The graph shows that Africa’s population has been growing fast between 1950 and 2020: from slightly more than 200 million in 1950 and close to 300 million in 1960 to more than 1.3 billion in 2020. It also shows that 1960 was indeed a watershed year (“The Year of Africa”) before 1960 only 30% of Africa’s population lived in politically independent countries. At the end of 1960 this percentage had increased to 68.

Making this graph meant taking a few politically sensitive decisions about the years of independence. For South Sudan we took its year of independence. For South Africa we used 1994, the year in which Nelson Mandela became the first President after free democratic elections. For Sudan we took its year of independence, 2011 (so before 2011 it was regarded as an internal colony of Sudan). And we used the approach of the African Union towards the Western Sahara, regarding it as an independent country from 1975 onwards, despite the fact that in practice it is part of the Kingdom of Morocco.

The graph clearly shows that for many Africans living now (most of them young), the colonial period is long ago; something belonging to the stories of their grandparents.

Although Africa is still lagging behind all other continents, social indicators show major improvements and rapid changes between 1960-1990 and 1990-2020, with faster change during the last thirty years than during the first thirty years. Within Africa there are major differences, though, as the map of adult literacy clearly shows: the highest literacy rates can be found in South Africa and Libya, and the lowest rates in a belt from West Africa to Ethiopia, and also with low figures in Mozambique, Angola, and Morocco. And almost everywhere there is a better performance among men than among women.

The table not only shows the tremendous growth in population numbers in all categories, but also the slow but gradual shift to a more balanced population in age categories. The overall gender balance was and is almost complete. The dependency ratio (children and seniors compared to the ‘working age’ population) was and is high, but decreasing: 0.85 in 1960 and 0.79 in 2020.

Both in 1960 and in 2020 Africa’s population composition really shows a pyramid, although the base in 1960 was even more extreme than in 2020, showing a gradual (but slow) shift to lower fertility levels.

Source (situation per 1.1.2019): http://countryportal.ascleiden.nl/
Africa as a whole: population growth, crop volume growth and livestock numbers growth, 1961 and 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population (million)</th>
<th>Crops area</th>
<th>Crops yield</th>
<th>Livestock numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>122.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>130.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>126.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Africa’s population increased with a factor 4.3 during this period. All livestock numbers have increased considerably, but not as much as the population. Cattle, goats, and sheep numbers increased faster than Africa’s population, but both pigs and sheep numbers lagged behind population growth.

Africa as a whole: livestock numbers (live animals), 1961 and 1991

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Cattle</th>
<th>Goats</th>
<th>Sheep</th>
<th>Pigs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With only one exception (sisal) Africa’s major crop areas expanded (green in the table), and for most major crops also yields increased (with a factor 4.8), while yields increased with 43%. Very rapid expansion in crop areas can be seen for rice, yams, sweet potatoes, potatoes, treenuts, soybeans, vegetables, and shea nuts. Most food harvests are eaten in Africa itself, and there has been a rapid growth in urban demand. That growth of demand has been higher than the growth of production, resulting in increasing food imports.

Africa’s no-go areas, in December 2019

Index

0     10     20     30     40     50     60     70     80     90     100
Alert  Warning Stable Sustainable

Africa at 60

The African Studies Centre Leiden (ASCL) is the only knowledge institute in the Netherlands devoted entirely to the study of Africa. It undertakes research and is involved in teaching about Africa and aims to promote a better understanding of African societies. The Centre is part of Leiden University and participates in the LeidenGlobal network. The ASCL’s work is not only of importance to researchers but also to policymakers, journalists, NGOs, businesses and other organizations.

Research: The ASCL’s research programme lasts for a period of five years.

Education: The ASCL organizes a one-year Master and a two-year Research Master in African Studies.

Library: The ASCL’s Library, Documentation and Information Department has the most extensive and specialized collection on Africa in the Netherlands in the fields of the social sciences (including law and economics) and the humanities. The library, which is open to the general public, has more than 90,000 books, 1700 documents and 200 film and audiovisual records.

Publications: ASCL researchers publish in many different journals and with well-known publishing houses.

Seminars: Regular seminars are held at the ASCL on Thursday afternoons on a wide range of topics. These are given by prominent local and international Africanists and are open to the general public.

Visiting Fellows: Between six and nine African academics are invited to Leiden every year on three-month fellowships to promote an effective academic dialogue between Africa and the North. These scholars use their stay in Leiden for data analysis and writing, and present a seminar.

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LeidenASA The Leiden African Studies Assembly activities are coordinated by David Bakhht, Maude Westra, and Ton Dietz, supported by the director of the African Studies Centre Leiden, Jan-Bart Gewald, and by Mariska van Wijk. Rik Jongman and Femke Veldkamp.

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