

The Nema of Papua New Guinea



Nema lady with firewood by Bonnie Mackenzie

The Nema people live on the southern slopes of the Saruwaged mountain range at the headwaters of the Erap river in Morobe province. The five Nema villages are situated on the ridges of steep mountains and separated from each other by deep valleys.

The people plant gardens and harvest foods like taro, sweet potato, greens, bananas and other kinds of fruit. The Nema people also plant betelnut, tobacco and coffee for cash crops.

The villages are between 1300 and 1700 meters above sea level so the nights can be quite cool and people sleep next to fire places that are in the center of every room. Houses are built on posts one to one and half meters off the ground. The walls are constructed with either woven bamboo or handmade planks. The roofs are thatched with broad bamboo leaves or grass.

The Lutheran church entered the area in the 1950s and since then has established a congregation in every village. When the church came in the people left behind their old ways of fighting. The Lutheran mission set up schools that taught Kâte, a language from the eastern coast, to the children until the 1960s. The Bible and liturgy books are available in Kâte and are still used in the church today along with Tok Pisin, the trade language. The younger generation doesn't understand Kâte, the older generation has low proficiency in Tok Pisin and there are no scriptures or liturgy available in Nema, so all three languages are used during church services.

There is a need for basic Biblical training amongst the Nema. They are dissatisfied with their situation, but since they don't have the Scripture in their own language they have not gained an understanding of God's promises for believers' everyday lives.

Primary Religion:

Christianity

Disciples (Matt 28:19):

Perhaps 1/3

Churches:

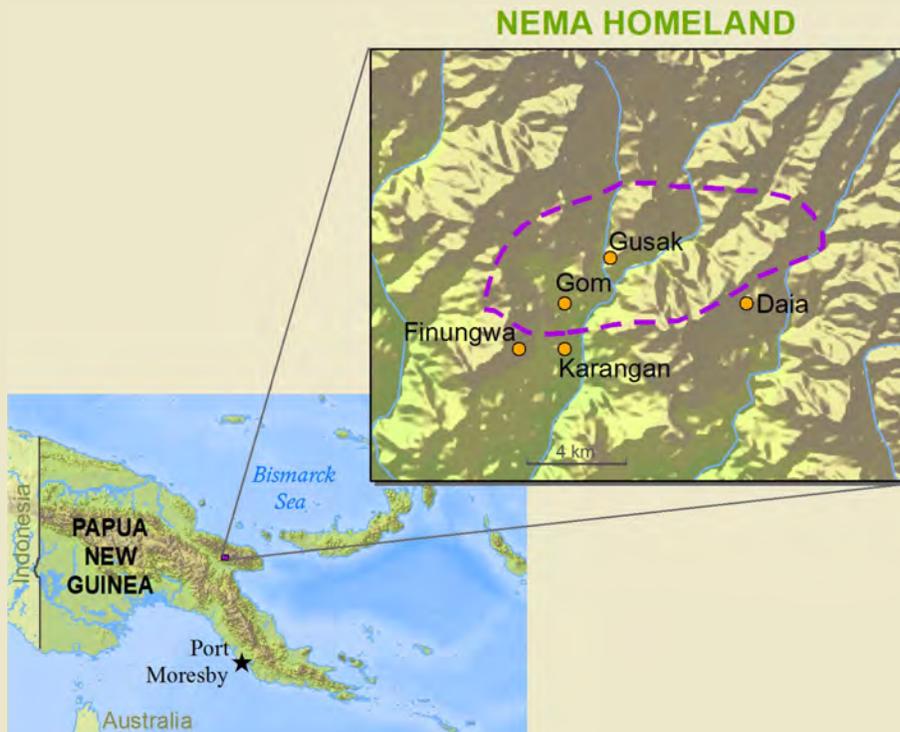
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Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):

None

Population (date):

1,024 (2000)



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Have They Heard The Gospel?

Call themselves Christians	100%
True Disciples	unknown but maybe 30-50% ? Less than half of the population regularly attends church. The proportion of true believers is probably less than that.
Response To The Gospel	Very receptive
Attitude to Religious Change	Somewhat resistant
Comment:	Resistant to new denominations coming in
Number of Churches	5
Number of Communities	There are 5 villages
Word of God Translated	No
Other Forms of Gospel Presentation	Recordings: No; Literature: No; Video/Films: No; Radio: No
Comment:	The Bible is available in Kâte and Tok Pisin. People reported that those over 40-years-old understand Kâte, but younger people do not. Some older people have very low proficiency in Tok Pisin; most people are fairly bilingual in Tok Pisin, but prefer the vernacular.
Are Cross-Cultural Missionaries Needed?	There is a definite need for basic Bible teaching, since the people don't have a good understanding of the real message of the Bible. There is also a need for Bible translation which would greatly aid sound Biblical teaching.

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Group Description

Geography and Environment

Rainforest on steep mountain slopes

Literacy

Men: 62%, Women: 50%, overall 56%

Active Literacy Program

No

Comment

Elementary teachers are very interested in creating an alphabet for the Nema language.

Economics

Subsistence type

Swidden agriculturalists

Occupation

Subsistence farming

Income Sources

Coffee, tobacco and betelnut

Products/Crafts

String bags and kundus (hand drums)

Utilities

Running water in two villages, one village has a generator for lights in the church.

Community Development

Health Care Quality

Poor. The nearest clinic is a three to four hour walk away and service is not regular.

Diet

Fair. Staples are sweet potato, taro and yams. They also have fruits and vegetables but very little meat and other sources of protein.

Water

Good. Two villages have filtered tap water in their village; the other three villages have streams close by.

Shelter

Houses are rectangular and divided into 2-4 rooms that all open onto a narrow veranda running the length of the house. The walls are made of either woven bamboo or handmade planks, the roof is thatched with bamboo leaves or grass. The floors are made with woven bamboo.

Electricity

There is no electricity, but there is a generator in one village

Energy/Fuel

Very good. Lots of wood available

Clothing

Second hand, western style clothing

Transportation

Walking

Infant Mortality Rate

5%

Comment:

The infant mortality rate and life expectancy given above are national averages. They are probably higher and lower, respectively, for the Nema people

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Society and Culture

Family Structures	Patrilineal society where people belong to an extended family within the village.
Neighbor Relations	They have good working relationships with surrounding groups.
Authority	The Lutheran congregation chairman, who is also a clan leader, is the leader of the village. Other clan leaders also take leadership in the church, organize community events and give direction
Social Groupings	People live in villages of 90-400 people.
Judicial Punishment	Most disputes are settled within the village through the congregation chairman. If the dispute is too big then it will be taken to the government appointed council in a nearby village.
Celebrations	People follow Lutheran church traditions. They have ceremonies to bless events like the birth of children and the first harvest.
Recreations	Chewing betelnut, soccer and volleyball.
Art Forms	Weaving string bags and creating decorations for their traditional dances which include body paint, grass skirts and feathers.
Attitude to Outsiders	Very Receptive
Attitude to Change	Somewhat Receptive

Youth

Labor and Tasks (6-12 year olds)	Looking after younger siblings, fetching water and betelnuts for parents.
Youth Problems (Teens)	After finishing school the teens go back to the village and do traditional farming but don't have paid work.

Education

Primary Schools Comment	2. Two villages have elementary schools which provide three years of school in the vernacular. Children then have the option of two other schools in two different language groups to complete primary school.
Primary School Enrollment Comment	56 Grades 1-3
Teachers Comment	3 There are three teachers from the Nema language group who are teaching in the Nema area.

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Language of Instruction Early Years	Nema [gsn] and Tok Pisin [tpi]
Language of Instruction Later Years	Tok Pisin [tpi] and English
Language of Textbooks Early Years	English
Language of Textbooks Later Years	English
Comment	Elementary schools are used to help children transition from Nema to English
Number of Schools >90% Homogeneous	2. Both elementary schools are over 90% homogeneous.

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Status of Christianity

Church Growth

Total Baptized	1,024
Comment	Everyone in the area is baptized as a child and then goes through confirmation class once they become a teenager.
Lay Leaders	27
Bible Schools	0
Christian Clinics/Hospitals	0

Religion and Response

Resistance / Receptivity	Very receptive to the gospel
Recommended Approaches	Missionaries would need to work with the Lutheran church and the existing authority system.

Scripture/Literature/Media

Scripture Use	Individuals and churches use the Tok Pisin and Kâte Bibles.
Translation Status	Scripture would have more meaning for people if it was in their own language and there would be less misinterpretation.

Missions and Churches

Organization #1	Evangelical Lutheran Church
Country of Origin	The first missionaries to Papua New Guinea were from Germany, the US and Australia. They sent out many Papua New Guinean missionaries. Now the PNG Lutheran Church is independent.
Main Ministry	Evangelism
Year Started	1950s
Number of Adherents	1,024
Number of Congregations	5
Number of National Workers	2
Number of Local Workers	27
Number of Workers using Local Language	27
Language used by Workers	Nema [gsn], Tok Pisin [tpi] and Kâte [kmg]