



## Makhuwa

The Makhuwa people group (pronounced mah-KOO-ah) is a large group of approximately six million people living in modern day Mozambique and Tanzania. Their language group is called Makhuwa (also spelled Macua, Makuwa, or Makua), and can be divided into six distinct dialects.

### Location

The Makhuwa people live mainly in Nampula and Zambezia province, the southern part of Cabo Delgado, and the eastern part of Niassa province.

### Climate

The climate is tropical with good rainfall. The temperatures are highest in November-December and lowest in June-July. Rain falls from October to March. Harvest runs from March to June.

### Culture

Traditionally, Makhuwa people build their own houses out of mud bricks and grass. They cook on an open fire. Most do not have sanitation or secure water supplies. Urbanization and Portuguese influences are bringing changes for many.

*Language:* The language group is called Makhuwa, and can be divided into six distinct dialects, including Lomwe, Makhuwa-meeto, Makhuwa-xirima, Makhuwa-makwana and others. (The Lomwe people originate in northern Mozambique, tracing their origins from Mount Namuli, near Gurue. About 1.3 million live in Mozambique and 700,000 in Malawi in a belt from the Indian Ocean into Malawi.)

*Livelihood:* Most Makhuwa people are farmers producing crops with a hand hoe, including beans, rice, corn, cassava, and peanuts. They also grow coconuts, cashews, bananas, cotton, and tea. Each year they are dependent on good rains to survive. Others who live on the coast make their living as fishermen since the soil is too poor there to produce much.

*Food:* The staple food is corn or cassava, dried and pounded into powder, then cooked into mush with no salt. It is served in "cakes," like scoops of mashed potatoes. The important accompaniment is a flavorful sauce of greens and peanuts, beans, or (rarely) chicken. They make alcohol out of sugar cane or bananas.

*Matrilinial Society:* Traditionally, the Makhuwa trace family through the mother's line. A child belongs to his mother and his mother's uncle, not to his father or his father's family.

*Crafts and Games:* Men make straw mats for sitting or sleeping on dirt floors. Women make clay pots for cooking. They play a game similar to *mancala* with pebbles in holes in the dirt. (In other countries, people play the game on a wooden board with colorful marbles.)

*Music:* Music in most churches is a capella.

### Religion

Traditional religion acknowledges the Creator God, but it focuses on spirits who must be pacified or manipulated to maintain precarious human life amidst hardship.

All branches of the Makhuwas believe that they originated on a sacred mountain called *Mount Namuli*. A certain cave on the mountain is the womb from which they and many animals came. A female left footprint is reputed to be outside the cave—so the mountain is seen as their mother. (This fits well with the matrilineal family structure of the Makhuwas)

It is believed that at death, the spirit of the dead person travels to Mount Namuli. The journey takes three days so a gift of food must be provided for the dead person's journey. Anyone who visits Namuli must realize that this mountain is sacred to the Makhuwas and must treat it with immense respect. Makhuwas themselves usually take gifts, especially *capulanas*, the beautiful colourful pieces of cloth that Mozambican women wrap round themselves as skirts.

The first Makhuwa to follow Jesus were baptized in 1922, and the message of the gospel has spread from the Lomwe to other Makhuwa groups.

### SIM Involvement

SIM's history with the Makhuwa-Lomwe goes back to 1939 when Africa Evangelical Fellowship (now a part of SIM) sent its first missionaries. Persecution led to the expulsion of all missionaries in 1959. Over 25 years later, during Mozambique's civil war, they were allowed to return. They discovered that churches had multiplied 25-fold since they had gone. Missionaries helped with refugees, feeding and clothing destitute people, and providing grassroots Bible teaching. Now, for the first time, Bible training above eighth grade level is being introduced in a cooperative effort, and the Old Testament is being translated into Lomwe. SIM missionaries are also working with the Makhuwa-Xirima and Makhuwa-Meeto groups.

### Scripture Availability

A Lomwe New Testament was published in 1931, and an Old Testament translation is now two-thirds finished. The Makhuwa-Xirima language group has a Bible, and the Reformed Church at Muapula is translating another. The Makhuwa-Meeto has no Scriptures, but SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics) workers are currently translating the Bible into that language.

## 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.

