Literacy in Africa

- An adult literate is a person aged 15 and over who can, with understanding, both read and write a short, simple statement on their everyday life.

- Literacy remains a major barrier to the development of African countries. Despite the progress achieved since 1990 in boosting literacy rates, according to UNESCO, four out of ten adults in sub-Saharan Africa cannot read or write, a total of 182 million people.

- In 2012, the average literacy rate in Sub-Saharan Africa was 68% for men and 50% for women.

- As of 2014, 22% of African children do not attend school, and of those who enroll in primary school, about one third drop out without becoming literate.

- “For everyone everywhere, literacy is...a basic human right,” Kofi Annan, Former UN Secretary-General

- An underlying barrier for literacy programs has been the unavailability of adequate reading materials. This has meant that people are not motivated to read and new literates relapse into illiteracy for want of things to read.

- The transformation that takes place when an individual -- adult or youth -- learns to read and write is inestimable. Literacy provides a sense of pride, competence, and ability to function more effectively as a parent, a farmer or businessperson and as a leader in one's community.

The African Library Project

Since 2005 the African Library Project (ALP) has been developing partnerships with rural communities in African countries. Each community provides the space, furniture and staffing for a library while ALP provides the books and coordinates book distribution. The libraries promote literacy and a love for reading. As of 2015, ALP has developed 1,485 libraries.

Quick Facts

- Africa’s population is over 1 billion people.
- There are over 1,000 different languages spoken in Africa.
- Africa is four times the size of the United States.
- Africa’s population is about 15% of the total world population.
- In Africa, the average life expectancy is 58 years.
- In sub Saharan Africa, about half the people live on less than $1.25 per day.
- Africa is a diverse continent of 54 countries.
- Africa is rich in natural resources.
- Africa is also rich in human resources, including Nobel laureates Desmond Tutu, Wangari Maathai, Kofi Annan, Nelson Mandela, and Wole Soyinka, and many children who also have the potential to achieve greatness.
About the Country
Botswana, a former British protectorate, gained independence in 1966. The country’s economy depended primarily on livestock until the 1970s when Botswana became a major exporter of diamonds. Currently, Botswana has one of the most successful economies and stable democracies in Africa. The Botswana economy now includes a service sector along with tourism, manufacturing and of course mining of diamonds along with other precious resources.

Although many languages are spoken in Botswana, English is the official language. Employers in Botswana require a high level of English proficiency, and newspapers in Botswana are written primarily in English. But being literate in English is the key not only to getting a good job; it’s also key to survival; medical records and medicine labels are also written in English.

Education
The discovery of diamonds and the revenue that their trade generated was beneficial for Botswana’s educational funding. Botswana spends about 10% of its GDP on education.

The early years of education are taught in Setswana, then children are introduced to English and more and more subjects are taught in English. All subjects are taught in English in secondary schools. The University of Botswana, in the capital city of Gaborone, is the country’s only public university. The Botswana government provides scholarships to students at the university level. Certain subjects are not offered at the university and so students must often go abroad to pursue an education.

The African Library Project
The African Library Project concentrates on establishing primary school libraries in Botswana in partnership with the Ministry of Education. In October 2008, the first ALP African Partners Summit in Kanye, Botswana, brought together our partners in Swaziland, Lesotho and Botswana to share best practices and develop simple evaluation tools. As of 2015, the African Library Project and the Ministry of Education have established 344 primary school libraries in Botswana.

Quick Facts
- Botswana is a sizeable country -- comparable to France, slightly smaller than Texas -- but its population is small at about 2 million.
- The people of Botswana are known as Batswana. A single Batswana is a Motswana. English and Setswana are their main languages but more than 20 other languages are spoken in Botswana.
- Botswana has one of Africa’s highest literacy rates: 85% for males and 86% for females.
- The life expectancy in Botswana is about 54 years.
- Botswana’s HIV/AIDS prevalence rate is 23%. This is the third highest rate in the world. The government has an excellent program providing HIV/AIDS medications.
- The Kalahari Desert covers nearly 85% of the country, including the entire central and southwestern regions.
About the Country

Ghana, an English speaking country, lies in the most southern part of the West African coast, surrounded by the Atlantic and its French speaking neighbors (Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, and Togo.) Previously an influential African Empire and then a British colony, Ghana gained independence from the UK in 1957. It was the first sub-Saharan nation to achieve autonomy from colonial rule. Ghana was also the first place in sub-Saharan Africa where Europeans arrived to trade - first in gold, later in slaves. Archaeological evidence shows that humans have lived in present-day Ghana from about 1500 BC. Today, Ghana is a model of democracy for the continent and the world.

Education

Ghana has one of the highest school enrollment rates in West Africa, with 82% of school-aged children attending school. The ratio of girls to boys within the education system is about 1:1. This is a contrast to many countries in the region where girls are much less likely to have the opportunity to attend school. Nonetheless, there are still about a half a million children who are not in school due to lack of resources, text books being a key example of such a resource. All classes in Ghanaian schools are taught in English. Ghanaian students have more educational opportunities than many of their neighbors. For example, Ghana boasts eight public universities while next door, in Togo, there are only two. The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (named after Ghana’s former president) is considered to be one of the best universities for science and technology in the region.

The African Library Project

In 2011, the African Library Project developed a partnership with the Michael Lapsley Foundation in an effort to found libraries in rural Ghana. Each community provides the space, furniture and staffing for a library while ALP provides the books and coordinates book distribution. The Ghanaian Members of Parliament and other government officials sponsor the libraries in their district. Together, ALP and the Lapsley Foundation evaluate and monitor the libraries—174 libraries as of 2014!

Quick Facts

- Ghana has a population of about 25 million people.
- The overall adult literacy rate is 71%. The rate for women is lower than that of men: 65% vs 78%.
- Ghana has one of the lowest rates of HIV/AIDS in the region: 1.4% among adults aged 15-49.
- Ghana is home to over 100 different ethnic groups. About 47 unique local languages are spoken although English is the official language.
- Ghana is the world’s second largest exporter of cocoa. Rich in many other natural resources, Ghana is also recognized for its oil, gold, timber, electricity, diamonds, bauxite, and manganese.
About the Country
To walk the land of Kenya is like walking the history of humankind. Some of the earliest fossils of prehistoric humans have been discovered in Kenya in the Great Rift Valley. A former British colony, Kenya achieved independence in 1963. Some of Kenya’s most well known people are the Maasai – a semi-nomadic warrior tribe that live in the southern portion of the country as well as in northern Tanzania. A Maasai shield is at the center of the Kenyan flag. Today, Kenya is known around the world for its technological innovations, especially in mobile finance.

Although many languages are spoken in Kenya, English and Kiswahili are the official languages. Employers in Kenya require a high level of English proficiency, and newspapers in Kenya are written primarily in English. But being literate in English is the key not only to getting a good job; it’s also key to survival; medical records and medicine labels are also written in English.

Education
Primary school education is free in Kenya, but many schools charge fees for supplies or other expenses, which places a burden on families. All students have to pay for secondary (high) school, but it is subsidized by the government for very high-achieving students. There are many colleges and universities in Kenya, and university education is subsidized for those who score high on their high school exams.

The African Library Project
In Kenya, the African Library Project works with Rongo University to establish school and community libraries. The partnership works in Homabay and Migori counties, in southwest Kenya. Since 2017, we have started 94 libraries (many with our former partner, Project Humanity).

Quick Facts
- Kenya is a sizeable country -- comparable to France, slightly smaller than Texas – with a population of about 48 million.
- The population of Kenya is on average very young, with about 60% of people under age 24.
- Kenya’s literacy rate is 81% for men and 75% for women.
- Kenya is home to one of the world’s largest refugee camps, with over 200,000 refugees, mostly from Somalia.
- Kenya’s HIV/AIDS prevalence rate is 5% nationwide; the rate in Homabay County is 21%), while the rate in Migori County is about 13%. While these rates are high, they have decreased over the last couple years, which is great news.
- Kenya is known for its abundant wildlife, and many tourists visit to see the animals. Kenya’s government takes an active role in conservation and recently burned 105 tons of ivory in order to discourage poaching.
- Agriculture contributes one-third of Kenya’s GDP. Kenya is especially famous for its tea and coffee exports.
- Kenya has extreme income inequality, and 36% of the population lives below the poverty line.
About the Country

Lesotho is a tiny country nestled in the middle of South Africa. Founded as a kingdom in the 1820s, Lesotho was a British protectorate for almost 100 years (1868-1966) before regaining independence in 1966. Today, the country is one of the world's smallest constitutional monarchies.

Lesotho is known for its beautiful mountains, horseback riding trails, fishing, and hiking. The country’s economy is based primarily on subsistence agriculture, tourism and notably, textile production. Lesotho exports more garments to the US than any other sub-Saharan nation; American companies like the Gap, Levi-Strauss and Wal-Mart have factories there.

Overall, Lesotho is very underdeveloped; it has little industrial production and very few natural resources. Many people of Lesotho (the Basotho) rely on employment in South Africa to support their families.

English and Sesotho are Lesotho’s official languages but Xhosa and Zulu are also spoken.

Education

In general, public schools in Africa charge tuition at all levels of schooling but since 2000, primary school education in Lesotho has been free and as a result, enrollment has increased. Unfortunately, students and parents face many issues paying tuition at the high school level. Only about a third of high school-age children attend school due to lack of funding and space.

The African Library Project

Lesotho is the home of the first African Library Project in Malealea Valley, begun in 2005. Since then, ALP has partnered with the U.S. Peace Corps, the Ministry of Education, and local citizens to start/improve more than 363 community libraries; this includes libraries in schools and hospitals.

In 2009, Lesotho hosted the 2nd ALP African Partners Summit. Among other activities, the Summit featured library tours featuring Lesotho’s innovative classroom libraries in primary schools.

Quick Facts

• Lesotho measures about 11k square miles (roughly the size of Maryland) and has a population of 2 million.

• Lesotho has one of Sub-Saharan Africa’s highest literacy rates: 90%. (Males: 83%; Females: 96%)

• The UN estimates that 49% of the population lives below the international poverty line of US $1.25 a day.

• Life expectancy in Lesotho is about 53 years.

• It’s estimated that about 23% of adults in Lesotho are living with HIV/AIDS- the 2nd highest prevalence in the world.
About the Country

The Republic of Malawi is a landlocked country in southeast Africa. A former British colony known as Nyasaland, Malawi gained independence in 1964. The history of Malawi goes back to the 10th century, when the area was first settled. Today, Malawi is one of Africa’s poorest and most densely populated nations. Malawi’s economy is based on agriculture and 84% of its people live in rural areas. Maize (corn) is the country’s main staple food while tea, coffee and sugar are some of its biggest exports. The people of Malawi have a rich history of traditional dance, mask carving and basketry. Soccer is the most popular sport.

Education

The educational system in Malawi consists of 8 years in primary school, 4 in secondary school and 4 at university. Starting in year 5 of primary school, all subjects are taught in English. School enrollment has historically been low. However in 1994, free primary education for all children was introduced and enrollment in primary schools nearly tripled. Unfortunately, the impoverished school system was unprepared and many unqualified teachers have been recruited to teach in severely overcrowded and underfinanced schools. As a result, some frustrated students have dropped out. Dropout rates are higher for girls than boys because girls often face discouragement from male students and teachers. Additionally, girls are expected to take care of their families: fetching water, collecting firewood and preparing meals leaves girls little time for schooling.

It’s estimated that Malawi had 770,000 AIDS orphans in 2013. In general, young people between the ages of 13-24 have been affected by AIDS more than other age group which is why many experts are calling for AIDS education in schools.

The African Library Project

The African Library Project (ALP) establishes and improves small libraries in rural sub-Saharan Africa. Wungwero Book Foundation (WBF), an NGO dedicated to rural library development in Malawi, initiated a partnership with the African Library Project in 2008. WBF was soon joined by DAPP Malawi, an NGO focused on teacher training, AYISE, an NGO focused on youth development. Each library project provides the space, furniture and staffing for a library, and the Malawi Institute of Education. ALP provides the books while WBF provides librarian training and DAPP coordinates the book distribution. Together, the organizations evaluate and monitor the libraries—219 as of 2014.

Quick Facts

- About half of Malawi’s population of 17 million lives on under $1.25/day.
- The adult literacy rate is 75%. Men tend to be more literate: 81% of men over 15 can read vs. 69% of women.
- Average life expectancy is about 60 years. Malawi has such a low life expectancy in part because about 11% of the population has HIV/AIDS.
- Malawi has two official languages, English and Chichewa, but several other local languages are spoken as well.
- Malawi’s capital city is Lilongwe and commercial capital is Blantyre.
About the Country

The republic of Sierra Leone is located in West Africa. It borders Guinea, Liberia and the Atlantic Ocean. It is known for its
gorgeous tropical climate. According to archeological findings, people have been residing in the country for at least 2,500
years. In 1492 Sierra Leone was named Serra Leoa, meaning "Lioness Mountains", by the Portuguese explorer Pedro de
Sintra. In the sixteenth century Sierra Leone was a very important center for the transatlantic slave trade. However the
country’s involvement with the slave trade ended in 1787 after Freetown was established by repatriated former slaves. In the
twentieth century, Sierra Leone became a British colony and later gained its independence in 1961. From 1991-2002 Sierra
Leone experienced a bloody civil war that killed over 50 thousand people and displaced over 2 million people. As a result of
this civil war, today the country faces high poverty and unemployment rates. Over 70% of the population in Sierra Leone lives
under the poverty line. However, through the leadership of the current president Ernest Bai Koroma, the country has
increased agricultural production and productivity which means rural incomes have also increased. Also, over the years,
Sierra Leone’s government has worked extremely hard to ensure the freedom of religion. Sierra Leone is one of the most
religiously tolerant nations in the world. In 2014, Sierra Leone was hard hit with an epidemic of Ebola. Schools were closed
for seven months to minimize transmission of the disease, and 3,300 people died (as of Feb. 2015).

Education

English is the language of instruction. The law mandates that students receive free primary education, and it requires them to
attend six years of primary school and three years of junior secondary school. However, this has not been happening and as
a result Sierra Leone has a low school enrollment rate. The civil war destroyed over a thousand primary schools and pushed
a lot of families into poverty. Many students have been forced to drop out so that they can work to support their families. Also
there is a shortage of key resources such as text books and teachers. Only about 7% of schools have libraries. There are
over 20 higher education institutions in the country. Fourah Bay College, now part of the University of Sierra Leone, was
established in 1827 and is the oldest university in West Africa.

The African Library Project

In 2012, the African Library Project developed a partnership with the Reading Initiative Salone (RISE) Network to found libraries
in Sierra Leone. Each rural community provides the space, furniture and staffing for a library while ALP provides the books
and RISE coordinates book distribution and librarian training. Together, ALP and RISE Network evaluate and monitor the
libraries. Founded in 2012, RISE Network is a consortium of organizations committed to the development of libraries and
reading rooms in schools in Sierra Leone as a way of promoting literacy and a love for reading. ALP has sent 82 libraries to
Sierra Leone (as of 2014).

Quick Facts

• Sierra Leone has a population of about 6 million people.
• The overall adult literacy rate is 35%. The rate for women is
  lower than that of men: 24% vs 47%.
• The HIV/AIDS prevalence in Sierra Leone is quite low: 1.5% among adults aged 15-49.
• Sierra Leone is home to 16 ethnic groups. Each group has
  their own language and traditional attire. English is the official
  language; however Krio is the language that is understood by
  most of the population. Krio is a Creole language, first spoken
  by descendants of freed Jamaican slaves who settled in the
  Freetown area.
• Sierra Leone’s economy is heavily dependent on mining
  diamonds. Sierra Leone is also rich in other natural resources,
  including gold, titanium, and bauxite. Its main exports are the
  mineral rutile, fish, coffee, cocoa, and iron ore.
• Sierra Leone has the third largest harbor in the world.