

KIMBUNDU

LANGUAGE & CULTURE

The Mbundu group trace their roots to the Ndongo Kingdom, established around the year 1400. The chief was called Ngola, whence the name Angola was derived. After almost 100 years of resistance, they were subjugated by Portuguese colonists in 1671. They suffered greatly due to the slave trade. In 1956 the North Mbundu played a major role in the development of the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) which was instrumental in causing the Portuguese government to grant Angola its independence in 1975.

The Mbundu lost some of their traditional culture during 200 years of Portuguese colonialism, and 22 years of civil war and the consequent migration of people to the urban centers. However the traditional African values of community solidarity remain more important for this people than individual initiative. Mbundu society is strongly matrilineal - men consider themselves bound to their mothers' families, particularly their mothers' brothers.

Due to the Mbundu's long contact with the Portuguese and their culture, a good percentage of them are nominal Catholics. There are also a number of Methodists due to the early influence of missionaries beginning in 1885.

Today, many Mbundu people in Angola earn their livelihoods in commercial farming around the capital city of Luanda.

STUDYING KIMBUNDU IN THE U.S.

Please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the NALRC web site at <http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu>



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WOMAN IN MALANJE, ANGOLA

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WHY STUDY KIMBUNDU?

Kimbundu, sometimes called North Mbundu or Loanda, is one of the major languages of Angola and of its capital, Luanda. About one-third of the population of Angola of about 12 000 000 speaks Kimbundu as their native language. Visitors to the country and to the capital will find that a command of Kimbundu language will make their visit more fulfilling.

Moreover, scholars in various disciplines, such as folklore, anthropology, and linguistics, find that a knowledge of Mbundu helps greatly with conducting research in areas where Kimbundu is used. Given Angola's recent past of violence and instability, historians, peace workers and volunteers in humanitarian and social services also benefit from being able to converse in the language while accomplishing their tasks. Because Portuguese is widely spoken throughout the country, students who already study Portuguese but want to branch out into other languages will find Kimbundu a highly attractive choice.

Linguists interested in the spread of Bantu languages across central, eastern and southern Africa also find a working knowledge of Kimbundu useful for their purposes. Businesspeople involved in international trade and resource management may benefit from learning Mbundu, as would geologists, geographers given Angola's abundant oil and diamond resources.

WHO SPEAKS KIMBUNDU?

PEOPLE & HISTORY

In 2006, the population of Angola, including Cabinda, was estimated at 12,127,071. More than 90 percent of this population speaks Bantu languages, one of the major ones being Kimbundu. The Mbundu people (sometimes called North Mbundu, to separate them from the Ovimbundu), who speak Kimbundu, live mainly in Luanda and its neighboring region. Their areas also include most of the Angolan provinces of Bengo, Cuanza Sul, Cuanza Norte and Malange.

Kimbundu has several mutually-intelligible dialects. Some of these dialects are spoken by the Loanda Mbundu living in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Mbundu are bordered by the Kongo people to the north, the Chokwe to the east, and primarily the Ovimbundu to the south. The Mbundu are the second largest ethnolinguistic group of Angola(after the Ovimbundu). The history of Mbundu has been traced back to prehistoric times, up through the arrival of the Europeans on the African coast, and into modern day by way of written records and oral tradition. Study of the Mbundu reveals they are culturally related to their neighbors to the north, the Kongo. Kimbundu is related to the Nsongo, Sama and Bolo languages, also spoken in Angola and the four together are called the Mbundu group of languages.

In the 16th century the Mbundu were organized into groups that had loose political connections. In response to pressure from the Kongo Kingdom to the north, the Mbundu leadership centered on the ngola (ruler) of the Ndongo people. The leadership of the ngola however, was destroyed by the Portuguese, who provoked warfare and slave-raiding on the Mbundu. Major clans of the Mbundu are the Mbaka, Ndongo, and the Mbondo. Others include the Hango, the Quissama, the Dembo, and Bangala.

Colonial language policies, such as the 1919 decree banning the use of African languages in formal education in Angola, greatly affected the potential growth of the language hence the decreased use of the language in Luanda and the hinterland by the educated classes in favor of Portuguese. The majority of the North Mbundu live in rural areas and are subsistence farmers, depending primarily on manioc, and sometimes maize (corn), as their staple crop. In modern times (1970's) the Mbundu groups provided a strong support for the Marxist-oriented Movement for the Popular Liberation of Angola which has ruled Angola since 1975.



An Angolan fan enjoys herself at a sporting event



Girls at the Luanda Carnival



Building in Avenida Rainha Ginga, Angola