

The Yemba of Cameroon



representative photo by Ludwig Tröller CC

The Yemba people live in western Cameroon which lies on the coast of West Africa. Tourists flock to northwestern Cameroon's beautiful forested plateaus, and Dschang is a hub for markets and trade. Amid the din of English and French bartering, there are also Yemba voices. Most are subsistence farmers, trading vegetables, coffee, pigs or chickens for other food or needs.

The Yemba are close-knit people, though they live in 21 villages, spread across the northwestern region. They often gather for social events. And though their unique mother tongue sets them apart, it also is a point of pride.

Although Christianity came to the Yemba in 1903 and approximately 92 percent of the people claim Christianity, only 5 percent truly follow Christ. Most practice a combination of Christianity and animism. This traditional religion includes ancestor worship and communing with the dead. They believe God is faraway, hard to reach, and unsympathetic to their daily struggles while their dead ancestors are closer to God and have a better chance to influence their future. So they diligently try to appease those spirits, displaying old skulls at home. The Fo'o, or chief, is highly regarded as the most powerful villager. He sacrifices to ancestors and mediates with spirits for them. Soothsayers are hired to ask ancestors about future events.

Primary Religion:

Christian

Disciples (Matt 28:19):

5%

Churches:

Yes

Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):

Portions

Population (date):

300,000 (1990)



YEMBA HOMELAND



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Have They Heard The Gospel?

Response to the Gospel	About 92% claim to be Christians but only 5% truly follow Christ.
Number that Use Primarily the Local Language in Their Services	None: Scripture is read only in English or French and many Yemba people struggle to understand it.
Is the Word of God Translated?	In progress; Gospel of Mark is complete
Other Forms of Gospel Presentations	
Recordings:	Yes; the goal is to produce an audio recording of the entire Bible
Literature:	Dictionary, poetry
Films/videos:	JESUS film
Radio:	No
Bible Stories:	Bible portions: collection of audio Bible stories and evangelistic messages
Hindrances to Scripture Use	The highest hurdle to faith in Christ is the people's need for traditional rituals. They think rituals provide protection and connect them to God. Villagers struggle to understand that Jesus' sacrifice is sufficient to secure their future and protect their families.
Language of Wider Communication or Trade Language	French [fra], English [eng]

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Group Description

Population all countries

World Population	300,000*; 565,000
World Population (Date)	1992 (Ethnologue*); Peoplegroups.org (IMB)

Geography & Environment

Location	West region: Menoua division, Dschang area; South West region: Lebialem division of Cameroon, Africa
Climate	Forested plateau

Language

Alternate Names	Atsant-Bangwa, Bafou, Bamileke-Yembaa, Tchang
Dialects	Yemba, Foreke Dschang (Dschang, Tchang)
Other Mother Tongues	French, English
Linguistically Related	Fe'fe' [fmp]; Ghoma'la' [bbj]; Kwa' [bko]; Mengaka [xmg]; Ndanda' [nnz]; Ngiemboon [nnh]; Ngomba [jgo]; Ngombale [nla]; Ngwe [new]
Neighboring Languages	Ngiemboon [nnh]; Ngwe[new]; Ghomala [bbj]; Fe'fe' [fmp]; Nkongho [nkc]

Literacy

Adult Literacy Percentage	2%
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Economics

Subsistence Type	Agriculturalists
Products/Crafts	Vegetables, coffee, pigs, chickens
Income Sources	Trading the above for food or other needs.

Society & Culture

Family	Close-knit although they live in 21 villages spread across the northwestern region.
Self Image	The Yemba language is a point of pride to these people.
Social Habits/Groupings	Often gather for social events; churches are a strategic gathering place.

Religion

Religious Practices/Ceremonies	Yembas diligently try to appease the spirits of their dead ancestors, displaying old skulls at home. The Fo'o, or chief, is highly regarded as the most powerful villager. He sacrifices to ancestors and mediates with spirits for them — at a steep price. Soothsayers are hired to ask ancestors about future events.
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Status of Christianity

History of Christianity

Year Began	1903
By Whom	Catholic priests
Significant Events	Priests built a community church.

Religion and Response

Translation status	Because their social culture makes churches a strategic gathering place, the primary goal is to translate the entire Bible — with an immediate focus on the Scriptures used frequently during services, so the Yemba can understand the truth of God’s Word.
Spiritual Climate and Openness:	Seem to be open to hearing the truth from the Scriptures
Attitude toward Christianity	Most Yembas (92%) would say they are Christians