Name: _____

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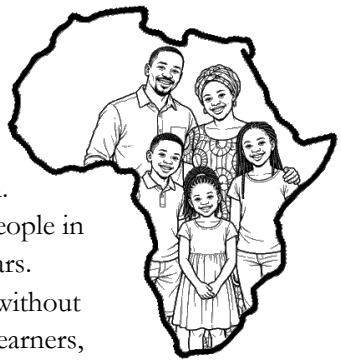
Sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges Ahead

Africa south of the Sahara Desert is changing at an extraordinary pace. Nearly half of sub-Saharan Africans are under 18, and almost 40 percent are under 15. By 2027, about 1.3 billion people will live in the region. The population has more than doubled since 1990, and experts say it is on track to double again by 2065.



The AIDS Crisis

A generation ago, AIDS threatened to devastate Africa's young adult population. The disease struck hardest at people in their parenting and working years. Millions died, leaving children without parents, families without wage earners, and communities without teachers, farmers, nurses, and other workers. In some countries, life expectancy fell by more than a decade.

At the beginning of this century, some experts feared the epidemic could cripple entire societies. Instead, new medicines transformed the fight against AIDS. Millions of people with HIV are now living long lives, while prevention and treatment have sharply reduced deaths and infections among children.

Why Families Are Large

In some of Africa's poorest countries, women may give birth to seven or more children. In rural areas, children help with farming, herding, gathering water, and caring for younger siblings. Where pensions and other safety nets are weak, grown children often support their aging parents. Girls who leave school early tend to have children at a younger age. With few opportunities for education or paying work, marriage and motherhood may offer one of the few paths available to them. Birth rates usually fall as incomes rise, more girls remain in school, and more children survive.

A Vast and Diverse Continent

Africa is the world's second-largest continent, three times the size of Europe. Its 54 nations include about 2,000 languages and ways of life ranging from the gleaming skyscrapers of Lagos, Nairobi, and Johannesburg to remote villages where life has changed little in thousands of years.

Managing Enormous Population Growth

Rapid population growth creates enormous challenges. Every year, governments must build more schools, homes, hospitals, roads, and power plants simply to keep up. Millions of young people enter the workforce each year, but there are not always enough jobs for them. Cities are growing especially fast as people leave the countryside in search of work and opportunity. In some places, housing, transportation, clean water, and electricity cannot expand fast enough to serve everyone.

Africa's young population is also a tremendous resource. If nations can educate and employ this generation, hundreds of millions of young Africans could help build stronger economies and improve life across the continent. Yet this is an enormous challenge when about 45 percent of the sub-Saharan population survives on less than $3 a day.

Political Instability

Political instability makes these challenges even harder. In 2012, soldiers overthrew the government of Mali as rebels and Islamic militants seized much of the country's north. Mali suffered two more coups in 2020 and 2021, while the violence spread into neighboring Burkina Faso and Niger. Freedom House, an organization that tracks political rights and civil liberties around the world, classifies half of Africa's 54 nations as "Not Free." In these countries, people face severe restrictions on their ability to choose their leaders, criticize the government, and exercise other basic freedoms.

Africa's Future

Africa's future is not yet written. Some nations have built stable democracies and growing economies, while others struggle with poverty, violence, and authoritarian rule. Across the continent, an enormous generation of young Africans is coming of age. How successfully Africa's nations educate, employ, and provide opportunities for this generation will help shape the continent for decades to come.

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Name: _____

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Fill in the Blanks

Africa south of the S__h__ra is home to a large and rapidly g__o__i__g population. Nearly h__lf of the people are u__d__r 18, and the population could double again by 20____. A generation ago, AIDS killed m__l__i__ns of adults, but new m__d__c__n__s and b__t__er prevention have allowed millions of people to live l__n__er lives. At the same time, b__r__h rates remain high in some poor countries.

This enormous y__u__g population creates both c__a__l__n__es and o__p__r__u__i__i__s. Governments need more s__h__o__s, homes, h__s__i__a__s, roads, e__e__t__i__i__y, and jobs as the p__p__l__t__on grows. Poverty and political ★i__st__b__l__ty make meeting these needs more difficult, and half of Africa's nations are classified as "N__t F__ee."

Answer in Complete Sentences

1. Why do women in the poorest nations have more children than in wealthier countries?

2. What are some of the challenges for a nation with a rapidly growing population?

3. Explain how political instability in Africa is a concern.

★4. How would life be different if you lived in a nation where half of the people were under 18 years old? Use your creativity to think of any advantages or concerns.

★ This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

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