

African Culture

Overall, African population is rising dramatically (over 750 million) with some countries at the highest growth rates in the world. It is common for African families in the small towns and villages to average 5-7 children each. Most of the large population centers are along the coastlines of the countries, but 70% of the population is still rural and live scattered across the African wilderness. The **life expectancy** has increased somewhat in the cities, but is still much lower than the world average. The life expectancy drops even lower when leaving the populated areas. Many of these have issues with a lack of **sanitation** (the ability to remove waste and maintain cleanliness) as well as all too common **malnutrition** (lack of a proper diet). Combined with the fact that diseases such as malaria is common and medical care is scarce, and Africa has the lowest life expectancies on Earth (22 countries with 60 years or less life expectancy).

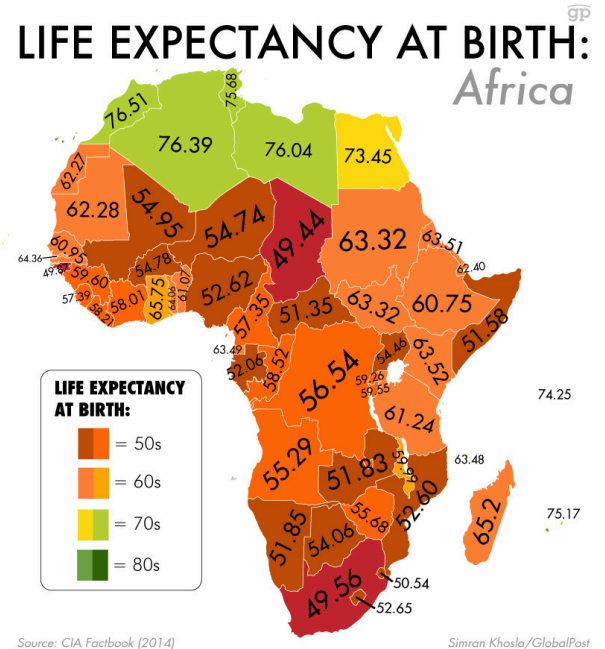
Close to 70% of the population work in agriculture, be it large corporate plantations growing **cacao** (used to make chocolate) or **sisal** (plant fiber used to make burlap and rope), or subsistence farmers growing **cassava** (a staple food plant for the region) and other necessities for daily use. With this production and little education on the effects of agriculture, much of the land has now been rendered unusable, creating a lack of food for the people.

Another obstacle to the growth of Africa is the language barrier created by the use of 2-3,000 different languages. The largest of these is Swahili with about 50 million users, followed by Hausa and Yoruba with about 20 million speakers each.



Along the cities and the more urbanized coastal areas, Islam and Christianity are the major religions brought by the traders and businessmen, but inland it becomes a mix with pockets of these religions, surrounded by hundreds of tribal African religions. In these areas, tribes are often recognized by their clothing. **Kente cloth** is a colorful fabric and each tribe weaves different patterns identifying their lineage as well as their **social status** within the clan.

In many of these tribal cultures, **rites of passage** (a challenge marking change from one stage of life to another) are common, and those not taking part are often considered outsiders, making trade difficult.





Schools and education are commonly forgotten in these rural regions, therefore the literacy rate is much lower in Sub-Saharan Africa. With little to no electricity, mass communication is unheard of instead, news and stories are passed by word of mouth or spread by **griots** (travelling storytellers).

With this type of survival lifestyle, families often live together in **compounds** (a group of homes surrounded by walls or fences). These not only keep the people, crops and herds inside safe from both animals and invaders, it helps maintain

control of the young and clearly marks a boundary for others to respect.

Countries:

Nigeria is about the size of California and is the most populated country on the continent. The country is one of the leading producers of oil in the world, but it also has several ethnic and religious conflicts with internal groups. They are around 250 different ethnic groups and the population is 50% Muslim, 40% Christian, and the remaining 10% are tribal religions. Around 60% of the people live in small rural villages making communications hard and allowing extremist groups to move into the region.

The Sahel countries are the countries that border the Sahara and include Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad. With the exception of Mauritania, the countries are landlocked making transportation of goods more difficult, hindering the ability to develop their valuable resources such as gold, oil, and uranium. The country is mainly dry grasslands, so herding is a major activity, but overgrazing is leading to desertification of the area.

In Central Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is one of the largest nations in both size and people. However, the country is in constant political turmoil leaving little to build an infrastructure to take advantage of the copper and diamonds found in the interior portions. With more than 200 ethnic groups, the majority of the population still live in rural areas, but the capital of Kinshasa is still home to over 6 million people.



Tanzania is also home to several ethnic groups, but they tend to cooperate better than the groups to the west. Most of the people speak Swahili and the unity has led to a more stable government in the country. In addition to agricultural goods like sisal and cloves, Tanzania has made its mark in the world with tourism. The stable government and laws protecting the wild animals has made it a destination for wildlife lovers.

Kenya has shared in the same successes as Tanzania. By maintaining the welfare of the various ethnic groups, the country is united behind its government and the economy has grown. Several multinational companies have their African headquarters in the capital of Nairobi and the port city of Mombasa is one of the busiest in the world.

Sudan on the other hand, is a highly unstable country. Sudan was controlled by Egypt which in turn was controlled by the UK until its independence in 1956. Since then the country has been through three civil wars, mainly with military leaders seizing control. In 2005, the third war started between the Muslim majority in the north and the Christian areas of the south. Close to 2 million people were killed in the Darfur region until the UN intervened and in 2011, South Sudan was declared an independent country which is currently in another civil war.

Ethiopia is the world's original source of coffee and is still a major crop producer. In the 1980s a severe drought caused a famine killing more than a million people from starvation and disease. Ethiopia is the oldest independent nation in Africa and is still home to followers of Christianity from the ancient Axum kingdom.

Somalia is a country of nomadic herders that, although Islamic, fight along clan lines, leading to disputes between major families and civil war. In the 1990s, the US tried to intervene and provide food, but to no avail. Currently, warlords control different regions of the country and there is no real government in power.

South Africa has one of the most highly developed governments and economies on the continent. People of the Zulu and Xhosa make up about three-quarters of the population while Europeans make up only 10% of the overall count. The country grew and prospered as a European trading port under the white ruled government of the apartheid era, but in the 1990s the native Africans took control of the country, rewriting the constitution, and giving rights to all of its people.

Lesotho and Swaziland are both enclaves of South Africa, with extremely poor living conditions and reliance upon South Africa for all of their needs. Off the Indian Ocean coast is the massive island nation of Madagascar. Being isolated from the continent, Madagascar is known for its unique species of animals and plants.

Further out are the small island nations of Comoros, Seychelles, and Mauritius. With the distance from these countries to the continent and their small sizes, they have avoided the ethnic battles embroiling the rest of Africa. The people on these islands tend to have higher qualities of life than their mainland cousins.

