

Human Well-Being Research and Policy Making
Series Editors: Richard J. Estes · M. Joseph Sirgy

Valerie Møller
Benjamin J. Roberts

Quality of Life and Human Well-Being in Sub-Saharan Africa

Prospects for Future Happiness

 Springer

Human Well-Being Research and Policy Making

Series Editors

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This series includes policy-focused books on the role of the public and private sectors in advancing quality of life and well-being. It creates a dialogue between well-being scholars and public policy makers. Well-being theory, research and practice are essentially interdisciplinary in nature and embrace contributions from all disciplines within the social sciences. With the exception of leading economists, the policy relevant contributions of social scientists are widely scattered and lack the coherence and integration needed to more effectively inform the actions of policy makers. Contributions in the series focus on one more of the following four aspects of well-being and public policy:

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 Springer

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Preface

Our volume on the prospects for future happiness in sub-Saharan Africa has taken a long journey in the making. Until recently, our research efforts had focused on documenting life quality on the southern tip of the continent. Here, we widen our lens to include a much broader landscape. In the past few years, we were invited to participate in a number of ambitious global projects on human well-being. Our assignment was to provide an African perspective to these undertakings. Thus, we set about looking at Africa's past history in order to gain an idea of how the lived experience of African people over time may have shaped contemporary well-being on the continent.

This book is informed by our contributions on African quality of life to these global projects. In this volume, we build on the knowledge and insights we have gained, but we also move on to explore new themes and to add fresh voices to our discussion of African well-being. In rewriting, we have distilled and updated our earlier work, by drawing on case studies and examples to illustrate both the obstacles and rewards experienced by African people seeking to better their life chances. We have deliberately avoided Afropessimism but do not gloss over the many challenges facing the region in the twenty-first century. We have made liberal use of *The Conversation Africa*, launched five years ago, that report evidenced-based news and analysis articles authored by expert scholars from universities and research institutions across Africa. Perhaps, most gratifying for us in compiling our report on sub-Saharan Africa has been to discover the many emerging young African scholars who are keen to share their knowledge and insights on how to optimise African prosperity in future. We are delighted to have this opportunity to showcase their work.

Our book is divided into three parts. In Part I, we retrace the largely undocumented untold history of well-being on the oldest continent populated by humans. We speculate on the key values and virtues that have promoted both the survival and well-being of African society over time.

In Part II, we turn to the success story of our age. Never in history have humans experienced greater progress in meeting their basic needs, which are essential for human happiness. Progress made in Africa is no exception.

Since ancient times, there has always been something new coming out of Africa. In Part III, we look to the future of well-being of sub-Saharan Africa. We take a longer-term perspective and report on the many positive stories that might possibly foretell a new African century. We examine how Africa's novel experience with democracy is supporting citizen's life goals; we look at options for turning the continent's youthfulness into an asset; and we list steps taken to enhance life chances for minorities in African societies. We also portray Africa's practical sense of innovation for enhancing everyday well-being as well as innovations that inspire a sense of awe in us humans. In our concluding chapters, we review our discussion of the importance of Africa's time-honoured virtues and the region's exceptional optimism as drivers and harbingers of a brighter future for sub-Saharan Africa.

Grahamstown (Makhanda), South Africa
Durban, South Africa

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To Richard Estes and Joe Sirgy for their boundless patience, support and encouragement during the production of this volume, as well the preceding chapter, we prepared for their edited volume *The Pursuit of Human Well-Being* (Springer, 2017).

To Halloran Philanthropies in recognition of its foresight and dedication to telling the untold histories of well-being both globally and across various world regions. In particular, we are grateful to Harry Halloran and Tony Carr for their support.

John Helliwell kindly invited us to contribute a regional chapter on Africa for the World Happiness Report 2017, and we are further indebted to him for granting us permission to draw freely on this material for this expanded publication.

Jay Loschky, Regional Director for Africa at Gallup, provided invaluable assistance with accessing the latest available well-being data for the region.

We are also grateful to Lynette Paterson for bringing a Shakespearean eye to the proofreading of the manuscript and to Bronwyn Tweedie for her assistance with the production of the maps used in the volume.

For much-needed administrative assistance at Rhodes University, our gratitude also goes to Bulelani Mothlabane and Gail Bint.

Springer Press was, as always, professional, efficient and ever-helpful during the production process, and we are especially grateful to Prashanth Ravichandran and Ameena Jaafar in this respect.

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Finally, to our long-suffering partners, Per and Pranitha, a heartfelt vote of thanks for allowing us to take precious family time over the years to focus on our research on quality of life in sub-Saharan Africa.

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Valerie Møller is Professor Emeritus of Quality of Life Studies at Rhodes University, South Africa. She studied sociology, earning her Licentiate and Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Zürich, Switzerland. She has lived and worked in sub-Saharan Africa since 1972. In 1971, she arrived in North Africa from southern Europe in a Volkswagen Kombi. She and her husband, an architect, had converted the Kombi into a camper for their African adventure. Their intended destination was Dakar, Senegal, where they planned to undertake a joint urban studies project. When their vehicle proved to be no match for the sand pistes of the Algerian Sahara, they rerouted back to Europe, shipped themselves and their VW on a Portuguese immigrant boat to Angola, and travelled along the southern coast of Africa to present-day Zimbabwe.

Since that time, Valerie has held positions in social research institutes at the now University of Zimbabwe (1972–5), the University of KwaZulu-Natal (1996–1997), and as Director of Rhodes University’s Institute of Social and Economic Research (1998–2006). Valerie pioneered the first quality-of-life and social indicators studies that have tracked South African life satisfaction and happiness from apartheid to the country’s transition to democracy. Her original research has employed both conventional and less conventional measures and approaches to study a wide range of life domains and issues that impact on quality of life. She has published numerous journal articles and chapters in books,

including two articles awarded the *Social Indicators Research* annual best-paper reward. She has edited a number of Springer volumes devoted to the South African and international experience of quality of life. She is a lifetime member of the International Society for Quality of Life Studies (ISQOLS), hosted its 7th conference at Rhodes University in 2006—the only one to be held in Africa to date and served as its president from 2007 to 2008. Her endowed ISQOLS track for the Advancement of Quality of Life and Well-being in sub-Saharan Africa aims to showcase local scholars' contributions to well-being research in the region. In 2016, she received the society's lifetime award for her contribution to a better understanding of quality-of-life issues. e-mail: v.moller@ru.ac.za
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His research interests and areas of expertise include attitudinal measurement and social change, subjective well-being and quality of life, poverty and inequality, and social cohesion. Select recent publications include: “Family Matters: Family cohesion, values and well-being” (2019, co-edited with Mokomane, Struwig and Gordon, Cape Town: HSRC Press); “Waiting for Happiness in Africa” (2017, with Møller) (in Helliwell et al. (Eds.) *World Happiness Report 2017*); “New Beginnings in an Ancient Region: Well-being in Sub-Saharan Africa” (2017, with Møller) (in Estes and Sirgy (Eds.) *The Pursuit of Global Well-Being*,

Dordrecht, NL: Springer); “Shadow of the Sun: The Distribution of Well-being in Sub-Saharan Africa” (2015, with Gordon, Møller, and Struwig) (in Glatzer et al. (Eds.), *The Global Handbook of Quality of Life*, Dordrecht, NL: Springer); and “Beliefs About Inequality and Redress Preferences in South Africa” (2014) (*Social Indicators Research*, 118, 1167–1190).

While pursuing postgraduate studies in the mid-1990s, Ben came across Valerie’s research on quality of life in South Africa and was struck by the critical relevance of this field of study for the young democracy—and indeed the continent. In establishing the SASAS series, quality of life was deemed a core thematic priority, with an emphasis on continuing the South African Quality of Life (SAQoL) series that Valerie established in the early 1980s. As South Africa draws close to its milestone of four decades of quality-of-life research, Ben wishes to express his heartfelt thanks to Valerie for her generosity, enthusiasm, committed mentorship and abiding support. Through her pioneering efforts, research in this field of study is flourishing in the country. e-mail: broberts@hsrc.ac.za
[http://www.hsrc.ac.za/en/staff/view/?i=BJ&f=Benjamin
&l=Roberts](http://www.hsrc.ac.za/en/staff/view/?i=BJ&f=Benjamin&l=Roberts)

Part I

Introduction



Mambila protective statue, artist unknown, c. 19th to 20th century, Donga Valley, Nigeria/Cameroon. Musée du quai Branly, Paris. Inventory no.: 73-1986-1-88 (*Photo by Siren-Com*; https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Statuette_Mambia_Nig%C3%A9ria.jpg)

Chapter 1

Locating Sub-Saharan Africa on the Globe



Abstract In this chapter we introduce our readers to the sub-Saharan region of Africa and to the people living there. We present an overview of the region's geographic boundaries on the continent, as well as Africa's range of climatic conditions, its riches in minerals, and its biodiversity of flora and fauna. Africa's cultural heritage is unique: the continent is the cradle of humankind and features the world's richest diversity of languages and customs. The length of time that African people have walked on this continent, and the geographic and cultural landscapes they have traversed over centuries, will have shaped their historical experience of well-being. Outsiders have viewed the quality of life of sub-Saharan people from different perspectives. In this book we shall attempt to present Africans' own appreciation of their life circumstances.

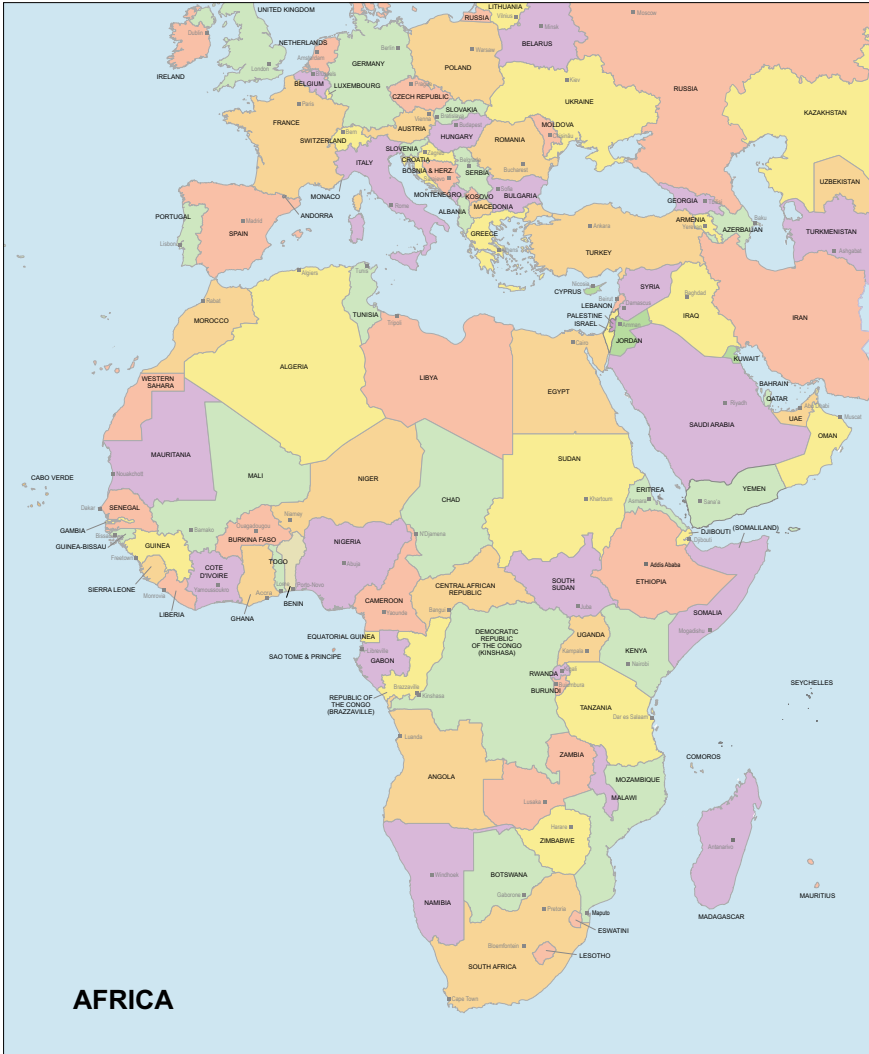
Keywords Sub-Saharan Africa · Well-being · Life satisfaction · Happiness · Socio-cultural diversity · Cradle of humankind

1.1 Introduction to the Sub-Saharan Region of Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa is unique in that it is the cradle of humankind and we all have ancestors from this continent. In geological time, it was the central continent from which Asia and the Americas split off. Some 3 million years ago, the first hominids appeared and around 100,000 years ago, the first anatomically modern humans left the continent to populate the globe. Their descendants were to return to Africa countless generations later, as strangers in the 1400s (Oppenheimer 2003).

Meanwhile, the people who remained in sub-Saharan Africa experienced a turbulent history. They survived times of climate change, feast and famine, internecine wars, slavery, colonialism, and exploitation, all of which will have shaped myths of origin, self-esteem, and values and aspirations that will influence evaluations of present-day well-being.

The region is bounded by the Sahara desert in the north, the Atlantic Ocean on the west, and the Indian Ocean and Red Sea on the east. Many of the rivers that flow from the centre of the region are either difficult or impossible to navigate. Many states are



Map 1.1 Regional map of Africa (public domain)

landlocked. This isolation meant that many earlier technologies did not reach Africa until later (Map 1.1).

Today, sub-Saharan Africa is home to just over a billion¹ people living in 49 countries. Given the length of time that humans have lived on the continent, it has the world’s greatest language and genetic diversity. An estimated 3000 languages—300 in Nigeria alone—are spoken. Many Africans speak several languages, an indigenous

¹<http://worldpopulationreview.com/continents/sub-saharan-africa-population/> (Accessed 29 April 2019).

local language as well as the national lingua Franca, which is often a colonial-era language adopted as their country's official language after independence.

Most sub-Saharan states are home to a number of ethnic groups, often distinguished by their unique languages and customs. For example, Cameroon, an erstwhile German colony that was divided between France and Britain after World War I, has a population of some 23 million and includes over 200 ethnic groups within its geographical boundaries.

The sub-Saharan region features a wide range of climatic conditions. The tropical belt in Central Africa gives way on both sides to more temperate bush- and savannah grasslands, as well as desert landscapes. Habitable regions are limited and rainfall is erratic. There is a high burden of disease, mainly in the tropical belt. Sub-Saharan Africa is rich in many different minerals. It boasts great plant and animal biodiversity and even a unique plant kingdom on the southern tip of the continent. The African continent may become the last refuge in the world for non-domesticated animals that still roam freely (Anthony and Spence 2012).

1.2 Africa Is Not a Country

In this first part of our book, we seek to better understand how people in Africa have experienced their personal and collective well-being over time. A perspective on the past is important if we are to make any credible extrapolation of Africa's prospects for future happiness. In a chapter to follow, we briefly trace the history of well-being on the continent.

At the outset, it will be important to remember that much of Africa's history predates written documents, and its history has produced an extremely diverse cultural and linguistic landscape.

The expansion of the Arabian Islamic Caliphate into North Africa in the seventh century (Tiliouine 2015; Tiliouine and Meziane 2017) and the European 'scramble for Africa' in the late nineteenth century introduced several of the European and Arabic languages that still serve as lingua franca and national languages on the continent. Over the centuries, African people have adopted some of the customs, technological advancements and new lifestyles of their former colonial masters. In more recent times, Africa has leapfrogged older technology to embrace the latest advancements, such as mobile phones and solar-powered electricity.

Centuries of slavery, colonialism and apartheid preceded the period of independence. Following on the 'first dance of freedom'² in the 1960s, the new African nation states experimented briefly with various styles of self-rule in what has been called the 'third wave' of democracy (See Huntington 1991; Diamond 2008; Diamond and Plattner 2010).

²The title of a chapter in Meredith's (2011, p. 162) history of Africa.