



The Birifor of Ghana

The Birifor homeland is a 2,000 square kilometer strip of land that borders Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast. The Birifor crossed the border from what was known as French West Africa into Ghana, which was called the Gold Coast, in about the mid-nineteenth century. They negotiated with the Gonja paramount chief to settle at Saru and Kalba. From there they spread northward toward Wa and southward toward Bole as well as eastward. The Birifor homeland now overlaps with the Wala, Vagla, Gonja, and Safaliba areas so there are a number of villages that are not purely Birifor, but rather a mixture of several people groups. There are also a number of Birifor in the western region of Ghana. It appears that the vast majority of educated Birifor settle in this region and do not typically return to their homeland on any permanent basis.

The Birifor people are predominately farmers. The men do a bit of hunting and the women often gather shea nuts and dawadawa pods for cooking and selling. Crafts such as pottery, baskets, mats and ropes are also produced.

Birifor villages are typically less centralized than other villages. Farms are usually made around the compounds as well as in the bush up to five kilometers away. Typically, compounds house about ten people. A compound consists of many rooms, which are rectangular with flat mud roofs and supported by wooden beams. It is common for a man to have at least two wives and for a wealthy man to have up to four wives.

The majority of Birifor follow African traditional religion. Currently, there are few Muslim Birifor and little Islamic influence in the area. The number of Christians is also small though there are several active churches in the area including the Evangelical Church of Ghana, the Church of Pentecost and the Roman Catholic Church.

Primary Religion:

Tribal Religion

Disciples (Matt 28.19):

5%

Churches:

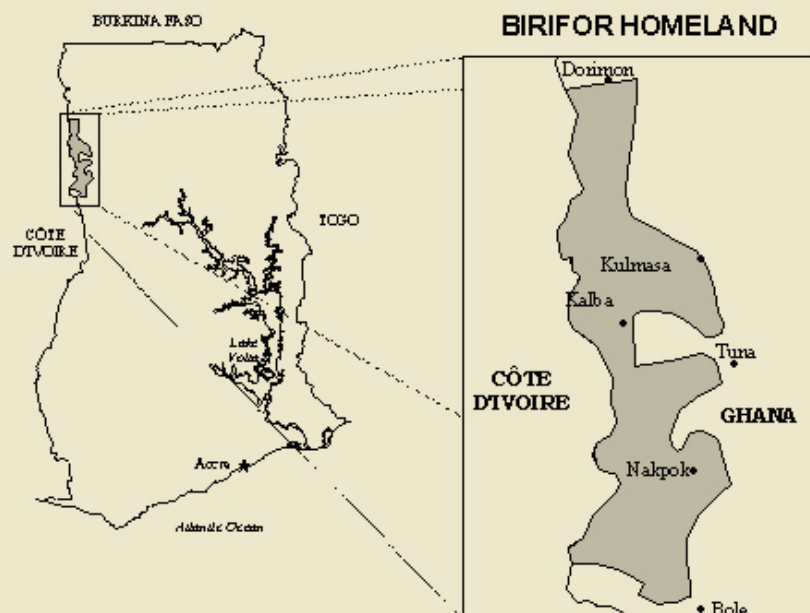
67

Scripture Status (Matt 28.20):

Work in Progress

Population (date):

120,000



The Birifor of Ghana

Item Name	Item Note	
Have They Heard The Gospel?		Profile Summary
Call Themselves Christian (%)	22%	
Believe In Jesus As God & Only Savior (%)	5%	
Prophet/Good Man, But Not God's Son (%)	<1%	
Believe In The Local Traditional Religion (%)	95%	
Have Not Heard Who Jesus is (%)	10%	
Number Of Pastors	11	
Number Of Missionaries Working	13	
Response To The Gospel	The Evangelical Church of Ghana, and outreach church of the WEC mission, has been in the Birifor area for over 40 years. They have made an impact and many people attend their churches, but pray for revival in the hearts of the people. Also pray for the written Scriptures as they are made available, that they would take root in peoples hearts and thus they would be truly changed.	
Number Of Communities	There are 300 Birifor communities.	
Number Of Churches	67	
Is The Word Of God Translated?	The Gospel of Mark was printed in 1993. 1,200 copies of 1 John have been reprinted. Also the epistles of John were printed along with portions of the Gospel of John. Work on Revelation is almost completed.	
Translation Medium	Printed	
Any Hinderance To Scripture Distribution?	Because the Birifor are spread out over a large geographical area, and because of the poor roads, large portions of the area have very limited access. Therefore, any literacy activity such as training teachers or checking on current classes and literature distribution are very difficult. Finding a means of transportation is also difficult as public transport does not go to many of the more remote places.	
Forms Of Gospel Presentation Available (Summary)	Gospel recordings have made Audio-cassettes.	
What Kind Of Missionaries Are Needed?	There is need for assistance from the outside as there are relatively few Christians and pastors to serve the churches. There is now a team working half time on the translation and a full time Mother tongue translator as well as a Literacy coordinator.	
Population All Countries		Group Description
World Population For This People	120,000	
Comment (World Population)	Birifor are found in 3 northern regions, southern Ghana, Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast. The Birifor oppose themselves to being counted, their argument being "you count things, not people"	
Countries Where People Group Lives		Group Description
Country Name	Burkina Faso	
Country Name	Cote d'Ivoire	
Country Name	Ghana	
Geography & Environment		Group Description
Location	A strip along the border with Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast, covering part of Wa Urban and Bole districts. Birifor settlements are typically quarters of villages shared with another tribe.	
Country	Ghana	
Ecosystem Type	Scrub Forest	
Geological Type	Other	
Elevation	500 to 1000 feet	
Longitude	W2.5	
Latitude	N9.5	
Climate	Hot with dry and rainy seasons	
Comments (Geography & Environment)	geological type: hills	
Language & Linguistics		Group Description

The Birifor of Ghana

Item Name	Item Note	
Comment (Language)	Northern Birifor in Burkina Faso, Southern Birifor in Ghana.	
Alternate Language Names	Birifo and Birifor	
Attitude Towards Mother Tongue	Very receptive	
Percent Monolingual (%)	35	
Other Mother Tongues Of This Group	GONJA	
Other Mother Tongues Of This Group	AKAN	
Other Mother Tongues Of This Group	LOBI	
Other Mother Tongues Of This Group	WALI	
Other Mother Tongues Of This Group	DAGAARI, SOUTHERN	
Comment (On Other Mother Tongues)	Multilingualism is very limited. In the 1985 survey 14 out of 70 people had some knowledge of another language.	
Linguistically Related Languages	GURENNE	
Linguistically Related Languages	DAGAARI, SOUTHERN	
Linguistically Related Languages	SAFALIBA	
Linguistically Related Languages	WALI	
Comments (Related Languages)	Not inherently intelligible with Birifor (Barker p 90)	
Comments (Related Languages)	According to Barker, p 90, some state that Birifor is a dialect of Dagaari, but the Ethnologue emphasizes that the two are separate languages.	
Neighboring Languages	VAGLA	
Neighboring Languages	GONJA	
Neighboring Languages	DEG	
Neighboring Languages	WALI	
Neighboring Languages	DAGAARI, SOUTHERN	
Neighboring Languages	SAFALIBA	
Literacy		Group Description
Adult Literacy Percentage	1	
Literacy Attitude	Indifferent	
Active Literacy Program	Yes	
Publications In Vernacular	8	
Comment (Literacy)	Education is not a central value, but more and more people come to realize that the ability to write is desirable to be acquired.	
Economics		Group Description
Subsistence Type	Agriculturalists	
Average Annual Income	\$150 per year	
Occupation	farming, hunting	
Income Sources	crops, shea nuts, trading, grinding mills, brewing, cocoa farming	
Products / Crafts	Pottery, baskets, mats, rope	
Trade Partners	Wali, Gonjas, Vaglas, smuggling to Ivory Coast,	
Modernization / Utilities	grinding mills, tractors, bullock ploughs	
Comment (Economy)	Main crops: maize, rice, guinea corn, cassava, yams, millet, groundnuts, beans okra, tomatoes, pumpkins, gourds. The landlord owns all the money. Thus average income is based on a calculation per compound, considering the global income.	
Community Development		Group Description
Health Care (Quality)	Poor	

The Birifor of Ghana

Item Name	Item Note
Comment (Health Care)	Catholic clinics in Tuna and Kalba and government hospitals in Wa and Bole. The Birifor are reluctant to use medical services and if used at all, the hospital or clinic is a last resort.
Diet (Quality)	Poor
Comment (Diet)	crops are sold, rather than stored for consumption. Traditionally, a taboo limited the selling of guinea corn, so that at least this item was available for consumption. Now this taboo is breaking up, and people are even more hungry.
Water (Quality)	Fair
Comment (Water)	collected from rivers, wells, and ponds. The Catholic church put in a lot of bore holes.
Shelter Description	A compound is occupied by an extended family and any widows, usually about 10 people. The family head decides when a member may start a fresh compound. Men have a sleeping room and women have both a sleeping room and a kitchen. A very large compound may house up to 40 people. Rooms are rectangular and flat roofs are made of mud supported by wooden beams. Few rooms are roofed with metal sheets. Compounds tend to be built about 50 to 100 meters apart to help keep domestic animals separate. (Barker p 93 -94)
Energy/Fuel (Quality)	None
Comment (Energy)	Kerosene, wood, charcoal. Fuel is becoming more of a problem with the depletion of forests.
Clothing	Men: old western second hand clothes. Women: wrap around skirt, often topless
Transportation	Daily lorries to the main centers, bicycles, motorbikes, walking. The condition of the roads is not too good.
Infant Mortality Rate	25%
Life Expectancy	55
Leading Cause Of Death	witchcraft, diseases

Society & Culture

Group Description

Family Structures	It is considered desirable for a man to have at least two wives, wealthy men have four. The women go to live with their husband's family when they get married. Matrilineal inheritance (through the mother and the mother's brothers to the sons. The mother and her brothers are responsible for dowries and settlements after wife stealing, a common practice in which a man steals another man's wife with her cooperation. The father and his brothers are responsible for schooling.
Neighbor Relations	The Gonjas claim to be the owners of the land. Therefore the Birifor are subject to the Gonjas and tend to take their complicated court cases to the Gonja paramount chief, although legally, the Birifor have their own village chiefs as well as a paramount chief, who has been appointed by the government.
Authority / Rule	There are endeavors to strengthen the position of the Birifor chiefs, but the authority of the Gonja paramount chief is still considered to be the one that counts.
Social Habits/Groupings	Birifor Youth Association: advocate the strengthening of the Birifor chiefs' position. CDR (Committee for the Defense of the Revolution), a kind of local police force. They enforce government regulations, but are not very well respected since they tend to miss-use their power.
Cultural Change Pace	Slow
Identification With National Culture	Distinct
Self Image	Depressed
Judicial / Punishment System	Local Birifor chiefs judge the normal matters, more complicated cases are taken to the Gonja chiefs.
Celebrations	Annual Boor festival with dancing and feasting and worship of minor gods.
Recreations	Football, talking, funerals
Art Forms	pottery, baskets, mats, ropes, blacksmith's work, carving hoes
Media	radio
Local Language Broadcasting	None
Attitude To Outsiders	Very receptive
Attitude To Change	Somewhat resistant

The Birifor of Ghana

Item Name	Item Note	
Youth		Group Description
Labor and tasks (6-12 year olds)	girls: carrying water/wood, planting, harvesting, grinding corn, cooking, brewing, sweeping, processing shea nuts, watching over siblings. Boys: watching cows, hoeing in farm, carrying water, harvesting, house building, making tools, hunting.	
Youth Problems (Teens)	Lack of education/employment opportunities, suppression by other groups (Gonjas), high dowry, lack of information on health care, alcohol.	
Youth Greatest Needs (teens)	Schools, health facilities, jobs	
Education		Group Description
Primary Schools	50	
Primary School Enrollment	2500	
Percent Of Eligible Students Enrolled	5	
Teacher To Pupil Ratio	30	
Language Of Instruction Early Years	English	
Language Of Textbooks Early Years	English	
Language Of Instruction Later Years	English	
Language Of Textbooks Later Years	English	
Number Of Schools > 90% Homogeneous	25	
Comment (Education)	Limited educational opportunities. For example, the school in Bilema has one teacher, three grades, and serves Bilema and two or three surrounding villages within a couple of miles. In the 1950s, everyone had to attend school for a period, with the result that there is a group of marginally educated Birifor in their 40s. Most of the schools are not on Birifor land, but the Birifor children go to them.	
Church Growth		Status of Christianity
Reached Status	Reached	
Reached Classification	Evangelized	
Total Baptized	300	
Lay Leaders	4	
Christian Clinics/Hospitals	2	
Comment (Church Growth)	Besides the Missions/Churches mentioned below Broken Yoke and Evangelical Church of Ghana also work in the area. Their main ministry is church planting. ECG is affiliated with WEC.	
Religion & Response		Status of Christianity
Religious Practices & Ceremonies	"Black Boor" and "White Boor" festivals (in connection with initiation into secret societies). If someone performed the Black Boor ceremony not in the proper way the villagers will kill the people. Every seven years they have a ceremony of initiation into the tribe for children over 7 years. Funerals are a type of festival.	
Attitude To Christianity	Somewhat receptive	
Attitude To Religious Change	Somewhat resistant	
Resistance / Receptivity	A deeply ingrained fear of disrupting the spirits and standards on drinking and polygamy hinder change. On the other hand they feel drawn to Christianity because it liberates from costly sacrifices in connection with death and selling of corn.	
Religious Analogies & Bridges	"Myth of the Bagre" (used during initiation ceremony) has many parallels with Christian faith (creator god, suffering, alienation etc.)	
Spiritual Climate And Openness	There is opposition to Christianity due to its standards on drink and polygamy, on the other hand, the fact that it frees from the burden of costly sacrifices makes it more attractive. In general there is a strong fear to disrupt the spirits	
Recommended Approaches	Explain Christianity in a global way, going back to the origins (separation from God etc.) Taking care of their development needs, pick one specific need and work on that.	

The Birifor of Ghana

Item Name

Item Note

Current Needs

Community level: General education and teaching in food management, nutrition and health care are some of the needs that have been expressed by community members.
Spiritual level: more pastors and financial resources to support them, solid Bible teaching

Items For Prayer

- Understanding of the message of the Bible in a broader context.
- Pray for the Birifor pastors.
- There are four unreached areas (around Lase, Oseikodwokrom, Dorinan, Krafus):
Pray for workers for each one of these areas.
- Pray for the development needs
- Pray for new translators for the Birifor NT

History Of Christianity In Group

Status of Christianity

Year Began

1939

By Whom

WEC International

Significant Events

The opening of their leprosy and general clinics caused significant response. They did not go into Birifor villages till 1957 though.

Scripture

Status of Christianity

Translation Status

In Progress

Available Scripture

Portions

Form Of Scripture Available

Printed

Scripture Use

Hardly at all

Comment (Scripture)

Malba-Birifor translation in Burkina Faso is finished. Translation was done by WEC International (Mission Protestant).

Other Forms Of Gospel Available: Literature

Yes

Other Forms Of Gospel Available: Recordings

Yes

Other Forms Of Gospel Available: Film/Videos

No

Other Forms Of Gospel Available: Radio

No

Missions and Churches

Status of Christianity

Organization Name

Pentecostal

Main Ministry

Church Planting

Main Ministry

Church Planting

Organization Name

Roman Catholic Church

Main Ministry

Community Development

Main Ministry

Community Development

Year Started

1930

Number Of Adherents

800

Number Of Expatriate Workers

1

Number Of National Workers

6

Number Of Workers Using Local Language

7

Language Used By Workers

Dagaare, Southern

Organization Name

Methodist

Main Ministry

Community Development

Main Ministry

Community Development

Year Started

1930

Number Of Adherents

100

Number Of National Workers

1

Language Used By Workers

Akan

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Item Name	Item Note
Organization Name	Evangelical Churches of West Africa
Main Ministry	Church Planting
Main Ministry	Church Planting
Year Started	1957
Number Of Adherents	1000
Number Of National Workers	1
Number Of Local Workers	7
Number Of Workers Using Local Language	8
Language Used By Workers	Birifor, Southern
Organization Name	Apostolic
Main Ministry	Church Planting
Main Ministry	Church Planting
Year Started	1953
Number Of Adherents	300
Number Of National Workers	1
Language Used By Workers	Akan
Organization Name	WEC International
Main Ministry	Church Planting

Christian Literature And Media Status

Status of Christianity

Literature Available	Marks Gospel
Audio Recordings Available	Gospel Recordings in Birifor, Song cassettes both done by WEC in cooperation with Gospel Recordings.