village or town tend to be rectangular, made from mud or cement blocks with tin roofs. The Kotokoli areas have progressed in terms of community development, but there are still some villages without electricity. Sokodé has running water, electricity and telephones, including cell phones and internet access. The main road from the port capital city passes through Sokodé.

Religion

The Kotokoli are about 90% Muslim. Many mix Islam with their traditional religion of the past. Islam was introduced into Togo in the 18th century by a warrior people group, the Anufo (Chokosi). Its expansion was aided by German colonial policy. Sokodé is the historic capital of Islam in Togo. It houses the first mosque, built in 1820.

The double barrier of outward Islam and privately practiced animism does not create a climate favorable to receiving the message of Jesus. Accepting Christ is a stigma. Muslim parents are greatly saddened and upset if their children convert to Christianity, and often will be thrown out of the home.

New followers are often floundering and on their own until they can become established within a group of supportive believers. Over a period of years, the family may gradually re-accept the believer. Possessing the positive testimony and character of a life changed by Christ, a Christian can often eventually be given the opportunity to share his faith one-on-one with family and friends.

SIM Involvement

SIM and the Union of Evangelical Churches in Benin (UEEB) began work among the Kotokoli in 1992. SIM now has four missionaries in Togo who began by developing radio programs in the Tem language. These programs include a message based on the Chronological Bible Teaching (storytelling) approach and Christian songs in the traditional Kotokoli style.

Radio broadcasts have been an effective means for communicating the gospel. People who fear attending a church service can listen and respond to an audio gospel message available in their language. Radio reaches people who would never enter a church for fear of being ostracized.

There is one indigenous mission specifically reaching out to the Kotokoli and other Muslim groups in Togo, along with several local churches within the Southern Baptist and Assembly of God denominations who are doing evangelism in Kotokoli villages. In the end, most Kotokoli believers have become followers of Jesus through the witness of friends and family.

At present, SIM ministries concentrate on encouraging and training local Christians to reach out to their Muslim neighbors, with organized efforts in village outreach only in their beginning stages.

Scripture Availability

Portions of the Scriptures, along with the books of Genesis, Mark, and James have been translated into the Tem language. After a break of several years, SIL once again has a team in place to continue working on the rest of God's Word. The published scriptures are not yet widely used as most Kotokoli Christians are in French-speaking churches. The high illiteracy rate, combined with the powerful Muslim prejudice against Christianity, prevents the Kotokoli from accessing the available Scriptures, either in Kotokoli or French.



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.

