

LANGUAGE & CULTURE

According to Luo mythology, a warrior chief named Ramogi Ajwang led the Luo into present-day Kenya about 500 years ago. A prime example of Luo culture represented in life in Luoland is the naming process. Luo names refer to forces that exist beyond the immediate presence of life on earth. When individuals are deceased, they are referred to as the spirits of the ancestors. The means by which children receive names is tied directly to the position of the sun in relation to the earth when they are born. Different names carry different personality characteristics. So, when meeting a stranger on a footpath, one gains insight into the character of that person simply by learning their name.

Luo name their children at the time of day that they are born, for example: Atieno is a girl born at night and Akinyi is for one born in the morning. Akeyo is the name given during harvesting, and Apiyo and Adongo are twins, with Apiyo as the name of the first to be born. The first letter of a name also indicates gender: "A" signifies a woman, and "O" for a boy. For example, Otieno would be the name of a boy born in the evening and Atieno for a girl, born in the evening.

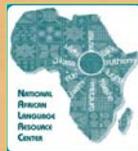
Traditionally, the practice of wife inheritance was common to ensure the family's sustenance. This practice is on the wane partly because of new challenges. In Luoland, the concept of adoption is unknown. Orphan children are simply and informally absorbed by extended family or neighbors. They are immediately considered part of their new family, giving practical meaning to the phrase, "It takes a village to raise a child." Observing the daily routines of different segments of Luo society is a window into the mechanics of the culture. Division of labor is based on gender. Females are responsible for virtually every aspect of daily life, from gardening and harvesting to cooking, cleaning, and childcare. Male duties include building the home and plowing the fields.

Education is an important aspect of the Luo people's culture. Often considered the intellectuals of modern Kenya, the Luo believe that each individual is educated from the moment of birth until death. Today, in Kenya and Uganda, some non-Luo people have adopted the Luo language for various reasons.

Customary Luo religion featured a central deity, *Nyasaye* (translation for God), who is the creator of humanity and the

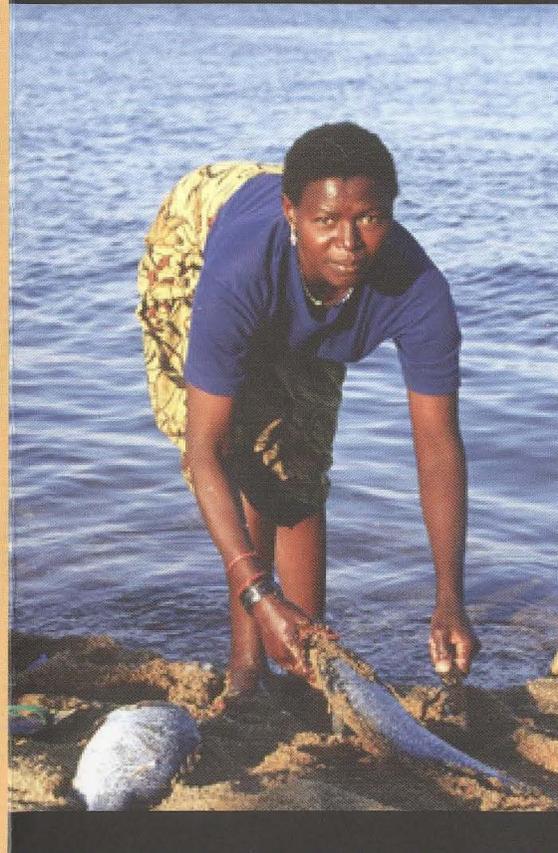
STUDYING LUO IN THE U.S.

Below is a list of some universities in the United States that currently offer Luo. For more information, please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the website, located at <http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu/>



NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTER (NALRC)

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WHY STUDY LUO?

Luo is spoken by over 4 million people in the East African countries of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Knowledge of Luo opens up various opportunities for students, Peace Corps volunteers, missionaries, teachers, scholars and others with interest in the region.

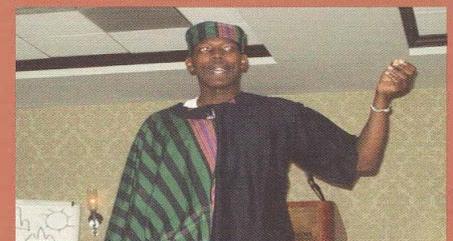
Outside the Kikuyu and Luhya, Luo people constitute the largest indigenous community in Kenya. Access to knowledge of this vast East African community is largely premised upon an understanding of the Luo language.

Additionally, Luo is mutually intelligible with the languages of the Lango, Kumam and Padhola of Uganda, the Acholi of Uganda and Sudan, and Alur of Uganda and Congo. Because of this, a knowledge of Luo opens linguistic barriers across several ethnic groups in East and Central Africa.

WHO SPEAKS LUO? PEOPLE AND CULTURE

There are approximately 4 million Luo people who live in parts of Kenya and Tanzania. The Luo (also spelt Lwo) are a family of linguistically affiliated ethnic groups who live in an area that stretches from the south of Sudan, through Northern Uganda and Eastern Congo (DRC), into Western Kenya, and ending in the upper tip of Tanzania. These people speak an Eastern Sudanic (Nilotic) language, a branch of the Nilo-Saharan language family. According to various classification schemes, they are sometimes referred to as River-Lake Nilotes or Western Nilotes, which also includes the Dinka-Nuer language group. People who speak Luo languages include the Shilluk, Anuak, Acholi, Lango, Palwo, Alur, Padhola, Joluo (Kenyan Luo), Bor, and Kumam.

Around the sixteenth century, the ancestors of the Luo began to migrate from the Bahr al-Ghazal region, south of the Nile, eventually settling on the eastern side of the Lake Victoria basin. The ancestors continued to arrive in a steady stream until the nineteenth century. Practitioners of pastoralism, they spoke a western Nilotic language known as Dholuo, which is distinct from the language spoken by their neighbors. Currently, the Luo are the third most populous ethnic group in Kenya, comprising over 13 percent of the country's population and many of its most influential intellectual and political minds. Due to the supra-national states created during the scramble for Africa by European colonists in 1884-85, there are also significant numbers of Luo people living in neighboring Uganda and Tanzania.



A Luo artist gives a performance



Luo performers welcome a foreign dignitary



Luo trader in Kisumu, Kenya