

Nyala

1. Description

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

The name of the society, language, and language family is Nyala. This language family is also known by the name Luhya, West Nyala, and East Nyala. (ethnologue.com)

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

The ISO code for Nyala is nle. (ethnologue.com)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

0.4333° N, 34.1500° E

1.4 Brief history:

There are 18 tribes of Nyala/Luhya in Kenya and 4 in Uganda. Most of these tribes are of the belief that their ancestors migrated from Egypt. Scholars believe that when the Nyala refer to Egypt they are referring to places along the Nile around modern Sudan and Ethiopia. The first contact they had with “white people” was when H.M. Stanley was traveling around Lake Victoria. The tribes had a leader, whom they called King Nabongo Mumia. He began a trade agreement with the “white man” Joseph Thomson in 1883. This opened up regions of Europe to Nyala peoples and shortly after there were several skirmishes that came to be known as the War of Chetambe. The Nyala people were unique in that they had a King. It was uncommon for Bantu people to have that form of government. In fact, Mumia was the last king and by outsiders (the British) was not even considered a king; they called him a chief. In 1984, there were ethnic clashes between the Nyala (Luhya) and Nandi due to land disputes. Beginning in March of 1994 there were reports of more skirmishes between the Nyala, Kalenjin, Luo, and Kisii, rumored to have begun because of cattle rustling. Continuing into April of '92 the fighting began to get more intense, and in July of 1992, the Luhya mounted an attack against a Kalenjin village. Ten Kalenjin were killed, and in retaliation 500 Kalenjin attacked a Luhya village. Late in '92 it was rumored that the government had been training Kalenjin and giving them weapons and armour to drive out other ethnic groups. In December of that year nearly 15,000 Luhya and Kikuyus had to flee their homes as Kalenjin came through burning their homes. Fighting has continued to this day, however the Luhya have seemed to stay out of the worst of it. (orvillejenkins.com and unhcr.org)

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

The United Kingdom has always been a big influence, as the British were the first people to open trade routes from the Lake Victoria area (heavily populated by Nyala peoples) to Europe. Nyala peoples have tried to stay out of the political conflict the Kenyan president (Moi) has stirred up since his “takeover” in the late 80s. In the early 90s the tribe was forced to flee from their homes due to violent government takeovers, however from the mid to late 90s they have successfully stayed out of the conflict and quietly gone about their lives. Because President Moi banned many outsiders access to the country there have been no missionaries coming in. Education in Kenya is decent: (Nyala) people have access to primary schools, however upon reaching secondary school and college it becomes very expensive for most to send their children to school. However, quality teachers are low, and the educational system has been accused of cheating. (orvillejenkins.com and everyculture.com)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

Nyala peoples are centered in the country of Kenya. The natural environment of Kenya is diverse, including Mount Kenya (at a height of 17, 058 feet), and at the opposite end of the spectrum the

Great Rift Valley that runs through the highlands of Kenya. The homeland of the Nyala peoples also boasts Lake Victoria, which feeds the Nile River. Nyala speakers also enjoy a wide range of wildlife: lions, zebras, elephants, antelope, giraffes, and wildebeests roam the country. Sadly, due to over hunting and human expansion wildlife has begun to see a decline (everyculture.com).

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

The population size of Nyala speakers is 35,000 people. (WolframAlpha.com)

Mean village size is never mentioned in precise numbers, however information suggests that Nyala speakers don't live in small villages much anymore; they are referred to as a "supertribe" suggesting that they have all moved to the same area (without forming villages). A smaller (but still large) population occupies part of Uganda as well with the same happening; no villages (books.google.com; google scholar).

Noting that most of the Nyala peoples reside in Kenya, the size of Kenya covers 224,961 square miles. Nyala (or Luhya) peoples make up about 14% of the population, making them the second densest population (everyculture.com).

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

The main carbohydrate staple of Nyala peoples is corn. They use it many different ways: they grind it into flour and make it into a porridge, which is then mixed with mashed beans, potatoes, and vegetables. They call this dish "irio" (everyculture.com).

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Although popular, meat for beef stew (which they call "ugali") is hard to obtain. Boiled greens and banana porridge are also common side dishes. Fish is popular around the coast, and those who herd cattle rely on milk. For celebrations/special occasions, it is a custom to kill and roast a goat; sheep and cow are also served (everyculture.com).

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

The Nyala peoples are not a hunter-gatherer society and have no need of hunting weapons. Most either farm or are herders where weapons are not required in order to provide for the family (everyculture.com).

2.4 Food storage:

There is no mention of how Nyala speakers store their food.

2.5 Sexual division of production:

For herders: men are responsible for the care of animals. Women take care of household duties.

For farmers: both men and women work in the fields, but women also take care of the children, keep an additional vegetable garden, cook/clean, fetching water, and taking food to the market to sell. Men also tend to leave their (rural) communities to look for jobs in the city. Women who live in the city are more likely to take jobs outside of the home (everyculture.com).

2.6 Land tenure:

Despite there being many different tribes and groups the Kenyan government is the authority; under British rule native peoples (Nyala included) were forced to work plantations. After independence, the government divided up the land into small farms, known as "shambas", and gave one to each family (everyculture.com).

2.7 Ceramics:

The women of the Nyala tribe make pottery, and ivory and gold are also used to sculpt ornamentations such as necklaces and bracelets. Basket weaving is also popular among the women (everyculture.com).

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

There is no mention of sharing patterns. However, in something possibly relating to it: whenever one visits a home, tea or other refreshment is always offered, and it is considered rude to refuse what a family offers to share (everyculture.com)

2.9 Food taboos:

There was no information specifically addressing taboos, however because Nyala are so influenced by all the other ethnicities around them, there seem to be no foods that are forbidden to eat (foodbycountry.com).

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

Information about watercraft was hard to find, however because it is mentioned that some Nyala people live on the shores of Lake Victoria, it is assumed that those people have some kind of watercraft to out fishing in since fish is their main food staple.

3. Anthropometry

*The original study for this took place in Sudan, but researchers used different regions, and considered Nyala peoples part of West Sudan.

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

The male mean adult height (20 years and older) is 172.4 cm, and the female mean adult height (20 years and older) is 161.3 cm (emro.who.int).

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

The male mean adult weight (20 years and older) is 65.6 kg, and the female mean adult height (20 years and older) is 57.7 kg (emro.who.int).

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

There is no specific age mentioned, but anywhere from 13 to 15 is normal.

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

Nothing is mentioned at what age males and females are encouraged to begin a family, although I assume that as soon as they can especially if they live in rural areas and need help farming or herding.

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

Extended families are thought of as part of the close family unit. This goes for both males and females. They can get as large as 10 to 12 huts (everculture.com).

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

No mention of inter-birth intervals.

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

There is no mention of this however, I would again assume that the earlier a couple gets married, the sooner they can start a family and get help working and in the house.

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

No statistics on this.

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

There was no specific percentage given, but it is common for men to have more than one wife, although in more recent years with Christian missionaries and few men in the economy now are able to support more than one wife (everyculture.com).

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

When the man has chosen his wife, he then discusses a bride price with the woman's father. The bride price usually includes cattle or money. The bride price of the first wife is generally higher than proceeding wives (everyculture.com)

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

Following traditions, inheritance passes from father to son. Not only are there legal, but there are cultural impediments that keep women from inheriting anything (everyculture.com).

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

The father is expected to build a hut for each wife and thus their children. In the case of the man having only one wife (much more common today) the man builds separate smaller huts around his larger hut for his older sons. The children are expected to help provide for the family (everyculture.com).

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

If a young man has sexual feeling toward another male, then there are actions taken to try and "cure" it. It is not acceptable in Nyala culture (books.google.com).

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

No results were found for this, but based on Nyala culture, I would say that endogamy would be practiced. It would not be within the family, but with other Nyala speakers.

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?

There is only one father recognized, and he is expected to help provide for his children (everyculture.com).

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

There is no specific information for this, however because the government of Kenya is such a large influence as well as Christian missionaries, I would assume that most Nyala speakers know scientifically about precreation and women's role in it.

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

For the same reason above, I believe that it is not.

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

Again, no information provided for this however, because of the continued civil wars there is occurrence of rape (unhcr.org).

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

Nothing specific is mentioned, but they don't marry within the family. They marry within the Nyala peoples though.

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

It is frowned upon for females to enjoy sexual relations outside of their own marriage.

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

There is no evidence of this.

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

Girls begin learning at a young age how to take care of children, not only for when they grow up and have children of their own, but in the case of their mother's death (everyculture.com).

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

No specific statistics, but assuming because of the evidence of polygynous marriages in the past (4 to 6 wives per man) there are more reproductive females than there are males, even with evidence nowadays that it is more common for a man to have only one wife.

4.22 Evidence for couvades

No evidence of couvades.

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

No evidence for different distinctions.

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

No research on this, however I assume that there is always a respect for elders, and others in the family.

4.24 Joking relationships?

No mention of joking relationships.

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

All patterns of descent are patrilineal (everyculture.com).

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

No mention of incest rules, but because of the influence of missionaries I would assume that there are at least rules about incest.

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

There is a formal marriage ceremony. It is held in the husband's house, along with the following feast. The marriage and feast can last up to 8 days (everyculture.com).

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

Names are inherited from family, or changed when the person gets married.

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

Marriage is not preferred within a "village" or a family group (incest), however they do marry within their culture (language) group. This is not mentioned specifically however, and they probably have rules that have not been researched.

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

There is no evidence of arranged marriages. Most resources say that the man picks his wife (or wives) (everyculture.com).

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

No evidence for this.

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

There is no specific statistics, however many have died over the years due to civil war, and even though it is not as prevalent today as it was in the 80s and 90s, many still die from war (unhcr.org).

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

There are statistics on this either, however over the years it seems like an equal number from both out-group and in-group have died violent deaths (unhcr.org).

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

Causes include war, border disputes, property disputes (unhcr.org).

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

The Nyala peoples have relationships with their neighboring societies when living in rural areas, and if they live in the city they have no choice but to interact with them. There is no specific number (unhcr.org).

4.18 Cannibalism?

No evidence of cannibalism.

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

Nyala peoples do not necessarily live in villages; they live in extended family groups which can consist of anywhere from 15-30 people (everyculture.com).

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

No evidence of seasonal mobility, however Nyala peoples that are herders follow their cattle (everyculture.com).

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

Nyala peoples were the only peoples to once have a king. Now however, they function as extended family units with no obvious single leader (orvillejenkins.com).

5.4 Post marital residence:

Once a woman is married, she will move in with her husband if she is his only wife, but if he has more than one then he will build of his wives a separate hut for her and their children (everyculture.com).

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

There is no mention of designed boundaries, however there are border disputes (unhcr.org).

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

No mention of specific relationships between different ages or sexes.

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

No mention of joking relationships.

5.8 Village and house organization:

Each "village" (if they live in rural areas) are made of a group of huts of the extended family (everyculture.com).

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

If a man has multiple wives his hut will usually be situated in the center of the circle of his wives' huts (everyculture.com).

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

Nyala peoples sleep in huts they make themselves (everyculture.com).

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

There is no set organization that I could find.

5.12 Trade:

Trade first began with Europe when a trade route was set up in the 1800s (orvillejenkins.com).

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

None, except for each family unit that has an unrecognized leader (mainly in rural areas) (everyculture.com).

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

There is no specific statistics, however since a majority of the Nyala people are greatly under governmental or missionary influence many have been converted to Protestant or Catholic, therefore going to church on Sundays, maybe Saturday evening services and such. For those who still practice traditional rituals and ceremonies there are specific events every year at which these are held or in times of great need (everyculture.com)

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

Nyala people call their shamans, "diviners". They use their powers for good, such as to bring rain after a drought. They also have witches and sorcerers however, they believe that these people use their powers for evil (everyculture.com)

6.2 Stimulants:

There is no mention of stimulants used, but the tribe could very easily be using natural plants that grow near them.

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

Rituals are very important, and there is a ritual that initiates boys and girls to adulthood or when they are of an age to marry. Age differs for this ritual, but can happen as early as 12 for girls and as late as 18 for boys (everyculture.com).

6.4 Other rituals:

No mention of rituals per se, however other secular ceremonies celebrated are: New Year's Day (1st January), and Labor Day (1st May). They also celebrate Madaraka Day, Moi Day (president's day), Independence Day, and Kenyatta Day. Not all of these are celebrated in each group, however these are popular ones to celebrate (everyculture.com).

6.5 Myths (Creation):

I could find no myths on creation.

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

As a country, Kenya is very supportive of the arts. Because many Nyala peoples live in the city, they do practice art, and might be involved in the national traveling theatre company. They practice sculpture and wood-carving, along with carvings done in ivory and gold. Dancing is particularly important as it gives a chance to express themselves (everyculture.com).

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

No mention of this.

6.8 Missionary effect:

Missionaries have been a large influence in Nyala culture. Very few practice older traditions on a regular basis anymore (orvillejenkins.com).

6.9 RCR revival:

No mention of a revival.

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

Nyala peoples that when one dies, they enter the spirit world. They also believe that the spirit world has enormous influence over the living. Children are considered to be the embodiment of the souls of the family's ancestors (everyculture.com).

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

No mention of a taboo such as this.

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

No evidence of teknonymy.

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

There is little description of traditional religion. Most of traditional religion information I gathered had to do with diviners (see above). Everything else centered around the Catholic Church (everyculture.com).

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

No mention of body paint.

7.2 Piercings:

Many women have at least their ears pierced (everyculture.com).

7.3 Haircut:

Both men and women usually have short haircuts mainly due to the heat (everyculture.com).

7.4 Scarification:

No mention of scarification.

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

Many men wear headdresses to claim their social or marital status. Women wear headbands, and necklaces and “neck rings” – these also signify if they are married or not, and if they have children (everyculture.com).

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

No mention of what is worn during the ceremonies.

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

Men wear headdresses and are not likely to wear necklaces. Women do not wear headdresses. Both sexes may have their ears pierced, however it is more common for women to (everyculture.com).

7.8 Missionary effect:

Missionaries have been a large influence in Nyala culture. Very few practice older traditions on a regular basis anymore (orvillejenkins.com).

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

No mention of this.

8. Kinship systems:

See section 5.

8.1 Sibling classification system:

Most cousins and aunts and uncles are considered brothers, sisters and parents respectively.

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

No mention of either.

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

None that is mentioned in any research I could find.

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

None that I could find.

Numbered references

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