

INTERPRETING DATA

Comparing Africa's Economies

Most of Africa's 50 countries are among the world's poorest. However, there are big differences among individual nations. Some countries, including Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, and Libya, have large supplies of oil. Others, such as Somalia, Liberia, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have been ravaged by long and brutal civil wars.

Botswana gains wealth from diamonds, and South Africa is the most industrialized country in southern Africa. But the AIDS epidemic has hit those countries and Zimbabwe hard. One out of every four of the world's deaths from AIDS occurs in those three nations, and more than one out of every seven adults there has HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. That is one reason Zimbabwe's economy has virtually collapsed. Another is that its government has been trying to break up large commercial farms and give the land to poor people.

That has made it difficult for people in cities to get food. Prices have gone up so fast that one U.S. penny is worth more than 370,000 Zimbabwe dollars.

This chart lists the five richest and five poorest countries in Africa. It compares them with Kenya (which ranks 20th among Africa's 53 countries), the United States, and the world average. It also lists life expectancy, literacy rates, and human development index (HDI) for each country.

HDI is a statistic developed by the United Nations to measure the quality of life in a country. It combines data for education, health, and wealth into a number between 0 (the lowest) and 1 (the highest). In 2006, the nations of the world ranged from Iceland (0.968) to Sierra Leone (0.329). The United States ranked 15th.

Study the chart, then answer the questions on the following page.

COUNTRY	PER CAPITA GDP*	HDI	LIFE EXP. (yrs male/female)	LITERACY RATE (% male/female)
Equatorial Guinea	\$30,200	0.642	59/60	93/81
Botswana	\$15,800	0.654	50/49	80/82
Gabon	\$14,900	0.677	56/58	74/53
Libya	\$14,900	0.818	71/76	92/72
South Africa	\$10,400	0.674	48/52	87/86
Somalia	\$600	NA	47/49	50/26
Liberia	\$500	NA	45/47	73/42
Burundi	\$400	0.413	47/50	67/52
Congo (DR)	\$300	0.411	49/55	81/54
Zimbabwe	\$200	0.516	40/40	94/87
Kenya	\$1,800	0.521	53/53	91/80
United States	\$48,000	0.951	75/81	99/99
World	\$10,500	0.743	64/68	87/77

*GDP stands for gross domestic product; per capita means per person. The amount is the value of all items produced by a country in a year, divided by the population. It often is used as a measure of a nation's wealth.

SOURCES: *The World Factbook 2008* (Central Intelligence Agency); *2008 World Population Data Sheet* (Population Reference Bureau); *Human Development Report 2007/2008* (United Nations Development Program)

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1. People in which of these countries have a life expectancy that exceeds the world average?

- (A) Equatorial Guinea
- (B) Gabon
- (C) Kenya
- (D) Libya

2. Which of the following countries has a higher literacy rate for females than for males?

- (A) Botswana
- (B) Libya
- (C) Somalia
- (D) South Africa

3. Which factors might indicate that the people of Libya have a higher standard of living than those of other African countries?

- (A) Their HDI and life expectancy are highest.
- (B) Their per capita GDP is highest.
- (C) The literacy rate among males and females is nearly equal.
- (D) They earn most of their national wealth from diamonds.

4. Zimbabwe has the highest literacy rate of all the African countries listed, but it has the lowest life expectancy. Which of the following statements seems most likely to account for this?

- (A) Education has no connection to health.
- (B) Few people in Zimbabwe can read or write.
- (C) Many Zimbabweans have died of AIDS.
- (D) War has devastated Zimbabwe's population.

5. Kenya is a poor country, but by which of the following measures is it doing better than some of the richer countries in Africa?

- (A) A greater percentage of women in Kenya can read than in Libya.
- (B) Kenya has a better life expectancy than Botswana or South Africa.
- (C) Kenya has a higher literacy rate than Gabon.
- (D) All of the above.

6. Four of the five poorest countries on this list are or recently have been engaged in civil wars. How might this hurt a country's economy?

7. How might a poor economy result in a low life expectancy?

8. Almost all of the countries on this list have a higher literacy rate for males than for females. What might be some of the reasons for this?

9. Somalia has been involved in a civil war since 1991 and does not have a functioning government. How might this account for its low literacy rate?

10. Several countries in southern Africa have the highest rates of HIV infection in the world. How might this affect their economies?
