

## 1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Democratic Republic of Congo, Dengese(Ndengese)/ Niger-Congo

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): COD

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): 0 00 N, 25 00 E

1.4 Brief history: The Portuguese discoverers reached the mouth of the Congo River in 1482 and began trading with the Kongo kingdom. The slave trade and ivory attracted the interest of other European countries. In 1883, explorer Peirre-Paul-Francois Camillie Savorgnan de Brazza signed treaties with the Bateke, a tribe located to the north, turning over the entire region to France. Today, the Congo continues its close relationship with France, despite achieving independence in 1960.

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: Administrative language is French, and in every part of the country French influence is eminent. Christian Missionaries made Christianity the major religion of DROC.

1.6 Ecology (natural environment): tropical; hot and humid in equatorial river basin; cooler and drier in southern highlands; cooler and wetter in eastern highlands; north of Equator - wet season (April to October), dry season (December to February); south of Equator - wet season (November to March), dry season (April to October)

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: Population size: 3.3 million.

## 2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s)/ Main Protein-lipid resource/ Food storage/: The Bakongo are better known for their fashions than for their cuisine. Typically, they eat three meals a day. For breakfast, a village family eats a dough-like ball made from cassava flour (fufu) with the previous day's sauce. Diners use their fingers, and before eating, they wash their hands in a basin of warm water. Some people may have coffee and French bread, which is baked locally throughout the region. The midday meal is the largest of the day. Bakongo enjoy one of several sauces, eaten with fufu or with rice. Cassava leaves (saka saka), pounded and cooked, are always a favorite. Dried salted fish (makayabu) or sardines are added to make a rich saka saka. Another local favorite is pounded sesame seeds (wangila), to which small dried shrimp are added. Pounded squash seeds (mbika), seasoned with lots of hot pepper and wrapped in banana leaves, are sold at roadside stands and are a popular snack for travelers. The most common dish is white beans cooked in a palm oil sauce of tomatoes, onions, garlic, and hot pepper. The beans are eaten with rice, fufu, or chikwange (a cassava loaf prepared in banana leaves). Supper generally consists of leftovers, but chikwange with a piece of makayabu covered in hot pepper sauce is very satisfying, especially when washed down with beer. Kin (Kinshasa) sept jours (meaning "Kinshasa seven-day loaf") is a giant chikwange, so large that it reportedly takes a whole family a week to eat it. The Bakongo are fond of palm wine. Palm juice is tapped from the top of the coconut palm trunk. It ferments within hours and must be drunk the next day. On Saturday and Sunday afternoons, people sit under mango trees, enjoying the milky, tangy drink. They also make sugar cane wine (nguila), fruit wines, and homemade gin (cinq cents). It is customary to pour a small amount on the ground for the ancestors before drinking.

2.2 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: N/A

2.3 Sexual division of production: Although both women and men work for wages when they can, men predominate in the better-paying and more prestigious occupations. In rural areas, men cultivate forest crops, including fruit trees, whereas savanna crops are appropriate to women. Men hunt; women fish and catch small rodents.

2.4 Land tenure: In principle, in Zaire all land belongs to the state, from which commercial developers may obtain use rights. In practice, in rural areas unattractive to capitalists, traditional rules of land tenure prevail. Land is owned by matrilineal descent groups called "houses" and is available for use to the members of the house, to in-married women, and to the children and grandchildren of male members. Fruit trees, also inherited matrilineally, are owned separately from the land on which they stand.

2.5 Ceramics: Traditionally, Bakongo artisans have excelled in woodcarving, sculpting, painting, and stonework. An example of their intricate carving is found in their wooden bowl covers that have human figures for handles. They also specialize in scepters (fancy royal staffs), ankle bells, cowtail flyswatters, and bottles for medicinal and magical powders, often displaying images of people and animals. Masks, on the other hand, have been less important to the Bakongo than to other people, such as the Luba. One unique type of folk art is the fetish, which is an animal carved from wood and driven full of nails. The Mayumbe near the coast paint calabashes (gourds), decorating them with hunting scenes and colorful geometric designs.

2.6 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: By tradition, a married woman and man have separate budgets, the wife being responsible for the provision of food (except meat) and the husband for clothes and other bought goods. Each disposes independently of any surplus, but in Zaire the government favors making women dependent on their husbands.

2.7 Food taboos: Water sources are mostly unprotected and often become contaminated. Infectious and parasitic diseases in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DROC) cause more than 50 percent of all deaths. Children under the age of five, who make up 20 percent of the DROC population, account for 80 percent of deaths. Their daily diets generally do not have enough vitamins, minerals, or protein.

2.8 Canoes/watercraft? N/A

## 3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): N/A

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): N/A

## 4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f): N/A

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): N/A

4.3 Completed family size (m and f): N/A

- 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): N/A
- 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): N/A
- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: N/A
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Monogamous nuclear family
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: N/A
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns: N/A
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: N/A
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: N/A
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): N/A
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized? N/A
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”) The Bakongo are matriarchal. Children belong to their mother's lineage, and the maternal uncle is in charge of them even while their father is alive. The maternal uncle decides where his sister's children will study and what career they will pursue. If a man succeeds in life but refuses to help the family, he may be strongly criticized by his uncle. On the other hand, in the case of certain misfortunes, the uncle himself may be blamed—uncles have even been stoned when they were suspected of wrongdoing. However, European patriarchal ways have begun to weaken this traditional system.
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? N/A
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape N/A
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin) N/A
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? N/A
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring N/A
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? N/A
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females N/A
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades N/A
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older) N/A
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? N/A
- 4.24 Joking relationships? N/A
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations N/A
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules N/A
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Couples are expected to go through traditional wedding formalities, but official recognition is extended only to legally registered marriages.
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? N/A
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) N/A
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? Although young people may initiate courtship, marriage is often arranged by the family, with older siblings or extended family members suggesting possible mates.
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

### **Warfare/homicide**

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: N/A
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: The Bakongo face many of the same problems as their fellow citizens in their native countries. They must cope with uncontrolled urbanization, collapsing state health care systems, a lack of well-paid jobs, and economic instability. Politically, Kongo nationalists have never accepted the division of their ancient kingdom at the conference of Berlin in 1884–85. They argue that the partition was a European decision in which no Congolese participated. Consequently, since the 1950s in Angola, Holden Roberto and the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) opposed first the Portuguese and then the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) regime. Their goal was the reunification of the Bakongo spread across three countries.
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: N/A
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): N/A
- 4.18 Cannibalism? N/A

### **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: N/A
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): N/A
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): Although Bakongo make up 14 percent of the Angolan population, they hold only 2.5 percent of the seats in the legislature.
- 5.4 Post marital residence: N/A
- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): N/A
- 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): N/A
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: Bakongo are friendly people who typically greet each other both verbally and by shaking hands. The familiar greeting in Kikongo is Mbote, Tata/Mama. Kolele? (Hello, Sir/Madam. What news?) Respect for authority figures and the elderly is shown by holding the left hand to the right wrist when shaking hands. Men commonly hold hands in public as a sign of friendship. Children are always supposed to receive objects with two hands.

5.8 Village and house organization: Living conditions are poor for most Bakongo. Rural families typically live in one- or two-room mudbrick huts with thatch or tin roofs, and without electricity. Cooking is done mostly outside. Windows are unscreened, allowing flies and mosquitoes to come in. Water sources are mostly unprotected and often become contaminated. Infectious and parasitic diseases in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DROC) cause more than 50 percent of all deaths. Children under the age of five, who make up 20 percent of the DROC population, account for 80 percent of deaths. Their daily diets generally do not have enough vitamins, minerals, or protein. Despite poor road networks, much of the agricultural produce of the Lower Congo region goes to feed urban populations in Brazzaville, Kinshasa, and Luanda.

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): Constructed of adobe, burned brick, or wattle and daub, with roofs of thatch or corrugated iron, the houses shelter single individuals or married couples. Usually, there are two rooms, the inner one reserved for sleeping and storage. A separate kitchen at the back of the house is the center of the female domain.

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? N/A

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: Nevertheless, children are a sign of wealth, and parents consider themselves blessed to have many children.

5.12 Trade: Villages within reach of a truck route may hold a market on Saturdays. Unlicensed traders bring manufactured goods from town for sale or barter, and may make cash advances to rural producers. In town, most women supplement their incomes by buying goods in small quantities and selling still smaller amounts, but a certain number have become successful wholesalers and importers.

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? N/A

## **6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)**

6.0 Time allocation to RCR: Long local animism until European missionaries arrived.

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): BaKongo of all walks of life commonly consult healers and magical experts (nganga ) to deal with not only illnesses but also afflictions such as marital disputes, unemployment, traffic accidents, and theft. Such experts, concentrated in the towns, include non-BaKongo. A distinction is made between afflictions sent by God, which are "natural," and those in which an element of witchcraft is involved. Sufferers and their families commonly essay a series of treatments for the same problem, visiting both the diviner and the hospital.

6.2 Stimulants: N/A

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): The Bakongo believe in a close relationship between the unborn, the living, and the dead. If they are Christian, they baptize their children. At birth, there is a ritual called a kobota elingi (which literally means "what a pleasure it is to give birth"), a party to which friends and relatives come to share in the parents' joy and to celebrate the continuity of the family. Until recently, initiation (Longo) held an important place among the rites of passage. Longo teaches children the secrets of Bakongo traditions necessary to taking on the responsibilities of adulthood. During Longo, children learn adult behavior, including control of their physical and emotional reactions to evil, suffering, and death. The ceremonies differ in form, duration, and name among the different Bakongo subgroups. In the past they lasted up to two months. Nowadays, given Westernization and rigid school calendars, fewer children undergo the rite. Death is a passage to the next dimension, the spirit village of the ancestors. In the past, Kongo tombs were very large, built of wood or stone, and resembled small homes into which the family of the deceased placed furniture and personal objects. The corpse was dressed in fine clothing and placed in a position recalling his or her trade. Graves these days are often marked with no more than concrete crosses, but some still exhibit elaborate stonework and stone crosses that reflect Portuguese influence. The more elaborate graves have statues of friends and family mounted on and around the tomb. Some tombs are so detailed that they truly are works of art.

6.4 Other rituals: Given the political uncertainty in their countries of residence, the Bakongo celebrate secular holidays quietly these days. However, the Kimbanguists make an annual pilgrimage to the Kamba River to honor their prophet. At the river they offer sacrifices, pray, ask for blessings, and take some of the water, which is considered holy. Kimbanguists believe in Jesus as the son of God and therefore commemorate Christmas and Easter, which are major holidays. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Bakongo celebrate Parents Day, (August 1) along with their fellow citizens. On this holiday, people go to cemeteries in the morning to spruce up family graves. The grave sites may be overgrown with tall, dry elephant grass, which is burned away, creating an Armageddon-like atmosphere. In the evenings, families get together to share a festive meal with the extended family.

6.5 Myths (Creation): The creator Nzambi's great illness, back when the Earth was still completely covered with water. In his fits of coughing, he spat up the Sun, Moon, stars, animals, and people. And so the world was born by accident.

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Kongo court art ranks with that of the Bakuba of Kasai and the Baluba of Katanga, tribes of the southeastern DROC. One type of statue—the mintadi, or "chief"—was a large piece of sculpture designed to "replace" the chief at court while he was at war or visiting the king in San Salvador. These statues, of which few remain, were sculpted of stone or wood and showed the chief's rank. Another type—"maternity"—depicted a mother and child. In their resemblance to portrayals of the Virgin Mary, these show a Catholic influence and are notable for both their nonstylized realism and their serenity. Kikongo has a centuries-old tradition of both oral and written literature. Kikongo verse is rich in proverbs, fables, riddles, and folk tales. Parts of the Bible were translated into Kikongo in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: N/A

6.8 Missionary effect: Catholic Christian missionaries spread the religion to the whole country. Nowadays, Catholicism is the primary religion of DROC.

6.9 RCR revival: N/A

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: According to the traditional religion of the Bakongo, the creator of the universe, called Nzambe, lives above a world of ancestor spirits. Many people believe that when a family member dies a normal death, he or she joins this spirit world (or village) of the ancestors, who look after the living and protect the descendants to whom they have left their lands. Spirits of those who die violent and untimely deaths are thought to be without rest until their deaths have been avenged. Sorcerers are hired to discover through the use of fetishes or charms called nkisi who was responsible for the death. In addition, healing practices and traditional

religion go hand in hand. Traditional healers called nganga may be consulted for herbal treatments or to root out kindoki (witches practicing black magic, who are thought to cause illness through ill-will, and to eat the souls of their victims by night).6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? N/A

6.12 Is there tekonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.) The Bakongo were among the first sub-Saharan African peoples to adopt Christianity and, as a kingdom, had diplomatic ties with the Vatican. In the colonial period, Belgian missionaries established Catholic seminaries in the villages of Lemfu and Mayidi and built mission churches and schools throughout Lower Congo.

## 7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: N/A

7.2 Piercings: N/A

7.3 Haircut: Women adopt the latest local fashions and hairstyles, which change every few months. The mainstay is the African sarong.

7.4 Scarification: N/A

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: N/A

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: N/A

7.8 Missionary effect: Western clothing has become popular since missionaries arrived.

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: N/A

## 8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system: BaKongo can trace their relationship to others through only one of several routes, depending on the situation. Two persons occupying the same status with respect to any third party are said to be "siblings," mpangi. When reckoning is by clans, this principle generates a terminological pattern of the Crow type, in which mother's brother's daughter is equated with "child," mwana, and father's sister's daughter with "father," se. When reckoning is traced from individual to individual, the pattern becomes Hawaiian, meaning that all cousins are called "sibling." Most kinship terms apply to relatives of either sex.

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

## 9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

9.1 Visiting: Visiting is important in Zaire and hospitality is traditional. Most visiting occurs in the home. Family and close friends often drop by unannounced, but strangers are expected to make arrangements in advance. When a person first visits a Zairian home, a gift is not appropriate. Small gifts, such as food or an item for the house, may be given after a relationship is established. If a Zairian offers to share a meal, the guest is first expected to show reluctance to join the host's table. But the guest should ultimately accept the offer. Not doing so is impolite. Zairians often judge the sincerity of their guests by the way they eat.

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