

# TESO

## LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

In Uganda a joke is often told that to prove an Itesot is dead, tempt them by placing a calabash filled with ajon (millet beer) by their mouth. If they don't wake up, then indeed they are dead. The origins of the joke are from the known love affair between the Teso and their locally brewed millet beer.

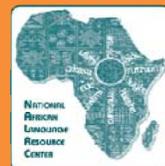
The people treasure it as though it is their staple food. In any ceremony likely to be attended by a group of Teso people, failure to include the local brew on the menu of drinks might invite you nods of disapproval.

Teso are generally a happy and a communal group of people. They have a belief that neighbors are 'people with whom one shares beer'. People join forces and renew their happiness by always drinking together at the beer parties.

The Teso have a variety of foods but Millet is their staple food. Millet is often served on one plate which is shared communally. Other varieties of foods include pumpkins, wild berries, peas, groundnuts, peas, and beans, meat of both domestic and wild animals, milk, butter and fish. The men did not eat with women

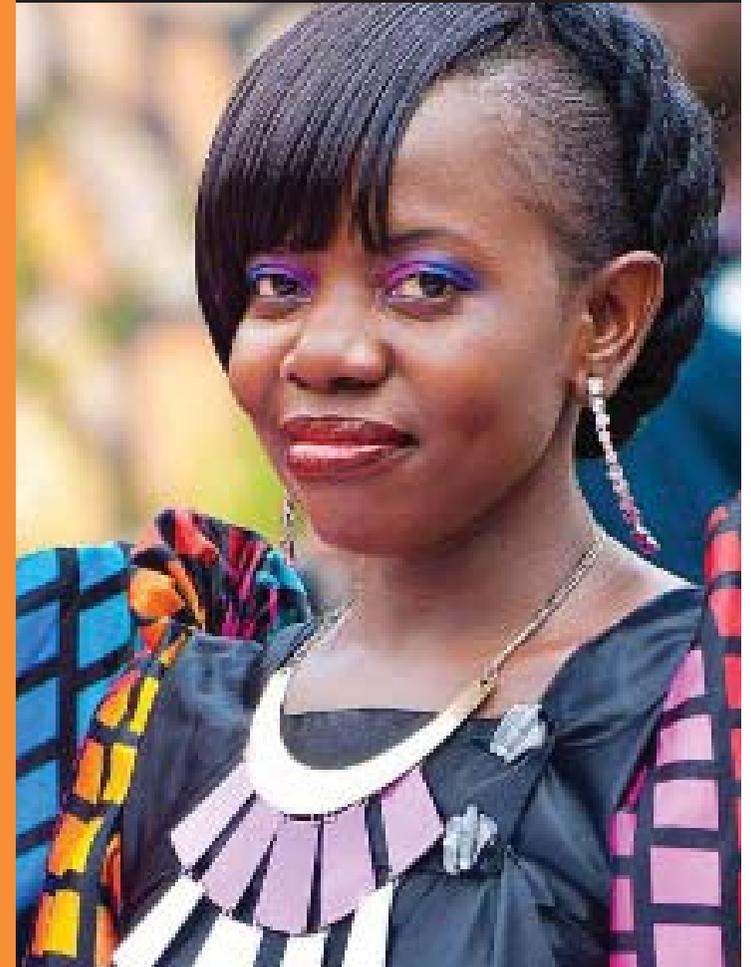
## STUDYING TESO IN THE UNITED STATES

Please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the NALRC website at <http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu/>



NATIONAL AFRICAN  
LANGUAGE RESOURCE  
CENTER (NALRC)

Room 3075, Hamilton Lugar  
School of Global and International Studies  
355 N. Eagleson Ave., Indiana University  
Bloomington, IN 47405  
Phone: (812) 856-4199 | Email: [nalrc@iu.edu](mailto:nalrc@iu.edu)  
Website: <http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu>



TRADITIONAL TESO ATTIRE

NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE  
RESOURCE CENTER (NALRC)

## WHO SPEAKS TESO?

Teso is a Nilo-Saharan language spoken by the Teso, an ethnic group in eastern Uganda and western Kenya. Estimated to be about eight per cent of the Ugandan total population, the Teso people make one of the biggest tribes in the country. In every place or gathering that you attend, you are most likely to meet a Teso there.

They primarily live in eastern Uganda in the districts of Soroti and Kumi while some are in Palisa and Tororo districts. The Ugandan political insecurity of the early 1990's shifted some of them as far below as Iganga district besides Kampala, the capital city.

The Dialectics of change among the Southern Teso are an Eastern Nilotic speaking ethnic group who reside across the border between Kenya and Uganda in Buledi district of Uganda and Busia district of Kenya.

They represent the last large-scale tribal movement into Western Kenya in the precolonial period. Despite being in different countries, the two groups of people speak the same language



*Iteso Cultural Troupe*

## WHY STUDY TESO?

Teso dialect is spoken by a tribe Teso which accounts for 300,000 people living between Lake Kioga and Mt. Elgon in the Eastern Uganda.

Teso traditions are said to have originated some where in Sudan and moved south over a period of centuries. It is not possible to calculate the time of this movement. Other historians say that a body of Iteso is said to have separated from the Karamojong and moved further south.

This may have been a very early separation because the clan names and ritual customs associated with the second of two distinctive groups of Karamojong and Jie people are not found among Iteso.

There is more compelling evidence that Teso originated from Ethiopia. There are people in Southern Ethiopia was called Omuut, which is a typical Iteso name. There is also similarity between Lake Bisina (in Teso) and Abyssinia (Ethiopia). History says that came from Ethiopia through Sudan and separated.



*Iteso Cultural Festival*



*A Teso boy in a dilapidated classroom*



*Teso men in their traditional attire.*



*Teso men playing "Akongo", a traditional music instrument*