

1. Description

- 1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Isuka (Isukha), Luisukha, Luhya
- 1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): 639-3
- 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): .30, 34.80
- 1.4 Brief history: It is believed that two brothers founded Isuka, and the neighboring Idako tribe.
- 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: A popular trade route has cut through southern Kavirondo for centuries, so the Isuka and neighboring tribes have always maintained a distant familiarity with outside influences. Trade posts from these other countries are present, but interaction is limited. A small trade and hut tax is placed on every male over the age of 16.
- 1.6 Ecology (natural environment): Located in the Kavirondo valley, on the north-east side of Lake Victoria on either side of the equator. The Isuka are in the southern valley, on the Masai Steppe. The area is very hot, and has two rainy seasons per year.
- 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: population: 306,000

2. Economy

- 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): Staple foods are prepared from grain crops, with sorghum and eleusine being the most prominent, along with potatoes. The diet follows the foods that are in season. Famines are rare but do occur due to this pattern.
- 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: cattle and ripe beans are both very important.
- 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Spears used predominantly in hunting. Pit traps are also extremely popular for large game. Many different small traps for catching small animals like birds and rats.
- 2.4 Food storage: Meat is dried and can be kept for up to a year. Other foods are stored in baskets and pottery.
- 2.5 Sexual division of production: Women prepare the food. Some small tasks in production of given to young children, for example, young boys are often selected to turn the spit. A boiled chicken in a special pot is the only food considered appropriate for a man to cook.
- 2.6 Land tenure: Land is traditionally passed from father to son. Between this time there are various ways males can acquire some if not all of the leadership of land. They can be chosen to maintain land, they can stake a claim on unused land, or occasionally be rewarded land for some impressive act.
- 2.7 Ceramics: Pottery is typically traded for with one of the neighboring Luhya speaking tribes.
- 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: Men always eat first. Also a large emphasis is placed on sharing with neighbors. A man with more than one wife must eat some of each wife's meal, but is expected to share the excess with other members of the community. Also when dividing food, the male the greatest portion. If dividing meat, the male will cut off the largest and best cut for himself and then distribute the rest to his family. If he is kind he will also give small pieces of his cut to his children. If after a meal children are still hungry, they most ask their mother secretly for extra food, as not to insult their father's ability to provide for them.
- 2.9 Food taboos: A chicken must be boiled by a man, certain crops must have first-fruit rites performed before consumption, men do not eat meals with women or young children.
- 2.10 Canoes/watercraft? No canoes or watercraft are mentioned.

3. Anthropometry

- 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): approximately 1.7-1.75 meters (male) 1.6 meters (female)
- 3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): approximately 150lbs (male) 110lbs (female)

4. Life History, mating, marriage

- 4.1 Age at menarche (f): around the age of 15
- 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): female- typically within 18 months of marriage. First marriages typically occur when the female is about 18-20. Males can be any age ranging from about 16, until old age.

- 4.3 Completed family size (m and f): A large family is considered ideal, with a delicate balance being maintained between the number of children a woman has, and her ability to keep up with her work. Men typically have many children with many wives.
- 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):
- 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): Early marriage is encouraged so that children are no longer economically dependent on their parents. Girls often resist marriage because they resent having to give up their sexual freedom.
- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: Divorce occurs somewhat often for various reasons such as female adultery, female infertility, lack of sexual attention from the spouse, and inability to produce a male son. More common than divorce though, is the husband marrying another wife and keeping the old wife for the purpose of domestic tasks
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: almost all males/ marriages end up polygynous
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: the dowry of the bride depends on the families economic standing. Dowry's usually include cattle, goats, chickens, and other staple products.
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns: Women cannot inherit property. Possessions are passed from father to son.
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): Females frequently engage in exogamy, by running away and eloping with men from other tribes, or seen as unfit. Endogamy is more common because of the relatively large size of the Isuka population
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized? Conception is seen as a result of the sexual union of the man and wife. If the man is unable to impregnate his wife, he selects his brother to do so.
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows") The female is seen as equally important in conception. If she is unable to conceive, this is typically blamed on a curse, implemented by another jealous woman.
- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? No, conception is more linked with orgasm, which is why the Isuka believe the female will be more likely to conceive after her period, because at that point she will be more sexually receptive, thus more likely to orgasm.
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: rape is not mentioned, however on a couples wedding night, a virgin that resists intercourse will be forced to yield to her husband.
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin) Relatives may not marry. Incest is realized to result in child deformities. Members may not marry anyone whose lineage can be traced to the clans of any of their four grandparents.
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? Females enjoy sexual freedoms until marriage. This is why many girls practice the little knowledge they have of contraception and occasionally abortion.
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: No evidence, typically if the male wants to engage in sexual intercourse with another woman, he does so, and makes her his wife.
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? The males other wives will raise the children.
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades: no couvades, men leave while the woman gives birth unless the delivery is particularly difficult and the woman requests their presence.
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? The husband generally avoids his mother in law out of respect.
- 4.24 Joking relationships?
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: patrilineal descent
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules: incest is considered highly taboo by both males and females.
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Yes the process from courtship to the consummation of marriage is all very ritualistic with many meals, dances, songs, and other performances. The most

important part is the feast at each spouse's family hut, and the marriage rites read to the bride by her maternal uncle. These rites are similar to vows in that they are all different. The main idea is to stress the importance of obeying and pleasing the husband.

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? Names are given during different stages of life. In the beginning there is the pet name that the mother uses for the child, and then the rest of the community adopts. Then in adolescence an informal second name is given. Females receive this name when they go to live with their grandmother and males receive it after their circumcision ceremony. The final name is a very serious ancestral name that has to be thought about for a long time. This name is given to the females after their betrothal ceremony, and males after their circumcision rites.

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) It is preferred but not stressed to occur within the community.

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? Marriages are arranged but not rigid. A couple may choose each other, and then seek approval. If approval is not given, they must either break up, or run away and elope.

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: Fathers want their sons to marry a woman from a rich family, so as to obtain a larger dowry, and fathers want their daughters to marry older men because they are already economically stable.

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: warfare is not mentioned, aside from the occasional hostile relation with a neighboring tribe

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: In group killing does not occur.

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: Out group killing only occurs in the occasional case of a skirmish with another tribe.

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

4.18 Cannibalism?- cannibalism is not practiced.

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: approximately thirty clans per village

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): The Isuka remain stationary, as they are an agricultural society

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): Clan heads are appointed. These heads are picked because of their advanced age, wisdom, reputation as a warrior, and wealth.

5.4 Post marital residence: Married youths stay with their families until the husband establishes a home of his own.

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): Defined boundaries due to previous disputes. The Isuka will defend their land. Trenches, or occasionally stones typically mark off the boundaries.

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): Young children are separate from children ages six to about thirteen. Then teens are separated from children, with the young women living with their grandmother or female elder responsible for their moral upbringing.

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: at a funeral, men close to the deceased will frequently cackle or make obscene gestures in front of the corpse in an effort to comfort the family.

5.8 Village and house organization: Men and women's quarters clearly separate. The huts are large, low walled structures made of timber and clay, with a thatched roof. A large pole in the center acts as support. The inside is divided into rooms. The first room where the guests are received, the second room where the cooking is done, and the third room which is the women's quarters. The back of the hut will have a door, which the women use. If all materials can be assembled beforehand, a hut can be built in four days.

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): The men spend the majority of their time outside of the huts in a porch like area. This is where they eat, rest, and socialize. There are also special areas of their property, sometimes enclosed, sometimes not, where they brew their beer.

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? Elevated sleeping platforms are assembled and used to sleep on.

- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: the Isuka organize themselves by clan.
- 5.12 Trade: The Isuka have been in the middle of a trade route for centuries, so trading with other countries has always been an option. Trading posts are located near the villages. The Isuka do not rely very heavily on these goods, however the presence of other cultures has influenced the Isuka culture.
- 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? Rigid social hierarchies. Elders are held in high esteem, followed by wealthy clansmen. Women are the bottom of the hierarchy. They do not possess the right to own or inherit property.

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

- 6.0 Time allocation to RCR: A great deal of time is spent on RCR. Ceremonies are usually time consuming and elaborate. Song and dance is popular in almost all rituals.
- 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): belief in levels of the supernatural: everyday people can be in possession of harmless magic. Evil people can possess curses or evil magic due to some broken rule or blood associated crime, or specialists who have learned how to wield mystical power. These are medicine men and rain-magicians.
- 6.2 Stimulants: Stimulants are not mentioned however there is a strong emphasis placed on beer consumption in many ceremonies.
- 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):
- Birth: after the child is born the mother and child must enter the hut from the side door, if they were to use the front door, it is believed that the child will die. The infant and mother are then placed in confinement. Two days for a girl, three for a boy. If it is her first born, the child may not nurse for a whole day. The days following consist of visits and presents from family and prominent community members.
- Puberty: male circumcision ceremonies are elaborate affairs that are conducted when the town elders feel that an appropriate amount of time has passed since the last generation of boys were circumcised. The interval is typically three or four years. The circumcision ceremonies are long and complicated, occurring in three stages. The first is preparatory observation of the candidates by the town elders, and the actual operation. The second stage is a healing period in a segregated hut where the boys are instructed in practical and theoretical knowledge. The final stage is the celebration with the feast of coming of out seclusion, which involves food and dancing and songs.
- Death: Death is seen as the end of life in body, but the spirit continues to be a presence. When an Isuka member takes a turn for the worst, often they are moved from hut to hut in hopes of leaving the sickness behind. When death is inevitable, the proper place for a man to die is under the partition in front of the mans house. The mans brother is responsible for killing a cow, and distributing its stomach meat. The stomach is eaten with the idea that if a person was responsible for putting a curse on the dying man, the stomach meat will make him sick and he will die. The moment the man dies, a wailing ceremony begins, which basically consists of all the people in the yard of the dying man breaking out in wails and cries. Days later the corpse is displayed for a final viewing. At this point mourners will sing a variety of mourning songs. The dead is then buried in a deep grave. Burial time is usually in the morning, or in late afternoon when the sun sets for a person of higher standing.
- Seasonal: There are first fruit rites for practically every crop cultivated. Each will consist of songs or dances, and a feast. The feast will have a prescribed order where the highest members or the community will feast first.
- 6.4 Other rituals: Quail trapping is an important skill passed from father to son. This can only be done during certain months.
- 6.5 Myths (Creation):
- 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): There are many songs sung in Isuka communities. Songs will be sung for rain ceremonies, funerals, weddings, betrothal feasts, circumcision ceremonies, and births.
- 6.7 Sex differences in RCR: If a man's wife dies he may court a new wife soon after her death, however a woman is expected to mourn for a longer period of time, and wear mourning ribbons, before she can take a new husband.

- 6.8 Missionary effect: Missionaries have passed through the kavirondo region repeatedly. Some Christianity is present in Isuka communities, however it is usually interpreted in a way that ties in native beliefs.
- 6.9 RCR revival:
- 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: The Isuka believe that the dead are still living spiritually, and often interacting in the community. For instance if an infant is particularly fussy, it is believed that this is a deceased ancestor that wants the child to skip the first two naming stages and take their ancestral name.
- 6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?
- 6.12 Is there teknonymy? No teknonymy, names follow the three stages of naming.
- 6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.) Ancestor worship and magic are the primary belief systems. Ancestors are believed to be alive spiritually, interacting in the community. Magic is believed to be possessed by anyone, however it can be harmless, evil, or perfected by a spiritual leader, such as the rain-magicians, who are called upon to create rain for the crops. Christianity has had some influence at the beginning of 1900 as missionaries began passing through Kenya.

7. Adornment

- 7.1 Body paint: Occasional painting for ceremonial dances.
- 7.2 Piercings: No piercings
- 7.3 Haircut: Hair cut close to the scalp
- 7.4 Scarification: Occasional sacrifice of chickens, cattle, or quail.
- 7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): Very little adornment for ceremonies. Mostly prop usage such as large leaves covering the bodies for certain dances, large sticks used as staffs, special drum like instruments for the rain-magicians ceremonies.
- 7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:
- 7.7 Sex differences in adornment: Mostly male adornment. Women wear mourning ribbons after the death of a husband.
- 7.8 Missionary effect: The villages exposed to Christianity show even less use of adornment.
- 7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

- 8.1 Sibling classification system:
- 8.2 Sororate, levirate: levirate is not obligatory for marriage, but occurs frequently. If while the husband is alive he proves to be sterile, it is expected that his brother will impregnate his wife.
- 8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

The sexual freedom among unmarried girls. Young women are allowed to engage in promiscuous sexual activity so long as it is not with an excessive number of men, gaining them the reputation of a “wanton woman”.

The extensive ceremonies performed without any elaborate adornment or accessories.

The many varieties of beer. Men formulate a variety of beers, and ferment some for a shorter period of time to make the weaker “women’s brew”

Numbered references

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2. Wagner, Günter, and Lucy Philip Mair. *The Bantu of Western Kenya: With Special Reference to the Vugusu and Logoli*. London, NY: Published for the International Institute by Oxford UP, 1970. Print.
3. www.ethnologue.com