

# PEOPLE GROUPS: BUSHMEN OF ANGOLA

The Bushmen are the oldest inhabitants of southern Africa, with about 100,000 people scattered across Namibia, South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho and Angola. In Angola, they are mainly concentrated in remote, inaccessible areas and live in rudimentary shelter or under trees, moving within their ancestral territorial bounds. Some have moved to villages surrounded by Bantu neighbours, and are being exposed to new ways of life.

The Bushmen have historically been oppressed by the surrounding people groups, especially after they fought on the losing side of the wars for independence in Angola and Namibia. They have little economic stability, and many across southern Africa find themselves in deep poverty.

There are a wide variety of names by which the Bushmen call themselves such as the *Tsoe* and *Ju/hoansi*. Outsiders call them by names such as the San or Bushmen. In Angola, the *!Xam* people are called *Vasikele* (people of the bush) and the *Kwê* people are called *Barakwene*. Most groups share cultural characteristics such as their style of living in family units.

Although the Bushmen languages are related and contain between five and seven clicks, there can be great differences between the languages of villages which are not far apart.

The Bushmen are not superstitious or religious, although they believe in a creator god. This may be because the traditions have not been passed down to the new generation. In some places, traditional medicine and hunting are disappearing among them and they work for neighbouring tribes, often at low wages.

No formal statistics exist on the percentage of believers, but missionaries among the Bushmen report that they are largely unreached. Most have heard the gospel, but it has not penetrated enough to have reproducing churches. One of the main barriers is the language, which is difficult for outsiders to learn, and problems with communication between the various groups. Their oral culture adds further complexities to sharing the gospel.

A great need for discipleship and absorption of the gospel exists. There are few Christians among them, and no churches. Missionaries are working on translating the scriptures in one of the southern Angolan languages.

## AT A GLANCE

- The Bushmen still live as hunter-gatherers, moving from place to place depending on food availability.
- They have been losing their traditions and know-how due to lack of oral transmission.
- In other countries, there are scriptures and churches among the Bushmen, but not in Angola.

## PRAY

- For the Bushmen to find new ways to sustain themselves as their lifestyles change.
- For missionaries working among them, and for Bushmen to rise up and lead evangelism and discipleship.
- For Bible translation and story creation in their languages.

Sources: <https://reliefweb.int/report/angola/san-people-southern-angola>  
Operation Mobilization missionaries



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