

1. Description

- 1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Ngäbere, Family-Chibchan/Guaymí. Other names include: Chiriquí, Guaymí, Ngobere, Valiente and Ngawbe.
- 1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): gym
- 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Northeastern Chiriquí, Bocas del Toro, western Veraguas, and western provinces. They are also in Costa Rica.
- 1.4 Brief history: The Ngäbe-Buglé (pronounced NAW-BEY) indians are Panamá's fastest growing indigenous group, with a total population of almost 200,000. At the time of the Spanish conquest the Ngäbe lived around the coastal areas, but retreated into the mountains to escape the Spanish. They remained semi-nomadic until the 1960s, when the Panamanian government began building hospitals and schools in the predominately indigenous areas. In 1997, after centuries of struggle, the Ngäbe-Buglé succeeded in establishing their own Comarca (autonomous district), which has both traditional and modern authorities.
- 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: In Soloy there are many different faiths such as Methodist, Evangelical, Catholic and even Ba'hi.
- 1.6 Ecology (natural environment): Traditionally lived on the coastlines, then fled to the mountains from Spanish conquest.
- 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: 128,000 in Panama (1990 census). Population total all countries: 133,090. Almost 200,000 now.

2. Economy

- 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): Crops raised by the Ngawbe include maize, millet, bananas, plantains, beans, rice, sweet manioc, *otoe* (*taro/Xanthosoma* spp.), *ñampi* (*yams/Dioscorea* spp.), sweet potatoes, squashes, sugarcane, pigeon peas (*Cajanus indicus*), chili peppers, coffee, and pineapples, as well as tree fruits such as peach palms (*Guilielma gasipaes*), avocados, papayas, mangoes, soursops (*Anona nutricata*), guavas (*Psidium guajaba*), oranges, lemons, grapefruits, and cacao. The Ngawbe also cultivate tobacco, century plant (for its fiber), and gourds and calabashes (for use as containers).
- 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: supplemented by the raising of a few cattle, chickens, or

pigs and, to a lesser extent today than in the past, by hunting, fishing, and gathering. The Ngawbe traditionally hunted deer, tapir, wild pigs, and a number of small forest animals for food, but game of any kind has become scarce throughout much of Ngawbe territory.

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Most hunting is done with shotguns or .22-caliber rifles; few men today are skilled in the use of the bow and arrow. Fishing is done traditionally, using dams, weirs, nets, spears, bows and arrows, and fish poison; the use of hook and line has caught on only in a minor way.

2.4 Food storage: The Ngawbe manufacture crude baskets for utilitarian purposes, large wooden trays, net bags of various sizes (some of extremely fine quality), stone pipes, grinding stones, wooden mortars, woven hats, hammocks, fiber string and rope, horsehair rope and bridles, and broad, beaded collars known as chaquiras. Except for net bags, baskets, and string, which all girls and women (and a few men) know how to make, items are made by part-time specialists and are obtained by others through trade.

2.5 Sexual division of production: Men hunt, clear land for planting, weed fields, organize cooperative labor parties called juntas, tend cattle and horses, collect firewood during the rainy season, chop firewood, and engage in wage labor. Women cook, care for children, clean house, fetch water, collect firewood during the dry season, make clothing for women and children (male clothing is now almost entirely purchased), make net bags, harvest cultivated foodstuffs on a daily basis, gather some wild foods, and occasionally work for wages as domestics or as pickers during the coffee harvest, when they may accompany their husbands to the plantations. Both women and men (and sometimes children) plant crops, participate in major harvest activities, and fish. There is some evidence that women have become responsible for an increasing number of agricultural tasks, as men have become more occupied with cattle and wage labor. The division of labor among the Ngawbe is not rigid, however, and both women and men will do whatever needs doing, albeit sometimes reluctantly. Ritual and political activities are primarily organized and led by men, but women do attend these activities and have participatory roles in traditional rituals. Mainly spectators at nontraditional political gatherings in the 1960s, women have come to play an increasing role on such occasions.

2.6 Land tenure: Land is owned collectively by cognatic kin groups, and use rights are generally regulated by the senior male members. Use rights are inherited equally by

women and men. In the past, when a man cleared climax forest, the land became his property, and his descendants had use rights. Today, however, climax forest is virtually nonexistent. Although the actual right to use land is complicated by several factors, use rights to land are generally lost if the lineal descendants of a person fail to exercise such rights for two generations and if the person is not living in a hamlet located on the land in question.

2.7 Ceramics: Ceramic vessels have been replaced by metal pots, and all knowledge of pottery manufacture has been lost. Although bark cloth is no longer worn as clothing, it is still made by some women for use as saddle blankets, bed coverings, and sanitary napkins.

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: The distribution of food to kin is a major feature of the structure of consumption. Formal patterns of sharing serve to distribute food on a large scale among near and distant kin during periods of localized scarcity.

2.9 Food taboos: Dietary restrictions are imposed upon the close relatives of the deceased and are strictly observed. Both salt and meat are prohibited.

2.10 Canoes/watercraft? No data found

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): No data found

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): No data found

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f): 12-14

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): no data found

4.3 Completed family size (m and f): no data found

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): no data found

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): It is often the case that women marry shortly after first menses—at age 12 to 14—whereas men are normally in their twenties before they marry for the first time.

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: First marriages tend to be quite stable, as are polygynous unions in which the women are in the kinship category of "sibling of the

same sex" to one another. Non-sororal polygynous unions are less stable, with younger women often leaving their husbands in favor of unions with men closer to their own ages.

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Polygyny is a male ideal and is quite common. Both sororal and nonsororal forms of polygyny occur.

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: Ideally, a symmetrical exchange of women occurs between two kin groups after a series of negotiations between the parents of the respective brides and grooms. Such arranged marriages are less common than in the past, but they still occur. There is no formal wedding ceremony. After a period of time during which the groom visits his wife in her parents' hamlet and provides gifts and labor for his father-in-law, the woman will move to her husband's hamlet.

4.9 Inheritance patterns: Although some personal property is buried with an individual, and the house is abandoned if a person dies in it, houses are generally inherited by the eldest married child who remains in the household. Other personal belongings, including domestic animals, are inherited by the children of the same sex as the deceased. To avoid conflict, cattle are likely to be given to children by elderly parents in anticipation of death.

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: Ngawbe children are normally given considerable freedom during their early childhood years, under the watchful eyes of parents and older siblings. Seldom are they harshly disciplined. At an early age, children of both sexes begin to assist their parents in daily tasks, learning by observation and imitation. Although such assistance is voluntary for boys into their adolescent years, it is generally compulsory for girls from the age of 4 or 5. Most play activities of young children also are imitations of adult activities of the appropriate sex. By late adolescence, children of both sexes are expected to do their parents' bidding without question.

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: No data found

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): No data found

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized? No data found

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows"); No data found

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over

time)? No data found

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: No data found

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin) No data found

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? No data found

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring; No data found

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? No data found

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females; No data found

4.22 Evidence for couvades; No evidence of couvades

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older); No data found

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? No data found

4.24 Joking relationships? No data found

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations; Virilocal residence is the ideal. In cases of nonexchange marriage or when the husband's group is experiencing a shortage of land, the young couple may reside uxorilocally.

4.26 Incest avoidance rules; Cousin marriage is prohibited. All first cousins and parallel second cousins are excluded by this proscription; second cross cousins and others may also be excluded, depending on the way kinship terms are applied in particular instances.

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? No

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? No data found

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?); In Ngawbe society, traditional marriage is not simply a union of man and woman; it is the basis of a sociopolitical and economic alliance between two kin groups.

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? Betrothal of female infants to adult males, said to be common in the past, is now rare. It is often the case, however, that women marry shortly after first menses—at age 12 to 14—whereas men are normally in their twenties before they marry for the first time.

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: No evidence found

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: No data found

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: No data found

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: No data found

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):
No data found

4.18 Cannibalism? No data found

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: The Ngawbe live in highly dispersed small hamlets (caseríos), which traditionally consisted of about two to eight houses occupied by families related through kinship ties.

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): No mobility data found

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): Ngawbe oral history is rich with descriptions of great caciques (chiefs) of the past, who supposedly exercised authority over regions within Ngawbe territory. But no social or economic classes exist.

5.4 Post marital residence: Because postmarital residence is ideally virilocal, Ngawbe hamlets tend to be composed largely of patrilineally related males, their wives, and their children.

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): The boundaries are defined by evidence of slash and burn agriculture.

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): Women and men cooperate in household decision making. Men dominate in the public arena, occupying most leadership positions in political and ritual affairs, but elderly women are listened to with respect.

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: no data found

5.8 Village and house organization: The distance between one hamlet and another is usually a kilometer or more. This pattern of dispersed hamlets existed prehistorically.

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): No evidence of such structures.

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? No data found.

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: There are no social or economic

classes. The cognatic kin group is the locus of socioeconomic power and authority. Cooperation in work activities beyond the household level is accomplished by reciprocal labor groups (juntas), organized by men.

5.12 Trade: Among themselves, the Ngawbe traditionally bartered manufactured goods for other goods or foodstuffs and exchanged food among kin on a reciprocal basis. Since the early 1970s, cash purchases have become more frequent, even among kin, which is an indication of the strong penetration of the cash-based economy into Ngawbe culture. Since contact times, the Ngawbe have engaged in trade with nonindigenous peoples. Dependence on such trade has increased dramatically during the latter half of the twentieth century and is now largely cash based. Maize, beans, rice, coffee, domestic animals, and net bags are sold to Panamanian merchants in small quantities, especially by those families with no wage-labor income, in order to purchase items of Western manufacture that have become necessities—for example, cloth, clothing, machetes, salt, medicines, metal pots, blankets, and the shotguns, rifles, and ammunition that are used in hunting. Panamanian buyers occasionally travel into Ngawbe territory to purchase cattle. The Ngawbe raise horses for riding and for use as pack animals, and these, too, are sometimes sold to outsiders.

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? No evidence of social hierarchies.

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR: No data found

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): Traditional religious practitioners are called sukias. They make predictions, interpret dreams, and effect cures for certain types of illness through communication with the deities and the spirits. Sukias were also included among the priests of the Mama Chi religion, and many remain among its adherents today.

Medicine; Traditional curers (commonly referred to by the Spanish term curandero) have extensive knowledge of plant medicines and can cure illnesses that are not deemed to be the result of supernatural causes. Both men and women may be curers. Sukias are often curanderos as well. Most adults have some minimal knowledge of plant medicines. Nowadays, individuals with serious illnesses are often taken to clinics in Panamanian towns for treatment, especially if treatment by a curandero or sukia has proved

ineffective.

6.2 Stimulants: Maize beer or “chicha”

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): **Puberty**; The feminine rite of passage, Mogön, is divided in two parts: the first immediately follows when the girl observes a change in her body, and is isolated for 4 days; the other part lasts the following 4 weeks, and all this ends in a party. They are then eligible to marry if they have not already been betrothed. In former times, young males underwent a physically taxing puberty ritual that served to mark their transition from childhood to full adulthood and marriageable status. This ritual apparently has not been performed since the early decades of the twentieth century.

6.4 Other rituals: The major Ngawbe ritual is called krun in Ngawbére, "balséría" in Spanish. Prohibited for a time during the heyday of the Mama Chi religion, it is once again being practiced. Krun rituals are grand events, with attendance numbering in the hundreds, and sometimes in the thousands. A man who serves as the host of a krun ritual achieves the pinnacle of renown and prestige in his region. Central to this ritual is the etdabali, the ritual-sibling relationship that exists between the host and his principal guest, who must also be a man of renown in his region. The ritual lasts for four days, with the central event, the throwing of 1.e-meter-long balsa sticks at opponents, taking place on the third day. Stick-throwing contests occur between teams from the host's and the guest's side, as well as between individuals. Only males participate in the stick throwing. Sponsorship of a krun ceremony requires provision of enormous quantities of food and drink, so a man must be able to call in obligations from a large number of kin.

"Chichería" is the Spanish term for several different Ngawbe rituals of lesser scale than the krun, all of which involve consumption of large quantities of chicha (maize beer), as well as singing, dancing, and music. The etdabali relationship is also central to these rituals.

6.5 Myths (Creation): beliefs in a protector god, a god of lightning, various spirits of good and evil, and a number of culture heroes to whom the Ngawbe attribute godlike qualities. Wooden crosses placed on rooftops and on trails at the entrances to hamlets ward off evil spirits when someone is ill. The use of such crosses appears to be non-Christian in origin.

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Several rituals involve stylized singing and dancing and the music of flutes, rattles, and conch shells. The songs or chants are not sung in Ngawbére, but in what is reported to be a dialect of Murire. Face painting, usually featuring geometric designs in black, red, white, or a combination thereof, is seen most often at rituals, although the more traditional Ngawbe say that they paint their faces whenever they are happy. Of the plastic arts, beaded collars and finely made, colorfully decorated net bags are most notable. Some collars and bags are now made expressly for sale.

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: Only males participate in stick throwing. Males host most ceremonies, but females participate in everything.

6.8 Missionary effect: Despite almost five hundred years of Christian—mainly Catholic—influence, the Ngawbe still retain certain traditional religious beliefs, which are manifest in their oral traditions and in certain rituals.

6.9 RCR revival: In 1961 a nativistic religious movement, known as the religion of Mama Chi (Little Mother) emerged among the Ngawbe as a result of the visionary experience of a young Ngawbe woman. This movement, at once transformative, revivalistic, and innovative, discouraged all contact with the outside world, prohibited the consumption of alcohol and the principal Ngawbe rituals at which alcohol is consumed (balser'ías and chicherías), instituted periodic prayer meetings, and prophesied doom and destruction if the Ngawbe did not comply with the tenets of the new religion and great good fortune at the end of five years if they did. Throughout the 1960s, the Mama Chi religion had a profound social impact on Ngawbe culture. Today it has only a small following.

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: When death occurs in a house, the dwelling must be abandoned. For this reason, an individual on the verge of death will be moved to a temporary shelter near the house, if possible. An initial period of mourning begins immediately after death. Some personal belongings are buried with the deceased, some of her or his clothing is placed on top of the grave, and the head of the grave is marked by the planting of wild ginger and sometimes a small wooden cross. Dietary restrictions are imposed upon the close relatives of the deceased and are strictly observed. Both salt and meat are prohibited. Another ceremony is held at the end of about one month, at which time the eating restrictions are removed, all guests are given a meal that includes meat,

and the day is spent in reminiscing about the deceased. It is not known whether any aspects of belief in an afterlife are non-Christian in origin.

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? No evidence found

6.12 Is there teknonymy? No data found

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.); beliefs in a protector god, a god of lightning, various spirits of good and evil, and a number of culture heroes to whom the Ngawbe attribute godlike qualities. Wooden crosses placed on rooftops and on trails at the entrances to hamlets ward off evil spirits when someone is ill. The use of such crosses appears to be non-Christian in origin.

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: Face painting, usually featuring geometric designs in black, red, white, or a combination thereof, is seen most often at rituals, although the more traditional Ngawbe say that they paint their faces whenever they are happy.

7.2 Piercings: No data found

7.3 Haircut: No data found

7.4 Scarification: no data found

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): Of the plastic arts, beaded collars and finely made, colorfully decorated net bags are most notable. Some collars and bags are now made expressly for sale.

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: Face painting, beads, and finery which are highly decorative are worn for ceremony and ritual.

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: A variety of traditional artesanias are made by Ngäbe women. Naguas are dresses that are made from a bright colorful fabric called dacron and are worn by many Ngäbe women.

7.8 Missionary effect: In Soloy there are many different faiths such as Methodist, Evangelical, Catholic and even Ba'hi. There is also form of traditional religion called Mama Tata (Mom and Dad). The Mama Tata religion was the revival of traditional beliefs by a woman named Besikö. Besikö had a vision which involved seeing the Virgin Mary who instructed her to preserve Ngäbe culture, as it was in danger of disappearing. This revival lead to the naming of the district Besiko in her honour and Besiko spent her

life committed to the preservation of the Ngäbere language and Ngäbe traditions.

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: Right now, the Comarca is at a crossroads between modern ways and ancient beliefs. As development becomes more prevalent in the Comarca, Ngäbe beliefs and traditions are dying out. One of the greatest challenges that faces the Ngäbe-Buglé is finding a way to live in the modern world without losing their unique culture.

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system: Descent among the Ngawbe is cognatic. No clans or lineages exist, and there is no strong evidence for the existence of unilineal descent groups in the past. As a general rule, a person's kin group consists of all individuals known to be related through the second ascending generation. Residence in the same hamlet, as well as geographic distance and personal acquaintance, may alter this basic equation.

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): Ngawbe kinship terms generally distinguish sex and generation. Terms are bifurcate-merging in the first ascending generation, meaning that father and father's brother are referred to by a single term and mother's brother by a distinct term, and mother and mother's sister are referred to by a single term and father's sister by a distinct term. Cousin terms are Hawaiian, that is, all individuals recognized as cousins are referred to by terms for siblings. Sibling terms refer to siblings of the same sex and siblings of the opposite sex.

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

1. In many ancient stories and in every ritual, you can notice that the number 4 seems very important. It is sacred for the Ngöbe, because it originates from the moment when Ngöbö(God) created the earth, in 4 days

Numbered references

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