

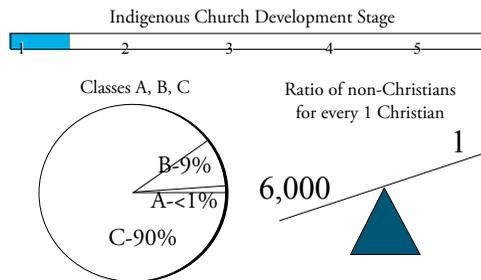
# Yao Muslims



## Quick Facts

**Population:** 1,800,000  
 Malawi: 1,000,000  
 Tanzania: 500,000  
 Mozambique: 250,000  
 Zimbabwe: 40,000

**Religion:** Islam  
**Believers:** 0.016% (MBB)  
**Scriptures:** Portions  
**Ministry Tools:** JRT  
**Church Status:** 1  
**Mission Status:** 1  
**MS Subgroups:** 10+



Class A- Are members of a Culturally Relevant Church  
 Class B- Have close access to a CRC, but have not yet joined  
 Class C- Have no reasonable or close access to a CRC

**Identity:** The Yao are a Bantu people inhabiting the eastern shores of Lake Malawi and the hills between the Mwembe and Luchilingo range. They are closely related to the Mwera, Makua, and Makonde.

**Lifestyle:** The Yao were formerly slave and ivory traders with the Arabs and Swahili. Colonialism and famine forced the Yao to migrate and find new sources of income. Many men became migrant laborers, or traveling salesmen, which still continues today. However, for most families, farming and fishing around Lake Malawi is the staple economy. Major crops are corn, sorghum and tobacco. Yao farming villages are considered small (12 homes, or 75-100 people). In Tanzania the government has forcefully enlarged and combined them, resulting in considerable social change.

**Customs:** The *Unyago* is the largest celebration of the year, and is the

climax to several weeks of initiation ceremonies for boys and girls between the ages 7-12. During this time they are taught what it means to be a member of the Yao tribe. Children who have completed the initiation are paraded under umbrellas dressed in sunglasses, jewelry (for girls) and new clothes as part of the *Unyago* celebrations.

**Religion:** The Yao began to convert in mass to Islam during the 19th century as part of a protest against the Catholic Portuguese who disrupted their livelihood as slave traders. The conversion was always very superficial, and it has only been recently that Muslim Yao have begun to move towards more orthodoxy. However, syncretism still abounds, and many former rites such as those involving ancestor worship (*sadaka* rites) are considered to be an essential part of being a good Muslim.

**Christian Outreach:** Over the last century, various Christian missions

have had success in winning animistic-background Yao to Christ. The descendants of these converts have essentially become a separate people from the Muslim Yao, though their potential for being equipped to reach them is significant. Thus a few mission agencies are concentrating on training and recruiting potential missionaries from these older church groups. Others are engaging the Muslim Yao more directly, though with limited success thus far.

## How to Pray:

☞ The Yao have made resistance to “Christianization” a part of their national identity. Pray that missionaries might have wisdom in offering the Yao the person of Christ, with no cultural strings attached.

☞ The Yao have a high rate of illiteracy, due in part to their reluctance to attend Catholic schools. Pray for a special ministry that intends to bring literacy to the Yao in a sensitive way, allowing the Love of Christ and the Holy Spirit to work in hearts as they study His word.

☞ Islamists actively oppose the presence of missionaries among the Yao. Pray for continued open doors and for courage in the face of intimidation and threats.

**Every year 18,000 Yao Muslims die without Christ.**