

## WHAT'S THE NATURE OF THEIR LANGUAGE AND CULTURE?

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The Fangs are to some extent tall, well built, with dark brown skin. The clans are out-marrying; marriage can be traced through the male line. The southern Fang have little political organization. In the north, some Benti groups have clan chiefs. The men are mainly hunters while the women are charged with farming. They practice polygamy because women supply the work power needed for the farm.

The main Fang crops are manioc, maize, plantains, yams, groundnuts, and oil palm. Livestock is limited to small animals such as goats, chickens, and pigs. These animals are only eaten at special occasions. They also practice fishing, which makes fish and brush meat their main source of protein. They use traps, large nets, rods, and hooks to catch a variety of aquatic life. Their most famous dish is the 'Conraua goliath' which is made from frogs.

## WHY STUDY FANG?

Although the official languages of Equatorial Guinea are Spanish and French, Fang is one of the indigenous languages that have been recognized as an integral part of the national languages. Since the majority of the people in Equatorial Guinea are of Fang origin, learning Fang will enable outsiders to better understand the language and culture of Equatorial Guinea.

In addition, as an American, if you study Fang, you would be able to communicate with people in at least three countries: Gabon, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. You would not be restricted to just one country in Africa.

It is good to know that greetings are an important and often lengthy form of social interaction. They usually involve shaking hands. People stand close when talking, often touching or holding hands. Elders, professionals, and those in positions of authority are treated with particular respect.

For a start, get acquainted to a few written forms of greetings in the Fang Language:

Hello (for one person) is **M'bolo**  
 Hello (for many people) is **M'bolani**  
 Response is **Am'bolo** or **Am'bolani**  
 How are you? Is **Y'o num vah?**  
 Response is **M'a num vah**  
 Thank you is **Akiba**



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A FANG SPEAKER IN HER TRADITIONAL ATTIRE

## WHO ARE THE FANG PEOPLE?

The Fang people are the largest indigenous group in Equatorial Guinea. Although they occupy most of the interior part of the country, their influence is rapidly spreading to the coastal areas absorbing other native groups such as the Benga, Combe, Baseke, Balengue, Bubi and Bujeba. They form part of the West Bantu language clusters, constituting 80% of the population and are comprised of 67 clans. Fang people in the northern part of Rio Muni speak Fang-Ntumu dialect, while those in the south speak Fang-Okah. The two dialects are mutually intelligible. Dialects of Fang are also spoken in parts of neighboring Cameroon and Gabon.

The Bubi people - as the Fangs are sometimes called- are an African ethnic group. They are members of the Bantu peoples group, who are indigenous to Bioko Island, Equatorial Guinea, and constitute 15% of the population. The traditional demarcation line between Fang and beach tribes was the village of Niefang (limit of the fang) inland from Bata.

## WHAT'S THE NATURE OF THEIR LANGUAGE AND CULTURE?

Like many other native speakers of the country, the Fang live according to their traditional customs. They still use the harp, xylophone, drums and wooden trumpet in traditional music and storytelling practices. The Fangs were believed by some to have been forced out of Nigeria by the islamized tribes of Hausa and have settled in parts of Gabon and Cameroon. Hence, there are some similarities in their language and culture. The only difference between the two is the fact that they had to adapt to the rain forest. Fang is also related to the Bulu and Ewondo languages of Cameroon. However, the influence of Spanish and French together with Roman Catholic religion has led to a gradual blending of Fang tradition with western culture.

It is believed that the spread of Pidgin English from Calabar in Nigeria has also encroached into the native languages of the countries including Fang. The Spanish anthropologist Martin del Molino recounts the story of an English missionary called Sturgeon who traveled to the mainland in the 18th century. During one of his sermons, the missionary noted that few of the people in the congregation understood what he was preaching in English. This was because most of the English words had changed their meanings when converted into Pidgin.

The Fangs practice the religion of the ancestors to achieve their mediation for solving the hardships of daily life. They believe in the existence of a god called **Mebe'e** and an ancestor of all clans called **Ndzame**. Some of them also believe that their life is determined by the influence of the spirits of the ancestors. It is traditional for each village to have a larger hut, built away from the others, called the "House of the Word." Men gather in this bigger hut to exchange pleasantries and solve issues of the village; women are forbidden to enter this house. The bones of a deified ancestor or animal are kept here for traditional worship.



A market scene in Gabon



Equatorial Guinean children of Bubi descent



House, Bioko Island