

NDEBELE OF ZIMBABWE – INFORMATION SHEET

BACKGROUND

Zimbabwe is situated in central southern Africa. It is bordered by Mozambique, South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, and Zambia. Harare, the capital, is located in Mashonaland and covers the area where most Shona-speaking people live. The second largest city, Bulawayo, is in Matabeleland in the west, where most Ndebele-speaking people live. The population is over 12 million with 70% of the population living in rural conditions. Ndebele are a minority group in Zimbabwe. Concerns have been raised about their survival in the current political situation.

ETHNIC MAKEUP

The Shona is the largest ethnic group and consists of several smaller groups which make up about 70% of the population. The second largest ethnic group is the Ndebele, consisting of the Ndebele and Kalanga groups, which constitute about 18% of the total population of Zimbabwe.

LANGUAGE

The official language of Zimbabwe is Shona as well as English and Ndebele. Shona (also known as *chiShona*) is a Bantu language used by the Shona people. There are several dialects of it. It is also a written language.

Ndebele belongs to the Nguni group of Bantu languages and is spoken in Zimbabwe. It is a dialect of Zulu. It is a click language.

RELIGION

The Ndebele believe in a creator who they believe to be the first human being. He and his wife are said to have emerged from a marshy place where they then found cattle and grain already in abundance. They passed on their culture and traditions to their children. It is believed that when they were old, they returned to the ground and became snakes.

CHILDREARING PRACTICES

INFANT CARE: The responsibility of infant care is the domain of the mother or if the mother works, another female family member. Children are seldom alone and learn family values in a familial situation. Great emphasis is placed on respect for adults. Children take on adult duties from the age of about 7 with girls taking on household duties and boys taking on caring for the herd.

INITIATIONS: Initiation ceremonies are undertaken every 4 years. Boys are taken to the bush for 2 months. They learn history, rituals, values and the traditional poems of the Ndebele culture. A circumcision ceremony is undertaken to mark the rite of passage into manhood. Girls are also initiated into the culture. A girl's rite of passage into womanhood is marked by her being isolated for a short period, after she has menstruated twice. A celebration makes the end of the initiation.

MURAL PAINTING: The Ndebele have unique practice of decorating their home with colourful murals. These designs are passed from one generation to another and from mother to daughter. The distinctive styles have symbolic meanings associated with their lives. Traditionally the houses were painted in mute natural colours but, since the introduction of Indian and Western influences, the pigments are now much brighter.



PRAISE POETRY: Praise poetry is a form of poetry that evolved from the desire to commend the achievements of the leader of the tribe. A special person called an *imbongi* is given the task of reciting the poetry to the leader.

CUISINE

The majority of Zimbabweans depend on staple foods. Mealie meal (cornmeal) is used to prepare '*bota*'; a porridge made by mixing the cornmeal with water to produce a thick paste. This can be flavoured with peanut butter, milk, butter, or, sometimes, jam. *Bota* is usually eaten for breakfast. Cornmeal is also used to make '*sadza*', which is usually eaten for dinner, and by many for lunch too. *Sadza* is prepared similarly to *bota*; however, after the paste has been cooking for several minutes, more cornmeal is added to thicken the paste until it is hard. This meal is usually served with green vegetables, beans, and meat that is stewed, grilled, or roasted. *Sadza* is also commonly eaten with curdled milk, commonly known as lacto, or a small dried fish called *kapenta*.

On special occasions, rice and chicken with cabbage salad are often served as the main meal. Family gatherings will usually be celebrated with the killing of a goat or cow, which will be braaied (an Afrikaaner form of barbecue) for the family.

REFERENCES

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