

# Searching for facts

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## Introduction

This chapter introduces yearbooks, encyclopedias and other reference material giving access to basic facts and fundamental information concerning particular countries or subjects. In the Nordic Africa Institute library's link collection [A Guide to Africa on the Internet](#) a selection of good links can be found under the headings [links sorted by country or region](#) and [links sorted by subject](#). Extensive guides to many different categories of information sources are the publications *Africa: A Guide to Reference Material* (McIlwaine 2007) and *African Studies Companion: A Guide to Information Sources* (Zell 2006). The latter is available as a printed publication and also accessible online at the libraries of the Nordic Africa Institute and Uppsala University, among others.

The general Internet search services are also useful, especially when searching for specific factual information. More about this can be found in the chapter [African information on the Internet](#). For older references, please see the previous edition of [Studying Africa](#) (Rylander 2005).

## Country specific information

### Basic facts

A good way to begin a search would be to look for brief and basic information on countries, concerned in general reference books such as *Nationalencyklopedin* or *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. These are generally available online at public libraries. In addition, [World Factbook](#) and [Background Notes](#) can be accessed free of charge on the Internet. The former, issued by the CIA, is updated annually, and is also available as a printed publication. *Background Notes*, produced by the U.S. Department of State, is updated regularly too. Brief and up-to-date country information on the Internet is also offered by Sida under [Countries and regions](#), Danida's [Landefakta](#) and the BBC's [Country Profiles](#), among others. Country information concentrating on specific problem areas can be found on the websites of various organisations, such as [WHO](#) for questions relating to health issues and [UNICEF](#) for questions concerning young people and children. *Länder i fickformat* is a series of small booklets issued by the Swedish Institute of International Affairs in Stockholm. Each booklet deals with one or two countries and briefly

discusses aspects such as their history, geography, politics, economics, people and culture. The series is also available as a database entitled *Landguiden*, and is generally accessible online at public libraries. *Political Handbook of the World* is a yearbook focusing on political conditions. In this volume, a short background, together with information about the government, constitution and political parties of all the world's nations, is given. Similar content specializing on Africa is presented in *Political Handbook of Africa 2007*. The wiki [Electionworld](#) and IFES' [ElectionGuide](#), available on the Internet, gives insight into political parties, elections and electoral systems, and parliaments of all the world's nations. The [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#) (IPU) gives in-depth information on political conditions, and on issues such as women's participation in political life.

The Corporate Council on Africa in the USA issues an African yearbook. It is succinctly entitled *Africa* and contains descriptions of countries, inter alia. With its handy format and affordable price, it is also suitable for smaller libraries. The same applies to the [Norwegian Council for Africa's](#) most useful yearbook, *Afrika-årbok*, which contains [country profiles](#) (only in Norwegian), amongst other information.

Somewhat more detailed country information can be found in the *Encyclopedia of the World's Nations and Cultures, vol. 1–4* (Kurian 2007). Africa-specific encyclopedias also exist, with references to the various nations. *New Encyclopedia of Africa, vol. 1–5* (2008), for instance, contains fairly detailed country descriptions, while *Africa A-Z: Continental and Country Profiles* (Esterhuysen 2008), in one volume, has country surveys and general overviews. The general overviews deal with subjects such as geography, demography, ethnography, history and economics of the continent as a whole. The book, with maps and tables of facts, can be recommended for public or school libraries. As far as printed reference works are concerned, it is always important to pay attention to the year of publication and to supplement this information, if necessary, with newer facts gathered, for example, from yearbooks or Internet sources.

## Country descriptions

Detailed country descriptions appear in yearbooks concentrating specifically on Africa. Incorporated in *Africa South of the Sahara* and *The Middle East and North Africa*, for instance, are country overviews and introductions to geography, contemporary history and economy. These works also incorporate statistical tables dealing with population, production, trade, national accounts, and more. Finally, there is a section with information about the country's constitution and government, its political parties and mass media, schools, transport, defence, and trade and industrial organisations. The development in North Africa can also be followed in *L'Année du Maghreb*, while various aspects of development in the area surrounding the great lakes in Central Africa are discussed in *L'Afrique des grands lacs*. Detailed information about South Africa can be obtained in the official [South Africa Yearbook](#) and in a summary version [Pocket Guide to South](#)

[Africa](#). These publications are available in printed format and online via the South African government's website. Another type of yearbook is *Africa Contemporary Record*, in which detailed country overviews take the form of accounts of the events and developments in all areas of society for those years represented by the respective volumes. This is a very solid and useful publication. Its release, however, is unfortunately subject to delay, making it necessary to look to other sources for recent developments. One such source is the *Annual Register*, which presents annual overviews of the developments in all countries of the world. In *Country Reports*, published on a monthly or quarterly basis by The Economist Intelligence Unit, an up-to-date overview is given, chiefly of the economy, but also of the political situation within the country. For more about the EIU, see the chapter [Periodicals](#). In addition to these publications, the handbook series *Historical Dictionaries of Africa* provides comprehensive information on countries. These reference works tend to be fairly wide-ranging and therefore are not of interest solely to historians. Apart from historical events, entries have also been provided for ethnic groups, geographical names, persons, etc. For larger country studies in the form of monographs, please see the chapters [The History of Africa](#) and [Politics, Economics and Society](#).

## News watch

The most up-to-date information available on a country is to be found in printed or online newspapers and periodicals. A selection of these is introduced in the chapter [Periodicals](#). One example is EIU's *Country Reports*, which are excellent for following the economic and political development in a country. Keesing's record of world events (*Keesing's World News Archive*, subscription required), based on daily newspapers and other news sources throughout the world, is a current record of the progress of events both internationally and in individual countries. A corresponding synopsis of development on the African continent can be found in *Africa Research Bulletin*, which consists of a political and an economic series. These are issued monthly and have a detailed annual index. Up-to-date information can also be sought via the Internet through news agencies, such as [AllAfrica](#), [Panapress](#), [Afol News](#) and [BBC News – Africa](#). Other news agencies and national media can be reached, for example, via the Nordic Africa Institute's [A Guide to Africa on the Internet](#) under the headings [links sorted by subject / News and media](#) and [links sorted by country or region](#).

## Subject related information

### Reference works and yearbooks

The *New Encyclopedia of Africa*, vol. 1–5 (2008), was mentioned in the previous section on country information. It also contains articles on different subject areas, and has a well laid-out index. The *Encyclopedia of African History*, vol. 1–3

(Shillington 2005), covers the history of Africa from the earliest times until the present day, and presents in-depth historical analyses in a number of areas. The *Encyclopedia of African History and Culture*, vol. 1–5 (Page 2005), also includes the history of Africa from the earliest times, but most importantly, from the colonial era up to the present day. *Africa: A Modern History* (Arnold 2005) and *Historical Dictionary of Civil Wars in Africa* (Arnold 2008) are examples of handbooks that relate to the modern history of Africa. *Dictionnaire de l'Afrique: histoire, civilisation, actualité* (Nantet 2006), an encyclopedia in French, focuses on social sciences. A solid reference work on the African diaspora is the *Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora: Origins, Experiences and Culture*, vol. 1–3 (2007). With an abundance of maps and illustrations, it can be recommended for public or school libraries. Further reference works focusing on history are discussed in the chapter [The History of Africa](#).

The yearbooks *Africa South of the Sahara* and *The Middle East and North Africa* begin with background articles on the political and economic development in the area, while *Africa Contemporary Record* opens with essays on topical questions. *Africa Yearbook: Politics, Economy and Society South of the Sahara* includes facts about the political, social and economic development in Africa south of the Sahara. Each volume begins with some essays on current issues, followed by descriptions of countries and regions. A detailed analysis of economic and social developments in Africa and worldwide can be found in annual reports from distinguished international organisations. Examples of these are [World Development Report](#) (World Bank), [Human Development Report](#) (UN's Development Programme – UNDP) and [African Development Report](#) (African Development Bank). Each annual report is devoted to a special topic, such as conflicts, climate change, sustainable development or poverty reduction. The last three organisations are also excellent sources for statistical information. Read more about this in the chapter titled [Statistics](#).

## Document texts

Resolutions, treaties and other documents can be found in full text as appendices to books. Another important source of documents is *Africa Contemporary Record*, which has a section made up entirely of texts concerning international relations, constitutional development, and economic and social relationships. *Africa Research Bulletin* often reproduces complete or partial documentary texts.

These publications follow constitutional developments in each country, with reproductions of statutory texts. Texts of documents are regularly featured in *Keesing's Record of World Events* and the French language publication, *Afrique contemporaine*. Texts of the constitutions of African states can be found in *Constitutiones Africae* (Reyntjens 1988–2002) together with an analysis of the text and a description of the historical background of each country. Similar information can be found in the French work *Les Constitutions africaines publiées en langue française* (Gaudusson 1997–1998). The constitutions themselves, togeth-

er with their amendments, are published as supplements to the statute books that form part of the Nordic Africa Institute's collection of official publications. Read more about this in the chapter titled [Official Publications](#). *Documents of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, vol. 1–2* (Murray 2001–2009) contains basic documents, resolutions, bulletins, reports, and more from the establishment of the commission in 1987 onwards.

## Regional and international organisations

*The Historical Dictionary of International Organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Mays & DeLancey 2002) covers regional and international organisations from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until 2000. A list of acronyms, a chronology, and an extensive bibliography are included. *Political Handbook of Africa 2007* gives detailed descriptions of the most important regional and international organisations acting in Africa. *Peoples and Cultures of Africa: Nations and Personalities*, presented below, has similar content but in a more concise format. *International Organizations: A Dictionary and Directory* (Schiafone 2008) is a reference work that provides a comprehensive guide to international organisations.

Since change is an ongoing process, these publications need to be constantly updated with supplementary data. In the yearbooks *Africa South of the Sahara* and *The Middle East and North Africa*, overviews are provided of UN and other international organisations' presence in Africa, as well as of regional African organisations, trade and industrial organizations, and trade unions. Examples of Internet-based lists of organisations are [The Directory of Development Organizations: Africa](#) focusing on development issues, [OneWorld.net – Global Partner Database](#) concerned with sustainable development, social justice and human rights. The [Dimitra database](#) contains profiles of organisations based in Africa and the Near East working with projects or activities on women in development. On its website, Columbia University Libraries' have compiled a list of [International Organizations on Africa](#). Links to organisations in Africa can be found in the Nordic Africa Institute's [A Guide to Africa on the Internet](#) under the headings *Research Institutes, Universities and Organisations*.

## Biographical information

*An African Biographical Dictionary* (Brockman 2006) has more than 700 entries on current and historically famous persons within various areas of activity. The book *Peoples and Cultures of Africa: Nations and Personalities* (see below) contains a biographical section of well-known persons.

Biographical main entries are also included in *Historical Dictionaries of Africa* and in some encyclopedias already mentioned. Information about people of topical interest can be found in, inter alia, *Africa Research Bulletin* and *Afrique contemporaine*. On its website, Columbia University Libraries have compiled the list [African Biography on the Internet](#).

## Ethnic groups and languages

Literature in the areas of language and ethnography are not currently included in *Studying Africa*. In this section only a small selection of more recent handbooks dealing with this extensive area are mentioned. [\*Ethnologue. Languages of the World\*](#) is issued by Summer Institute of Linguistics in the USA, in continuously updated editions. It is available as a printed book and in a web version (the latest is the 16th edition 2010). Here, one can search for countries, particular languages or language groups, or alternative language names. The *Encyclopedia of the Peoples of Africa and the Middle East, vol. 1–2* (Stokes 2009) has chapters that are presented in an easily accessible format with maps, tables of facts and illustrations, which makes it highly suitable for use at public or school libraries. *Peoples and Cultures of Africa* (Mitchell 2006), in 6 volumes, gives a broad introduction to Africa's geography and culture. Five of the volumes deal with the respective regions, while one volume, titled *Nations and Personalities*, contains brief country surveys, and entries on well-known persons, as well as a list of regional, international and environmental organisations acting in Africa.

## References

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- [World Development Report](#) (annual). Washington D.C.: World Bank.
- [World Factbook](#) (annual). Washington D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency
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## Internet resources

*African Biography on the Internet* <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/africa/cuwl/afrbio.html>

*African Development Report* –

<http://www.afdb.org/en/documents/publications/african-development-report>

*Afrol News* – <http://www.afrol.com/>

*AllAfrica* – <http://allafrica.com/>

*Background Notes* – <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/>

*BBC News – Africa* – <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world/africa/>

*Country Profiles* (BBC) – [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/country\\_profiles/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/country_profiles/default.stm)

*Countries & Regions* <http://www.sida.se/Engelska/Countries--regions>

*ElectionGuide* – <http://www.electionguide.org/region.php?ID=1>

*Dimitra* <http://www.fao.org/dimitra/dimitra-database/en/>

*The Directory of Development Organizations – Africa* – <http://www.devdir.org/africa.htm>

*Electionsworld* – <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Electionworld/Electionworld>

*Ethnologue: Languages of the World* – <http://www.ethnologue.com/web.asp>

*A Guide to Africa on the Internet* – <http://www.nai.uu.se/library/resources/guidetoafrica>

*Human Development Report* – <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports>

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*Landinformasjon* – <http://www.afrika.no/Landinformasjon>

*OneWorld.net* – <http://archive.oneworld.net/section/partners>

*Panapress* – [www.panapress.com](http://www.panapress.com)

*Pocket Guide to South Africa* – [http://www.gcis.gov.za/resource\\_centre/sa\\_info/pocket-guide/index.html](http://www.gcis.gov.za/resource_centre/sa_info/pocket-guide/index.html)

*South Africa Yearbook* – [http://www.gcis.gov.za/resource\\_centre/sa\\_info/yearbook/index.html](http://www.gcis.gov.za/resource_centre/sa_info/yearbook/index.html)

*UNICEF* – <http://www.unicef.org>

*WHO* – <http://www.who.int/en>

*World Development Report* – <http://econ.worldbank.org/wdr>

*World Factbook* – <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>