

**Institute of African Studies
University of Nairobi**

**Cultural source materials
for population planning
in East Africa
by Angela Molnos
in four volumes**



east african publishing house

vol III Beliefs and practices

With an introductory analysis by Angela Molnos
and contributions

by W. Arens, J. H. M. Beattie, T. O. Beidelman

B. G. Blount, D. W. Brokensha, R. T. Curley

P. H. Gulliver, M. Hautvast-Mertens

G. W. B. Huntingford, A. H. Jacobs, Ivan and P. Karp

G. Kershaw, B. L. and D. W. Kettel, M. N. Kisekka

J. E. Lamphear, G. O. and M. B. Lang

C. D. and E. R. Laughlin, I. M. Lewis, R. S. M. Lukalo

I. Mayer, J. Mbiti, S. D. Messing, J. F. Middleton

M. T. Mushanga, S. P. K. Mwambia, K. Ndeti

B. K. Njeru, D. J. and M. A. Parkin, O. F. Raum

P. Reining, A. W. Southall, M. Southwold

H. Ueda, R. van der Meeren-Yeld

C. M. Varkevisser and Monica Wilson

THE ITESO OF THE KENYA-UGANDA BORDER
IVAN AND PATRICIA KARP

1 Traditions Promoting the Birth Rate
(Answer to Question 36)

There were, and to some degree still are, two important practices and beliefs which we believe had some influence in promoting high levels of overall fertility.

The first is the traditional religious system which operated in a negative way to suppress impulses that might lead to a lowering of the overall level of fertility. We believe that this factor is still effective today and will have to be considered by anyone attempting to change Teso values where they concern attitudes towards fertility. Teso religious ceremonies may conveniently be divided under two rubrics - public and domestic ceremonial. With the loss of Teso independence under the colonial regime and the disappearance of the traditional age system, public ceremonies have almost completely disappeared from Iteso life. Domestic ceremonies, however, have survived unaltered since precolonial times and at present, they compose the core and larger part of the Teso traditional religious system.

All of these domestic ceremonies concern the symbolic role of a woman as an agent of fertility. Men have no role in these ceremonies except occasionally to kill and skin a sacrificial cow. The ceremonies occur when it is necessary to dramatize transformations in the woman's role. Thus, there are ceremonies which emphasize her status as a newly-wed (a potential mother and agent of fertility), actual new mother (who is in danger of losing the product of fertility - a child) and successful mother (of a newly-wed husband). There are also fertility ceremonies when children are sick, i.e. when the products of fertility are in danger. At such times it is not the children who play the central ritual role but the mother who, by ritually performing her customary household tasks which are concerned with fertility and abundance (threshing, winnowing, grinding, and cooking), cures the children. There is no evidence of any decline in importance of these rituals in Teso life.

It seems that the major symbolic theme of traditional Teso religion is a ritual emphasis on the role of women as agents of fertility and abundance through the production of children. If Teso religion has any efficacy at all, women are continually enjoined to fulfil the role that is expressed in the ceremonies.

The other major traditional factor in promoting a high level of overall fertility was the institution of marriage through the customs of widow inheritance and privileged access of younger brothers. For a number of reasons such as high bridewealth, reluctance of fathers to grant permission and the importance of warfare, the Iteso probably married relatively late in life. This means that at the death of a husband, a woman was likely to have some number of childbearing years left. She was not left in widowhood, but was inherited by a member of the dead man's minimal lineage. It was and is the duty of the dead man's sisters to nominate an heir to the dead man who would be trustee of his estate and inheritor of one or more wives. The usual choice was a younger brother or, failing that, a son by another wife. Sons born subsequent to the death of the man were the children of the inheritor. In a kind of anticipation of their inheritance, younger brothers who were usually and sometimes perpetually unmarried, were allowed sexual access to an older brother's wife. For an older brother to have intercourse with a younger brother's wife, however, was an offence comparable to incest. Many Iteso now deny that such things ever occur. There are still no legal sanctions against younger brothers having intercourse with an older brother's wife. As one informant put it, 'It isn't adultery; it isn't incest; it must be simple theft!'. The consequence of these rules is to utilize as fully as possible the fertility of the woman that is the object of so much emphasis in the domestic ceremonies.

2 Traditional Naming Customs

(Answer to Question 41)

There is no evidence to indicate that traditional naming customs influence desired or actual numbers of children. However, the naming customs of the Iteso do indicate a prevalent concern with and ritual emphasis upon the problem of fertility. This is shown in two ritually significant instances where problems of fertility are dealt with by the Iteso. These are occasions of exceptional fertility, the birth of twins or other multiple births; and the cases of exceptional infertility where a woman has been unable to give birth or when a number of children have died in succession. In what follows below, we shall first discuss naming customs following normal births, then the customs pertaining to these exceptional situations.

Normally, the name of a child is decided upon by the grandmother (father's mother) of the child who plays an important role in the fertility rituals surrounding the child. The general way of naming children is what we call a 'commemorative' pattern, in that the name given to the child celebrates some person or event. These names may be concerned with either trivial or significant things. Thus, a man may be called EKAPULU, after a variety of bush vegetable, because it was in his home on the day he was born; or EKIRING (meat) because there was meat in his home. Infants may also be named after the day or time they were born. There are names such as OKWARE, born at night; BARAZA, born on Monday - the day of the chief's baraza; or OMKAGA, born on Saturday. The names also commemorate more important events such as OKODOI (smallpox) which may note either an inoculation campaign or an epidemic; or NYABOLA, a word borrowed from Luhya, which signifies a rinderpest epidemic. Also, unusual events which intrude on Teso social life are commemorated. Thus, there were infants who were named MOTOKA (from the word 'motor car') for the appearance of the first automobile; or EMUSUGUT (European) for a time when a European visited that area.

In addition, infants are named after other people in order to remember relatives and ancestors. This naming takes three forms: the infant is straightforwardly given the name of the person to be remembered; the infant is given the name of the relationship by which he or she calls the person to be remembered (thus one finds names such as MAMAI, mother's brother, or TATA, grandmother); or the infant is given the nickname of the remembered person.

People may also choose to name a child after another person in one of two ways: to commemorate a revered living or dead person, especially a senior clansman or woman; and before or during a pregnancy, an EPARAIT or APARAIT (male or female spirit of the dead) will cause a woman to dream. This eparait is angry because he has not been remembered and will tell the woman in her dream how to name the child, usually after himself.

In addition to ordinary names, people acquire nicknames and age-group (ATURI) names. The nicknames are often derogatory, pointing out some unfortunate personal or physical characteristic. One person we know is called EPIKISIT (foreleg) because of the unusual size of his legs. Another is called 'Nairobi' because he is always bragging about his experiences there. Age-group names commemorate some important event that occurred during the time the people of that group were born. These are usually applied only to men. The men born in the 1942-44 period are known as PANYAKO for the Pioneer Corps recruiting which took place during that time.

The naming of the child takes place on the day of birth in a ceremony called ALIMOKIN IKOKU EKIROR (telling the child his name). As soon as the umbilical cord is cut, the child's father's mother brings in a calabash of water. The mother and grandmother of the child wash their hands from the calabash, then shake the water from their hands onto the fire which has been burning in the middle of the hut. They say, 'let it be cool', meaning things should be well in the home. The grandmother then puts one finger in the water and makes a sign (a straight vertical line) on the forehead, chest and both shoulders of the mother. She then puts the finger in the child's mouth and calls his name and says, 'begin sucking'. The name is known at this time by only the mother and grandmother of the child.

Part of this ceremony is repeated a few days later in a ritual called AKIPUDUN ABERU (bringing the woman who has given birth out of the house), but it is sometimes also called ALIMOKIN IKOKU EKIROR, the same as the previous ceremony. Akipudun aberu ideally requires the presence of all women who have married men of the lineage. During this ceremony, the father's mother dips her finger in a calabash of beer (instead of water as in the first ritual) and puts the finger into the child's mouth. She then calls out the child's name, which has been kept secret until this time. If the child cries a great deal, it is said that he has not accepted the name and beer must be brewed for the changing of the name. This name, given first on the day of birth and made known to others a few days later, is the most important one in that it is the only one to be given ceremonially, and is called EKIROR LOKA KINET (the sucking name).

This ceremony is altered in two cases. The first is an occasion of exceptional fertility such as the birth of twins. The names of twins are predetermined and alimokin ikoku ekiror is not done. Instead of the ceremony being a small domestic occurrence for the people of the home, it becomes an elaborate public affair with much singing, dancing and involving the expenditure of considerable resources. This is explained as the expression of joy by the local community to show the blessing of fertility as symbolized by the birth of twins.

The other instance is that of exceptional infertility or the failure of fertility as in the death of a number of children. The Iteso explain the failure of fertility as being caused by the intrusion of forces represented by the 'bush' (MODING or AMONIE) into the home along with other diseases and disasters. The solution to this problem in the case of children involves the ritual killing of a number of white animals and the association of the child with the bush. In the case of the ceremony where a child is given his name, the name is chosen from some of the 'things' from the bush. Some of

the more common names are ETYANG (animal), EBU (hyaena), EMODO (wildcat) and EMOTO (striga weed). These are mostly intrusive things which come into the home and destroy the things of the home, i.e. crops and domestic animals. In the ceremony of naming the child, the child is placed outside of the home in the bush, then taken by his father's mother and given to his mother who is told to 'keep this animal I have found in the bush'. Thus, an attempt is made to associate the child with the antagonistic forces which might destroy him.

3 The Physiology of Conception (Answer to Question 43)

Teso ideas of female physiology are much less complicated than the western view. The parts of the body concerned with reproduction are the vagina (AKWAN ABERU), the uterus (TOTO K'ITUNGA), the placenta (ANGASIEP) and the breasts (IKISIN) which are necessary for feeding the child. Women are not aware of having ovaries or of the production of ova.

Notions of female physiology are very important for understanding beliefs about menstruation, conception and menopause. A woman is born with a placenta. When she reaches puberty, her placenta has developed to the point where it is ready to release the blood which it has begun to manufacture. At the time of menstruation, the uterus opens and blood is released by the placenta which is contained in the uterus. The menstrual period lasts for four or five days for girls and young women, and from two to three days for older women. This is because young women have a much larger supply of blood than do older women. When the menstrual period is over, the uterus slowly closes again. People feel that menstruation is important as the blood which has remained in the uterus for one month will be 'bad' if left there any longer.

This leads us to Teso ideas of fertility and conception. Besides releasing blood, another function of the uterus is to 'catch' the semen (ADWA) deposited by the male during intercourse. The uterus must be open to do this and as it is open during menstruation and closes slowly afterwards, it is thought that the most fertile period for a woman is the four or five days after the end of her menstrual period. Then the blood and semen mix to begin the formation of the child. There is no idea of any part of the child developing more quickly than another; the embryo looks like a child at the beginning of gestation and then becomes progressively larger until birth. It is unthinkable that a couple should have intercourse during menstruation. As the woman is losing her own blood at this time, she will also lose the semen deposited by the male.

Sexual intercourse is essential during the first months of pregnancy as the semen helps the child to grow. The semen is not deposited inside the uterus which has closed and does not open again until the actual birth of the child. Instead, the semen surrounds the uterus and is expelled before birth, pouring out like water from a membranous sac. This is called AKIPARE AUKOT (literally, the pouring of blood; the word blood is used as a polite euphemism for adwa or semen which is rude). This is the amniotic fluid which is released when the amniotic membrane is broken, sometimes referred to as the 'bag of waters'. The placenta is expelled after the child and a new one begins to grow immediately inside the uterus.

When a woman grows old, she no longer has interest in sexual intercourse. The uterus closes as the 'food which it ate' - the semen - is no longer provided. The placenta also stops producing blood. After menstruation stops, an old woman becomes like a girl (APESE) again as opposed to a woman (ABERU). She can sit on her married son's bed and she can wear the clothes of her daughters-in-law (ATERAK) as though she were a young girl, things which she was not allowed to do before the menopause. After the menopause, a woman ceases having sexual intercourse. It is believed that intercourse is harmful at this time when there is no open uterus to catch the semen. This is because as the man withdraws, he pulls the uterus out with his penis and the woman will die (we are not sure why the uterus is pulled out of the body).

It is believed that the mother contributes the blood to the child, while the father gives it bones and flesh. The child's strength is also given by the mother as it is her body which 'sucks' the semen from the father. People believe that the sex may be contributed by either parent. If a child is a girl, it is due to the mother's blood being stronger. If the child is a male, it is because the semen of the father was stronger. Facial characteristics may be given by either parent, but there are no ideas of how this is accomplished. If the child behaves like either the father or mother, it is due to the child's conditioning within the womb.

4 Female Fertility

(Answer to Question 45)

A married woman should become pregnant as soon as the preceding child reaches the age of about one year. It is assumed that by this time, the child will be totally or almost totally weaned. He will also be encouraged to learn to walk by his mother and older brothers and sisters. He will be left more and more in the care of older children.

There seems to be no set age at which a girl or woman is expected to have her first child. One grandmother thought that her 14 year old grand-daughter was about the right age to have a child. Young girls with at least primary education think that a more appropriate age for childbearing is 24 or 25.

Ideally, a woman should give birth to at least 10 children, some of whom are not expected to live to maturity.

A woman's status in her husband's lineage is to some degree determined by whether she produces male children. If she does, even a small number, she is called ABERU NAX'EKITEKERE (woman of the clan). A woman with many children, some of whom must be boys, is also considered a woman of the clan. If a woman produces only girls, regardless of the number, she is not a woman of the clan. This is not unusual considering that the Iteso are a society in which inheritance is through men only and the continuity of lineage groups depends on the production of male offspring.

A woman with many children, if some are boys, is more important than a woman with few children. A woman with grown children is even more important. When a woman has sons who marry, her status changes from that of wife (aberu) to that of grandmother (TATA) - the term which is also used by son's wife for husband's mother. This is a term that denotes achievement and the right to be respected as a senior member of the household.

A childless woman is treated differently from one with children. Her relatives seem to act as if they prefer daughters who have borne children. Her husband and his family are said to treat his other wives with children better than the childless one. One rather subtle difference is in her treatment by the community. If she were to visit a person's home, she will not be given any gifts, but a mother taking her child with her is given gifts of chickens, finger millet or other things which are often 'for the child'.

Although people do not overtly treat the childless woman badly, they often consider her to be a bad person. A common idea is that a woman is childless because she has committed adultery or that she was a prostitute before marriage. Others think that she was born without a placenta and is therefore unable to conceive (this is usually thought of women who have no menstrual periods).

There seem to be no distinct images of a woman who is the mother of one, two or three children. People do not see them as being different from each other. A mother of twins (IMWATOK) or other multiple births (also called imwatok) has a very distinct image. She is an important woman because of her unusual fertility. She is called TOTO K'IDWE (the mother of children). The Iteso do not look upon the birth of twins as an inauspicious event. Rather because of the unusual fertility implicit in the event, it is regarded

as a great blessing. The mother, father, twins themselves and their followers are always required to help in a field in which people are working when they pass by. In doing this, they help to impart some of their exceptional fertility to the agricultural endeavour.

5 Male Sex Life and Fertility

(Answer to Questions 47 and 49)

The Iteso have no elaborate ceremonies which dramatize the change from one status to another. Like the other tribes of the Karamojong-speaking groups, the Iteso do not practise circumcision but, in addition, they no longer have an age-set system and its consequent ceremonies of initiation, succession and retirement. In contrast to many African societies, status transitions are no longer abrupt and rigidly marked.

In the immediate precolonial period, the age-system was centred around a set of retirement groups. Both initiation into the age-system and retirement were the same ceremony. This transition was rather abrupt and, for some men, apparently unwanted. Older informants tell us that some men had to be dragged forcibly to the ceremony. As soon as a man had grandsons, there was social pressure upon him to consider performing the retirement ceremony. This meant he could no longer marry or participate in political activities. This accounts, to some degree, for the unusual antagonism found between Iteso fathers and sons in this period. Again, informants tell us that a son had to fight and physically defeat his father before he was allowed to marry. The effect of this may have been to considerably delay the age of marriage and to prolong a man's activities as a warrior. Other unintended probable consequences of this system were a wide discrepancy between the marriage ages of men and women. Older men would be marrying much younger girls and, as a consequence, there may have been a very high rate of adultery between younger married women and unmarried men. Our information on these points is limited.

At present, a boy's heterosexual activities begin at the age of 12 to 15 when he builds a bachelor hut 50 to 100 yards from his father's compound. Until this time, sexual activities will consist primarily of masturbation, practised either singly or in groups, but we have no information on its frequency. After building his hut, the boy will attempt to make assignations with the young girls of his neighbourhood and the surrounding areas. The opportunity for this sexual activity exists primarily during those times when adolescent dances are held or some group of girls visits a friend in the neighbourhood. The best opportunities, according to our informants,

are with unmarried girls who are visiting the mother's brothers or married sisters. In fact, it is often the girls who are visiting the neighbourhood who are the most likely marriage prospects. Other good places for meeting girls are the market and church. We would think opportunities for sexual encounters are very rare. The major problem is the relative scarcity of girls. There is a fairly high rate of polygyny and the average age of marriage for uneducated girls is 14 or 15 versus 23 or 24 for boys.

At adolescent dances we have attended, the girl-boy ratio seems to be 1:10, if any girls come at all. This might indicate that there may be a very high adultery rate and a relatively high rate of sexual perversions among unmarried men, but we have no figures to confirm these suspicions. Very few cases of adultery seem to reach the stage of formal accusation. Certainly many young wives of older men are suspected of adulterous activities. There seem to be very few sexual perversions among men. One reason for this is the extreme disapproval with which offenders are regarded. They are classed as IKACUDAK, which puts them in the same category as sorcerers and people who have committed incest. In addition to ritual fines, they will be severely beaten and probably turned over to the police. We have found only one case of male homosexuality and two of bestiality.

Our informants indicate that a fair number of early sexual alliances are entered into with female age mates of one's sub-clan. This is a non-marriageable union and technically an incestuous one, but the offence is lightly regarded. If the couple is caught, the girl will frequently claim she was raped. If a child results from the union, it will simply be adopted into the girl's home, unless she marries shortly after and takes it with her to her married home. If the pregnancy resulted from a non-incestuous union, considerable pressure including the threat of a court case can be brought upon the boy's family to force a marriage. If the boy is a promising student, the family is generally reluctant to consent to a marriage.

In any case, the sexual activities will take place in the boy's bachelor hut which he is likely to share with younger brothers and sisters, and this may very well constitute a learning experience for them.

The average age of marriage for a young man is customarily 23 to 25 or even 27. One important factor seems to be family wealth and the ability of the boy's father to supply the first bridewealth payments. If an agreement between the two families is not forthcoming, the couple may agree to elope and claim it was a marriage by capture. The order of marriage is strictly determined, with older sons of one woman having priority. There is no order among sons of different mothers and one father. Men who have been labour migrants for a number of years sometimes marry in their late thirties or more. There are

a few men who do not marry at all, or who engage in short-term marriages and then do not attempt to find another wife at all. They are jokingly referred to as 'senior bachelors'. There are also a very few men, just as there are a few women, who go through a large number of wives/husbands very quickly. Generally speaking, however, divorce is relatively rare, perhaps one marriage in twenty ending in divorce.

Intercourse is practised with the couple lying on either side or with the woman on her back. Any other heterosexual activities are viewed with a mixture of derision and disgust. In the first week of marriage a man is expected to have intercourse with his wife at least three times a night, declining after that to a pattern of once every other night. In a polygynous marriage, a man should have intercourse with each wife in turn just as he should eat with each wife in turn. In practice, however, men tend to favour one wife over another, which leads to considerable conflict. It is expected that age will decrease a man's sexual activities and interests.

Most married men, especially younger ones, expect to engage in extramarital activities. There are no sanctions against this in the traditional legal system as there are against married women. The sanctions against this kind of activity are more diffuse. Neglect of a home will bring pressures from family and neighbours, and there is a general fear of venereal disease. For a man to pass a venereal disease on to his wife is regarded as a very shameful thing and will bring severe reprisals from her brothers. Finally, if a man becomes impotent for a short time, his wife and, if it becomes known, also public opinion will blame his condition on extramarital activities.

Fertility and the successful raising of large numbers of children are the traditional signs of worldly success among the Iteso. Informants have often denied that some obviously powerful figures could have been important, because they did not leave many descendants. Under normal circumstances, a high degree of fertility was the outward sign of a man's success in traditional Teso society, as well as the very means of ensuring success.

Traditional Iteso society was highly egalitarian and democratic because there were no hereditary offices, such as chiefs and, as a consequence, leadership positions were awarded on the basis of achievement that is, to those who were able to demonstrate or seem to demonstrate ability. The most visible sign of that achievement was wealth. The Iteso equate ability with success.

In a relatively economically undifferentiated society such as the Iteso, wealth could be demonstrated in only two ways - cattle and women. It must be pointed out that cattle were then easily converted into women through the exchange of bridewealth in marriage. The women, as producers of surplus agricultural products, could be used to obtain followers who were necessary if

cattle was to be accumulated through success in warfare and raiding. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, in the succeeding generation, women would produce children who would be the source of more wealth and worldly success. Male offspring would serve as both followers of the father and his protectors and providers in old age. Female offspring were the producers of more wealth for the father in the form of cattle. Traditional bridewealth among the Iteso was as high as forty cows in some cases and, in addition to this wealth, daughters' husbands were potential followers. This is true because in Teso society wife-givers occupy a superior position to wife-receivers. The husband of a woman is always under a sense of obligation to his wife's father or brother. If a man was powerful enough, he could easily turn a daughter's husband into a follower - even, as was true in many cases, forcing the husband to come and live with him as his supporter and dependant.

We have tried to give above some of what we think are the political and economic reasons for the Iteso traditionally placing great stress on a high fertility rate (the religious and cultural stress on fertility emphasizes the role of women and is dealt with in another section). There can be no question that a high degree of fertility is desired. Men never answer the question, 'How many children should a man have?' with an absolute number. They invariably say '10 per wife', and in traditional society unlimited polygyny was the ideal. We have tried to indicate that a high degree of fertility had consequences for a man's social status in that the more fertile a man, the more successful he was deemed to be.

The man who is totally without children was and is an object of pity and sometimes contempt and ridicule. The man without offspring is someone who will have a lonely and neglected old age and death. Although the Iteso do not have a system of ancestor worship, it is often said of a childless man: 'Who will sacrifice at the head of his grave when he dies?'. In other words, who is there to care for him and succeed him?

If a man had female children, he could always adopt a poorer man's son and the adopted son could then use the bridewealth brought in by the female children, but if he was poor and completely childless, he was a pathetic creature. At present, given the recent but increasing concern over lack of land, a childless man can invite a son of a poor family to live with him.

This concern that land is no longer a limitless resource has to some degree reduced the desire for numerous offspring. Younger men tend to think that two wives are sufficient for any man, but they still hold to the figure of 10 children per wife.

6 Child Rearing Practices
(Answer to Question 54)

Nursing a child is a very important part of life for Iteso women. They often say, 'Now I am caring for my child so that he may take care of me when I am old'. The practice of nursing itself is carried out in every possible case. Bottle-feeding is done only when a woman does not produce enough milk herself or if she is a working mother (there are few of the latter among the Iteso).

When the child is nursing, it is customary for the mother not to eat certain green vegetables like EBOO (cowpeas) and others for which we are unable to find English equivalents. It is felt that these vegetables are detrimental to the production of milk in the breasts. It is customary to eat sugarcane and to drink finger millet beer (AJONO NUK'AKIMA) and plenty of tea. Women say that these things help to make a great deal of blood in the body, which in turn makes an ample supply of milk.

Although there are few actual rituals surrounding the practice of nursing, it is important to know of another kind of association between the mother's breast and the child. One way a mother curses her children is to blow on her own breast. This curse is a very serious one as it cannot be withdrawn and is supposed to kill all of a woman's children. The symbolism of this is quite clear. The mother-child relationship is a nursing relationship and the curse works by the repudiation of nursing.

Nursing begins as soon as the umbilical cord (AKALIGET) is cut. The child is held by its mother, while the child's grandmother (tata) holds the breast of the mother saying, 'suck our breast'. If the child refuses to suck at this time, it will be given the name of an old woman or an old man to identify it with the old people who no longer suck at the breast. Before the first breast-feeding, the tata will wash the mother's breast with water. This is not done for any hygienic reasons, but to allow the milk to flow more freely.

People say that weaning is begun as soon as possible. This usually occurs when a woman becomes pregnant again, but if not, the child is often allowed to nurse until it is three years old. Some women say that, at this age, the child will refuse the breast himself. If a woman wants to wean her child abruptly, she will often rub her breasts with hot chillies (PILI PILI) which will burn the child's mouth. There are no rituals concerning weaning of children.

The parents are primarily concerned with one idea while raising their children. This expression is often verbalized: 'You will be the people of the clan (EKITEKERE) when we die', i.e. they represent social perpetuation and reputation.

During the first twelve months, breast-feeding is the primary source of food, but the child is also given porridge. When the two upper and two lower teeth have come in, it may begin to eat solid food (ATAP). When it is very young, it is said to sleep most of the time. Up to the age of twelve months, it sleeps in the day-time as well as at night. It may wear an undershirt or vest if one is available. Usually it wears no clothes, but only a string of beads around the waist said to be for 'beauty' only. If the child has a tendency to suck his thumb, a string is often worn around the wrist and thumb to prevent such action. A bracelet of cowrie shells may also be worn if the mother is suffering from spirit possession, to prevent the child from becoming infected through the mother's breasts while he is still nursing.

During the first twelve months, a child learns to sit and talk, encouraged by parents and older brothers and sisters; he also begins to walk holding onto a stick, led about by his mother and older siblings. During the next period and up to five years, he is taught to urinate and defecate in the 'bush' instead of in the domestic compound.

Other activities are learned through imitating mother and father. It is not unusual to see girls under the age of five peeling cassava, drying finger millet in the sun and trying to do the rather difficult task of grinding the various grains. Boys of the same age imitate their fathers, especially herding cows.

People feel that a good up-bringing will give the child a strong and good character. If he is not given good training and discipline by his parents, he will probably have a weak and very poor character.

7 Social and Symbolic Significance of Children

(Answer to Question 55)

The death of a new-born baby is not a terrible event. It is explained as a benefit in that the child may have killed the mother if it had not died first itself, either by drying inside the womb or refusing to be born at the appropriate time. A new-born baby not brought out of the house (AKIPUDUM ABERU) to be seen by members of the lineage is not yet a member of the lineage and there is little concern if it dies. The Iteso say that such a young child has no spirit (EPARAIT); therefore, it cannot cause people to dream and make them ill with the disease of the spirits of the dead (EMUSEBE).

When a small child dies, there is mourning. The Iteso say they are sad because the child was a member of the lineage. He had also developed an eparait and would now be able to cause emusebe by sending his spirit to

cause dreams. Such deaths are hopefully prevented by the slaughter of a white hen or cock (depending on the sex of the child) when children are ill. Domestic ceremonies (AKILONG ECUM and EGWASIT) will be performed to rid the child of illnesses. Often, as a last option, people will take their children to the nearest hospital or dispensary. The Iteso seem to have no particular image of parents whose child dies during the first years of life. They sometimes blame the death on the father if he has not provided an animal for sacrifice in domestic ceremonies.

A number of ceremonies are held for the new-born child. On the day of its birth, it is also given a name. After the third day, the child is brought outside the hut for the first time (akipudun aberu) to be seen by lineage members, when it is officially named. He is held by the mother who calls out a name chosen by the grandmother on the day of birth. The grandmother will then place a very small amount of beer in the child's mouth. If he does not cry, he has accepted the name. If he does cry, more names must be called until he finally accepts one.

The Iteso do not practise ancestor worship. When a parent or a sibling dies, a very small child must push some dirt into the grave on the day of burial, even if its hand has to be guided by someone else. This symbolizes the close connection between child and parent, and the responsibility of the children to perform the subsequent funeral ceremonies for their parents.

The mother and father of only one child attain some degree of social status because they have proved their fertility. The parents of large numbers of children are even more important. The ultimate position of respect is to attain the status of having grown-up, married sons.

Children are expected to help parents in their work which they learn by imitating the parents, as soon as they are capable. Parents do expect to be supported by their children in old age, especially the mother. We were told that while breast-feeding a child, a mother often says: 'I am caring for you now so that when I become old you can care for me'.

Children are seen as being a continuation of their parents' life after they die. Not only are they the new members of the lineage, but parents say that they will be remembered by others through their children.

No one with whom we have talked will admit to wanting to limit their children to two or three. We asked specifically about the shortage of land and how a man could divide a small portion among many sons. We have the idea that people feel this is not their decision to make because they have no power to do so, but that the decision belongs to the creator (NAKA SUBAN). Most of the social pressure to have a large number of children is exerted by the husband's father and mother, followed by the wife's mother and father.