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 Africa we used 1994, the year in which Nelson Mandela became the first President after free democratic elections. For South Sudan we took its year of independence. For South Africa we used 1994, the year in which Nelson Mandela became 

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.

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.

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.
Africa as a whole: population growth, crop volume growth and livestock numbers growth, 1961 and 1971

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population (million)</th>
<th>Cereals (milion tonnes)</th>
<th>Roots and tubers (million tonnes)</th>
<th>Stock units* (million)</th>
<th>* calculated as camels = 1; cattle = 0.7, goats, sheep and pigs = 0.1; chicken = 0.01</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>379</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>424</td>
<td></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 growth of Africa's population. However, chicken, pigs, and goats numbers increased faster than Africa's population, cattle and sheep numbers lagged behind population growth.

In 1961 many newly independent African countries looked at the future with high expectations. Although some areas experienced violent contesations (the civil war in Algeria was still going on, Apart- hed in South Africa, South-west Africa and Rhodesia deepen), the situation in Portuguese colonies was grim, and soon after independence there were violent break-aways in Congo (with a factor 4.8), while yields doubled. For roots and tubers the area expanded much more (with a factor 4.8), while yields increased with 43%. Very rapid expansion of production, resulting in increasing food imports.

With only one exception (siala) Africa's major crop areas expanded (green in the table), and for most major crops also yields increased (green as well). For cereals areas expanded by a factor 2.2, while yields doubled. For roots and tubers the area expanded much more (with a factor 4.8), while yields increased with 43%. Very rapid expansion of production, resulting in increasing food imports.