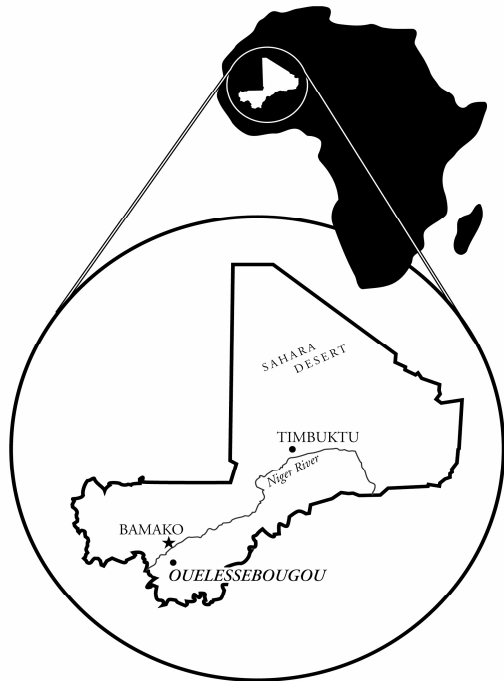


OUELESSEBOUGOU AT A GLANCE



Ouelesseboucou (way-less-ay-boo-goo) is a 72-village region in Mali, West Africa. The main town in the region is also called Ouelesseboucou. Within the rural region of Ouelesseboucou, there is a population of approximately 60,000. Ouelesseboucou is located in the southern portion of Mali, approximately 60 miles from the capital city of Bamako.

History

According to oral legend, Ouelesseboucou was founded in the 13th century by a hunter named Welesse Samake (Way-less-ay Saw-maw-kay). Ouelesse lived in the village of Tentoukoro at a time when there was not enough farming land. While hunting, Welesse discovered the area and felt it would be a good place to settle because it had a large stream that could be used for farming and agriculture.

In Mali, it is tradition to offer a sacrifice before settling a new area. Welesse returned to the area, stayed in a special grass hut for 40 days, and made an animal sacrifice. This sacrifice prepared the land to be a prosperous settlement. At the end of the 40-day sacrifice, Welesse brought his family from Tentoukoro to settle the village. Today, approximately one quarter of the inhabitants of Ouelesseboucou are descendents of Welesse Samake (a clan in the Bamanan tribe). The other three-quarters of the population includes peoples of the Malinki, Fulani, Bobo, Taureg, Senufo, Songhay and Dogon tribes.

Local Government

The town of Ouelesseboucou has a village chief, mayor, government representative and several leaders of various associations. The Mayor is elected by the people in Ouelesseboucou to oversee municipalities, utilities, etc. The Chief is chosen through heredity within the Samake family (though not always father to son). The Mayor consults with the Chief before making major decisions.

Land and Climate

The landscape in Ouelesseboucou is classified as savannah. The sub-Saharan desert landscape is similar to parts of Southern Utah with reddish dirt, bushes and scattered trees, but no fields or grassy areas.

There are three seasons:

Hot Season- Mid-February to June (no rain; weather is hot and dry with temperatures between 95 and 130 degrees Fahrenheit)

Rainy Season- June to September (weather is hot and humid with temperatures averaging 110 F and daily rain showers)

Dry Season- October to mid-February (most pleasant time of year with bright sunny days, and temperatures in the mid-80s)

Time

Similar to many countries in the East, a lunar calendar is used to determine the dates of important religious rituals and celebrations.

Depending on daylight savings, the time zone in Mali is 6 or 7 hours ahead of Utah.

Agriculture

Life for most Ouelesseboucou villagers is centered around agriculture. In addition to growing their own food, most villagers work in agriculture and depend on the excess harvest for income. The rhythm of life revolves around planting and harvest. During harvest season, school is out and children work with their families in the fields. Many children's favorite celebration is the harvest festival in late September. Celebrations include drummers and dancers. Many times a dancer dressed in costume with the mask of a kono bird will perform. The women prepare many feasts following the harvest. Some harvest time celebrations continue for a month.

Animals and Plant Life

In Ouelesseboucou villages, you will often see a number of domesticated animals such as chickens, donkeys, cattle, goats, dogs and guinea hens.

Wild animals native to Mali include: elephant, hippo, lion (southern Mali), camel (northern Mali), ostrich, antelope, chimpanzee, gazelle, wart hog, hyena and porcupine.

Common plant life includes the baobab tree, thorny acacia, mango tree (southern Mali), doom palm and shea tree. Common harvest crops include millet, sorghum, corn, rice, cotton, peanuts, onions and yams.

Language

The official language, French, is spoken by government administrators and in urban areas, and is the primary language of school instruction. However, in Ouelesseboucou the most widely spoken tongue is Bamanankan (termed Bambara by the French). Other tribal languages include Fulfulde, Dogon, Senoufo, Songhai, Tamashek and Bomu. In rural areas such as Ouelesseboucou, only the small percentage of the population who have had the opportunity to attend school will speak, read and write French. Bamanankan, the native tribal language, is the language of daily life spoken between family, friends and community members.

As is common among other African dialects, Bamanankan is not traditionally a written language. History and important information is passed on orally. *Griots* are the oral historians in the villages. Whenever a public gathering is held, the *Griot* will come and sing about the occasion and its importance. The

French word *Griot* simply describes an entertainer; so Malian families usually refer to their historians in Bamanankan as *Djieli* (*jaylee*), which literally means “blood”—signifying that *Djieli* are the lifeblood of Malian families and the libraries of Malian society. Each “family” has a *Djieli* who keeps track of the family history through their gift of storytelling and song. Families compensate by caring for the *Djieli* or *Griot* (e.g. providing food, shelter, etc.). Both male and female, the *Djieli* or *Griots* compose a separate caste within the community. Young *Djieli* or *Griots* inherit all the stories of their parents, and build on those histories throughout their lives. It is important that all people know their heritage, so they can be proud of their ancestors and their own role in history.

Religion

Ninety percent of all Malians are Muslim. They honor Islam’s “Five Pillars of Faith,” which are the foundation of the religion. The five pillars of Islam are:

1. *Shahadah* Declaration of Faith—“There is no deity but God, and Mohammed is His messenger”
2. *Salah* Regular Prayer; practiced five times daily
3. *Zakah* Almsgiving
4. *Siyam* Fasting; occurs at Ramadan, which occurs one month of each year
5. *Hajj* Pilgrimage to Mecca

Mosques (Muslim places of worship) are located in many of the villages. The town of Ouelessebouyou has an adobe mosque near the main market place.

General Attitudes

Ouelessebouyou villagers are friendly, generous and sociable. Villagers tend to be community minded and are quick to assist one another. When making decisions, they consider how the decision will affect their family and community.

Villagers have a great sense of humor. They often make humorous teasing comments, which are regarded as attempts to be nice and not to offend. Villagers often joke with other groups about family names or castes. These “joking cousin” remarks relieve tension and help maintain friendly ties.

Greetings

The traditional greeting in Ouelessebouyou is somewhat of a ritual. A shortened version of a greeting between two men is included below:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| A: <i>A ni sògòma.</i> | “Good morning.” |
| B: <i>M’ba, ‘ni sogoma.</i> | “Good morning to you.” |
| A: <i>Hèrè sira?</i> | “Did you have a good night?” |
| B: <i>Hèrè, bè.</i> | “Very good, thanks.” |
| A: <i>I ka kènè?</i> | “Are you well?” |
| B: <i>Tòorò tè.</i> | “Quite well.” |
| A: <i>So mògòw ka kènè?</i> | “Is the family well?” |
| B: <i>Tòorò t’u la.</i> | “Very well, thank you.” |
| A: <i>I muso ka kènè?</i> | “Is your wife well?” |
| B: <i>Tòorò t’a la.</i> | “Very well, thank you.” |
| A: <i>Denw ka kènè?</i> | “Are your children well?” |
| B: <i>Tòorò t’u la.</i> | “Very well, thank you.” |

It is also tradition that children greet their parents every morning as a way of showing respect to their elders.

Gestures

The left hand is considered unclean since it is traditionally used for bathroom purposes. It is disrespectful and unsanitary to use the left hand to eat, offer food or money, accept anything or extend a handshake. Gesturing with the index finger is impolite; one should point with the entire hand. One does not look an elder in the eye when conversing.

Societal Roles

Discipline and care of the children is the concern of the entire community. Because extended families live together, an aunt, older cousin or neighbor is always around to help keep an eye on the children.

By age five, both girls and boy begin assuming chores such as feeding the chickens. Girls are responsible for helping their mother and, at a young age, they begin taking care of their younger siblings. Boys help their fathers with farming and heavy labor. A typical responsibility of young boys is chasing birds away from the crops.

At age 7, boys begin to receive more guidance from the men of the community. They are tested with riddles, and taught the history of their people.

In rural regions such as Ouelessebouyou, most families are large. For many women, marriage brings honor and security. Men tend to marry at age 24 and women at age 15. Although the practice is less common due to economic circumstance, Muslim law permits a man to marry up to four wives if he is able to take good care of them and treat them equally. Usually only wealthy men will take more than one wife. It is not uncommon for women to have 5–10 children.

The elderly are valued for their wisdom. Children are raised in the presence of their grandparents because of the belief that children will learn more and gain a richer experience. Grandfathers love to tease and joke with their grandchildren.

An average day for a woman in the village of Ouelessebouyou might be as follows:

Get up, 5:30 am. Go to the village well, hand pull buckets of water. Pour water in container for bathing. Make fire from wood and brush. Heat rest of water in pan over a fire and add ground millet. Cook one hour. Hear baby waking. Clean baby; fasten in sling on back. Feed extended family. Clean up after breakfast. Walk children to school. Pound lunch millet one hour. Stop to care for baby. Cook millet two hours. Walk to garden, baby on back. Hand pull buckets of water. Hand water garden. Pick okra and lettuce. Take lunch to men working in field. Walk to bush to cut firewood. Carry home large bundle of wood balanced on head. Pound millet for dinner, two hours. Go to well, hand pull buckets of water. Build fire. Cook millet for two hours. Make sauce, feed family dinner. Clean up after dinner. Pound millet for breakfast one hour. Talk with family or friends around fire. 10 pm, Go to sleep.

Men are primarily responsible for the heavy work of the village. They clear the trees for planting and spend long hours tilling the fields. When it is time to plant and harvest crops, they work together with their wives and children until the job is finished. Men are responsible for building houses and community buildings. They fell the lumber and logs for firewood and butcher the livestock. Men may also learn a trade such as carpentry to supplement their family income.

Recreation

Soccer (called “football” in Africa) is the favorite game of boys. Most of the time children have to make their own ball out of whatever they can find. Sometimes old rags are rolled into a ball and bound with twine.

Children play a popular game in which they dig a small hole in the ground and place a mango seed in it. One player has a small metal spike that he throws down, trying to spear the seed. The other player has a small stick that he waves back and forth above the hole trying to block the spike and defend the seed. If the seed is struck, the opposing player gets a point.

Wali is a popular game. Two men play at a time, on a carved wooden board, using round stones or beads as the playing pieces. The object is to eliminate the opponent's pieces from the board using complex numerical strategies. Games will often go on for hours and bets are sometimes placed on who will win. Older men often play card games, particularly a complicated game called *belotte*.

Visits to family and friends play an integral role in society, as a way of building and maintaining ties. Visits between rural friends and relatives occur often and usually unannounced, as making prior arrangements is difficult without telephones. Evening visits can last several hours. Houseguests may stay several weeks and will bring gifts of food from their home region.

Drinking tea is a common social activity among men, women's groups, families and neighbors. Tea is always drunk in three rounds, with each round being progressively sweeter. The green tea is drunk from tiny glasses. It can take a couple of hours of chitchat to finish three rounds of tea. Malians often eat peanuts with their tea.

Dance and song are a part of everyday life in the village of Ouelessebouyou. Men, women and children enjoy participating in song and dance celebrations for community and religious rituals, as well as fun and entertainment. Dance and song are also used to honor guests, and to express gratitude and thanks on behalf of the community.

Women dance with a unified style, moving continuously in a circle. One woman may step forward into the circle to perform a short improvisational dance then move back into the outer ring of dancers. The group is always moving and participating as a whole.

Men dance intensely, in short spurts of highly energetic and athletic dance, then recede to the outer circle while another individual takes his turn. The thrust of their work is similar.

Storytelling is one of the most traditional forms of entertainment. Stories told by elders, though enjoyable to hear, serve the purpose of educating the younger generation on how to make wise decisions.

Housing

In Ouelessebouyou villages, the extended family (including aunts, uncles and grandparents) lives in a "compound." Family compounds usually consist of 6-9 mud huts with an open communal area in the center. In the communal area, family members socialize with friends and neighbors, and women cook meals over an open fire.

Huts, built from mud bricks, have a thatched roof, mud stucco exterior and dirt floor. There is always a designated cooking hut. Most of the huts are used as sleeping rooms. Women and children sleep in a separate room from the men.

Eating

As is custom throughout North Africa and Arabia, villagers eat from a communal dish with their hands (rather than utensils). It is very important, however, that *only* the right hand is used for eating. Hands are washed with water before and after meals.

The most common meal is rice or millet served in a large bowl with okra, red or peanut sauce poured over it. Family members will eat together from one communal bowl and men eat separately from the women. On special occasions, the sauce will have meat and a variety of vegetables added to it. The most common drink is *da bleni* (hibiscus tea).

Most families grow all the food they eat. Millet is the most important staple food and often requires all of the family efforts

to farm enough for their sustenance. After the millet grain is harvested, women pound it into a fine powder before cooking it.

Clothing

The most traditional clothing worn in Ouelessebouyou is the *boubou* (*boo-boo*), a long, flowing robe worn over pants or a skirt. Sometimes villagers, usually men or children, wear western clothing such as jeans and t-shirts. Women usually wear long wrap-around skirts, blouses, sandals and a head-wrap made from bright, colorful fabric. It is important that women dress modestly by covering their legs.

Water

Villagers get all of their water (for drinking, bathing, gardening, cleaning and cooking) by drawing it from a well. Some families have a simple well within their family compound, however most wells with pumps are communal.

During the African drought crisis in the 1980's, many traditional wells dried up. Some villagers walked several miles daily for water and a few entire villages were forced to relocate because they had no access to water. The Ouelessebouyou-Utah Alliance was originally founded in response to that need. Since 1985, over 70 new wells have been constructed in the region with assistance from the Alliance.

Market

Every Friday is market day in the town of Ouelessebouyou. On market day, all the surrounding villages come to buy and sell goods such as fruit, vegetables, millet, small animals, and household items. Some vendors from surrounding villages will wake-up at 4:30 a.m. and travel nearly 60 miles by foot and public transport to get to Ouelessebouyou for market day.

Holidays & Celebrations

Harvest Celebration is a favorite of Ouelessebouyou children. In September, villagers celebrate the harvest with feasts, music and dancing.

The most important religious holidays are the feast at the end of Ramadan (when Muslims go without food and water during the day but eat in the evening), and Tabaski (feast of mutton honoring Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son). The dates for these feasts change each year based on the lunar calendar.

National holidays include New Year's Day, Army day (20 January), Martyr's Day (26 March), Labor Day (1 May), and Independence Day (22 September).

Transportation

Most villagers walk everywhere they go. Some also ride bicycles or motorbikes, if they can afford them. Since villagers do not own cars, they may take public transport in minivans, called *bachee* (*baw-shay*), to travel long distances. Travel by road is difficult, because most roads are unpaved.

Communication

No electricity or telephone lines exist in villages surrounding Ouelessebouyou, so villagers communicate long-distance by radio broadcast. A private radio station in the town of Ouelessebouyou announces news, emergency weather reports, weddings, funerals, meetings and other public-service announcements, and broadcasts Muslim and Christian sermons. Broadcasts are made in French and Bamanan.

In the town of Ouelessebouyou, most people go to the post-office to make or receive phone calls. Mail is delivered to the post office, but not to homes. Villagers often send mail with travelers who are going in a letter's intended direction.

Health

Through most of Mali, there are inadequate medical facilities. On average, there is only one doctor for every 17,000 people and clinics are often without supplies. Widespread epidemics of Malaria and other harmful diseases cause several thousand deaths each year. Trachoma, a disease that can cause blindness, affects one-third of all the children.

Within Ouelessebouyou, there is a small local government sponsored hospital and 2 to 3 doctors. In 2001, an operating room was added to the hospital. Yearly, a medical team of doctors and nurses from Utah travel to Ouelessebouyou to perform much-needed surgeries and provide training.

There is immense need for health education. Many illnesses could be avoided by teaching basic preventive techniques. The Ouelessebouyou-Utah Alliance trains village health workers to treat common illness and educate community members about nutrition and hygiene.

Modern medicine is supplemented by traditional medicine, and some people trust traditional medicine more. Most villages have an active traditional healer, or medicine man. Traditional healers are knowledgeable in herbal medicines and have a good success rate in curing patients. They know where to find the proper leaves, roots and bark to prepare their remedies. A son of a medicine man inherits the privilege and power of healing from his father, and is carefully trained in the secret ways of medicine. Older women usually serve as the traditional healers for medical needs pertaining to birthing and childcare.

Education

Although the Mali government makes education a priority and spends a relatively large *percentage* of its budget on education, the government's limited resources can fund only a few state schools. Nearly 90% of Ouelessebouyou children are unable to attend government schools. Recently the Mali government passed a law allowing villagers to create their own schools. In theory, every village can have a community school, but this is only possible if villagers can raise enough money to fund one themselves.

Through the generous donations of Utahns, the Alliance is now able to subsidize 12 community schools, giving many more children access to education. Schools follow a curriculum subscribed by the state—math, ethics, P.E., life skills, science, geography, history, art and singing. Children also learn to read and write in French and Bamanankan. Literacy helps villagers read their own language, record important events such as childrens' birthdays, and keep a written record for posterity.

In Alliance schools, teachers' salaries are subsidized through the generosity of donors in Utah. Parents also contribute money (approx. 72 cents/month) for each child to attend school—a significant sacrifice for villagers. It is considered a privilege for a child to go to school, and some large families cannot afford to pay this amount for all their children to attend.

Some villages have begun working cooperatively as a community to help fund education. In the village of Fadiobouyou, the money made from one harvest day is set aside for the school. Women of the village also tend a community garden of millet, gather cotton and pick shea nuts. The proceeds from these enterprises help to pay for the education of their children.

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GLANCE AT THE COUNTRY OF MALI

An excellent 4-pg summary of info on Mali can be ordered from CultureGrams (1-800-528-6279 or www.culturegrams.com).

History of the Great Mali Empire

Malians take great pride in their history and ancestry. Mali is the cultural heir to three ancient African empires: Ghana, Malinke and Songhai. Historically, the name "Mali" means "Land of the Wealthy Ones." In the 14th century, the Mali Empire was the wealthiest, largest, and most powerful in all of Africa. Present day *Djeli* sing the stories of when the great Empire of Mali was founded under Sundiata Keita (also known as the Lion King) in 1230 CE. Through his great leadership, he united many kings under his rule and led Mali into an era of peace and prosperity. Gold from the minefields at Bure brought much wealth to the empire. Mali excelled in the trade industry and Malian cities were the centers of commerce and culture.

Under the reign of Mansa Moussa (1317–1337 CE), the empire continued to expand, along with the religion of Islam within the empire. Moussa took a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324, which fostered political, cultural and intellectual links between western Sudan and the Arab world. The kingdom of Mali became known as a center of Islamic learning. The foundations for Africa's first university were laid in Timbuktu in 1325 CE.

Mali's period of power and prosperity declined in the 15th century due to a succession of weak rulers and warring factions.

Democracy & Government

Present day Mali is ranked as one of the most free democracies among both African and Muslim countries. Mali's multi-party democracy includes a president who serves as the head of state and a prime minister who serves as the head of government. The National Assembly, consisting of 116 members serving five-year terms, is directly elected by the Malian people. Voting age is 21.

Population & Diversity

Seventy-five percent of Mali's population of 10.4 million live in rural areas. Mali has an ethnically diverse population including peoples of the Bamanan, Malinke, Dogon, Taureg, Senufo, Songhay and Dogon tribes. With such diverse populations, the potential for ethnic rivalries in Mali may seem great, but people get along remarkably well.

Social Capital

The relative ethnic harmony in Mali is often attributed to the nation's most precious asset: *social capital*. Conceptually very different from financial capital, *social capital* relates to human, cultural and spiritual values, where relationships are more important than individual wealth. Partially due to strong historical ties, but also because of the harsh environment and difficult living conditions, relationships between neighbors in Mali are based on mutual respect and interdependence. There is a strong sense of family and community, which despite depressing economic statistics, makes Mali one of the world's richest countries in terms of human relationships.

Sources

The information in this document was primary taken from native commentary and original analysis. Content is accurate to the best knowledge of contributors.
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