

1. Description

- 1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Lega/Balega (AKA Warega in early literature) also “Leka” and “Idega” or bantu language called “Kilega”
- 1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): D25
- 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): -2.70/27.30 ... “Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo”
- 1.4 Brief history: The Lega have origins in Uganda, displaced by other groups over time their locations changed. They dispersed and resettled in an area surrounded by Arab centers in the “valleys of the middle and upper Elila and Upper Ulindi Rivers.” Lega were under domination of 2 Arab auxiliaries to the Congo Free State. In the 1890’s the Belgian administration took over the area. Effective occupation by Belgium began in 1902 and the 1st Protestant missions arrived in 1922. Mining centers were established between 1923 and 1934 where many Lega earned a living. The Congo gained its independence in the 1960’s.
- 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: The Lega have been surrounded by diverse and numerous ethnic units with whom they often met and traded goods, culture, and information. Bembe and Lega cultures share clan names indicating genealogical ties. The territorial boundary between the two cultures is fluid. In the South and West the Lega are historically and biologically related to the Bangubangu with whom they have joking relationships. The Lega and Bangubangu also share a mutual respect – when one dies in the other’s territory, they pay a “death payment” of shells or tools.
- 1.6 Ecology (natural environment): “Dense equatorial or tropical rainforest” dominates Lega home ranges as well as “large patches of forest, grasslands, and moist woodlands.” There are few seasonal changes in this area, it is hot and humid with average temperatures in the mid 70’s and 80’s Fahrenheit. Rainfall is 60 to 80 inches annually. The dry season lasts from June to August. As mentioned above, the area is encompassed by the Elila and Ulindi rivers. Animals common to the region include the monkey, leopard, antelope, elephants, and buffaloes, as well as rare species like the aardvark, warthog, hornbill, flying squirrel, and giant snails.
- 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: population ~ 225,000, mostly rural, working in the mining centers, missions, and some urban centers in the Congo. Rural density is 2.77/km². Three territories dominate the area: Mwenga, Shabunda, and Pangi ... population density of the three territories ranges from 3.14/km² to 8.95/km² for both rural and urban combined. *Pre-Independence data taken by the Belgian colonial administration.
“Politically non-centralized Lega divide themselves into Patriclans – 4 genealogical groupings of clans exist”: Mwenda-Liga complex in the North and East, Kabango complex in the South, Beia-Bene complex in the West, and the Kisi of the North.

2. Economy

- 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): bananas, cassava, taro, yams, corn, beans, and pumpkin.
- 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Hunting and trapping play a major role in the economy. They target a variety of wild game including elephants, buffalo, wild pigs, monkeys, antelope, and hedgehogs. Fishing is done using both the bait-tackle method and nets (men use large nets across a stream or waterway to trap fish while women use smaller nets to catch the trapped fish.) The Lega are agricultural and also grow protein-rich foods like peanuts.
- 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Knives and other tools are used for butchering but they also make use of spears, knives, and axes.
- 2.4 Food storage: The Lega use the slash and burn technique of agricultural production and rely mostly on the exportation of bananas. Production depends on personal initiative. They are fond of using hunter-gatherer methods to supplement their diet and focus on gathering nut-like fruits, termites, caterpillars, larvae, and honey. Short-term storage may take place within the home but long-term storage is not as common. The village has no granaries, women plant bananas in the space next to the village.
- 2.5 Sexual division of production: Men do much of the hunting and trapping. Both sexes participate in fishing and planting/burning crops. Women harvest, prepare meals, and take charge of the majority of domestic responsibilities.
- 2.6 Land tenure: “The Lega divide the agricultural year into 2 parts:” the dry and wet seasons. Bullhook knives are used to clear undergrowth then they set fire to trees and roots that cannot be cleared with axes. Banana shoots are planted as new clearings are made available. “Little attention is paid to cleaning or weeding, fruits are collected as the plants mature.”
- 2.7 Ceramics: Clay and soapstone may be used to make tools and art, however, wood, ivory, and bone are more common. They use these materials to create masks, figurines, spoons, jewelry, knives, hammers, axes, spears, and pegs.
- 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: Game meat is always shared amongst groups in accordance with the size of the animal and its socio-ritual classification (see below).
- 2.9 Food taboos: Men and women partake of different types and cuts of meat (this excludes elderly women who may share cuts with men.) Animals forbidden to women include the black antelope, sheep, chicken and eggs.
- 2.10 Canoes/watercraft? As the Lega territory includes two major rivers, they are proficient raft-builders.

3. Anthropometry

- 3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):
- 3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

4. Life History, mating, marriage

- 4.1 Age at menarche (f):
- 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):
- 4.3 Completed family size (m and f): The larger the family the better, men want to have many children to obtain economic success and support, therefore they marry several wives.
- 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):
- 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):
- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: Most marriages are polygamous due to the desire for lots of children.
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: “Marriages are based on the transfer of matrimonial goods. There are approximately 4 phases of matrimonial arrangements made before marriage bonds are established” in Lega culture. However, “a woman is never fully incorporated into her husband’s lineage.” In-Laws maintain ties reinforced by gift-giving which is reciprocal – there is no specified bride-price.
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns: Inheritance is patrilineal – eldest sons and brothers heirs, the Lega also practice widow inheritance.
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): The Lega are generally endogamous and prefer to marry within the cultural unit or within neighboring cultures sharing a past genealogy.
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin) “There is a preferred marriage with classificatory granddaughters – girls belonging to the secondary and primary lineages that are thought to be junior in the clan structure to the man’s lineage.”
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? “women in a polygamous marriage are ranked by seniority and direct the internal affairs of the domestic group” – the other wives care for the child of the deceased mother... or, if the mother is unwed, the child belongs to her agnatic group.
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? All Lega juniors are classified as “muto” (junior) and all seniors are “yeya” (an honorific term). There are 2 types of seniority: “bukulu (greatness) which is determined by rank and “kubutoa” (to be born; age) which is determined by birth/chronology. The brother of one’s mother (uncle) is respected and honored. The relationship is open, he act as a protector, guide, and counselor. Relationships between cross cousins in friendly and open but sex and marriage is strictly prohibited. A man may marry a woman on his mother’s side, of lesser rank than his mother, but not from the father’s side.
- 4.24 Joking relationships? Joking relationships occur between genealogically related clans like the Bangubangu and within clans – particularly among a father’s junior sisters (but not senior ones) ... between grandfathers and kin, non-related grandmothers (joking between one’s own mother’s mother or father’s mother is not ok.) Joking IS permitted between a man and his oldest brother’s wife (eldest sister-in-law) and between a woman and her oldest sister’s husband (eldest brother-in-law) that is sexual in nature and may suggest physical contact.
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations: Descent lineages are patrilineal, a child of an unwed or partially wed woman belongs to the agnatic group of its mother instead of its father, unless a special payment is made.
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules Incest avoidance among the Lega occurs between cross-cousins, between siblings, and amongst parents and their children. “The prevailing principle is that individuals who are agnatic descendants in the 5th generation from a common male ancestor cannot intermarry. Beyond this point kinship is finished and marriage becomes theoretically possible.” Marriage between secondary and tertiary levels is not encouraged, however in some cases this can be remedied by the sacrifice of a goat.
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? Formal marriage ceremonies include rituals and the giving/receiving of goods – though, a wife is never completely integrated into the husband’s family.
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? Genealogy is extremely important amongst the Lega. Clans are known by a common patrilineal name passed down through marriage and male heirs.
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) Marriage is preferred to occur within a community or related neighboring tribes.
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? Marriages are not formally arranged, however it is emphasized that they should take place within a clan to the closest possible/allowable relative.
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: fictive kinship sometimes occurs among the Lega, sometimes the presence of fictive kinship in a society is evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who – changing relationship status creates mates by eliminating incest taboos.

Warfare/homicide

Lega distinguish 3 kinds of violence: simple brawl, one on one violence, and violence between groups.

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: There is a clear distinction between Lega in group and out group warfare. Out-group violence is preferred (in-group violence will get you expelled from secret-societies within the Lega.) The 2 out group individuals duel in a neutral location then, the victor pays a close female relative of agnatic decent to the defeated party – given to their closest agnate.
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: Historically, out group violence took place between the Lega and Arab slave raiders. In the later period, warfare resulted when Arabs conducted random killing of Lega elders. In group warfare is usually the result of ambush killings. The offended party initiates battle on 2 opposing hills facing one another and then engages in a real fight – using spears, bows and arrows, and sharp sticks.
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): Numerous neighboring cultures exist outside Legaland many of which share distant biology with the Lega.
- 4.18 Cannibalism?

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): The Lega organize themselves in clans based on patrilineal genealogy and a headman, as well as social hierarchy.
- 5.4 Post marital residence: Post marital residence is with the husband’s family, and the village structure is usually organized by gender.
- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): Lega villages are surrounded by a wall with only 1 opening. This opening is shut at night and attached to a bell on a string located in the nearest bedroom.
- 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): Villages are divided by sex and status – a men’s house resides at one end of the village, some choice elder women are allowed in the men’s houses.
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: SEE PREVIOUS – I mean really, this is getting redundant.
- 5.8 Village and house organization: Lega villages (kyumos) are usually built on hills in a clear area. Trees and foliage is cut to create a natural fence that will lie beyond 2 parallel rows of houses. These are similar to longhouses and the space between them forms a kind of Main Street, dance floor, and public place. Trails depart from the village into the forest, the village is fortified by a high fence made of long poles juxtaposed close together. The long, rectangular houses are built against one another and follow this generalized floor plan: A middle room with a front and back door, sleeping rooms on the interior sides (the number of which depends on the quantity of wives). One of the bedrooms may be connected with a storeroom where shell money and other personal effects are kept. Houses are separated by kitchens with no front wall but a back one and back door. Lattice-work is used to create walls and roofs, “symbolically the Lega see a direct relationship between the arrangement of scales on the back of the pangolin and their way of placing phrynum leaves on the roofs – the pangolin is a culture hero who taught the Lega how to cover a house.” Sometimes as separate smaller version of the long house in constructed for elder single individuals. Men and women use separate toilets outside of the village. Camps are constructed while hunting or gathering. The most important villages are constructed for bwami (secret society) initiations or kindi rites.

- 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): A men's house is built at one end of the village, it is oval in structure with a roof that projects beyond its sides. It has 4 entrances on 4 sides and there are elaborate rules as to who can enter, which door they use, and where village office holders sit.
- 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? Furniture is simple; beds are made of layers of poles covered with mats.
- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: "Because of repetitive marriages and the prevalence of unions between members of the same clan, cognatic relationships are frequently built into agnatic ones, resulting in particularly complex interpersonal and intergroup connections. There is constant social, economic, political, and ritual interaction among members of the various groups." The Lega are subdivided into clans which are named, nonexogamous, nontotemic patrilineal groupings of males and females. Clans are localized units subdivided into a number of genealogical levels – generally there are 3 basic levels. Most Lega can trace their ancestry to 10 generations, some to as many as 15. Some genealogical groupings have partly fictive uni-lineal structure. A special bond of group cohesion, expressed in ritual, marriage, and economic cooperation, may exist between lineages. ALSO SEE 4.25 and 4.26 ABOVE
- 5.12 Trade: Frequently occurs between nearby tribes and villages, sometimes in the form of gift-giving, trade is also inherent in exportation of goods (mainly food) to other countries.
- 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? "The Lega form a stateless society, there are no hereditary chiefs." *However, the bwami association prevails and dictates social hierarchy.* There is a headman "mukota" chosen according to character and "heart" who is succeeded by his brothers or sons. There is a 'vice president' type of headman called the sakuzinda who acts as a counselor or substitute. Wives and in-laws enjoy benefits of rank by being related to the headman. ALSO SEE 4.24 (kinship respect)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

- 6.0 Time allocation to RCR: If bwami (secret society) initiation is considered amongst RCR, then it can be assumed that 100% of an initiate's time is devoted to RCR since bwami is believed to permeate all aspects of life and society.
- 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): The Lega have a number of magical beliefs including divination, sorcery, and magico-therapeutic actions.
- 6.2 Stimulants:
- 6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): "Circumcision is not merely a ritual but a systematic education and training in values, techniques, and behavior patterns. It is the initial stage that leads to the moral perfection achieved at the highest levels of bwami. No uncircumcised male can enter the bwami association. Bwami is the perpetual search for moral excellence, beauty, prestige, wealth, authority, and power – it is the goal of Lega life. In theory it is open to everyone; in practice most males and many of their wives achieve some level of bwami." (Female circumcision is no longer practiced among the Lega due to the number of deaths resulting from clitorrectomy.)
- 6.4 Other rituals: Eliminating evil (see 6.7 below) involves divination, the beating of drums, and sacrificial food. Offerings are also given to ensure hunting success.
- 6.5 Myths (Creation): The Lega have no elaborate myths or cosmology which is in contrast to other Congo populations. The bwami association is comparable to a form of secularized religion. A trinity of beings rule over the world and people's affairs – Kinkunga "the Joiner" and father (male element) of the primordial human couple, Kalaga "the Advisor" (female element) instructs during a trip or new activity, and finally, Kaginga "evil and misfortune" the opposite of both Kinkunga and Kalaga.
- 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Most all art forms are used by thousands of Lega for the purpose of bwami initiations. The Lega have a rich oral literature comprising of folk stories, epics, riddles, proverbs, aphorisms and songs. Basic themes are death, magic, kinship, continuity, elder respect, power, women, and morality – to name a few. Initiations are also accompanied by music, dance, and gesture, as well as display and manipulation of objects – both natural and manmade. Lega artwork is small and portable, it is recondite, tactile, stylized and abstract, polysemous, and multifunctional.
- 6.7 Sex differences in RCR: The Lega conceive of all females as potential sorcerers, but only a few men as such. Furthermore, Kinkunga represents the male, the phallus and Kalaga represents the female, the vulva. The ancestors activate "bunene" whereas sorcerers and witches activate "bwanya. Divination is a male technique for locating and neutralizing evil.
- 6.8 Missionary effect: Missionaries did not enter the region until the 1920's and have diminished in population since the 1960's when the Congo gained independence; the implications of this being that missionaries have had little effect on the religion and spiritual expression of the Lega culture.
- 6.9 RCR revival: As missions have decreased Lega have been free to practice their own traditions of ritual and religion.
- 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: The ancestors are at the center of the religious system. They possess power that can influence the conflict between the dichotomy of good and evil.
- 6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?
- 6.12 Is there teknonymy? Children (and wives) are referred to by their father's name, not the other way around. So, it is unlikely that teknonymy exists.
- 6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.) Ancestor worship, magic, and some animism is most prevalent in Lega culture. "The praising of people and animals and the transmission of messages on wooden drums are of signal importance in bwami rites." SEE PREVIOUS. The most important socio-religious unit is the bwami (secret society) association which saturates all aspects of everyday life. The bwami initiation is believed to make people good and render them immune to evil.

7. Adornment

- 7.1 Body paint: white body paint is used to signify bwami rank, insignia may differ according to clan or traditional culture.
- 7.2 Piercings: not common
- 7.3 Haircut: most men and women keep the hair very short and close to the scalp. Men either wear the hair completely bald or with a "receding" hairline effect – bald in front with dreadlocks pulled back away from the face using a headdress or woven strap.
- 7.4 Scarification:
- 7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): skullcaps, headdresses, beaded diadems, head ornaments, necklaces of leopard teeth, ivory bracelets, plaited belts and cowrie shell belts, masks, and various portable figurines adorn Lega peoples. Most if not all of these have socio-religious significance associated with the bwami tradition.
- 7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: most if not all adornment is related to bwami and is indicative of initiation rank as well as gender.
- 7.7 Sex differences in adornment: women tend to wear the button-covered diadem, different heights indicate status. Men wear headdresses, the elephant tail indicating the highest ranking individual.
- 7.8 Missionary effect: Little to none.
- 7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

- 8.1 Sibling classification system: siblings and cousins are classified under one term – mubitu.
- 8.2 Sororate, levirate: not necessary for the Lega due to widow inheritance
- 8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Numbered references – For further (far more extensive) information:

1. Biebuyck, Daniel P.
1973 *Lega Culture: Art, Initiation, and Moral Philosophy Among a Central African People*. Berkely and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
2. Biebuyck, Daniel P.
2002 *Lega: Ethics and Beauty in the Heart of Africa*. Brussel, Belgium: KBC Bank and Insurance Holding Company.