

TONGA

LANGUAGE & CULTURE

The Tonga language of Zambia is spoken by about 1.38 million people in Zambia and 137,000 in Zimbabwe; it is an important lingua franca in parts of those countries and is spoken by the members of other ethnic groups as well as the Tonga.

Tonga community has scored a first for minority languages in Zimbabwe following the formalization of Tonga language in schools in Zambezi Valley basin that borders Zimbabwe and Zambia. Tonga language was in October 2011 officially tested at Grade 7 level for the first time in the history of Zimbabwe.

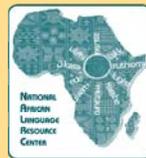


Tonga Tribes

STUDYING TONGA IN THE UNITED STATES

please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the NALRC website at

<http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu/>



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TONGA WOMAN

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WHO SPEAKS TONGA

The Tonga people of Zambia and Zimbabwe (also called 'Batonga') are a Bantu ethnic group of southern Zambia and the neighboring northern Zimbabwe, and to a lesser extent, in Mozambique. They are related to the Batoka who are part of the Tokaleya people in the same area, and also to the Tonga people of Malawi. In southern Zambia they are patrons of the Kafue Twa. The **BaTonga** people of Zimbabwe are found in and around the Binga District, Binga village the Kariba area, and parts of Matabeleland. They number up to 300,000 and are mostly subsistence farmers. In Zimbabwe the language of Tonga people is called *chitonga*. During construction of the Kariba Dam in the 1950s the Tonga community was displaced cutting cultural ties with the other Tonga communities in Zambia.

Successive governments have neglected the development of these areas as reflected by the poor quality education and health facilities resulting in cultural values and systems of the minority groups being eroded as children are groomed through alien languages. The introduction of the Tonga language in schools would help restore their cultural rights, pride and dignity of the Tonga community as equal citizens in Zimbabwe. The Tonga language and the culture has over the years been marginalized in Zimbabwe where two vernacular languages-*Shona* and *Ndebele* were recognized as "national" and Tonga children have been taught in those languages.

WHY STUDY TONGA

Tonga language and culture are synonymous with the Zambezi River that borders Zimbabwe and Zambia, the riverine Chief Mola's area in the northwest of Zimbabwe is one of the bastions of Tonga language and culture. Gokwe North, Binga, Hwange and other districts are other centers of Tonga culture.

Chief Mola is one of 18 chiefs that were displaced on both sides of the river when Kariba dam was being constructed in the 1950s. The displacement of the Tonga people then was both physical and symbolic. While they lost their ancestral lands and river they were also forgotten in terms of development, which has led to near synonymy between the Tonga people and underdevelopment. Tonga was never taught in schools until 2005. Now all that has changed, and a renaissance of the language is well afoot.



A Tongan one-cent (seniti taha) coin.



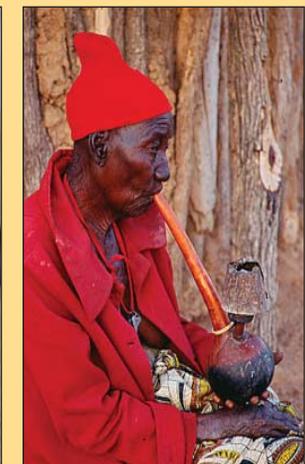
BaTonga woman winnowing basket



BaTonga Funeral Drums



Tonga tribal ceremony lwiindi-zambia



Tonga elders smoking from water pipe, Zimbabwe.