

Zerma



Quick Facts

Population: 4,200,000

Niger: 4,000,000

Nigeria: 100,000

Benin: 35,000

Ivory Coast: 18,000

Religion: Islam

Believers: 0.007%

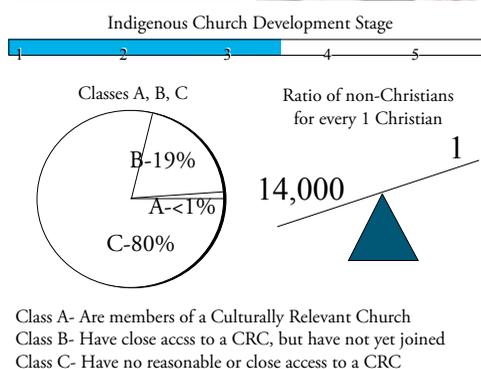
Scriptures: None

Ministry Tools: JRGT

Church Status: 3

Mission Status: 2

MS Subgroups: 15+



Identity: The Zerma are an ethno-linguistic subgroup of the Songhai, living primarily in Southwest Niger. Together the Zerma-Songhai peoples founded a kingdom in the 15th century that dominated the region for centuries.

Lifestyle: The Zerma are primarily subsistence farmers. Staple crops are millet, sorghum, and beans. The head of every household is responsible for dividing up the family's farmland among individual members, each of which will be given their own area to farm. Women usually tend small lots, in addition to their other domestic tasks, and grow small crops of peanuts, peas and okra. After the harvest season, men often seek work in West African port cities. Zerma men also dominate government positions in the capital city of Niamey, even though the Hausa are the majority group.

Customs: Weddings are a four day affair among the Zerma. They begin

in the home of the bride as an all-day celebration. After this, the friends of the groom bring the bride to his home where there will be an additional three days of celebration.

Religion: The Zerma embraced Islam as early as the 11th century. Today every Zerma village has its own mosque, and prayers are well-attended by adult males on a daily basis. However, there remains a high degree of syncretism among them, and spirit-possession cults led by traditional sacred-specialists are ubiquitous. They preside over special ceremonies such as the *yenendi*, which is held at the end of the hot-season to invoke the spirits to bring rains for a bountiful harvest. Muslim leaders, called Marabouts, also contribute to this syncretism by producing charms, such as pouches with verses of the quran in them, which are carried to ward off evil.

Christian Outreach: Significant missionary effort has gone into reaching

the Zerma, and churches have been established in the strategic urban centers of Niamey and Ouallam. In addition there is ongoing work in around 40 villages by an excellent partnership of mission agencies.

How to Pray:

☞ One organization has developed a unique and effective church-planting strategy called a "mobile center," which goes from village to village for a given period of time with a variety of programs that are customized to the local situation. Pray for the multiplication and blessing of these "mobile-centers" so that every village might be reached.

☞ Only about 15% of the Zerma are literate, and over the last decade mission agencies have produced a variety of discipleship programs and resources to reach those who learn primarily through oral means. Pray for the wide acceptance and use of these resources by Zerma evangelists and disciple-makers.

☞ Plans are underway to produce local radio and TV programs for the Zerma. Pray for creativity and the right personnel to produce these programs. Pray also for continued openness to preach the gospel in Niger.

**Every year 37,000
Zerma die
without Christ.**