Kongo/Bakongo
1. Description
1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Kongo/Bakongo, Language KiKongo (central Bantu)
1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): kwy
1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): 4° 15' S   15° 15' E
1.4 Brief history: "The Kongo peoples migrated into their current location during the 13th century from the northeast under the leadership of Wene. In 1482 the Portuguese arrived on the coast, and the Kongo began diplomatic relations which included sending Kongo nobles to visit the royal assemblage in Portugal in 1485. Kongo leaders were targeted for conversion by Christian missionaries, and often divisions between followers of Christianity and followers of the traditional religions resulted. In 1526 the Portuguese were expelled, but the Kongo peoples were then invaded by the Jagas in 1568, and the Kongo were forced to look to the Portuguese for help. The Kongo kingdom never regained its former power. In the ensuing years the Kongo alternatively fought for and against the Portuguese, eventually being colonized in 1885. The Kongo political party Abako played an important part in national independence in 1960." (1)
1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: "The Christian mission that invaded the Kongo during the Free State Era gave rise to many congregations and conferences, as well as to schools, hospitals, seminaries, and other specialized institutions. It has brought about the overwhelming christianization of the Kongo people, however, most Kongo Christians still subscribe to the fundamental tenents of the Kongo religion and worldview." (2)
1.6 Ecology (natural environment): "Climate: 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). Terrain: Vast central basin is a low-lying plateau; mountains in east." (9)
1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density "BaKongo predominate in the many towns of their home region but are also found in towns and cities throughout their respective countries. In their own rural areas, BaKongo live in scattered villages varying in population from a few dozen to a few hundred persons." (8)

2. Economy
2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): "The Kongo cultivate cassava, bananas, corn (maize), sweet potatoes, peanuts (groundnuts), beans, and taro." (4)
2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: "Fishing and hunting are still practiced by some groups, but many Kongo live and work or trade in towns." (4)
2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:
2.4 Food storage:
2.5 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." (8)

2.6 Land tenure:
2.7 Ceramics:
2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns: "In its heyday the Kingdom exacted taxes, forced labor, and collected fines from its citizens in order to prosper." (1)
2.9 Food taboos:
2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

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 Bakongo family lives as a nuclear unit and is usually monogamous (only one husband and one wife). Although women typically give birth to as many as ten children, diseases and other illnesses cause many of the children to die while they are still infants or toddlers. Nevertheless, children are a sign of wealth, and parents consider themselves blessed to have many children." (6)

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:

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: "The bridegroom pays a bride-price to his wife's family. This payment recognizes the family's loss of a family member and their role in raising her." (5)

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: "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." (6)

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

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") "Procreation and gestation are often likened in central Africa to proper cooking, tending a fire, and serving a meal. Indeed, these metaphors often compare procreation with eating, wombs with hearths, and infertility with theft and violence." (11)

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? "Selfishness with food remains tied to the dangers of mixing the 'waters' (sperm) of multiple lovers with a single pregnancy, and to envious women who enter cabinets to steal menstrual blood and block a neighbor or relative's fertility." (11)

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

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

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?

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? "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." (6)

4.24 Joking relationships?

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

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? "The bride is blessed by all of her relatives, but the most important blessing comes from her father's mother's kanda. This blessing protects the bride from curses and other evils. Without these blessings, the young wife might not be able to have children. The final steps in the Kongo marriage include a feast and dancing." (5)

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

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

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? "Today traditional Kongo marriages are arranged by the families of the betrothed. Both the father's kanda and the mother's kanda must agree to the marriage." (5)

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: "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. Their activities have resulted in repression and massacres, the most recent of these occurred in January 1993 on "Bloody Friday" when between 4,000 and 6,000 Bakongo were killed. Bakongo in Angola are also endangered because the regime links them with the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) rebels. Although Bakongo make up 14 percent of the Angolan population, they hold only 2.5 percent of the seats in the legislature." (6)

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

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): "When the Kongo Kingdom was at its political apex in the 15th and 16th centuries, the King, who had to be a male descendant of Wene, reigned supreme. He was elected by a group of governors, usually the heads of important families and occasionally including Portuguese officials. The activities of the court were supported by an extensive system of civil servants, and the court itself usually consisted of numerous male relatives of the King." (1)

5.4 Post marital residence:

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): "The Kingdom of Kongo was composed of 6 provinces: Mpemba, Mbata, Nsundi, Mpangu, Mbemba and Soyo, plus 4 vassal Kingdoms: Loango, Cacongo and Ngoye, at the North of the N'Zari river, and Ndongo, at the South of the Congo river." (3)

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization: "The villages were often governed by lesser relatives of the King who were responsible to him." (1)

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? "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." (6)

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: "Descent is reckoned through the female line, and kinship is further organized through lineages. The main characteristic of social organization is fragmentation: nearly every village is independent of its neighbours, and almost nothing remains of the ancient Kongo kingdom."

5.12 Trade: "At times, enslaved peoples, ivory, and copper were traded to the Europeans on the coast. The important harbors were Sonyo and Pinda." (1)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? "The Mani Kongo (King of Kongo) was elected by a council of six, headed by the Marquess of Vunta (Mani Kabunga) who was an Infante i.e. a descendant of King Afonso I: generally he was not the son of the dead King and was already recognized as the Nelumbo. The new King had to be crowned by a Catholic priest. In fact, the succession was disputed among 2 lines of descendants of King Afonso I: the Kimulazu and the Kimpanzu." (3)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR: "As constant sources of life and well-being, both the land and the matrilineal ancestors buried in it form the basis of preoccupation in Kongo thought." (2)

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): "When an individual encountered hardship and feared that a spirit had been offended, it would be necessary to consult a diviner (nganga), who would often instruct the afflicted to add medicines to certain nkisi in order to achieve well-being." (1)

6.2 Stimulants: "In the 17th Century, tobacco, the prototypical New World stimulant, was introduced to Africa by European traders. By 1607, tobacco was being cultivated in Sierra Leone, and in 1611 a Swiss doctor commented on how the soldiers of the "Kingdom of Kongo" fought hunger by grinding up tobacco leaves and setting them on fire, "so that a strong smoke is produced, which they inhale." (10)

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

6.4 Other rituals: "All members of government were invested with their power under the auspices of a ritual specialist." (1)

6.5 Myths (Creation): "The Kongo religion centres on ancestor and spirit cults, which also play a part in social and political organization. A strong tradition of prophetism and messianism among the Kongo gave rise in the 20th century to nativistic, political-religious movements." (4)

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): "The most prolific art form from this area is the nkisi objects, which come in all shapes, mediums, and sizes. The stratification of Kongo society resulted in much of the art being geared toward those of high status, and the nkisi figures were one of the only forms available to everyone." (1)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect: "Although the Portuguese attempted to Christianize the Kongo peoples as early as 1485, for the most part people either resisted entirely or incorporated Christian iconography into their own religions." (1)

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: "Death is a passage to the next dimension, the spirit village of the ancestors." (6)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.) "Nzambi was the supreme god for all in the Kongo Kingdom, and the intermediary representations included land and sky spirits and ancestor spirits, all of whom were represented in nkisi objects." (1)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: "As Fu-Kiau (1980) tells us that even today, the Bakongo cosmogram is best understood among women, who on special occasions ritualistically paint their entire body with red ochre to symbolize the fact that it was the female blood that brought this knowledge system to human kin." (7)

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification:

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): "In ancient times, the Bakongo wore clothing made from bark softened by pounding. However, through their long association with the West, the Bakongo have adopted Western clothing. Photographs from the late 1880s show them wearing suits over their sarong (long wraparound skirts). They generally are considered to be very proper dressers by other Congolese. Women adopt the latest local fashions and hairstyles, which change every few months. The mainstay is the African sarong *(pagne).* Many families are forced to buy used clothing at the markets; children typically wear T-shirts, shorts, and loose cotton overshirts for everyday wear." (6)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: After death, "the corpse was dressed in fine clothing and placed in a position recalling his or her trade." (6)

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

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)

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):

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