

The Nyungwe of Mozambique



representative photo by Soren Kjeldgaard

There are nearly half a million speakers of Nyungwe in Western Mozambique. The Zambezi River flows through the area and many villages depend on this large river for farming and fishing.

While the neighboring language areas are in highly productive, higher elevation agricultural areas, the Nyungwe survive long dry seasons with cattle and goat herding. The heat is the most difficult aspect of life in the Nyungwe area. Temperatures are regularly over 40C/100F during half of the year.

Although many Nyungwe people would identify themselves as Christians, they may have only a surface understanding of the Gospel. In the cities, almost everyone has heard of the Bible and Jesus but their traditional religion is animist, with all the ancestor worship and spirit appeasement that entails.

God is working among the Nyungwe, but progress is slow with little vision for evangelism and sharing the truth. The needs of the Nyungwe people would probably be best addressed through God's Word becoming an agent of change in their lives.

Primary Religion:

Ethnic Religion

Disciples (Matt 28:19):

8%

Churches:

Yes

Scripture Status (Matt 28:20):

In progress

Population (date):

439,000 (2006)



NYUNGWE HOMELAND



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Have They Heard The Gospel?

Religious Practices and Ceremonies

The Nyungwe people are primarily animistic.

Comment

There are still rural pockets of people who have never heard of Jesus. It is common to find all ages, social standings and educational levels of Nyungwe people who believe that they can make their lives better by paying a traditional doctor to identify the dead relative who is unhappy with their life choices and actions. By presenting the “relative’s spirit” with gifts through the traditional healer or witch, they believe they can prevent further illness, business failure, or bad luck.

Is the Word of God Translated?

Portions: 1897–2010. In progress.

Other Forms of Gospel Presentations

Recordings:

Audio-visual Bible lessons in 40 pictures, with Bible overview from creation to Christ, and teaching on the Christian life. For evangelism and church planting.

Literature:

Yes, Dictionary, Grammar.

Films/videos:

Jesus Film

Language of Wider Communication

Portuguese

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Group Description

Population all countries

World Population For This People 439,000
World Population (Date) Ethnologue, 2006

Geography & Environment

Location Tete province: Zambezi river banks north of Sena language area; Manica province: east bank, Luenha river, east from Changara.
Climate Arid
Comment The heat is the most difficult aspect of life in the Nyungwe area. Temperatures are regularly over 40C/100F during half of the year.

Alternate Language Names

Chinyungwe, Chinyungwi, Cinyungwe, Nyongwe, Teta, Tete, Yungwe
Percent Monolingual
Other Mother Tongues Portuguese
Comment While Portuguese is the only official language of Mozambique, Nyungwe is one of the recognized national languages.

Linguistically Related Languages

Similar to Sena

Neighboring Languages

Tawara, Dema, Ronga, Sena, Barwe, Manyika

Literacy

Adult Literacy Percentage The literacy rate in rural areas is low.
Comment Recorded scripture is spreading very slowly.

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Economics

Subsistence Type Agriculturalists

Occupation Farming

Community Development

Diet (Quality) Good.
Comment Maize and millet grow well in a good year. Small plots of tomatoes, onions and greens provide daily vitamins. Peanuts and beans are protein staple crops and goats or chickens are butchered on special occasions.

Shelter Description Nyungwe houses are built on rocky slopes or dusty savanna dotted with thorny bushes and small trees.

Society & Culture

Family The Nyungwe family structure is patrilineal, as are many of the groups along the Zambezi and southwards.
People live in villages comprised of several extended families with their own compounds; each family has houses for each wife and their children. Grown sons build a house nearby and bring their wives to live there.

Neighbor Relations Nyungwe tradition seems steeped in a combination of fear and jealousy. One's own family members or neighbors are very likely to resent his success and arrange for a curse to stop success. Each person feels suspicious of those nearest to him; they are afraid to get too far ahead in life and be accused of cheating by arranging for a charm from the witches.

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Status of Christianity

Religion and Response

Translation status	Bible translation is underway
Spiritual Climate and Openness	Translation is being received with hope and joy among those who hear of it.
Comment	Although many Nyungwe people would identify themselves as Christians, they may have only a surface understanding of the Gospel. In the cities, almost everyone has heard of the Bible and Jesus but their traditional religion is animist, which includes ancestor worship and spirit appeasement.
Comment	Those who do follow Jesus often place more value on education. They also trust Jesus to protect them from the spirits and the curses of jealous relatives. When Jesus removes the fear, they are free to move out of a cycle of poverty.
Attitude toward Christianity	God is working among the Nyungwe, but progress is slow with little vision for evangelism and sharing the truth. While the Nyungwe area is very accessible to outside communication, not many missions or development projects stay around for long.

References

Ethnologue, 18th edition, 2015

Wikipedia, 2015