

## LANGUAGE & CULTURE

With its extensive coffee plantations, Sidamo was a province with abundant revenues. Its rule was given to nobles loyal to the Emperor, such as *Dejazmach Balcha Safo*, who governed it at different times before the Italian occupation. Following the liberation of Ethiopia from Italy in 1942, the provinces of Borana and Welayta, created from conquered states of that name, were merged into Sidamo.

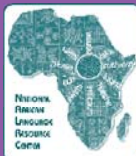
Sidamo was the location of a revolt of the Gedeo people in 1960, who objected to a reorganization of the taxation system, which they believed was oppressive. The revolt was brutally suppressed, as Bahru Zewde, an Ethiopian Historian notes, "Armed mostly with spears and swords, peasants confronted a well-equipped enemy composed of the land-lords and the government troops." The Gedeo rebels were crushed in several engagements, and the arbitration commission headed by Afa Negus Eshate Gada not only found for the landlords, but fined the elders of the Gedeo who had led the revolt. With adoption of a new constitution in 1995, Sidamo was divided amongst Southern Peoples, the Somali, and the Oromia regions of Ethiopia.

Spirit possession occurs among the Sidama. Nearly 95% of the Sidama live a life centered around agriculture. An important staple food is the *wesse plant*, or *Ensete*. Other crops are also grown and they breed cattle. Perhaps the most important source of income is *coffee*, and the area is a major contributor to coffee production, producing a high percentage of export coffee for the central government.

## STUDYING SIDAMO IN THE UNITED STATES

Please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the NALRC website at

<http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu/>



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# SIDAMO



SIDAMO WOMAN

NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE  
RESOURCE CENTER (NALRC)



## WHO SPEAKS SIDAMO

Sidamo is an *Afro-Asiatic language*, belonging to the Cushitic branch, part of the Highland East Cushitic group. It is spoken in parts of southern Ethiopia. Sidamo can alternatively be referred to as Sidaama, Sidaamu Afoo, Sidaminya or Sidámo 'Afó. Sidaamu Afoo is the ethnic autonym for the language, while Sidaminya is its name in the Amharic. Although it is not known to have any specific dialects, it shares over 50% lexical similarity with the Alaba-K'abeena, Kambaata, and Hadiyya, all of which are the other languages spoken in southwestern Ethiopia. Over 100,000 people use it as a second language. In terms of its writing, Sidamo used an Ethiopic script up until 1993, from which point forward it has used a Latin script.

The term Sidamo has also been used by some authors to refer to larger groupings of East Cushitic and even Omotic languages. The languages within this Sidamo grouping contain similar, alternating phonological features. The results from a research study conducted in the 1968-1969 concerning mutual intelligibility between the different Sidamo languages suggests that Sidamo is more closely related to Derasa (also called Gedeo) than the other Sidamo languages. Sidamo vocabulary has been influenced by Ge'ez and Amharic, and has in turn influenced Oromo vocabulary.



*Sidamo women at a traditional Ethiopian Coffee Ceremony*

## WHY STUDY SIDAMO

Sidama preserved their cultural heritage, including their traditional religion and language until the late 1880s during the conquest by *Emperor Menelik II*. Before this, Sidama had their own well established administrative systems that dated at least to the 9th century, though it was made up of a loose coalition of the Sidama kingdoms. These kingdoms extended into Gibe region. As a result of marginalization and since the language does not have its own alphabet, very little has been written on Sidama issues. Many were not able to attend school until after the Derg came to power in 1975.

Today, Sidama area has only a small number of schools, and inadequate health services, though primary education has increased recently. The people have repeatedly complained that Sidama doesn't have regional autonomy in the country and asked for the government to give Sidama people their own region. Those against autonomy argue that with the *SNNPR* being a condensed region with the most ethnic groups concentrated in a small territory, carving out the boundaries that historically never existed and are often violently disputed between ethnicities in order to give the autonomy to the more than 40 ethnic groups is virtually impossible.



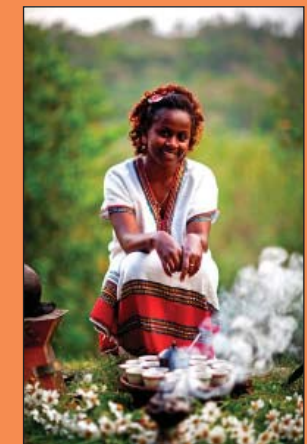
*Sidamo produce the world's best coffee: Woman at a ferocoop*



*Sidama farmers exhibiting their coffee*



*Sidama socio-economic culture*



*Sidamo girls*