

Gumuz

Location

The Gumuz ethnic group lives in Ethiopia and Sudan. The Gumuz of Ethiopia live in the northern and western parts of the country near the Sudan border. Over 120,000 Gumuz in Ethiopia live in the “bush-savanna” region, an area covered primarily with bamboo and other small trees.



Topography and Climate

Ethiopia—once known as Abyssinia—is a rugged country located on the Eastern Horn of Africa, bordered by Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, and Sudan. Its dominant feature is a high, mountainous, central plateau, which is split diagonally in the south by the Rift Valley. This region is crossed by a number of rivers, the most notable the Blue Nile, which has its source in Lake Tana, and joins the White Nile at Khartoum, Sudan.

In the Gumuz area of Ethiopia, the land surface varies in topography from 550 to 2,500 meters (600-2700 yards) above sea level. The highest area is Belay Terara Mountain. The hottest months run from January to May, followed by the rainy season from May to October. The temperature ranges from 28-34° C (82-93° F.) in the hot season, while the average yearly temperature ranges from 20-25° C (68-77° F.). The average annual rainfall amounts to 800-1200mm (31-47 inches).

Culture

Language: The Gumuz language has ten dialects, but those who speak them can understand the others.

Livelihood: The Gumuz people hunt with bows and arrows. Most breed cattle or farm for a living. They farm their lands together as a clan. When a boy reaches the age of 16, he may work his own farm along with his father's. During the harvest season, they build huts on the fringe of the farmland and live there. They grow millet, sorghum, onion, cotton, tobacco, mango, and various spices. The staple food of the Gumuz is porridge flavored with a sauce made from leaves, onions, and spices. They supplement their diet with pumpkin seeds, peanuts, fruit, and some insects, and—like many of us—they like to drink coffee. Because they are farmers, trading is important to them, but the lack of roads makes this difficult. They trade most often with the nearby Oromo people. In exchange for their goods, they receive coffee, cloth, soap, salt bars, and other items.

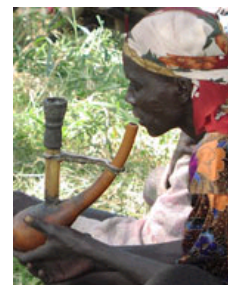
Social Interaction: The clannish nature of the Gumuz keeps their community cohesive, and when there is an infraction, the entire clan involves itself in the punishment. Discipline is meted out for such things as stealing, lying, and wife abuse, keeping drunkenness and idleness to a minimum.

Marriage: When a daughter is ready for marriage, the clans perform a “sister exchange.” That is, the newly married man gives his wife's clan a young woman from his own clan to “replace” the woman he married.

Religion

The Gumuz are animistic, which means they worship the “spirits” of certain rocks, trees, and animals for good health, good crops, good luck, and protection. Rebba is their “supreme god who knows all.” T

he Gumuz firmly believe that if a woman drinks milk, she will go bald, and if a man eats cabbage, he will be lazy. If a woman eats porridge while she is making it, they believe she or her husband will become ill.



Living Conditions:

The tributaries from the Blue Nile provide great potential for irrigation, hydroelectric power, and increased farming in the future. Presently, only a few towns have electricity. While the area is rich in fertile soil, a mere 4.3% of it is cultivated. The presence of gold, copper, zinc, base metal, and marble resources ensures the economic future, provided they find ways to access and process them. At present, the communication systems throughout the area are very poor. In addition, the health coverage is met by two hospitals, three health stations, and 57 clinics. Malaria, malnutrition, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis are among the major diseases.

While many animals roam the area, such as lion, cheetah, elephant, antelope, buffalo, warthog, bushbuck, and duiker, there is no hunting reserve or wildlife park.

History

The Gumuz people were at one time considered slaves. During the 16th to the 19th centuries, they suffered oppression under the Turko Egyptian Empire, the Mahadist State in Sudan, and the Emperor Menelik in Ethiopia. This has prevented the Gumuz people group from developing and modernizing.

SIM Involvement

The Gumuz do not have a Bible, and only relatively few have heard the Gospel. But we are beginning to see a spiritual breakthrough among this group. SIM and other Ethiopian missionaries have begun helping the Gumuz to build roads, develop agricultural methods, begin a literacy program, and start a school (over 90% of the Gumuz are illiterate). All these projects have given them opportunities to share the Good News of Jesus. This area is ready to hear the gospel of freedom from spiritual oppression.

Urgent Prayer Need

Bingham Academy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, urgently needs a [French teacher](#) to join their staff team in August. Pray that God will provide the right person to meet this need.

