



EAST AFRICANS

The East African Community is made up of the following countries: Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi and the Republic of Congo. This community has been in existence for a while and is guided by the motto “Ushirikiano Wa Africa Mashariki” meaning Unity Of East Africa. People of East Africa have shared a common history, language (Swahili), culture and infrastructure, making it easier for them to realize collective development and collaboration in Africa, as well as here in the United States. East Africans continue to reinforce this unified identity by interacting closely and freely here in the United States. Most people from Congo, Rwanda and Burundi are here as either refugees or asylees, but most Kenyans, Ugandans and Tanzanians are here as immigrants (Visa, Lottery winners, etc).



• DID YOU KNOW?

- Over 2000 Kenyans, Ugandans, Tanzanians, Rwandans, Burundians and Congolese make their home in Guilford County.
- Most immigrants from East Africa are either middle-aged adults or children; very few are seniors (over 60 years)
- Most East Africans speak Swahili
- Most of the refugees in the United States came through East Africa. Some people from other countries, especially refugees such as Sudanese, speak Swahili too.

- Information included here is provided to help you become more aware of the culture and traditions of your clients, students and co-workers. Please use this only as a guide, keeping in mind that all people within a culture are not the same. Be sure to ask your clients and their families about their specific beliefs, practices and customs. Showing respect and openness toward their traditions will help you build better relationships and provide more effective services.

• CULTURE

LANGUAGE There are many East African tribal and ethnic languages, but the main languages spoken are Swahili, French, and English. Most individuals, with the exception of the younger generation, are bilingual.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES & BELIEFS Sub-Saharan Africans are essentially religious people. Life and world view pivot around religion. Their religious practices include Christianity, Islam, and traditional beliefs.

Although Christianity and Islam do not oppose modern medicine, some fundamental Christians and Muslims lean on their faith when it comes to issues of health and wellness. Within this community, Muslims and Christians get along very well, despite the stigma which has been created about Muslims since September 11, 2001.

SOCIAL CLASS Social class is generally related to income, family size, tribe, clan, education and geographical region. The wealthy and those in leadership positions are respected and seen as mentors in the community.

EDUCATION East Africans have different levels of education.

They range from professionals with college degrees to non-skilled laborers. In recent years, many females, especially in Guilford County, are pursuing careers in nursing. Nonetheless, a good education does not guarantee a professional job. Most trained individuals only have access to low paying positions and/or temporary jobs. The huge discrimination in the job market diminishes their expectations of a better life in the United States and creates more health-related problems.

TIME ORIENTATION Unlike for Americans, it is acceptable for East Africans to arrive late for gatherings. Most of them struggle with the American concept of “keeping time,” because in their homelands, coming late for a meeting or a function is the norm. Through cultural assimilation, however, most East Africans are adjusting to keeping time.

FOOD & DIET The East African diet mainly consists of corn, wheat, cooked vegetables, meats, tea, fruits, rice, milk, and potatoes. The consumption of meat is very high. They eat very few raw vegetables, such as in salads. Most of their food is fried. When visitors come into their homes, East Africans offer food and drink

as a gesture of hospitality and will become offended if visitors refuse to accept food that is offered.

• FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS

All in all, East Africans are generally cheerful and welcoming. It is common for other relatives, such as uncles and aunts, to be referred to as father or mother; cousins are called brothers and sisters. It is not unusual to find many extended family members sharing homes or apartments. An individual within the community feels secure with the support of the extended family.

GENDER ROLES

Most East African cultures are patriarchal. Traditionally, the men head the families, make decisions, are the breadwinners, and control finances. Females, on the other hand, are only required to be in charge of domestic issues.

This is changing, however, as men, women, and children, particularly adolescent youth, are accepting new responsibilities and sharing roles in an effort to help support the family.

This change of roles has not been well received by everyone and has sometimes contributed to family disputes. Domestic violence is prevalent, although it is not

always reported or discussed. The rates of divorce and separation are on the increase, largely due to the change of roles and the increased stress which comes with working long hours. Most mothers in the United States have to work to help support their families; this was not usually the case in Africa. Likewise, men have had to learn to take care of children – very much a phenomenon to men of foreign cultures.



CHILDREN & YOUTH The youth are required to show great respect to their parents, as well as to community leaders. They are also required to help at home with domestic chores and caring for younger siblings. Because of the increased financial strains that have come with living in this country, youngsters are often forced to work in order to help contribute financially to their families. This additional income may help support family still living in Africa, as well as their own needs. It is alarming to note the increase of school dropouts, teenage pregnancies, and involvement in unhealthy lifestyles.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION Domestic conflicts are resolved within the family. In the absence of immediate family, or if a family cannot resolve the conflict for

themselves, then closest friends, community leaders and church leaders, in that respective order, are consulted. Taking conflicts to court is, therefore, very unusual for Africans, and those who do this are not well received by the community.

GREETINGS & SHOWING RESPECT Most East Africans shake right hands and hug when greeting each other. Hugging indicates a certain familiarity and it is reserved for one's friends and family members.

Respect is considered an important virtue, both at the family and the community level. Children are required to show respect to their elders at home and in the community. Likewise, the elders are accorded great respect by their families and in their community. Men are viewed

as more superior. Therefore, they make most decisions at home.

In this country, teachers and people in leadership positions are highly respected. Most children are taught to address adults as "aunt" and "uncle." It is, therefore, uncommon for East Africans to address people by only their first name. They will always add "Mr.," "Mrs.," "Dr.," as it is appropriate. They highly respect the law and government.

GESTURES & CUSTOMS Eye contact is not always advised, especially between older and younger people. Most people from East Africa do not volunteer information unless they have developed some trust in the person with whom they are communicating.

• HEALTH & WELLNESS

HEALTH BELIEFS For Africans, modern medicine has proven successful in eradicating many deadly diseases and epidemics. Generally, educated people, regardless of their confession of faith, turn to modern medicine in time of need.

Modern Christians believe that God can use human hands (medical doctors) to heal

humans. Therefore modern medicine, alongside traditional home remedies and prayers, is common.

ALCOHOL USE Drinking and smoking is prevalent, however, it is very rare to see women doing either. Cases of use and abuse, especially among the youth population, is on the increase.

WEIGHT MANAGEMENT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY People who are fat are perceived to be healthy, however, cases of obesity are very rare. Moreover, children who are skinny are perceived as unhealthy. This notion is changing, however, especially among the younger generation who are very concerned about weight and diet.

Most individuals are sedentary and inactive. One of the main reasons they give for this is lack of time and limited access to resources.

OBSTACLES TO ACCESSING CARE The healthcare system here is very different than in Africa. It is sophisticated, yet very difficult to maneuver. Some of the challenges include language, lack of transportation, lack of health insurance, and cultural differences. Because of the high cost of health care and other systematic barriers, most people,

especially men, only seek health care if they are really sick.

- **EAST AFRICAN-OWNED BUSINESSES**

Beluga's
High Point Road
Greensboro

- **PLACES OF WORSHIP**

Miracle Center
501 S. Mendenhall Street
Greensboro, NC

All Nations Evangelical Church
2721 Ring Road
Greensboro

Christ Covenant
1414 Cliffwood Road
Greensboro

Cathedral of His Glory
4501 Lake Jeanette Road
Greensboro

