

Africa Today

The Land

Africa is the world's second largest continent. More than three times the size of the United States, it is home to enormous mountains, tropical rainforests, grassy savannas, three large deserts, and one of the world's longest rivers.

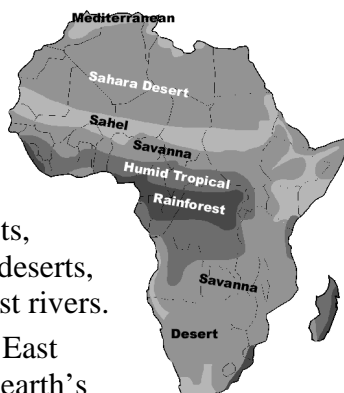
The Great Rift Valley of East Africa is a huge crack in the earth's surface. The result is a stunning landscape stretching from Mozambique in the south, to Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Sudan in the north. There are places along the rift where the walls of the valley are more than a mile high.

Many lakes have formed in the Great Rift Valley. Lake Tanganyika formed in a rift and is almost a mile deep. Lake Victoria, on the border of Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya, is the world's second largest freshwater lake. Victoria is a source of the Nile, the world's longest river.

The Nile is one of the two longest rivers in the world. Geographers have different definitions of where a river begins; so in some measurements the Amazon River in South America is slightly longer than the Nile. The Nile has been measured as flowing from between 3,417 and 4,225 miles long. The waters from the Nile River made it possible for a civilization to flourish in Egypt more than 8000 years ago.

Mount Kilimanjaro is the tallest of the many mountains in East Africa. Kilimanjaro is a volcano that is no longer active. Kilimanjaro is located near the equator, but is so high that its peak is always covered with snow.

Most of equatorial Africa, or land near the equator, is a lush, tropical rainforest. The climate is hot and wet; an average of more than 70 inches of rain falls annually.



The rainforest is home to two-thirds of all of the living animal and plant species on earth. Rainforests absorb vast quantities of carbon dioxide and emit oxygen. This keeps the earth's temperature from rising. If the earth's temperature rises, even by a few degrees, the ice near the north and south poles will melt and the oceans will rise. Most of Palm Beach County is less than ten feet above sea level; so global warming could have a strong impact on our lives.

North and south of the rainforests are savannas, areas with tall grasses and scattered trees and bushes. The savanna is home to large grazing animals like elephants, lions, tigers, giraffes, and zebras. The savanna is generally not used for farming because the topsoil is too thin.

Africa is home to three deserts, the Sahara, the Kalahari, and the Namib; together they comprise more than a quarter of the continent. The Sahara is the second largest desert in the world, covering part or all of eleven African countries. *Sahara* is derived from the Arabic word for desert. The Kalahari is a cold, rocky desert in southern Africa. The Namib, in southwest Africa, is one of the hottest, driest places on earth, with less precipitation than even the Sahara.

The Sahel is the strip of land that separates savanna from the desert. *Sahel* comes from the Arabic word for "edge" or "border" because it is the edge of the desert. The Sahel is shrinking at an alarming rate. Animals have been allowed to graze on its fragile land, which has destroyed the vegetation. The people who live along the Sahel have caused it to shrink by cutting trees and bushes for fuel. Without the trees and bushes to hold it in place, the thin topsoil of the Sahel blows away, leaving stony land where neither grass nor crops can grow. The Sahara and the Kalahari Desert creep one hundred miles closer to one another every year as desertification and erosion spread.



Ethnic Rivalries

The people of Africa speak more than 2000 languages and belong to thousands of ethnic groups. It is not uncommon to find twenty different ethnic groups within the borders of one African nation. Many Africans identify more with their ethnic group than their nation. This is due to the fact that when Europeans colonized Africa, they often created borders without regard to the interests or customs of diverse ethnic groups. Sometime borders divided people belonging to the same ethnic group, while at other times, bitter rivals were forced to share power. As African countries won their independence, the arbitrary borders set by the Europeans remained unchanged.

Since many Africans are multilingual, they generally speak their native language and a second world language such as Arabic or English. Arabic has long been the language of merchants and traders in Africa. Additionally, it is spoken by most of the 500 million Muslim people on the continent, often as a second language. Kiswahili, a mixture of Arabic and Swahili, is spoken in many parts of East Africa.

Sudan

Sudan, in northwest Africa, is an example what can happen when rival groups are forced to live with one another. Northern Sudan, once the ancient kingdom of Nubia, became part of the Arab world with the expansion of Islam in the seventh century. Oil-rich southern Sudan is composed mostly of black animists and Christians. The Ottoman Empire and the British controlled the region until 1956, when the British granted and control to a government dominated by northern Sudanese. What followed was the century's longest civil war. More than two million Sudanese died from war, starvation, and disease. A 2005 peace agreement signed by the north and south seems to have brought some measure of peace to the war ravaged nation.

During the Sudanese Civil War, international relief agencies have tried to bring food to the southern Sudanese, but the northern controlled government has hampered their

efforts. A human rights organization named Amnesty International charged the government in northern Sudan with abducting women and children and selling them into slavery. Many are physically and sexually abused, and beatings for "disobedience" were common. The Sudanese government claimed it was a matter of rival tribes engaging in hostage-taking, and that they have little control over the situation.

The Sudanese government has backed armed Arab groups known as the Janjaweed in their current assault against the mainly nomadic black people of the western province of Darfur. According to Human Rights Watch, the Janjaweed have killed thousands of the local Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa people, have raped women, and destroyed homes and food stocks. It is impossible to know exactly how many people have been killed in Darfur, but estimates range as high as 250,000 with more than one million people forced to flee from their homes as refugees.

AIDS

Sub-Saharan Africa and many other parts of the developing world are being devastated by AIDS. AIDS is an acronym for acquired immune deficiency syndrome. It is a virus that weakens the body's immune system, which allows other diseases to spread. AIDS is spread most often through sexual contact, contaminated needles, infected blood, or from pregnant women to their children.

Sub-Saharan Africa is home to ten percent of the world's population, but more than sixty percent of the people living with AIDS. 28 million people have died from AIDS related illnesses. HIV is an acronym for Human Immunodeficiency Virus, the disease that often leads to AIDS. In many sub-Saharan nations the average person dies before they are 40. Life expectancy in many of those nations was once more than 60 years old.

More than half of people with HIV became infected before they are 25, acquiring AIDS and dying by the time they turn 35. People in

that age group are the most likely to have started families. As a consequence, the AIDS virus has left behind more than 15 million orphaned children in sub-Saharan Africa. AVERT, international AIDS charity, estimates that 9% of sub-Saharan African children have lost at least one parent to AIDS. The number of AIDS orphans in the region is so staggering that extended families such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles are often unable to cope with the burden.

Fewer than 10% of infected people in sub-Saharan Africa are receiving drug therapy for AIDS, but thirteen times as many Africans are receiving treatments since 2003. Many people in the region are living as subsistence farmers, growing only enough food—and sometimes not enough—for them to eat. Moreover, the stigma and discrimination that result from being diagnosed with AIDS to discourage most people in the region from discovering their HIV status. Finally, AIDS therapy often requires patients to follow a rigorous timetable, but this is difficult in places where there are not many clocks and watches.

One common treatment for HIV can be produced in bulk for less than a dollar per dose, but the company that holds the patent charges more than eight times their cost. A patent prevents a company from copying another company's invention. The company has a responsibility to be profitable to its shareholders. It must recoup the cost of developing the drugs it produces, and it wants to invest in the development of future drugs. Forcing drug companies to sell their products at cost would discourage research and development of new drugs.

Governments in some developing nations have encouraged the production of generic drugs. A generic drug is a near equivalent to a name brand drug, but costs far less than the original. Many large drug companies have agreed to sell their drugs at highly discounted prices to poor nations, but the nations have the responsibility to ensure the drugs are not diverted and sold in richer nations.

The Forest People

A growing number of Africans are moving to cities, but some people continue to maintain the lifestyle and customs of their ancestors. The Mbuti are one of twelve ethnic groups that live deep in the Ituri forest in central Africa. Outsiders have called them pygmies, a Greek word meaning dwarf, because adult Mbuti are only 4½ feet tall. Many of the forest people consider this term to be offensive.

The Mbuti and similar ethnic groups are nomads. They travel through the forest in groups of fifteen to sixty making a new camp every few weeks. The men hunt with spears, small arrows, and nets, with which they hunt antelope and other small animals. Women gather fruits, berries, and roots.

These ethnic groups have faced discrimination and humiliation. Ota Benga of the Batwa people, was displayed in a cage in New York's Bronx Zoo in 1906. Investigators from the United Nations found evidence in 2003 that in the Congo Civil War, government and rebel fighters have slaughtered and eaten the forest dwellers. Some people in the Congo believe that eating the flesh of the forest dwellers gives them magic powers. To this day, many Africans refuse to socialize or hire the forest people because they are viewed as sub-human.

Estimates vary on how many of the forest people remain, but experts agree that their numbers are dwindling. The forest is being cut down as Africa becomes more urban and roads are built through the forest. Humanitarian organizations have tried to teach the forest people modern farming, but they have had little success. Most of the forest people have no

interest in leaving the forest, but many people are concerned with what will happen to the Mbuti the other forest dwelling ethnic groups if the forest no longer exists.



The Big Man

Thuggish rulers have plagued several African nations in the post-colonial period. The “Big Men” have generally taken power in military coups and repressed any disagreement in their nations. Most of the “Big Men” have been uneducated soldiers who were poorly equipped to lead. They often used elaborate displays to impress their people, but their actions often bordered on buffoonery.

Jean-Bedel Bokassa saw himself as a modern Napoleon when he installed himself as “emperor” of the Central African Republic in 1977. Bokassa’s \$22 million “coronation” consumed one quarter of his poor nation’s annual revenue. Bokassa enriched himself during his years in power by exploiting his country’s diamond mines, while living standard for most people in his nation fell. After Bokassa’s overthrow two years later, he was convicted, among other things, of murdering members of his army and poisoning his grandchild. Bokassa personally participated in the massacre of school children who protested against paying for school uniforms bearing his picture. Bokassa was exiled after a 1979 coup and lived in a luxury villa in France. Seven years later, Bokassa returned to his nation expecting a warm welcome, but he was arrested, and sent to prison for six years. A jury found Bokassa not guilty of cannibalism, despite testimony from his former cook that he prepared meals with human flesh and watched Bokassa eat the meals “with relish.” Other witnesses testified that Bokassa enjoyed fooling visiting foreign dignitaries by serving his opponents as roast beef. Bokassa was released from prison in 1993 and died three years later.

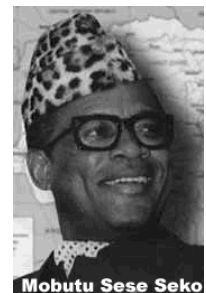
Idi Amin seized power from another dictator in Uganda in 1971. He named himself Chief of the Armed Forces, Field Marshal, President for Life, King of Scotland, and Heavyweight Boxing Champion. Human rights groups estimate that Amin’s death squads killed close to 300,000 people, often in public displays that demonstrated the dictator’s power.



Amin forced all Asian immigrants to leave Uganda in 1972, because he said God ordered him to do so in a dream. Many of the immigrants had lived in Uganda for generations. Amin gave their businesses and homes to native Ugandans, which led to the breakdown of Uganda's economy. In 1976, Amin was personally involved in the Palestinian hijacking of a French airliner to Entebbe, Uganda. Amin was toppled in a 1979 coup, and lived in Saudi Arabia until his death in 2003. The novel and film *The Last King of Scotland* was based on Amin’s rule.

When the people of the Belgian Congo declared their independence in 1960, the Congolese people elected Patrice Lumumba as their leader. Lumumba took power during the "Cold War," a conflict led by the United States and the Soviet Union (now Russia) from the end of World War II to 1990. The United States led the "free world" of capitalist countries centered in North America in Europe, while the Soviet Union led the "Communist" world of eastern Europe and most of Asia. Both the United States and the Soviet Union wanted to influence the "third world" of underdeveloped nations in Africa, the Caribbean, South America, and Southeast Asia. Fidel Castro took control of the Caribbean island of Cuba in 1959 and formed a Communist state. The American and European governments feared Lumumba would do the same in Congo, so they backed a coup, or military takeover, led by Joseph D. Mobutu.

Mobutu was a corrupt ruler who used his country's treasury to amass a fortune estimated at \$5 billion, including homes throughout Europe. In 1970, he renamed his nation Zaire, and ordered that all places and people take African names. Mobutu renamed himself Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku wa za Banga, which according to a government authorized translation means: "The all-powerful warrior who, because of his endurance and inflexible will to win, will go from conquest to conquest leaving fire



in his wake." Mobutu was suffering from cancer when a civil war erupted in 1997. The Cold War had ended, so Mobutu was no longer able to count on support from either the United States or the Soviet Union. The dictator left quietly with his fortune and died in exile. Zaire reverted to its former name. It is now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo. More than 5.4 million people died in a five year civil war that erupted when Mobutu left power. Congo is now a democracy with an elected government, but the nation continues to have violent uprisings.

Charles Taylor is a Harvard-educated former Liberian warlord who ruled his country from 1997 to 1993. Taylor is said to have accumulated more than \$600 million while waging war throughout West Africa. He was forced from power after the United Nations charged him with war crimes. Taylor backed rebels in neighboring Sierra Leone hoping to secure the diamond trade. The former dictator is now on trial for "crimes against humanity."

Robert Mugabe was elected president of Zimbabwe in 1980 after a seven year civil war against a white minority government. Mugabe was once popular in his nation and in the world community, but government corruption and an unstable economy plagued Zimbabwe. Mugabe initially promised cooperation with the white farmers who remained in Zimbabwe after the war, but in 2000, Mugabe's government began seizing white owned farms and redistributing the lands without compensating the former owners. Zimbabwe has an inflation rate of 100,000%. This means that prices will multiply 1000 times every year. Angus Shaw of the Associated Press used this anecdote to describe the Zimbabwean economy:

The word is out: The Spar supermarket has bread at only \$7 million a loaf. People rush to the shelf duly marked \$7 million, but by the time they reach the till with their hyper-inflated Zimbabwean dollars, the price is up to \$25 million. That equals just 62 American cents, more than a teacher makes in a week. "How can we afford to eat that?" a woman exclaims. Customers leave

*their loaves at the counter and walk out with their brick-sized bundles of bank notes, angry and disconsolate.*¹

An opposition party claimed victory in a 2008 election, but Mugabe's government has refused to release the vote totals. The government has accused opposition leader Morgan Tsvangiraihas of treason. Tsvangiraihas has left the country, saying he fear being attacked or imprisoned if he returns to Zimbabwe.

There are hopeful signs that some of Africa's most war-torn nations are working to develop democratic governments. A democracy is a government ruled by its citizens. Wars and ethnic violence have subsided in somewhat in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Bloody ethnic fighting continues, however, in Ivory Coast, Congo-Brazzaville and other African nations.

The Nations of Africa

The **population** is the number of people who live in a nation. The **area** of a nation is how much land it occupies. **Density** is the population divided by the area. It describes how crowded a nation is. The **Gross Domestic Product** is the total value of goods and services in a nation. The **GDP per capita** is the Gross Domestic Product divided by the population. This is the income of the typical person in that nation. **Life Expectancy** describes how long a typical person will live. **Fertility** is the number of children a typical woman will have over her lifetime. **The Annual Growth Rate** is the percent change in population. The **Literacy Rate** is the percentage of adults who are able to read. **M** and **F** are the literacy rates for **males** and **females**. The **HIV/AIDS Rate** is the percentage of the adult population suffering from HIV or AIDS. Half of the people are older and half are younger than a nation's **median age**.

¹ Mugabe Fights for His Political Life. (Mar. 28, 2008). Tampa Bay Examiner

The Nations of Africa

Nation	Population	Area (in sq.miles)	Den- sity	GDP (in billions)	GDP per Capita	Life Exp.	Fert. Rate	Liter- acy%	M	F	HIV/ AIDS%	Median Age
Algeria	33,769,376	919,591	37	\$268.9	\$8,100	75	1.8	70	80	60	0.2	26
Angola	12,531,357	481,352	226	\$81.0	\$6,500	39	6.5	67	83	54	3.9	18
Benin	8,294,941	43,483	191	\$12.8	\$1,500		5.0	35	50	23	1.9	18
Botswana	1,842,323	231,803	8	\$24.4	\$14,700	49	2.7	81	80	82	37.3	21
Burkina Faso	15,264,735	105,869	144	\$17.5	\$1,200	54	6.3	21	29	15	4.2	17
Burundi	8,691,005	10,745	809	\$6.4	\$800	53	6.4	59	67	52	6.0	17
Cameroon	18,467,692	183,568	101	\$40.1	\$1,408	54	4.4	68	77	60	6.9	19
Central African Rep.	4,434,873	240,533	18	\$3.1	\$700	44	4.9	51	63	40	13.5	19
Chad	10,111,337	495,753	20	\$16.0	\$1,600	49	5.4	48	56	39	4.8	16
Comoros	731,775	838	873	\$1.3	\$600	66	4.9	57	64	49	0.1	19
Dem. Republic of Congo	66,514,506	905,564	73	\$19.1	\$300	66	6.3	66	76	51	4.2	16
Congo	3,903,318	132,046	30	\$14.0	\$3,700	55	5.9	84	90	78	4.9	17
Djibouti	506,221	8,494	60	\$1.9	\$1,000	45	5.1	68	78	54	2.9	18
Egypt	81,713,517	386,660	211	\$431.9	\$5,400	75	2.7	51	63	39	0.0	25
Equatorial Guinea	616,459	10,830	57	\$25.7	\$44,100	62	5.1	86	93	78	3.4	19
Eritrea	5,028,475	46,842	107	\$4.8	\$1,000	62	4.8	59	70	48	2.7	18
Ethiopia	78,254,090	435,184	180	\$55.1	%700	51	5.0	43	50	35	4.4	18
Gabon	1,485,832	103,348	14	\$20.1	\$13,800	55	4.7	62	74	53	8.1	19
Gambia	1,735,464	4,363	398	\$1.3	\$800	57	5.1	40	48	33	1.2	18
Ghana	23,382,848	92,100	254	\$31.2	\$1,400	60	3.8	58	66	50	3.1	20
Guinea	10,211,437	94,927	108	\$9.7	\$1,000	51	5.7	30	43	18	3.2	18
Guinea-Bissau	1,503,794	13,946	108	\$0.9	\$600	49	4.7	42	58	27	10.0	19
Ivory Coast	18,373,060	154,502	119	\$32.9	\$1,800	52	4.4	51	58	44	7.0	19
Kenya	37,953,938	224,962	169	\$57.8	\$1,600	57	4.7	85	91	80	6.7	19
Lesotho	2,128,180	11,718	182	\$3.1	\$1,500	39	3.1	84	75	94	28.9	21
Liberia	3,334,587	43,000	78	\$1.5	\$500	42	5.9	58	73	72	5.9	18
Libya	6,173,579	679,359	9	\$78.8	\$13,100	79	3.2	83	92	72	0.3	24
Madagascar	20,042,551	226,656	88	\$20.0	\$1,000	65	5.2	69	76	63	1.7	18
Malawi	13,931,831	45,745	305	\$10.5	\$800	43	5.8	63	76	50	14.2	17
Mali	12,324,029	478,765	26	\$14.2	\$1,200	52	7.3	46	54	40	1.9	16
Mauritania	3,364,940	397,954	8	\$5.8	\$1,800	56	5.7	51	60	43	0.6	17
Morocco	34,343,219	172,413	199	\$127.0	\$3,800	74	2.6	52	66	40	0.1	25
Mozambique	21,284,701	309,494	69	\$17.8	\$900	40	5.2	48	64	33	12.2	17
Namibia	2,088,669	318,259	7	\$10.7	\$5,200	49	2.8	85	86	84	21.3	21
Niger	13,272,679	489,189	27	\$9.0	\$700	44	7.3	29	43	15	1.2	16
Nigeria	138,283,240	356,668	388	\$294.8	\$2,200	48	5.4	57	67	47	5.4	19
Rwanda	10,186,063	10,170	1,002	\$8.6	\$1,000	51	5.3	70	76	65	5.1	19
Sao Tomé & Príncipe	206,178	371	556	\$0.3	\$1,200	70	5.4	85	92	80	NA	16
Senegal	12,853,259	75,749	170	\$20.6	\$1,700	59	4.9	39	51	29	0.8	19
Sierra Leone	6,294,774	27,699	227	\$4.9	\$800	43	6.0	35	47	24	7.0	18
Somalia	9,558,666	246,201	39	\$5.6	\$600	51	6.6	38	48	26	1.0	18
South Africa	43,786,115	471,444	93	\$467.6	\$10,600	41	2.1	86	87	86	21.5	25
Sudan	40,218,455	967,495	42	\$107.8	\$2,500	51	4.6	61	72	51	2.3	19
Swaziland	1,128,455	6,730	168	\$5.4	\$4,800	32	3.3	82	83	81	38.8	19
Tanzania	40,213,162	364,900	110	\$43.5	\$1,100	53	4.6	69	78	62	8.8	18
Togo	5,858,673	21,927	267	\$5.1	\$900	60	4.9	61	75	47	4.1	19
Tunisia	10,383,577	63,170	164	\$77.1	\$7,500	77	1.7	74	83	65	0.0	29
Uganda	31,367,972	91,135	344	\$31.5	\$1,100	53	6.8	67	77	58	4.1	15
Zambia	11,669,534	290,853	40	\$15.9	\$870	39	5.2	81	87	75	16.5	17
Zimbabwe	12,382,920	150,803	82	\$6.2	\$2,481	38	3.0	91	94	87	24.6	20
Total Africa	952,003,381	11,645,170	82	\$2,571.2	\$2,700	50						
United States	303,824,676	9,629,091	32	\$13,860,000	\$46,000	77	2.1	99	99	99	0.6	37