

The Jola People of West Africa

A group of young children sat in a huddle, listening to the story of Noah and the ark. Perhaps some of them had heard of the prophet Noah before, but none of them knew his story in detail. Behind them some of the mothers sat, chatting or greeting others who walked past. Soon the story ended and the children ran off to play, but the women stayed behind. "Tell us another story!" said one of the women, indicating her desire to hear more. Most Jola have never heard any of the stories about Jesus and the kingdom of God from the Bible, but many of them are willing to listen.

Location - About 560,000 Jola people live across three countries in West Africa (Senegal, the Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau). The largest number of Jola are located in the Casamance region of Southern Senegal. In Gambia, many Jolas live along the southern bank of the Gambia River, while others have moved to a regional city for employment opportunities and / or education. Some Jola people also live in the northern part of Guinea Bissau and small numbers in other West African countries

Catholicism has had a presence in Senegal for centuries and even now some Jola families are

traditionally Catholic. During the last century however, there has been a major shift toward Islam because of influences from the north. Most people - both Muslims and Catholics - maintain various degrees of the traditional animistic beliefs and practice, including the fear of witchcraft, evil spirits, and curses. At the present time over 90% of Jolas claim to be Muslim. In contrast, only about 2% claim to be believers in the Messiah, but the committed ones are even less numerous.

Culture - The Jola people are known for their relaxed, friendly manner and hard work. In their bush villages the farmers grow rice, millet, peanuts, and some vegetables. They have no caste-type system, all are considered to be equals. Families are large and fiercely loyal to one another. Many families are polygamous - men often have up to four wives. The women of a household are responsible for gardening, cultivating rice, food preparation, household chores, and care of the children. Men build the houses and fences and cultivate crops (especially peanuts) which are sold to provide financial resources for the family.



▶ Prayer REQUESTS

- ▶ *Pray that the light of God will shine into the Jola villages and towns. Pray that they will have dreams and visions of Jesus and will trust in Him.*
- ▶ *Pray that chiefs, religious leaders, and elders will follow the Messiah. Pray that local and non-native believers will be able to get the Word of God to all the Jola by various means.*
- ▶ *Bible Translation in Gambia: Three gospels are complete and the rest of the New Testament is being corrected. Pray that God will prepare the Jola to hear the Word in their language, understand it, and believe. Pray for the Gambian translators as they seek to express the gospel clearly in their own language.*