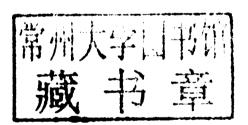


Africa

Diversity and Development

Tony Binns, Alan Dixon and Etienne Nel





First published 2012 by Routledge 2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data Binns, Tony.

Africa / Tony Binns, Alan Dixon, and Etienne Nel.

o. cm

"Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada"—T.p. verso. Includes bibliographical references and index.

Africa—Geography.
 Africa—Social conditions.
 Social change—
 Africa.
 4. Social conflict—Africa.
 5. Cultural pluralism—Africa.
 6. Africa—Economic conditions.
 7. Economic development—Africa.
 8.

Africa-Environmental conditions. I. Dixon, Alan

II. Nel, E. L. III. Title. DT6.7.B56 2011

960-dc23

2011023142

ISBN: 978-0-415-41367-1 (hbk) ISBN: 978-0-415-41368-8 (pbk) ISBN: 978-0-203-15349-9 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman and Franklin Gothic by Keystroke, Station Road, Codsall, Wolverhampton



Printed and bound in Great Britain by TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

Preface

Writing a book on Africa is at the same time both exciting and frustrating. Exciting, because there is just so much going on in this continent of fifty-three countries, and frustrating because it is quite impossible to cover everything and, since the pace of change is so rapid, by the time the book is published it is inevitable that further changes will have taken place. Although one may feel one knows this continent well – and, collectively, we have a total of over seven decades of experience teaching and researching on and in different parts of Africa – there is never a shortage of engaging revelations.

As we write this Preface and prepare to despatch the typescript to the publishers, North Africa is in turmoil as popular democratic uprisings attempt to overthrow dictatorial regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, while in Libya what amounts to a civil war is in progress, as Colonel Muammar Gaddafi attempts to cling on to the power he has held for forty-two years. Elsewhere in the continent democratic elections have been held in Nigeria, Africa's most populous state, and a referendum has been conducted among the population in the south of Sudan, the continent's largest state, which has indicated overwhelming grassroots support for breaking away from the north and forming a separate nation. On the economic and social fronts, while Africa still has many of the world's poorest countries, some African states have experienced rapid economic growth in recent years and have actually made some significant progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and reducing poverty. Meanwhile, South Africa, the continent's 'economic powerhouse', was in April 2011 invited to Beijing to join a meeting of the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India and China in a summit of the so-called BRIC group of rapidly developing nations. We are in no doubt that in the decades ahead Africa will be the continent to watch in terms of economic and social progress, and will hopefully be engaging on more equal terms with the rest of the world.

A book such as this is, we believe, a timely offering, both to dispel stereotypical perceptions and to raise awareness of Africa's considerable diversity and potential. The book has its origins in an earlier book, *Tropical Africa*, written in 1994 by Tony Binns. In this new book, Tony has joined with Alan Dixon and Etienne Nel to consider the entire continent; with a much broader scope and greater depth, this book is very different from the earlier one.

Over the following ten chapters we have attempted to examine many aspects of Africa's diversity, and key issues which play a role in affecting progress and the quality of life experienced by Africa's people. One of the key aims of this book is to draw attention to the complex relationships between poverty and development in Africa, and the various factors that influence this. In formulating an appropriate structure for the book, we decided at the outset not to include separate chapters on such topics as gender and politics. Since we firmly believe that these issues are absolutely crucial in understanding so many aspects of the present situation and future prospects, they are considered in a variety of contexts at different points throughout the book: for example, gender aspects of rural life and health; and politics in relation to historical events, conflict and economics. We also recognize

that while individual chapters focus on specific themes – such as the environment, population and health – there are actually many linkages between them.

Chapter 1 examines how Africa has been perceived at different points in time, suggesting that inappropriate perceptions and stereotypes have often obscured realities and interfered with our understanding of patterns and processes. The significance of history is recognized in both shaping present-day Africa and in looking forward to the future development of the continent.

Africa's population is the focus of Chapter 2, in which we explore a range of demographic indicators and official policies towards population growth. Both positive and negative future population scenarios are considered in the context of improving economic growth and enduring problems, such as poverty and the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Chapter 3 is concerned with Africa's environments, and particularly the important interface between people and environment. Following consideration of the need to adapt to climate change, other aspects of management and adaptation to environment are examined. The main thrust of the chapter is that we need to achieve a more detailed appreciation of people—environment relationships, rather than merely see Africans as passive victims of uniformly harsh environments.

Africa's rural sector is where the largest number of the continent's people still live and work, and it is the subject of Chapter 4. Following a consideration of land tenure, different types of rural livelihoods are then examined. Issues such as rural diversification, marketing and food security are discussed and examples of rural development strategies are critically reviewed.

Although still predominantly rural, Africa is rapidly urbanizing. In Chapter 5 we consider Africa's towns and cities, their origins and recent rapid growth, and the implications of this growth for the provision of shelter, food security and employment. The changing nature of urban environments is discussed, with a focus on the problems of delivering basic services, such as water, sanitation and power.

Health is a key influence on the quality of life, and in Chapter 6 we review the status of human health and health systems in Africa and show that women and children are disproportionately disadvantaged. Various aspects of environmental health are examined and the incidence of communicable diseases is evaluated, particularly HIV/AIDS and malaria. The chapter concludes with an investigation of the quality of health systems in light of limited financial expenditure in many African countries.

Meaningful progress in achieving development is dependent upon stable and transparent governance, and conflict has been a feature of many African countries, peaking in the 1990s. Chapter 7 investigates the causes of conflict, including the possible relationships between poverty and conflict. The impacts of conflict on individuals, communities, economy and infrastructure are investigated, and the challenges of the post-conflict period in reconstructing livelihoods and achieving sustainable peace are articulated.

Chapter 8 provides an overview of the state of Africa's economies. Following an examination of their relative size and strength, discussion then focuses on change and development in the different sectors — agriculture, industry and services. The vulnerability of certain African countries which are dependent on 'one-product economies' is then considered, and the potential for future diversification and development is examined in the context of selected countries.

Chapter 9 considers the contested meaning of the concept of development, and then undertakes a chronological review of different phases of theory and practice since the Second World War as they relate to Africa. Attention then turns to examining development theory and practice in the twenty-first century, with emphasis on locally based and regional development as well as the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The important issues of aid, trade and debt are then examined.

In conclusion, Chapter 10 looks to the future of Africa and its people, taking stock of key issues and possible directions for progress in four main areas – social, environmental, economic and political. Many countries have a long way to go in delivering basic services and uplifting the lives of all their citizens, but there is much optimism and an impressive sense of resilience and resourcefulness that will hopefully lead to significant progress in the decades ahead.

We hope that this book will go some way towards dispelling popular myths and media stereotypes about Africa. After getting to know large parts of the continent ourselves and making enduring friendships through working at grassroots level in urban and rural communities, we have no hesitation in saying that there are many positive things happening, and we are firmly convinced that everyone should be giving greater attention to Africa.

We would particularly like to acknowledge the help we have received from Andrew Mould and Faye Leerink at Routledge while compiling this book. Our thanks are also due to Tracy Connolly, who drew the figures, and to Jerram Bateman, for his help with referencing. Most of all, we would like to express our deep appreciation to the many friends and colleagues in Africa with whom we have collaborated, in some cases for almost forty years. Through working together in universities, development agencies and, especially, the field, we have shared some rich experiences and learned so much, and we firmly believe that we understand things much better as a result. This book is a tribute to our cherished friendships and collaboration.

Tony Binns, Alan Dixon and Etienne Nel May 2011

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Africa: continuity and change

1.1 Images of Africa

In the early twenty-first century, Africa is widely perceived as the world's poorest continent with a seemingly endless agenda of development priorities. Yet, in many African countries, solid progress is being made (ODI, 2010), and Africa deserves to have a stronger voice, such that both its problems and its potential are placed 'centre stage' in world economic and social development forums. A once popular image of Africa was that of 'the dark continent', as it was first portrayed by nineteenth-century explorers such as Stanley and Livingstone. In the past, Africa has been regarded as being 'off the map', a mysterious terra incognita, populated by wild animals and characterized by harsh environments such as vast deserts and impenetrable forests. In the last two or three decades, however, Africa has become more synonymous with famine, drought, poverty and diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS. It is a continent where poor governance and political instability are often seen as the norm rather than the exception, and where seemingly little progress has been made in achieving economic, social or cultural development.

Africa is also still seen as a predominantly rural continent, where, it is often suggested, an inability to feed its growing population is due to inefficient and outdated farming systems, operated by an inadequately trained and poorly motivated workforce who are reluctant to adopt modern methods. Another feature of the post-independence period is that many African countries have at times become dependent on large-scale imports of food, together with a multitude of aid and development programmes sponsored by international agencies, governments and NGOs (non-governmental organizations). But the situation is certainly changing. Although only 39 per cent of Africa's population was urban in 2007, the United Nations Population Fund estimated an urban growth rate (2005–2010) of 3.2 per cent, the highest rate among the world's major regions, and considerably above the world average urban growth rate of 2.0 per cent (UNFPA, 2007). Already, Cairo has an estimated 12 million people, with Lagos (9.8 million), Kinshasa (8.2 million) and Johannesburg (3.5 million) all growing rapidly. Some 50 per cent of Nigeria's 140 million people are already urban-based (see Chapter 5).

Such generalized images and stereotypes unfortunately ignore the great physical and human diversity of the African continent and also fail to appreciate the complex historical processes which underlie this diversity (see Figure 1.1a). Africa is a vast continent, second in size only to Asia, stretching 8320 km from Tangier (Morocco) in the north to Cape Agulhas on South Africa's southern coast, and 7360 km from Cap Vert near Dakar (Senegal) in the west to Cape Guardafui, the easternmost point of the Horn of Africa in Somalia (see Figure 1.1b). The continent and surrounding islands now comprise fifty-three countries. Once the cradle of the world's earliest civilizations, Africa now has over a billion people, comprising a wide range of ethnic, language and religious groups. The continent's pre-colonial history was rich, varied and often highly sophisticated. It is only since the

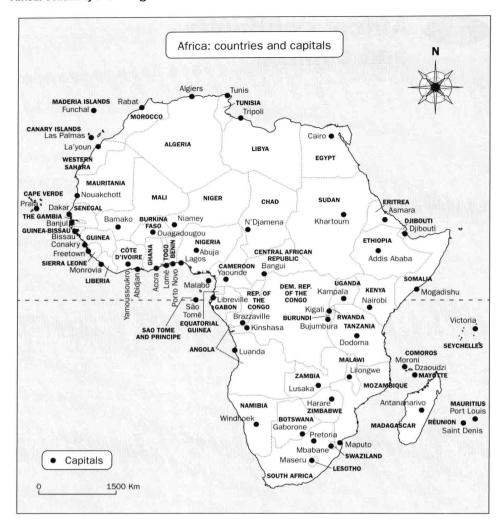


Figure 1.1a Africa today: countries and capitals.

Source: Adapted from Binns, 1994

nineteenth century that colonialism has significantly transformed economies and societies and has pulled Africa, sometimes unwillingly, into the world economic system through trade in crops, minerals and other resources.

1.2 Understanding and misunderstanding Africa

Longstanding myths and stereotypes about Africa, built up since the first Europeans set foot on the continent, and continually portrayed in the media, are difficult to eradicate. These perceptions, which are often founded upon an inadequate understanding of African environments, societies, cultures and economies, have sometimes, directly or indirectly, compounded Africa's problems. There are many examples of this, such as in the shape of countries, alignment of boundaries and ethnic composition of African states. The 'great powers', meeting in Berlin in 1884–1885 to divide up the African 'cake', showed little concern for the future viability, governance and development of African countries and