

Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa is the region of the African continent located south of the Sahara Desert and consists of 55 countries. The region is home to 1.18 billion people with an annual population growth of 2.6% (in 2021). With a GDP of more than US\$1.9 trillion some of the fastest growing economies in the world can be found in Sub-Saharan Africa (1).

It is an incredibly diverse region with hundreds of ethnic groups speaking two thousand of the world's more than seven thousand languages (2). Thirty percent of the earth's mineral resource reserves are located in Sub-Saharan Africa. Countries bordering the Sahara Desert have vast deposits of oil and uranium ore and in central and southern Africa, gold and diamonds are abundant. Many of the region's economies are based on commodity exports, making them vulnerable to the ups-and-downs of global commodity prices (3).

IACD in Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with most IACD Members. Out of a total of 536 current IACD members, 176 are based in Sub-Saharan Africa, representing 33% of our total members. The vast majority of our members are based in Nigeria, with 78 members (44.3%). The runner up is Kenya, with 43 members (24.4%), followed by South Africa with 15 members (8.5%) and Uganda with 12 members (6.8%). We currently have members in 20 of the 55 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Interestingly, almost half (49.4%) of these members are students (87 out of a total of 176).

In the words of Chimamanda Adichie (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg&t=108s>) one of Africa's great literary voices, the continent is a land of many diverse talents, resources and challenges. "If I had not grown up in Nigeria, and if all I knew about Africa were from popular images, I too would think that Africa was a place of beautiful landscapes, beautiful animals, and incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and AIDS, unable to speak for themselves and waiting to be saved by a kind, white foreigner.... Of course, Africa is a continent full of catastrophes: There are immense ones, such as the horrific rapes in Congo and depressing ones, such as the fact that 5,000 people apply for one job vacancy in Nigeria. But there are other stories that are not about catastrophe, and it is very important, it is just as important, to talk about them.... All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story."

In keeping with the IACD definition of community development (below), the members of the Sub-Saharan Africa region of IACD are engaged in tackling challenges and building solutions with communities in all the spheres covered in this definition.

- 1: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/ZG> & <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/overview>
- 2: <https://world101.cfr.org/rotw/africa>
- 3: <https://world101.cfr.org/rotw/africa/economics#natural-resource-wealth-a-double-edged-sword>

“Community Development is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, economic opportunity, equality and social justice, through the organisation, education and empowerment of people within their communities, whether these be of locality, identity or interest, in urban and rural settings.”

What are the challenges?

- poverty and economic development
- corruption, maladministration
- racism, sexism, gender-based violence
- political instability
- climate change
- missing the opportunities of developing our own resources
- a high growth in youth, many of whom are not finding employment or other income stimulating opportunities



This information shared in a recent Fetola (www.fetola.co.za) seminar shows that Sub-Saharan Africa is the only global region that will experience a growth in young people of 51% by 2050.

This calls for the region to respond swiftly and imaginatively to this situation, if it is to not only absorb but also make the most positive use of the vibrant and innovative young population within Sub-Saharan Africa.

What are our solutions?

- A region full of diversity, cultures and traditions
- We have countries that hold a position of excellence in certain aspects - e.g. mine (RSA) is part of global leaders in Open Budget Survey
- As Africans, we live and lead our lives with Ubuntu

- Strong interest in technological innovations to drive change and development, particularly among Africa's youth population
- The prominence of women emerging as leaders and acceptance of the marginalized groups to contribute recognition of the rights of minority and marginalised groups to participate
- We have rich indigenous knowledge systems that could contribute to sustainable development and protecting the environment
- Our rich history, and contribution to various forms of art
- Impressive education and health outcomes

Initiatives on the ground

An example of positive youth work from one of our members in Kenya (Anthony Hulula) is the Smart Youth, Smart Future programme – a 9-session mentorship programme run by Ngao Foundation (<https://thengaofoundation.org/>) aimed at “opening the student's eye to available opportunities, helping students discover the strengths within themselves, leading students to resources that will help them develop necessary skills, guiding them to design their own pathways to success, and demonstrating to them how they can realize their potential and achieve their dreams”.

Another commendable initiative involves the training and implementing of the ABCD (Asset-based Citizen-led Development) approach throughout the region, particularly in South Africa, where IACD members have been engaging for several years with government departments. Some of the government agencies have now officially adopted this strengths-based approach into their policy strategic plans, and indications of impact are already visible in communities where residents are taking ownership of their own development activities and mobilising their existing assets.

Countless other examples exist of innovative and energetic solutions being developed by Africans for Africa, significantly often involving the youth – e.g. <https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/careers/here-are-south-africas-young-rising-tech-stars-and-how-they-are-ensuring-ai-includes-african-languages-bf7f2081-901d-4dc0-b9aa-12efbf105d57>

Emerging networks for spearheading community development in Africa

A discipline is as robust as the practitioners who shape its discourse – from theory to practice. IACD Sub-Saharan Africa Region, informed by a regional survey carried out in June 2020 identified the need for a regular meet up but with a substantive capacity building approach. Members indicated their areas of strength from which they could lead to build up together, as well as the areas they needed further capacity building. Around these areas a series of webinars have been developed and delivered by IACD members from within the region – using own resources. Thus far the region is in the 25th edition of webinar series and going strong. The calendar for 2023 is already populated – evidence of the popularity of these networking sessions. In this [link](#) is an excerpt from the 22nd IACD SSA Region Webinar edition focusing on changing roles of women in community development in Africa.

Development of networks of community development practitioners is another area of success that IACD@70 inspires.

The successful hosting of an international symposium in 2019 by Association of Community Development Practitioners-Kenya (ACDP-K) was a watershed moment as soon after Kenya was nominated to host the WCDC2020. ACDP-K, the Kenyan network of community development practitioners, officially registered in 2017 seeks to bring together community development practitioners to network and share experiences as well as professionalise the practice of community development in Kenya. The overarching goal is to enhance sustainable community development work and practice through promotion of the rights, dignity, and social justice of all stakeholders in community development. IACD SSA region leadership continues to promote establishment of similar networks in the region. Starting late 2022 a robust network largely composed of community development academicians in Nigeria has been established and a robust networking through WhatsApp platform is evidence of the wealth of resources for community development in the country. A network of ABCD practitioners is in place in South Africa and going to great lengths to deepen sound practice of community development built around the assets available in communities. Similar networks are at various stages of formation in Ethiopia and Uganda. (For more details about the Association of Community Development Practitioners – Kenya visit - <https://www.acdpk.org>)

Other useful links: <https://youtu.be/qhVus5Od8nY> how women and men are working together for gender equity in western Kenya

Corporate ABCD impact in South Africa by Zutari:

<https://www.zutari.com/expertise/communication-and-stakeholder-engagement/>

To end our profile, a heart-warming birthday note from outgoing IACD Trustee, Tony Ssembatya

Thoughts on IACD's 70th anniversary

This year the IACD celebrates its 70th anniversary. This is as a result of the critical role played by civil society in organizing, mobilizing and coordinating for positive change. This anniversary falls two years after the UN celebrated its 75th anniversary. UN's commemorative declaration reads in part, "Every day, countries, citizens, private sector and civil society representatives use the platform provided by the United Nations to make life better for all of humanity."¹ From advancing for political inclusiveness, to access to education for all especially the girl child, to addressing access to scarce resources such as water, the IACD has and continues to be a key actor in Africa.

The IACD has been able to provide a space for dialogue for academics, practitioners and activists from Africa with our global network. This in return has enabled a better understanding of the emerging and evolving role of community, drawn insight into the future we want and provided for a platform of aligning global challenges and imagining mechanisms through which community development can address them. While Africa continues to advance on several fronts, it stands out clearly that community development will remain essential in the future and shaping the Africa we want. The interlocutor around democracy, electoral rights, climate justice, prevention and resolution of conflicts, remains community. Happy 70th birthday IACD.

Dr. Anthony Ssembatya Kimbowa.

¹ <https://www.un.org/pga/74/wp-content/uploads/sites/99/2020/06/200625-UN75-highlight.pdf>