

# the Digo of Kenya



**LOCATION:** Southeastern Kenya

**POPULATION:** 409,000

**PROGRESS:** 0.1% Christian

**BIBLE TRANSLATION:** New Testament



## PEOPLE GROUP

The Digo are an East African tribe, concentrated on the southern coastal strip of Kenya between Mombasa and the border of Tanzania. It is rather surprising to find that in a country that is largely Christian, the Digo are nearly all Muslim.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Digo experienced a time of great famine. It became a common practice for them to give either themselves or their children as kore, or “blood money,” to serve as temporary collateral for a loan of food. Sadly, there were many times when the debt could not be redeemed, thus leaving them to live as slaves. Many of the Digo who were brought to Mombasa as slaves later obtained their freedom by converting to Islam.

## WHAT ARE THEIR LIVES LIKE?

For many years the Digo have been involved in trade with Muslim Arabs. As a result, they have enjoyed a higher standard of living than most of their neighboring tribes. In addition to trading, farming and fishing are two other sources of income for the Digo. Their principal crop is “manioc,” a small shrub with thick roots that are eaten like potatoes. They also grow sesame, corn, rice, and beans. “Palm wine” is a popular drink produced from the palm tree.

## WHAT ARE THEIR BELIEFS?

Islam is more widely accepted among the Digo than among any of the other Mijikenda tribes. Nevertheless, ties with traditional practices (such as animism and ancestor worship) still have more influence on the Digo community than does Islam. (Animism is the belief that non-human objects have spirits. Ancestor worship is the practice of praying to deceased ancestors for help and guidance.) One example of spiritism is their use of blood sacrifices. Such sacrifices are very significant to the Digo, especially in the exorcism of evil spirits. Witch doctors are also consulted regularly.

Most of the Digo people over forty years of age have no real understanding of the Koran. Only a few of them have studied Islam in any depth, and most of them have only a superficial knowledge of its principles and doctrines. However, its presence among the Digo over the past eighty years has not gone entirely unnoticed. Its existence has altered both religious and political structures. For example, the people have adopted new attire and diets from their Muslim Arab neighbors. Although they know no religious significance for wearing the black veil, Digo women wear it to show respect for their husbands. This nominal identification with the Muslim religion is referred to as “folk Islam.”

## WHAT ARE THEIR NEEDS?

Even though the nation of Kenya is predominantly Christian, the Digo have never been successfully reached with the Gospel. The Old Testament translation into Chidigo has begun and there is a need for literacy training. Also, the religious practices of the Digo are deeply rooted in spiritism and folk Islam. This makes reaching them a very difficult task.



## MINISTRY DESCRIPTION & PLATFORM

You would be joining Kenyan Global Teams Field Partners currently working among the Digo. You would begin your ministry with learning language and culture while looking for open doors and bridges for the Gospel in this people group. You will build interpersonal relationships among the Digo and look for a person of peace. Discovery Bible Studies can be launched and discipleship can begin even before they have come to follow Christ. Since this is a very communal society, you will encourage them to share their questions and what they are learning with family and close friends. You will look for resources, networks and opportunities for partnerships with other organizations and individuals as you develop strategies for multiplying movements among the Digo.

**AVAILABLE PLATFORM:** Teacher. Other platforms can be developed.



*If you are a follower of Christ, have a heart for those who have not yet been reached, are ready and willing to relocate and learn a second language, are excited to build a team in the field with people from other cultures and if you are ready to respond to God's call to go, we are ready to send you.*

Email Jenny at [mobilization@global-teams.org](mailto:mobilization@global-teams.org) or visit <https://www.global-teams.org/letsgo>