

NIASSA, MOZAMBIQUE: THE MAKHUWA-SHIRIMA AND YAO PEOPLES



CENTER FOR
THE STUDY
of Global
Christianity

GORDON  CONWELL
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



Niassa, Mozambique: the Makhuwa–Shirima and Yao Peoples

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Cover Photo: Woman selling vegetables at a market.

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Unless otherwise noted, data is sourced from the *World Christian Database* and the following citation should be used: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed December 2019).

ABOUT THE CSGC

The Center for the Study of Global Christianity is an academic research center that monitors worldwide demographic trends in Christianity, including outreach and mission. We provide a comprehensive collection of information on the past, present, and future of Christianity in every country of the world. Our data and publications help churches, mission agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to be more strategic, thoughtful, and sensitive to local contexts. Please visit our website at www.globalchristianity.org.

DATA AND TERMS

This dossier includes many technical terms related to the presentation of statistics. A complete methodology document is found here: <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity/research/dossiers>. We use a social scientific method for measuring religion around the world; namely, self-identification. If a person calls herself a Christian, then she is a Christian. We measure Christians primarily by denominational affiliation in every country of the world and these data are housed in the World Christian Database. Ethnolinguistic people groups are distinct homogeneous ethnic or racial groups within a single country, speaking its own language (one single mother tongue). These dossiers measure gospel access (also known as “evangelization”) by a number of variables, including but not limited to, evangelistic outreach, church planting, personal witnessing, sharing on social media, etc. These dossiers also utilize data from the United Nations related to socio-economic, development, and gender-justice related issues.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Children playing in the sand in Mozambique.

1994 resulted in a relatively stable modern republic. Despite the history of power struggles, Mozambique's indigenous population, which include the Yao and the Makhuwa-Shirima peoples, carries with it a unique legacy challenged by colonialism and trade. To the present-day, these peoples maintain a presence in Mozambique; albeit, one that is continually threatened by cultural imperialism and globalization.

The Yao (also, Wayao) people, many of whom live in Niassa province, largely rejected foreign colonial rule and the Christianity associated with it. Islam, introduced by Arab traders, was perceived a better cultural fit for the Yao and allowed for greater economic opportunities in light of the extant slave trade that ran through the Lake Niassa region and along the Rovuma River. As a result, the Yao were quite prosperous. Famous Scottish pioneer missionary-explorer David Livingstone passed through Niassa in search of the most direct route to the African interior. One of his most trusted African colleagues was a Yao man.

While less is known of the history of the Makhuwa, they are traditionally an agricultural people who inhabited the area between Lake Malawi and the coastline. Their proximity to and close dealings with the Yao led to many shared cultural attributes that continue to this day. Moreover, the peoples of this region have been characterized by tribal warfare and high mobility throughout the region.

Today, the top socio-economic priorities for indigenous peoples and the region include poverty alleviation and increasing the range of available healthcare options. Particular health challenges include treating malaria, HIV/AIDS, respiratory diseases, child malnutrition, and issues related to sanitation and drinking water.

The constitution states that Mozambique is a secular state. It prohibits religious discrimination, provides for the right of citizens to practice or not practice a religion, and stipulates that no individual may be deprived of their rights or exempt-

The region of modern-day Mozambique has always been strategic for global trade. Since at least the medieval period its coasts have been visited by traders from India, Somalia, Ethiopia, and beyond. Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama arrived in 1498, marking the beginning of nearly 500 years of Portuguese colonial rule of the territory. Mozambique achieved independence from Portugal in 1975, but subsequently experienced a series of civil wars from 1977 to 1992. Democratic elections in

MOZAMBIQUE QUICK FACTS

POPULATION (2020): 32,309,000

CHRISTIANS: 17,448,000

RELIGION: 54% CHRISTIAN, 28% ETHNIC

GOSPEL ACCESS: VERY HIGH

PEOPLES: 66 LEAST-ACCESS: 8

DEVELOPMENT: 44 (AVG: 70)

GDP PER CAPITA: \$1,100 (AVG: \$15,300)

GENDER INEQUALITY: 39 (AVG: 37)

ed from their obligations because of religious belief or practice. The constitution protects places of worship and the right of religious groups to organize, worship, and pursue their religious objectives freely. However, while religious freedom is guaranteed, laws often work against such freedom.

Customary laws in some regions discriminate against women, even in matriarchal family units where sometimes the only rights afforded to women are through a brother or maternal uncle. This is the case in the north, including Niassa. Young girls are sometimes forced to leave school for early marriages, especially in rural areas. Single women also remain marginalized from society in more conservative, rural areas.

Islam and Christianity are the largest religions in the country and the Yao are 84% Muslim. Islam, and some expressions of Christianity, in Niassa are integrated with ancestor-based practices. Muslims generally do not become Christians because of their cultural and familial ties to Islam.

NIASSA QUICK FACTS

POPULATION: 1,868,000
CHRISTIANS: 841,000
% CHRISTIAN: 45%
GOSPEL ACCESS: VERY HIGH

PEOPLE GROUP QUICK FACTS

YAO

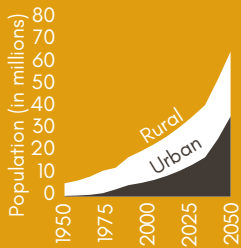
POPULATION: 591,000
CHRISTIANS: 15.0%
GOSPEL ACCESS: HIGH
PRIMARY RELIGION: ISLAM 84%
SCRIPTURES: MALAWIAN YAO AVAILABLE.
MOZAMBICAN YAO IN PROGRESS

MAKHUWA-SHIRIMA

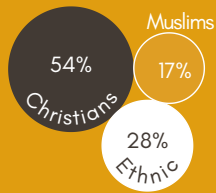
POPULATION: 900,000
CHRISTIANS: 20.0%
GOSPEL ACCESS: HIGH
PRIMARY RELIGION: ETHNIC (ANIMIST) 60%
SCRIPTURES: SHIRIMA TRANSLATION IS UNDER INVESTIGATION

MOZAMBIQUE IN CONTEXT

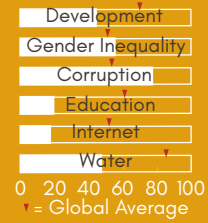
COUNTRY



population

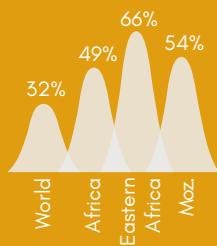


religion

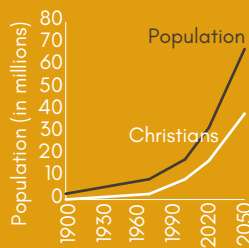


human need

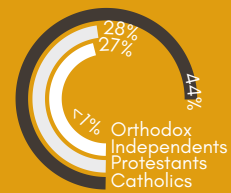
CHRISTIANITY



region

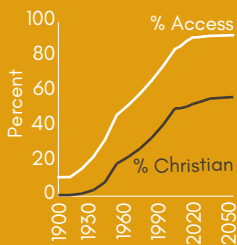


history

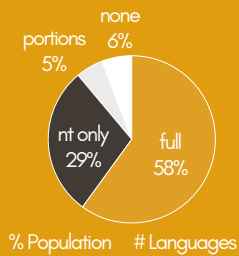


tradition

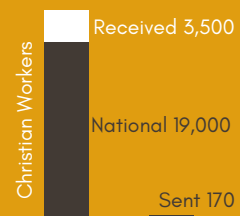
MISSION



evangelism



bible translation



personnel

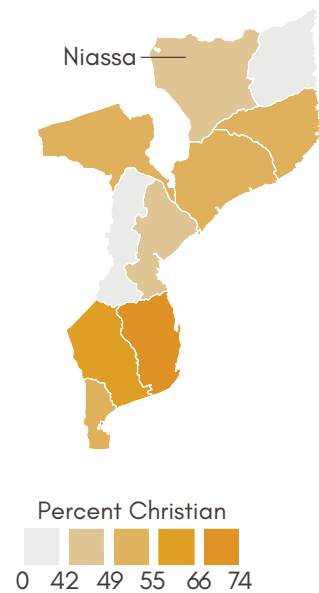
LOCATION

Niassa is the largest province of Mozambique. Not to be confused with historical Nyasaland (present-day Malawi), the Niassa Province is in the northwest corner of the country bordering Tanzania. It currently known for the Niassa Game Reserve and Lake Niassa (also known as Lake Malawi). However, the Yao have a long-established sociocultural heritage that transcends geographical boundaries, evinced by its regional conquests and participation in the Arab trade along the southern African coast. Historically, the Yao, the Makonde, Nyanja and Ngoni, and the Makhwua inhabited the area between Lake Malawi and the eastern coastline and bordered on the north and south by the Lukuledi and Zambezi rivers, respectively. This close habitation led to a shared culture with many similarities.

HISTORY

While recorded history is scant for the peoples of the Niassa Province, there is more known about the Yao people, who factor significantly in the history and culture of the region. Early accounts describe the Yao as economically independent, fashioning iron tools before the slave trade arrived via Arab merchants. Yao kingdoms proliferated in the 15th century and were active in the slave trade while controlling land through commerce and warfare. By the 18th century, the Yao were already competing with Arabs in the slave-trade, extending their contact with them about 200 years prior to European arrival to the area. As a result, Islam became widespread among the Yao. The Yao converted to Islam starting in the 1870s, with the first known convert Makanjila Bonali III. The famous Chief Mataka II converted in 1880. The association between the Arabs and the Yao people was so pronounced that the arrival of European abolitionists was met with resistance from both groups. The wide regional presence of the Yao is evidence of their historical migrations due to internal dissension and conflict with neighboring tribes. The Makhwua, like the Yao, have been known to be agriculturalists; however, they were also traders who made journeys to the coast armed with guns and spears.

CHRISTIANITY IN MOZAMBIQUE



Mozambique became a major center for the slave trade in the 18th and 19th centuries, with the Yao serving as major players in the slave trade due to their association with Arab traders.

MOZAMBIQUE TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

1498: Europeans first visited Mozambique.	1530: Portugal completely controls the area.
18th-19th c.: Mozambique becomes major slave-trading center.	
1964: Armed campaign against the Portuguese led by Eduardo Mondlane.	1962: Anti-colonial groups combine to form the Front for the Mozambique Liberation (FRELIMO).
1975: Mozambique declares independence on June 25.	1976: Mozambican Civil War between FRELIMO and RENAMO groups.
1989: FRELIMO renounces Marxist-Leninist doctrine.	1990: Constitution amended to allow a multi-party political system.
2019: Peace deal signed between FRELIMO and RENAMO.	

COLONIALISM

European contact with the region began during the voyages of Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama in 1498. Portugal established a strong presence in the region and completely controlled the area by 1530. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, colonists set up trading posts and mining enterprises and began to parcel out land to European settlers, while instituting agricultural production in Niassa Province. In 1893, a Portuguese merchant formed the Nyassa Chartered Company with the goals of developing Niassa and preserving Portuguese control of the region. However, what started as a company specializing in economic development eventually become a purveyor of migrant labor just after the turn of the century. This development severely impacted the indigenous Yao presence. As the indigenous Yao, Makhuwa, and Maconde lived beyond European contact, by 1914 they were significantly impacted by the presence of the Company through massive dislocation and upheaval. This shift came as British and South African interests took more control of the Nyassa Chartered Company; with meager profits coming from economic development, the Company turned to conquest to secure laborers for mining in South Africa.

In the meantime, Portugal was securing its colonies in Mozambique through its program of modernizing the indigenous population through Christianity and science, while subjugating it through hut tax, or a mussoco. Impelled by the encroachment of other colonial powers, Portugal solidified control over its colonies by registering peoples and lands under its control, while inserting the state in any land concessions. This led to the creation of indigenous reserves in 1944, designed to preserve indigenous cultures and peoples; however, this effected the denial of property rights to many black inhabitants and extended the system of forced labor. The reserves also fostered dualistic spaces, where indigenous black peoples living in the reserves were amusement to white tourists. Today, controversy persists in determining administration of the land between state and local influences.

By the mid-20th century, Mozambique was still an overseas territory of Portugal despite other African movements toward independence from Western colonial powers. Several nationalist anti-colonial groups merged to form the Marxist-Leninist Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO,

Frente de Libertação de Moçambique). Also comprised of exiled Mozambicans and female fighters, the front began an armed guerilla campaign against the Portuguese under the leadership of Eduardo Mondlane. Lusophone colonies in Africa – Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea-Bissau – aided each other in the Portuguese Colonial War (1961-74). Indigenous peoples, including those in the Niassa Province, were often recruited and coerced into aiding the forces for the sake of resources and knowledge of the local area. It was not until the latter phase of the conflict that the Portuguese began in earnest a series of developmental efforts to gain solidarity among the indigenous population and win its favor. The 1974 military coup in Portugal known as the Carnation Revolution brought down the authoritarian government in Portugal that had refused to give up their territories in Africa. The end of the Portuguese Estado Novo regime led to the peaceful exodus of hundreds of thousands of Europeans from Portuguese territories in Africa. Mozambique declared independence on June 25, 1975.

Mozambique subsequently experienced a civil war fought largely between the ruling Marxist FRELIMO government and the anti-communist Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO, Resistência Nacional Moçambicana), founded in 1976 as an anti-FRELIMO resistance group. RENAMO was established in pushback against FRELIMO's desire for a one-party political state and to reduce communist influence in the country. FRELIMO renounced socialism and Marxist ideology in 1989, moving the country toward market-based capitalism. Over one million people died during the Mozambican civil war. The country's consti-



Boys transporting goods in a boat.

After nearly 500 years of colonialization by the Portuguese, Mozambique spiraled into a civil war from 1977-92, where over one million people died, many from starvation.

Cabo Delgado Province, neighboring Niassa to the East, experienced a rise of Islamic extremist activity beginning in 2017 that continues today, with fears violence might spill over into Niassa.

The Yao rejected Christianity during the colonial period due to its inextricable tie with Portuguese rule; Islam was perceived a better fit with Yao culture.

tution was amended in 1990 to allow a multi-party political system though a peace between FRELIMO and RENAMO was not signed until 1992. Tensions between the two groups resurfaced in 2013, with RENAMO militants attacking police stations, military patrol stations, and killing civilians. The conflict was resolved with the signing of a peace deal in August 2019 that finally integrated the remaining armed RENAMO militants into the country's military.

Josina Muthemba Machel served as an important figure during Mozambique's independence struggle. She and many of her family members were each jailed at some point for undermining Portuguese colonial rule in the Niassa and Cabo Delgado regions. Josina was dedicated to the emancipation of African women in particular and helped mobilize young women in the effort to liberate Mozambique from the Portuguese. She set up social programs in liberated zones for those affected by the war. At the age of 20, she was tasked with running FRELIMO's newly established women's department with the purpose of fully incorporating women into the liberation struggle. She died at 25 from liver cancer. Her husband, Samora Machel, became the first president of Mozambique in 1975. Mozambique celebrates National Women's Day on April 7, the anniversary of her death.

YAO PEOPLE IN RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

Arabs introduced Islam to Mozambique through trade. The Yao rejected Christianity during the colonial period due to its inextricable tie with Portuguese rule and Islam was perceived as a better fit with Yao culture. In addition, European abolitionists who arrived in the region to disrupt the prosperous slave trade were identified as those attempting to convert the Yao to Christianity. The Yao are 84% Muslim today and many of the unreached sections of Niassa province are Yao tribes and towns. Famous Scottish missionary-pioneer David Livingstone passed through Niassa in search of a direct route to Africa's interior. One of his trusted African companions was a Yao man.

Despite the deep ties between the Yao and Islam, Christianity spread through the Portuguese agricultural plantations with many forced to become Christians under the colonizers. While Yao Muslims resisted the encroachment of Christianity, others received the new religion as it became associated with the colonizing effects of Western education.

NIASSA TODAY

PEOPLES AND LANGUAGES

The Yao and the Makhuwa-Shirima peoples are part of the Central Bantu who migrated into the region between the 1st and 5th centuries CE from the west and north of the Zambezi River valley. The Yao, along with many of the indigenous peoples in the region, practice matrilineal succession, a system that favors the rights of the eldest sister, or to the descendants of the next senior sister. Clan names are passed down matrilineally, with subclans organized by a common ancestress.

The Makhuwa-Shirima are majority traditional religionists, with smaller proportions of Muslims (20%) and Christians (20%). About four million people in northern Mozambique speak Makhuwa and it is the largest spoken indigenous language in the country. The complete Shirima Bible translation is underway by SIL. The Yao people are 84% Muslim, 15% Christian, and 1% traditional religionist, though syncretism between the monotheistic faiths and traditional beliefs and practices is common. A Yao Bible translation does exist, but it is very Malawian culturally and not embraced by Yao in Mozambique. The Bible Society has a Mozambican Yao Bible translation currently underway.



Farming in Mozambique.

PEOPLE GROUPS IN CONTEXT

The Yao and the Makhuwa-Shirima speaking peoples are part of the Central Bantu who migrated into the region between the 1st and 5th centuries CE from the west and north of the Zambezi River valley.

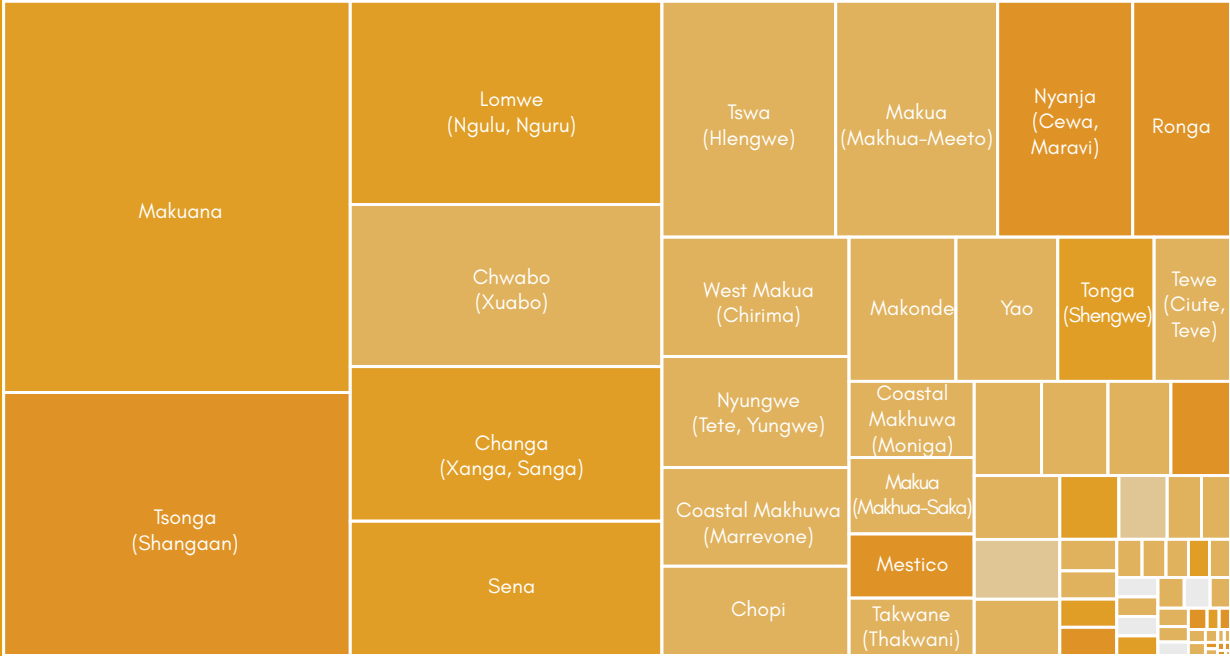
The Makhuwa-Shirima are majority traditional religionists, with smaller proportions of Muslims (20%) and Christians (20%). About 15 million people in Mozambique speak one of 15 “wider Makhua” languages, of which Makhuwa-Shirima is the fifth largest. Many Makhua languages have scriptures but their compatability with Makhuwa-Shirima is still being investigated.

The Yao people are 84% Muslim, 15% Christian, and 1% traditional religionist, though syncretism between the monotheistic faiths and traditional beliefs and practices is common.

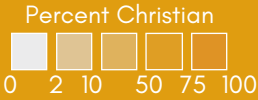
NAME: YAO
 POPULATION: 591,000
 CHRISTIANS: 88,700
 GOSPEL ACCESS: HIGH
 PRIMARY RELIGION: ISLAM
 SCRIPTURES: FULL BIBLE IN MALAWIAN YAO. MOZAMBICAN DIALECT TRANSLATION IN PROGRESS.

NAME: WEST MAKUA (Chirima)
 POPULATION: 900,000
 CHRISTIANS: 180,000
 GOSPEL ACCESS: HIGH
 PRIMARY RELIGION: ETHNIC (ANIMISTS)
 SCRIPTURES: TRANSLATION UNDER INVESTIGATION, NEAR-LANGUAGE BIBLE(S) AVAILABLE.

PEOPLES OF MOZAMBIQUE



The treemap depicts all 66 people groups in Mozambique. The rectangles are proportional to the population of each people group, while the color intensity reflects the percent Christian within the people group.



Alleviating poverty and increasing the range of available health care are top priorities for the region. Particular health challenges include treating malaria, HIV/AIDS, respiratory diseases and malnutrition in children, and issues related to sanitation and drinking water.

CITIES, TOURISM, TRANSPORT

Lichinga (Niassa's capital) and Cuamba are the primary cities in the region. Important economic activities of the cities include the production of cotton, corn, beans, reno potatoes, sweet potatoes, sorghum, and semi-precious stones. Fishing and hunting are economic activities around Lake Niassa. Inland, the Niassa Reserve helps foster economic activity from tourism and hunting passes. Bikes, motorbikes, cars, buses and trains are the main modes of transportation.

CONFLICT

Cabo Delgado Province, neighboring Niassa to the East, experienced a rise of Islamic extremist activity beginning in 2017 that continues today. Ansar al-Sunna ("supporters of tradition") have been actively attempting to establish an Islamic state in the province as a reform movement within Islam. Starting in 2018 they have received support from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Ansar al-Sunna is an Iraqi group that fought against the US insurgency in Iraq from 2003-2007; locals call this group "al-Shabaab" but it is different from the al-Shabaab terrorist group in Somalia. Most members of Ansar al-Sunna are Mozambican but also include some Tanzanians and Somalis. Dozens of attacks have occurred since 2017 in Cabo Delgado Province, with fears violence could spill over into Niassa. Attacks have targeted civilians, livestock, and property, ranging from kidnapping women to dismembering captives. These kinds of attacks increased in 2019-2020 with more funding, recruits, weapons, and developed organized strategies. Militants have temporarily taken over a few district capitals in Cabo Delgado, showing their power and vision for establishing Shariah Law.

CHALLENGES FOR NIASSA

DEVELOPMENT

Alleviating poverty and increasing the range of available health care are top priorities for the region. Particular health challenges include treating malaria, HIV/AIDS, respiratory diseases and malnutrition in children, and issues related to sanitation and drinking water. Mozambique is home to black-market trade of albino body parts for rituals of traditional witchdoctors. The country has also become a haven for drug traffickers, particular heroin, as laws in neighboring Kenya and Tanzania become stricter.

Mozambique is one of the world's poorest countries and relies heavily on international aid. The G8 nations canceled \$1.3 billion of Mozambique's national debt in 2006 to divert funds toward development work, particularly infrastructure, health, and education. However, ten years later, the World Bank suspended direct financial aid to the country due to more than \$1 billion in undisclosed loans.

Corruption and bribery are rampant social problems tied to the local economy. Even people with education struggle to obtain jobs, lacking the cash necessary to bribe the right people in power. The creation of the Lake Niassa Reserve has been very important economically for the region. Together, the World Wildlife Fund, the Coca-Cola Company, the US Agency for International Development, and the Mozambican government opened the reserve in 2011. Its aims include to conserve biodiversity, moderate fishing, and increase economic opportunities for locals, particularly to bring more tourists to the area. The east coast beaches of the country and safaris inland also bring in many tourists.

Nevertheless, conservation and development remain sensitive issues in Mozambique with regard to the indigenous population, including the Yao and Makhuwa. While land regulation is still relevant with regard to the conservation and management of flora, fauna, and natural resources in the country, legislation is not clear about the integration of indigenous knowledge with respect to the management of Conservation Areas (including Niassa Reserve) and land management. Voices at the table are still dominated by the

Mozambique is one of the world's poorest countries and relies heavily on international aid.



Man and children riding in a cart behind cattle.

Climate change is having a significant impact on the people of Mozambique and the country faces several environmental challenges such as deforestation, drought, and fresh water supply.

State, the elite, and those influenced by neo-liberal values pushing for modernization and development. For instance, in 1990, Mozambique changed legislation to adopt more of a neo-liberal framework for development among its citizens. However, the conclusion of the First National Conference on Culture in 1993 was that indigenous knowledge and traditions were weakening as a result. Even in the sector of conservation and resource management, indigenous peoples became marginalized for the sake of the privileged: input from local people were deemed obscure and primitive. This effect had reverberating echoes of the past colonial laws that displaced black inhabitants if white settlers found their land useful. Thus, the traditions of the indigenous peoples remain institutionally threatened; despite exhibitions such as 'Makuya', which involve songs, inspirations, and dances by the Makhuwa, Yao, and Makonde to inform the public of indigenous culture, the meaning of cultural heritage in Mozambique's social consciousness continues to wane in the shadow of Western influence.

ENVIRONMENT

Climate change is having a significant impact on the people of Mozambique and the country faces several environmental challenges. If not properly curbed, deforestation can cause flooding and block tree roots in preventing soil erosion and mudslides. The country is prone to periods of drought, which severely impacts rain-dependent farmers. One failed crop can quickly send small-scale farmers into



Bales of grass in a village in Mozambique.

a cycle of poverty by selling off assets, making it difficult to grow in future seasons. Fresh water supplies are limited. Many predict that droughts will become increasingly common, though they impact the south of the country more than the north. Cyclone Idai devastated parts of Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Malawi in March 2019. The cyclone killed over 1,300 people and impacted over 3 million during its five-day trek across the region. Cyclone Kenneth (April 2019) was the strongest cyclone to make landfall in Mozambique since modern records began, primarily impacting Cabo Delgado province.

POLITICS

The constitution states the nation is secular. It prohibits religious discrimination, provides for the right of citizens to practice or not practice a religion, and stipulates that no individual may be deprived of their rights or exempted from their obligations because of religious belief or practice.

The constitution protects places of worship and the right of religious groups to organize, worship and pursue their religious objectives freely. However, while religious freedom is guaranteed, laws often work against these freedoms in practice. The 2018 US International Religious Freedom Report on Mozambique summarizes the situation well:

“The law requires all NGOs to register with the Ministry of Justice, Constitutional, and Religious Affairs. Under the law, ‘religious organizations’ are charities or humanitarian organizations, whereas ‘religious groups’ refer to particular denominations. Religious groups register at the denominational level or congregational level if they are unaffiliated. Religious groups and organizations register by submitting an application, providing identity documents of the local leaders, and submitting documentation of declared ties to any international religious group or organization. There are no penalties for failure to register; however, religious groups and organizations must show evidence of registration to open bank accounts, file for exemption of customs duties for imported goods, or submit visa applications for visiting foreign members . . . the law permits religious organizations to own and operate schools. The law forbids religious instruction in public schools.”

While religious freedom is guaranteed, laws often work against religious freedom in practice.

A new law is currently under debate that would require churches to be registered with the government. Registered churches would need to have at least 60,000 members, which could only be confirmed in person at the Religious Affairs Office. The passage of this law would be detrimental to new churches that seek legal recognition.

GENDER

Customary laws in some regions discriminate against women, even in matrilineal family units, where the only rights afforded to women are often through a brother or maternal uncle. This is found throughout the north, including Niassa. The asyene mbumba, as the senior brother, is the warden of his sisters, which also include his sisters' daughters and granddaughters. This warden is responsible for the conduct of these women, represents them in legal affairs, and plays a significant role in marriage negotiations. Young girls are sometimes forced to leave school and marry young, especially in rural areas. Single women are also marginalized from society in more conservative, rural areas. Restrictions exist that limit women's access to land, economic benefits, certain types of work, and natural resources.

GENDER IN MOZAMBIQUE

	% FEMALE	GENDER GAP	GENDER INEQUALITY
MOZAMBIQUE	51	10	55
WORLD	50	8	37
AFRICA	50	12	55
MIDDLE AFRICA	50	10	52

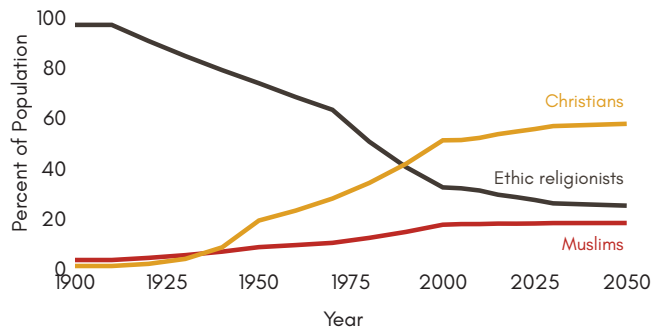
The table above compares key measures of gender equality against global, continental and regional averages.

Women also experience indigenous rituals in different capacities than men. Girls have intricate rites of initiation into adulthood separate from those of boys. Among Muslim practitioners, female circumcision was said to be discontinued at the turn of the 20th century due to heavy mortality. Among the Yao, menstruation is deemed to be dangerous, posing a threat of disease to men. In addition, a widow is considered unclean for a time after her husband's death and is not allowed to marry for two or three years, while a widower departs from his wife's village upon receiving a gift.



Children playing in Mozambique.

MAJOR RELIGIONS IN MOZAMBIQUE, 1900–2050



Christianity and Islam are replacing traditional religions in Mozambique, however many Christians and Muslims religions still hold traditional religious beliefs and practices.

Both Islam and Catholicism in Niassa are integrated with traditional religious ancestor-based practices.

RELIGION AND MISSION

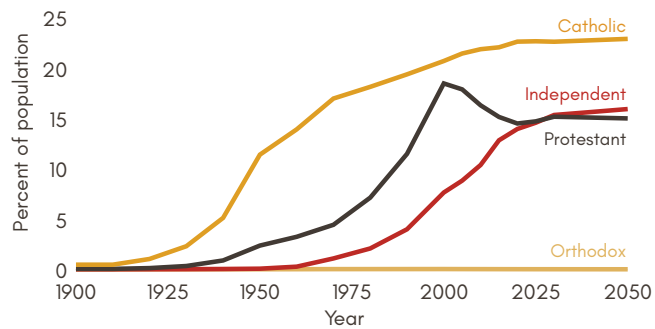
RELIGION

The two main religions in the region are Islam and Christianity (28% Catholic, 16% Zionist, 12% Protestant). Jehovah's Witnesses have been growing rapidly and have a reputation of association with the prosperity gospel. Both Islam and Catholicism in Niassa are integrated with traditional religious ancestor-based practices. Many Christians in Mozambique maintain animistic and traditional practices, such as consulting shamans for healings, marriage, and revenge. TEAM reported two pastors with the Baptist Union of churches in northern Mozambique who died after taking herbs in a ritual to dethrone rival pastors in the denomination, which is quite common. Rural Pentecostalism is both vehemently opposed to traditional religious practices, yet many attendants are involved with both, usually in secret.

CHRISTIANITY

Christians have been in Mozambique since the arrival of the Portuguese in the early 16th century. Protestants arrived from neighboring colonies in the 1880s. In the 20th century, many different African Initiated Churches arrived in Mozambique, especially Zionist churches. Post-civil war peace was first brokered by churches, and mostly by the Catholic Church. One feature of Christianity in Mozambique is the introduction of prosperity gospel churches founded in Brazil, such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, which arrived in 1992. Because Mozambique is a Portuguese-speaking country, it is likely that Brazilian missionaries will contribute significantly to evangelism and church planting as Brazil sends more workers to the country.

CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS IN MOZAMBIQUE, 1900–2050



Catholics are the largest Christian tradition in Mozambique today. Independent traditions are likely to become the second largest tradition over the next 30 years.

Because of strong government opposition, African indigenous churches have had difficulty establishing themselves in Mozambique. Many indigenous church traditions have been brought home by Mozambican miners working in South Africa. Several, including the African Apostolic Church of Johane Maranke, have been imported from neighboring Zimbabwe, and the African Methodist Episcopal Church was formed by blacks from the USA as early as 1883. Several have Mozambican origin, beginning with the Igreja Luso-Africana, which split from the Swiss Mission in 1921. Zionist churches from South Africa are particularly popular among the poor.

MISSION

Missionary Aviation Fellowship flies workers into northern Mozambique (Niassa and Cabo Delgado) to work with the Makhuwa, Makonde, Lomwe, Chuabo, Yao, and other people groups. Iris Global, the World Mission Centre, and OM once had a presence in Niassa but have since left. Southern Baptists work among the Meeto and Integral Vision Africa (Visao Integral) work among the Yao. YWAM primarily works among the Yao, particularly in evangelism and church planting in and outside of Lichinga. Anglicans were some of the first to engage with the Yao and have many Yao in their church. Equipa de Vida, an Anglican ministry, focuses on HIV/AIDS education, and other health factors. Their Salt, Health and Light project on the upper lakeshores works in tandem with the Mozambican government. In 2007, the World Mission Centre reported that 61 villages in Niassa had Christian churches (23% of the villages) and 215 villages had Islamic centers (82% of the villages).



Scripture portion distribution to children at a Church of the Nazarene congregation, 1996 (United Bible Societies).

The Assemblies of God have a large presence in the region. Many AoG members are not Niassa natives but rather workers from other parts of the country who live and work in Niassa, also known as vientes (newcomers). There are also formally educated business and government elites in Niassa who relocate from the more prosperous cities of Mozambique’s southern and coastal regions. The African Assemblies of God (ADA) and the Evangelical Assembly of God (EDA) are also present. The ADA began in Southern Rhodesia in 1968 and soon spread to Mozambique, arriving in Niassa in 1992. Brazilian missionaries run a very active Bible school in Cuamba.

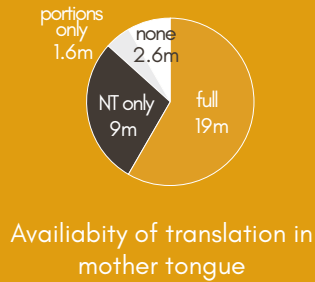
The most visible and well-known Pentecostal presence among Lichinga’s churches is the Brazil-based Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus). Fifteen branches have opened in between 2000 and 2010. Yet, in that same time, three of those branches had folded while others had moved into smaller buildings.

MISSION RANK	% CHRISTIAN	CHRISTIAN GAIN P.A.	CHRISTIAN GROWTH %	GOSPEL ACCESS	BAPTISMS PER ANNUM	MISSIONARIES RECEIVED	CHRISTIAN BROADCAST %	PERSONAL EV (ALL)	PRIORITY PEOPLES
MOZAMBIQUE	54.0%	870 K	6.6%	91%	564 K	3,500	3.5%	8m	2
WORLD (OF 234)	200	21	22	147	21	30	207	23	73
AFRICA (OF 58)	32	10	16	24	10	6	50	6	24
REGION (OF 20)	8	5	7	10	5	3	16	3	7

The table above depicts indicators of mission and Christian presence for Mozambique and ranks them globally, continentally and regionally against other countries. For example, Mozambique ranks 16th out of 58 countries in Africa for Christian Growth.

BIBLE TRANSLATION AND ACCESS IN MOZAMBIQUE

TRANSLATION AVAILABILITY



Bible translation began in Mozambique in 1888 and within 20 years a full Bible was completed in xiTshwa to go with the 1908 Tsonga (South Africa) Bible, and Portions or a New Testament in 7 other languages (plus six additional dialects of those languages). New languages and revisions were completed over the next 100 years and today 60% of Mozambique people have the full Bible and 92% at least a Portion.

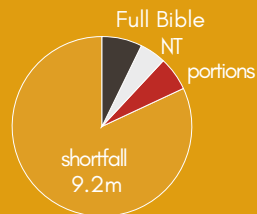
TRANSLATION NEED

The 8% remaining with no translation still make up a sizeable 2.6 million people. Of these, just one (Makhuwa-Marrevone) is a large language (with 742,000 speakers), which leaves 1.9 million in 13 languages, each with over 5,000 speakers. Translating at least one book into those 13 additional languages is the goal set by translation agencies over the next 14 years.



BIBLE DISTRIBUTION AND ACCESS

Progress toward Bible Distribution Goals in Mozambique



Adult literacy: 51% Internet users: 18%

Assuming that every literate adult should have access to at least one book of scripture, 9.2 million books would be required to be in place in Mozambique. Over the last 20 years (the assumed life of a hard copy Bible), 1.7 million Bibles, New Testaments and individual books of the Bible were actually distributed. Most of the Christian population then cannot have their own book of scripture and the non-Christians are largely without access.

ANALYSIS

Development is a key factor in any work in this region. Christians should speak up for indigenous rights while combatting corruption. Working on behalf of women's rights is likely to have a significant impact on the region, but this can only happen with female workers with proficient skills in the indigenous language. Christians can partner with indigenous efforts to improve the situation for girls and for women. Most of the population is under 30 years old, so youth and sports ministries could be very fruitful in this area. Agricultural training could also be helpful, though difficult. Grassroots evangelism and Bible teaching, village visitation, and microfinancing all have potential if done while building trusting relationships.

Another important consideration is the role of African Traditional Religion in the growth of the churches. More deliberate efforts to incorporate practices which are not opposed to the scripture (e.g. music or art) will be important in reducing the cultural distance that the various peoples in the region have to traverse.

APPENDIX

RELIGIONS OF MOZAMBIQUE

Religion	1900		1970		2000		2020		Avg. Annual Growth Rate 2000-2020	2050	
	Population	%	Population	%	Population	%	Population	%		Population	%
Religious	2,600,000	100.0	9,157,000	99.9	17,990,000	99.6	32,177,000	99.6	2.95	67,455,000	99.5
Christians	16,700	0.6	2,511,000	27.4	9,128,000	50.5	17,448,000	54.0	3.29	38,684,000	57.1
Catholics	12,000	0.5	1,553,000	16.9	3,735,000	20.7	7,300,000	22.6	3.41	15,500,000	22.9
Protestants	1,200	0.0	405,000	4.4	3,333,000	18.4	4,675,000	14.5	1.71	10,150,000	15.0
Independents	100	0.0	99,000	1.1	1,377,000	7.6	4,500,000	13.9	6.10	10,780,000	15.9
Orthodox	0	0.0	2,000	0.0	5,000	0.0	5,000	0.0	0.00	5,000	0.0
doubly-affiliated	0	0.0	-185,000	-2.0	-175,000	-1.0	-232,000	-0.7	1.42	-251,000	-0.4
unaffiliated Christians	3,400	0.1	637,000	7.0	853,000	4.7	1,200,000	3.7	1.72	2,500,000	3.7
*Pentecostals/Charismatics	0	0.0	139,000	1.5	3,263,000	18.1	6,000,000	18.6	3.09	12,500,000	18.4
*Evangelicals	800	0.0	281,000	3.1	2,959,000	16.4	4,200,000	13.0	1.77	7,000,000	10.3
Ethnic religionists	2,505,000	96.3	5,738,000	62.6	5,753,000	31.8	9,035,000	28.0	2.28	16,665,000	24.6
Muslims	78,300	3.0	900,000	9.8	3,076,000	17.0	5,635,000	17.4	3.07	12,000,000	17.7
Hindus	0	0.0	6,500	0.1	29,100	0.2	47,500	0.1	2.48	80,000	0.1
Chinese folk-religionists	0	0.0	0	0.0	1,700	0.0	5,500	0.0	5.94	12,000	0.0
Baha'is	0	0.0	1,000	0.0	2,200	0.0	3,600	0.0	2.44	7,500	0.0
Buddhists	0	0.0	0	0.0	810	0.0	2,600	0.0	5.98	6,000	0.0
Jews	100	0.0	200	0.0	200	0.0	200	0.0	0.03	200	0.0
Nonreligious	0	0.0	5,000	0.1	77,600	0.4	132,000	0.4	2.70	320,000	0.5
Agnostics	0	0.0	5,000	0.1	64,300	0.4	110,000	0.3	2.72	270,000	0.4
Atheists	0	0.0	0	0.0	13,300	0.1	22,300	0.1	2.61	50,000	0.1
Total population	2,600,000	100.0	9,162,000	100.0	18,068,000	100.0	32,309,000	100.0	2.95	67,775,000	100.0

Source: World Christian Database

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For additional information including the definition of terms and research methodology used in this document, please visit:

<https://www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity/research/dossiers/>