

## **1. Description**

### 1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

The Giriama or Giriama is a sub tribe of the Mijikenda Group of people living on the coast of Kenya. Their language is called kigiriama or kigiryama and is a part of the Bantu Language group

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

E72

### 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

03.20/39.40

### 1.4 Brief history:

the Giriama or Giriama, people are Bantus living along the coastal areas of Kenya. They have migrated from Singwaya in the north eastern sides of Kenyan coast bordering the Oromo.

### 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

They are part of Mijikenda group, which literally means, “nine homes or nine homesteads” in Swahili. The Giriama and the other eight groups of the Mijikenda groups live near and among each other. Over time the group has assimilated with the modern culture for both trade and beliefs. Today many of the Giriama are either Christian or Muslims due to missionary activity. Despite this they still practice many traditional rituals honoring their ancestors, but are very familiar with modern life. They raise cash crops to sell at local markets and trade for modern goods.

### 1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

The Giriama live along a ridge near the coast of Kenya and Tanzani and are mostly found in the Kilifi and Malindi district. On a coastal area that is 70 by 30 miles long and stretching 30 miles inland to the plains of the Taru Desert the Giriama people reside. The majority of the tribes live on the fertile coastal strips because of the fertile farming land. Earlier generations were forced to live in the dry hinterland because they were avoiding enslavement by Arabs. The Giriama people live in large forts called a Kaya. These are situated atop a tall heavily wooded hill that is cleared at the top. They also living near the ocean and forest they utilize both for food.

### 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

The population of the Giriama people is 745,000 that live near the coast of Kenya. Giriama extended families reside in homesteads, or compounds. There are usually three generations—a father, his wife or wives, all of his sons, the sons' wives, any unmarried children, and the grandchildren. Homesteads range in size from seven to 70 people. They live in thatched houses made of mostly mud walls, but recently iron and brick have become more common materials.

## **2. Economy**

### 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

The Giriama are experienced farmers that rely on maize, millet, rice, coconut palms and peas for their carbohydrate staples. They are experienced farmers with each family having a Shamba, or plantation. They are known as the best cooks of the Mijikenda group. They also enjoy a popular dish of Kenya, Wail, which is a rice and coconut milk mixture. They also grow cashews and coconuts as cash crops for market.

### 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Since the Giriama live near the coast it is obvious that fish and other seafood provide the main source for protein in their diets. They do not keep many cattle, and a fair amount of goats and chickens. Cattle are only killed in the event of a major feast/ritual and goats or chickens on less important occasions.

### 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

The men use bow and iron tipped arrows, and knives for hunting. When hunting all men who helped in the kill receive a portion of meat.

### 2.4 Food storage:

Grain and other crops are stored on long wooden platforms built in the house called, lutzaga. The Giriama are very clever about their food storage and often light fires underneath to prevent molding.

### 2.5 Sexual division of production:

Like in most tribal cultures the men are responsible for providing food and protection to the family, while the mother is left all domestic responsibilities.

### 2.6 Land tenure:

Each man places a boundary mark around his shamba or farm often consisting of a path or marker of sticks. That man will retain that land for the rest of his life. He may choose to leave the land unused, and leave for many years. If he hears of someone using his land he may return and demand the price of the land leaving the farmer forced to pay. The bush and trees (jungle) are public domain.

### 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

As far as sharing goes the Giriama people have a very simple philosophy. They believe that anyone who help with the work get a portion of the harvest. If the community

### 2.9 Food taboos:

There are no taboo foods in the Giriama culture. They believe in using every part of the animal from organs to blood. Milk is regularly enjoyed and sold. The drink of choice is a grain alcohol called tembo that is precious to their people

### 2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

The Giriama fish for some of their food and often use canoes to reach certain kinds of fish. The canoes are made of hollowed out trees from the surrounding jungle.

### 3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

Not available

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

Not available

### 4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

The women of the culture reach menarche at the common age of 9-12. On the night of a young girl's first menstruation the father is forced to leave the hut and not return until after she has completed her first cycle. During at age of menarche the girl is isolated from the rest of the tribe and she is covered in oils and perfumes. She is not allowed to leave the hut unless it is to use the restroom when she must cover her face so no one can see. After the first cycle the girl is then moved to another hut where other unmarried women who have reached menarche. She will leave this hut once she is married.

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

This specific information was not available, but premarital relations are not allowed in the Giriama. Resulting in the first child coming after marriage.

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

There were no clear numbers available for this information, but it is known that the Giriama strive to have as many offspring as possible. The reason for this is that a larger family has less work per individual as the women and children sever the man of the house. Multi-generation families live in the same hut. Most men have 2-3 wives

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

1-2 years

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

Men: between 26-28 Women: 15

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

n/a

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

No research on percentages could be found but the practice of multiple wives is encouraged. A man is allowed as many wives as he can afford, but 2-3 is common.

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

15 gourds of tembo and cattle or cash

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

Inheritance is through the father to the sons. The head of the household is the eldest male and inheritance follows to his eldest son. That is only partially true because the eldest son shares the responsibility of the land with his brothers. Since all work the land they each share in the harvests equally.

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

Parent-offspring interactions must be excellent since so many people live together in the same houses. All members of the family must know their place in the chain of command and exist only there. Parents have a large amount of control over their children because they believe in the parent curse. This is where the parent can curse the child at anytime with infertility. The curse can only be lifted once the child admits to their misgivings and parents are pleased.

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

There is no recorded record of homosexual activities,

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?

Paternity is not partible within the Giriama culture. Only the husband is allowed sexual access to this wife.

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")

She is the vessel for new life.

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

These are strictly forbidden since the woman is property of the man. A man found guilty of rape or adultery he must pay a fine to the scandalized male.

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

No, the male is allowed to choose any female he finds fit, but because parents do have a large say in who they choose because of the parent curse.

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

No they are considered property of the husband. They can make arrangements with another couple to swap partners, but all parties must be willing

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

None, this practice is not allowed

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

Since the families live in multi-generational groups the children are given to the care of the other women in the family, traditionally the eldest daughter. Also the children are property of the father so the death of the mother has little effect.

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

No number found, but this can be a source of conflict between males. This causes many males of the younger generations to leave the Kaya in order to claim their own land and independence. This would result in a lower number of males compared to females living within the walls of their fortress.

4.22 Evidence for couvades

No

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

Young women are traditionally married to older men, often much older.

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

Marriage is not allowed in the father's clan but is promoted in the mother's clan or the father's mother's clan. This solidifies family and clan bonds.

4.24 Joking relationships?

n/a

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

patrilineal

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

Not allowed

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

Yes the tow are married by a tribal leader and then dance and drink follows.

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

During the marriage the female takes on the man's identity as the wife becomes the property of her new husband.

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

It is preferable to find a mate near you homestead, but is one is not available many travel to surrounding tribes. This builds string relations between neighboring tribes.

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

The father will tell their son to go out and find a wife. He will do so and upon finding an appropriate mate the father and son will take a gourd of tembo to future bride and father and ask her to marry him. If she says yes then they dink and then her father will ask her again if she wishes to marry her suitor. If she says yes they continue the courtship until the dowry is paid and wedding is complete. The woman is allowed to say no to the proposal at any time.

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

No, in order for a marriage to take place both the potential bride and her father must agree to the union. If at anytime the female of her fathers deems the suitor unworthy the marriage process is terminated. Also with the exchange of tembo and cattle the marriage ritual is to be beneficial to all parties involved.

## **Warfare/homicide**

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

n/a but during 1913-1914 were engaged in a war against colonialism.

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

The Giriama is closely related to those surrounding and are major contributors in trade.

4.18 Cannibalism?

The Giriama culture does not practice cannibalism.

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

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

low population density is due to poor land with roughly 50 people per sq Km resulting in ranges from 900-1500 people per Kaya.

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

Because they live in permanent kaya they do not move during the seasons.

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

The people of giriama adhere to a non-centralized government based on a council of elders called the Kambi, which are derived from age sets. Age-sets and secret societies rule the Kaya. There is one female secret society known as Kifudu, who keep clay pots that stand for ancestresses, in a thatched roofed hut. These pots are in the control of post-menopausal women, who are in control of the fertility of the entire ethnic group. To honor them, the women take the pots from the shrine, bring them to the center of the homestead, and "play" them—by putting their mouths in the openings of the pots and blowing. Without the women performing rituals centering on these clay pots, the Giriama believe that young fertile women will have problems in childbirth. The Giriama have five male secret societies, the main society being the Gohu society, which similar to the Lions Club or the Masons, is a fraternal organization for wealthier-than-average men. You have to be elected to membership and pay membership fees, which by local standards are quite

expensive. There isn't a lot of wealth stratification among the Giriama, but Gohu membership requires giving a bull. The key feature of the Gohu society is how they honor their members when they die. Men in the society are skilled carvers and are paid to create the kigango—a memorial statue—for the dead Gohu member. The posts, which range from four to nine feet tall, are created from indigenous termite-resistant hardwood. They consist of a circle for the head and rectangle for the body, and vary in decoration. Vigango are placed around the edge of the homestead, but they are not the sole monuments. Other uncarved wooden statues, called komo, are raised in honor of non-Gohu members and occupy the middle of the homestead. "These smaller statues are erected in a clear space that is surrounded by homes. People are buried right next to their houses, so these statues do not actually mark the graves. Even these ordinary statues play a role in the daily lives of the Giriama. When they drink palm wine, they'll pour a few drops on the ground in front of the statues and say a few words to the ancestors.

#### 5.4 Post marital residence:

This only effects the women because men are the share holder in the community. If a women finds herself a widower she normally stays with her family living in the hut caring for the children of the next generation. If is post medaposal she may be asked to join the Kifudu.

#### 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

The Giriama people's history is drenched in warfare making them a very defensive people. The Kaya serves a fortress for the community that is heavily guarded to ensure safety. Most families live and farm with in the walls of the Kaya fortress, but some families farm outside its walls and build a second house near their farm. When constructing the second house the ensure a clear route back to Kaya for protection.

#### 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

The Giriama people adhere to strict age-sets. These age sets delineate the chain of command and ensure the transmission of tradiotn from one generation to the next. There are a total of 13 age-sets that each male will go through. In order to advance in society you must go through certain rituals of recognition. Men age 60+ go through a ceremony called, Mung'aro in order to enjoy retirement. To become part of the kimbira, the ruling council, men ages 40-69 go through a Kirao. If you wish to be part of the Kimbra you must be prepared by going through the Sayo ra Mudhanga from ages 37-69 and the ritual continue along the road to maturity .

#### 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

None recognized.

#### 5.8 Village and house organization:

The village resides in the Kaya, with a town center and huts and farms surrounding. The kaya maybe surrounded d by additional farms and homes.

#### 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

the Giriama live in family groups with the oldest male as the head of the household. All sons born in to the family will stay with the father and bring their wives and children to live with their father's family group. The entire family shares the responsibilities and benefits of their work.

#### 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

The sleep in bed in huts

#### 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

There are many secret societies in the culture that were discussed during 5.3/

#### 5.12 Trade:

The girima have become prominent trader in the area. Raising many cash crops (coconuts and cahsew ) the culture has made itself an important part of the economy.

#### 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

As previously stated the giriama adheres to age-sets, so hierarchies are based on age.

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

#### 6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

Often as needed and upon deaths.

#### 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

They have a medicine man but believe all member of the society are connected to the spiritual world. There is a great fear of demon possession and

#### 6.2 Stimulants:

During some rituals Tembo and Khat, an Abyssinia tea.

#### 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

They have many rituals for many occasions as described earlier elderly women blow in ceramic pots. Men are ceremonially circumcised while females a separate during menstruation. If a female child dies within three days of a male child dies within four days of birth the child is buried under the water bowls stand. Others are either buried beside their hut or close to where they died. When a person dies the body is washed in cold water, if it is a male by his brother, if female by her mother or grandmother and the head is shaved by a friend. The body is then clothed in new garments and covered in a white sheet and placed in the grave. The bodies are then placed in the grave. If it is male oh his right side, if female her left. Then a monument called a Vigango, is raised in their honor. The vigango is a carved figure ranging from 3-5ft tall and 9inches in breadth. These are placed upright at the head of the grave and a coconut bowl is placed in front of it for sacrifices.

#### 6.4 Other rituals:

Often when illness falls, the inflicted family goes to the medicine man. He will often tell them that the illness is brought on by the ghost of a hungry ancestor and that in order to rid them of their sickness the ghost must be fed. The family must then kill a goat and

offer the ghost the blood and tembo, then tie a piece of the skin from the goats head on the monument. The Giriama also believe in devil possession. Symptoms include pain, aches and sickness in intervals. The only way to rid yourself of the devil is to call a devil doctor. He is considered to be the friend of the devil and will not upset the devil when he treats the inflicted. The Devil doctor takes you into his confines and places lighted charcoal in a pot and then sprinkles it and the person with frankincense or aloe wood. The doctor will identify if it is a permanent spirit or a wandering spirit. If it is a wander the doctor prepares medicine for him. If a permanent spirit a white cloth is placed on his face while drum and dancing casts the spirit out of him..

6.5 Myths (Creation):

n/a

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

Music and dance are an important part of Giriama ritual. Drums are often used to ward off evil.

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect: Most are Islam or Christian but, still practice traditional rituals.

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

believe ancestors go to the afterlife watch over

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

no

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

no

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

The Giriama are a very spiritual people who believe in one god and one devil. They do not believe in reincarnation. They believe that their ancestors watch over and reside with them. They also believe that warring tribes can send demons to possess members of the Giriama.

## 7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

N/a

7.2 Piercings:

n/a

7.3 Haircut:

Women hair often long, men's hair is short or shaved.

7.4 Scarification:

If a suicide has taken place a gourd will be placed on the foot of the grave and tembo or animal blood will be offered to please the ghost of the deceased. Also tembo is often offered to ancestors for protection.

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

nothing specific to the culture

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

During rituals women wear short kilt like skirts, with layers of fabric underneath

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

no

7.8 Missionary effect:

Most have switched to Islam or Christianity, but traditional practices are still recognized

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

## 8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

As the communities are based on age-sets the same is true with siblings. The older the child the higher the rank he enjoys. Also often daughters will raise younger siblings as the mother moves on to other responsibilities.

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

This is not practiced within the Giriama people

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

kinship provides a framework for all primary social interactions. Strong friendships not based on lineage of marriage often use the same kinship terms when referring to one another to strengthen bonds.

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

If a child is born feet first, it is smothered after birth. The reason for this is that it is believed that crops will wither, cattle will die and other misfortunes will fall upon the community.

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