

# GLOBAL SNAPSHOTS

## Issues Transcending Regional Boundaries:

# AFRICA

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[https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/maps/refmap\\_political\\_africa.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/maps/refmap_political_africa.html)

**Did you know that the first environmentalist to win the Nobel Peace Prize was an African woman?**

**That Africans have been trading with people from distant continents for many centuries?**

Africa is a diverse and dynamic continent. The African Studies Program (ASP) at Indiana University brings together experts and educational resources on Africa's regions and countries including: Algeria, Angola, Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, and South Africa. These and other African countries often make the news only when there are environmental catastrophes or political conflict, yet there is so much more to know. Some snapshots of information featured on the following pages demonstrate the vitality of the African continent and some of the challenges it faces.



# Things Students Should Learn about Africa

1. Africa is not a country. It is the world's second largest continent and consists of 54 politically sovereign, culturally and linguistically diverse, states. The continent's 1.2 billion people speak nearly 2,000 languages and practice various indigenous religious traditions as well as Islam and Christianity.
2. Ancient kingdoms existed across the continent well before European contact. While the Egyptians are the most famous, highly sophisticated kingdoms and vast centralized states developed in Southern, Northeastern, and Western Africa. They include ancient Zimbabwe, Aksum (Ethiopia), and Mali, to name a few.
3. Africa has always been connected with the rest of the world. For example, ancient trade networks linked Africa with China, the Mediterranean, Europe, and the Arabian Peninsula. Today, Africa is part of the globalized world economy.
4. The colonial experience varied across Africa. Although there were continuities, each European colonial power had its own approach to political and economic control. The impact of colonization also varied across and within the colonies of a particular European power depending on factors such as the presence of colonial officials or settlers in a particular area and whether or not cash crops were produced or minerals extracted.
5. African states began to reclaim independence in the 1950s. In the 20 years between 1957 and 1977, forty-two African states gained independence from a European colonizer, most of them in the 1960s. Some movements for independence involved armed struggle but most were won as a result of mobilization by a cross-section of Africans, including labor union members and emerging political leaders. South Africa did not see majority rule until after the end of apartheid, in 1994.
6. African identities are complex and using the word "tribe" misrepresents reality. "Tribe" is a loaded word that offers little analytic insight. With no equivalent in many African languages, it reduces complex relationships and identifications to an oversimplified and misleading archetype. Using more accurate, and context specific terms such as people, ethnic group, nationality, community, village, city, chiefdom, or kin-group has more explanatory power.
7. Africa boasts an extensive body of literature and film. In addition to rich oral traditions, African writers and filmmakers have produced a vast range of work in African languages (e.g., Arabic, Swahili, Yoruba) and in the former colonial languages. Many have achieved international acclaim, winning awards at competitions on and off the continent. There are also popular genres of writing and filmmaking, the most prominent being Nigeria's "Nollywood" – an African variant of Hollywood and India's Bollywood.
8. African visual arts are highly varied. Masks, figures, and other "traditional" arts, such as beadwork and ceramics, are only part of Africa's rich visual culture. Internationally known contemporary artists from the continent create innovative new art forms that are challenging definitions of art on a global scale, as well as contributing to international arts' dialogues on painting, digital photography, sculpture, installation and performance art. The diverse, dynamic forms are capturing attention at home as well as in museums and galleries the world over.
9. Africa is a rapidly urbanizing continent. Africa has long and varied urban histories but urban growth today is unparalleled. Cities are growing at a higher rate than cities on any other continent, due both to rural-urban migration and population growth. More than 50 metropolitan areas now have anywhere from 1 to 15 million inhabitants. More than 50% of the continent's population live in cities.
10. Africans are at the center of the mobile revolution. More than half of the continent's 1 billion persons have at least 1 mobile phone. As prices decrease and technology advances, smart phones are revolutionizing banking via mobile transfers, reorganizing business networks, and recalibrating the digital divide.



# POLITICAL SYSTEMS

## Electoral Democracy

In the early 1990s, a wave of democratization swept across sub-Saharan Africa. Multiparty elections were held in over a dozen African countries, many for the first time in decades. In some cases, this set these countries on a trajectory toward repeated multiparty elections and democratic consolidation, such as in Ghana. In other cases, this initial “democratic moment” resulted in the continued presence in power of the autocrat, such as in Uganda. Still other countries seemed caught somewhere in between these two extremes with democratic progress and retreat, primarily through coups d’état between election cycles, such as in Niger. In the past decade, events such as the disputed and violent elections in Kenya in 2007, in Zimbabwe in 2008, and in Côte d’Ivoire in 2010, led some observers to wonder whether African countries would turn away from electoral democracy.

African presidents frequently use their control over other political institutions to try to extend the number of terms they are constitutionally permitted to stay in office. In December 2015, voters in Rwanda overwhelmingly approved a referendum to permit President Paul Kagame to run for a third term in office. Recently in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, President Laurent Kabila’s party is suspected of trying to delay new elections. In other cases, however, leaders who have attempted to change the constitution and extend their rule have faced intense opposition from citizens and opposition political parties. In Senegal, President Abdoulaye Wade was rebuffed in his pursuit of a controversial third term by voters, who elected opposition candidate Macky Sall in 2012. In 2014, President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, who gained power in a coup d’état in 1987, resigned in the face of demonstrations led by the country’s youth and civil society against his attempts to further extend his term in office. In 2016, Senegalese voters approved a referendum to reduce presidential terms from seven years to five. In 2017, President Robert Mugabe, who had held power for decades in Zimbabwe, resigned to avoid certain impeachment following a coup d’état. These different political trajectories discussed above reflect the significant levels of variation in democratic progress across and within African countries. These dynamics are what makes the study of African politics and African citizens’ perceptions of democratization so interesting.

### Related Resources:

- Rwanda 2015: Kagame succeeds in changing constitution in referendum to enable him to run for a 3rd term (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/rwanda-joins-african-trend-in-term-limits-referendum-1450431980>; <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/19/rwandan-president-paul-kagame-could-rule-until-2034-after-voters-lift-limits>).
- DRC 2016: Kabila allegedly pursuing a policy of “glissement” to postpone elections (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/12/03/will-congo-vote-in-2016/>)
- Senegal 2016 referendum reduces term in office from 7 to 5. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/04/03/heres-everything-you-need-to-know-about-senegals-recent-referendum/>)
- Burkina Faso 2014: Compaoré’s attempt to suspend term limits thwarted by popular uprising (<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-29858965>)
- Dulani, Boniface. 2015. “African publics strongly support term limits, resist leaders’ efforts to extend their tenure,” Afrobarometer. (<http://afrobarometer.org/publications/ad30-african-publics-strongly-support-term-limits-resist-leaders-efforts-extend-their>)
- Ghana’s 2016 election: “How Democracy Looks Different in Ghana,” Newsweek. <http://www.newsweek.com/how-democracy-looks-different-ghana-530588>



# ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY

## Renewable Energy

Almost two-thirds of Sub-Saharan Africans lack access to electricity; in rural areas this figure increases to 85%. Seen as a region with enormous potential for developing clean geothermal, hydro, wind, and solar energy, numerous initiatives have emerged to bring electricity to millions of Africans across the continent. These range from small, “off-grid” applications like solar powered lamps and mobile phone chargers to large projects capable of powering entire cities, like the 300 megawatt Lake Turkana Wind Power Project in Kenya or the 6,000 megawatt Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Nile. Non-governmental organizations, private national and international companies, donors, and governments are all involved in a variety of these projects. Entrepreneurs and government aid agencies in Europe and the United States, concerned with the effects of global climate change, are particularly keen to support and finance ‘green’ energy projects such as these. The “Power Africa” initiative, for example, was announced by President Obama in 2013 and supports investments in a range of energy projects. At the outset limited to Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Liberia, and Nigeria, the program has expanded to 26 countries and now seeks to add more than 30,000 megawatts of clean, efficient electricity generation capacity and to connect 60 million households to national electric grids. These types of local renewable energy projects are extremely attractive to many African countries, given the high cost and volatile prices of imported fossil fuels. However, they face a number of challenges. The effects of climate change have curtailed rainfall in some areas, decreasing the amount of electricity dams are able to generate. Moreover, environmental activists question the impacts that new hydropower projects can have on local communities and their environments. In spite of these drawbacks, across the continent, innovative and ambitious programs are underway at the local and regional levels in an effort to harness and stabilize Africa’s renewable energies for the future.

### Related Resources:

- Block, Ben. “African Renewable Energy Gains Attention,” Worldwatch Institute, <http://www.worldwatch.org/node/5884>
- Brew-Hammond, Abeeku. 2010. “Energy access in Africa: Challenges ahead.” Energy Policy 38(5): 2291-2301. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0301421509009707>
- Jackson, Tom. “Africa’s new breed of solar energy entrepreneurs.” BBC News, 27 January 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-30805419>
- United States Agency for International Development (USAID) “Power Africa” <https://www.usaid.gov/powerafrica>



“Phones being charged at a mobile solar power charging station” <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-30805419>

# EXPRESSIVE CULTURE

## Indigenous Architecture and Embellishment

Africa is home to a diverse array of sophisticated indigenous architectural forms. West Africa, for instance, has come to be known for its iconic earthen mosques, with their jutting pillars and projecting wooden scaffolding. Perhaps the most famous of these is the Great Mosque of Djenné, Mali, whose importance has been acknowledged with its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage site. In the rural communities of countries such as Mauritania, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, and South Africa, the oldest form of dwelling still in use is the earthen compound-style house, which is composed of round and rectangular rooms surrounding a central courtyard and connected by an outer wall. Their owners typically build such houses often with the assistance of friends and neighbors, out of local sand mixed with water. Once the walls have been completed, women decorate their surfaces with geometric and figural designs that represent important elements of daily life and culture. In Ghana and Burkina Faso, for instance, women paint designs that refer to funeral celebrations, musical performance, and traditional dress. Some of the most common designs refer to items such as calabash bowls, which are used by women to serve food and water to their families and guests, making them important symbols of domestic life and hospitality. Historically, such paintings have been rendered in red, black, and white pigments derived from local gravels and stones. Today, women often also use commercial paints in colors such as yellow, pink, purple, and washing blue in their compositions. In recent decades, communities in some areas have developed or adapted their practices to attract tourist audiences. In Ghana, for instance, the Sirigu Women's Organization of Pottery and Art (SWOPA) promotes appreciation for local artistry while also improving the livelihoods of its members. Among Ndebele, elements of contemporary life, such as cell phones or airplanes, may be incorporated into their painted architectural decorations. Moreover, some Ndebele artists are using motifs once confined to architectural decorations and adapting them for use on other surfaces – from paint canvases to cars. In all cases, women's practices of architectural embellishment are dynamic, changing over time, adapting and evolving in response to ever-shifting political, religious, and socio-economic circumstances.

### Related Resources:

- Contemporary Ndebele painting:  
<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-esther-mahlangu-is-keeping-africa-s-ndebele-painting-alive>
- Sirigu Women's Organization of Pottery and Art (SWOPA) website:  
<http://www.swopa.org/>
- Smith, Fred. 1978. "Gurensi Wall Painting." *African Arts* 11(4): 36-41+96.
- Wemegah, Rolland. 2009. *Architecture, Mural Decoration and Pottery in Sirigu Culture*. Master's thesis, School of Graduate Studies, African Art and Culture, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana.
- Woets, Rhoda. 2014. "This is What Makes Sirigu Unique: Authenticating Canvas and Wall Paintings in (Inter)national Circuits of Value and Meaning." *African Arts* 47(4): 10-25.



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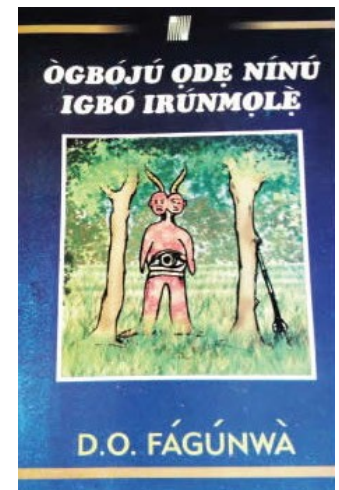
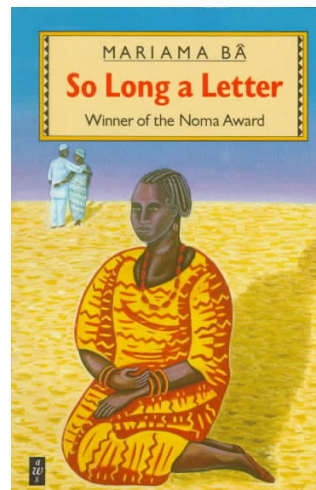
# EXPRESSIVE CULTURE

## Literature, Narrative and Audience

Praise poems, popular stories, histories, and songs (performed in religious, social and work situations) all make up some of the narrative conventions common in precolonial African societies. Conventional ideas of literature in western societies, meanwhile, have tended to limit the concept to written texts. Contact between the societies and empires on the African continent and European colonizers could have led to a reconsideration of what we mean by the term literature. Historically, though, the prestige reserved for written texts in colonial societies may relate to the fact that many colonized societies in Africa did not have a longstanding system of writing; colonizers could reinforce their claim to superiority by modifying their definition of literature and of what makes one form of literary expression superior to another. These cultural biases of 'high' narrative expression and 'lower' folk idioms are still with us, although the emergence of a global capitalist system (which was only made possible through colonial contact) dramatically changed all societies involved. Generally, in the capitalist societies of today, literary expression is closely tied to the market of commodities--somewhere underneath this discussion of literature, there is a product to be made for sale and purchase (an ink-and-paper book, a digital file, or an oral performance, for example). This is why it is necessary to consider audience when thinking about literary expression in Africa. Large, international publishing houses based in Europe and the United States seek a certain kind of product in the African texts they make available in bookstores around the world. Publishers in countries like South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, or Senegal tend to seek a different range of narratives to be produced and sold nationally. Authors writing in Afrophone languages (languages indigenous to Africa like Kiswahili, Yoruba or Wolof) often use a different publishing platform and find still different audiences. These varied formats give an indication of the many kinds of narratives that African authors are creating, and the different ways that they find their publics. With that said, the borders between these sets of narratives, publishers and publics are in no way fixed. What becomes apparent, here, is that there is not one African Literature but several modes of writing, and varied readerships, for the creative use of language as an expressive form in Africa.

### Related Resources:

- Snyder, Emile. 1986. "Modern Africa in Literature." *Africa*. Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara, eds. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Julien, Eileen. 2014. "Literature in Africa." *Africa, Fourth Edition*. Maria Grosz-Ngaté, John H. Hanson, Patrick O'Meara, eds. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Barber, Karin. 1995. "African-Language Literature and Postcolonial Criticism." *Research in African Literatures* 26.4: 3–30.
- Julien, Eileen. 1992. *African Novels and the Question of Orality*. Bloomington: Indiana U. Press.



# ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

## Open-air Markets

Open-air markets have existed in many African countries for centuries. They are dynamic and adapt to changing consumer tastes. Open-air markets distribute a variety of products including foodstuffs, clothing, textiles, and manufactured goods. From Kumasi Central Market in Ghana, one of West Africa's largest, to smaller neighborhood and village markets, open-air markets operate within the informal economy sector, yet they can profoundly impact the so-called formal economy. They are not only a place of economic exchange but also a hub where a variety of social activities take place. Market-goers share community and family gossip, discuss politics and news, and learn about upcoming events. In the Kumasi Central Market one can find just about anything: appliances, electronics, new and second-hand clothing, shoes, watches, jewelry, dishes and other household items, and of course foodstuffs—fresh produce, smoked fish, cassava flour, rice, and cooking oil. One can also buy prepaid minutes for cell phones, play the lottery, or get an electronic device repaired. However, for those living in Kumasi, a trip to the central market is not a daily activity. Because getting to it often requires traveling on public transportation through busy traffic and then maneuvering the densely populated market, people typically frequent the Central Market when a particular item is needed (e.g., textiles) or stock up on food and household items for the week. Even as shopping malls, boutiques, and indoor grocery stores are emerging across Africa, people still prefer to do the bulk of their shopping in the Central Market or in smaller neighborhood markets.

### Related Resources:

- Clark, Gracia. 1994. *Onions Are My Husband: Survival and Accumulation by West African Market Women*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Darkwah, Akosua. 2007. "Making Hay While the Sun Shines: Ghanaian Female Traders and Their Insertion in the Global Economy." In *The Gender of Globalization: Women Navigating Cultural and Economic Marginalities*, pp. 61–83. Oxford: James Currey.
- Grabski, Joanna. 2012. *Market Imaginary* [53 minute film]. Indiana University Press.



Kumasi Central Market from its wholesale yards.

*Courtesy Gracia Clark*



# ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

## Women's Access to Financing

There exists an extensive and dynamic repertoire of development approaches which have varied across time and place, and which have generally arisen from external conceptualizations of what it means, theoretically and practically, to be “developing.” Such externally-driven, non-African based conceptualizations have created one-size-fits-all models and strategies that ignore the particular conditions that development interventions seek to remedy in the first place. In an attempt to overcome such universal approaches, women in particular have moved to the forefront of development approaches and strategies in recent decades. Indeed, there is a significant and powerful link between a country's *gender* development, economic development, and overall development. In developing countries, for instance, with other conditions remaining the same:

- Women are 20% less likely to have a formal bank account than men;
- Women are 17% less likely than men to have accessed loans from formal financial institutions in the past year;
- Women lack the same level of financial education and literacy than men; and
- Women experience less access than men to savings accounts, digital payment platforms, and insurance programs.

These realities are mirrored in sub-Saharan Africa and are particularly problematic in Senegal, where women are half as likely as men to have financial accounts at formal institutions or to have access to various savings and payment platforms. Dalberg Global Development Advisors (DGDA), in collaboration with Africare, took on this disequilibrium in an attempt to address both economic and gender development in Dakar, Senegal. The ultimate goal was to create a financing mechanism that would facilitate economic inclusion, productivity, and wellbeing for female entrepreneurs. After numerous stakeholder interviews with microfinance institutions, investment funds, social enterprises and enterprise incubators, DGDA and Africare launched the first female investment club in Senegal on 8 March 2016. This club generates female involvement in the investment market, allowing interested Senegalese women of all financial backgrounds to become members in order to both improve their financial knowledge as well as see returns on assets they would otherwise not be mobilizing. Starting an investment club also makes it possible for DGDA and Africare to introduce an immediate product to the market. Such a club addresses the gendered gap on the supply-side of the investment market, but does nothing to improve demand-side female financial inclusion and access. To this end, DGDA has assembled a team to create a corresponding investment fund over the course of the several years. The returns generated in the club will be shifted to this investment fund, and will be used to invest in businesses owned by or mostly benefitting women. In this way, DGDA aims to address both supply- and demand-side needs of women within the investment environment in Senegal.

### Related Resources:

- World Bank DataFinder, 2015 & World Bank Global Findex, 2014.
- Andrianaivo, Mihasonirina, and Kangni Kpodar. “ICT, Financial Inclusion, and Growth: Evidence from African Countries.” IMF Working Paper. IMF, 2011.
- Frickenstein, Judith. “Advancing African Women's Financial Inclusion -- What Role for Policy Makers and Regulators?” *Advancing Financial Inclusion for Women in Africa*, November 27, 2013. <http://www.cgap.org/blog/advancing-financial-inclusion-women-africa>
- Keating, Christine, Claire Rasmussen, and Pooja Rishi. “The Rationality of Empowerment: Microcredit, Accumulation by Dispossession, and the Gendered Economy.” Edited by Shirin M. Rai and Kate Bedford. *Signs* 36, no. 1: *Feminists Theorize International Political Economy Special Issue* (2010): 153–76.





# OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES

Maria Grosz-Ngaté, John H. Hanson, Patrick O'Meara, eds. *Africa: Fourth Edition*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014. Available in print and e-book format. Fourteen chapters on topics ranging from geography through the arts and human rights; chapter 15 is a guide to print and electronic resources.

African Studies blogpost – This blog is maintained by the IU African Studies Collection Librarian and Senior Collections Assistant, and features news on the continent:

<https://libraries.indiana.edu/african-studies>

“Africa South of the Sahara” – Selected Internet Resources

Provided by Stanford University, this web portal provides access to resources about Sub-Saharan Africa. Browse by country or topic.

<http://web.stanford.edu/dept/SUL/library/prod/depts/ssrg/africa/guide.html>

African Activist Archive ---online records of activism in the United States to support African struggles against colonialism, apartheid, and social injustice from the 1950s through the 1990s.

<http://africanactivist.msu.edu/index.php>

African Online Digital Library – portal to multi-media collections about Africa

<http://www.aodl.org/>

*Diversity and Tolerance in the Islam of West Africa: A Digital Library of Peaceful Muslim Practices*

<http://aodl.org/islamictolerance/>

[Allafrica.com](http://Allafrica.com) – Aggregates reports from outlets across Africa and provides comprehensive coverage of the continent.

*Africa is a Country* (<http://africasacountry.com/>) – a blog that seeks to complicate and challenge prevailing images about the continent. Its title is an ironic take on the widespread discursive understanding of Africa.

Electronic Newspapers of Africa: [http://library.columbia.edu/locations/global/virtual-libraries/african\\_studies/newspapers.html](http://library.columbia.edu/locations/global/virtual-libraries/african_studies/newspapers.html)

