



Geography

Unit-7

Exploring Continents (Africa, Australia and Antarctica)

Dear Students

Warm Greetings, now we are going to learn about – *Africa*

Introduction

A teacher handling class VIII entered the classroom and asked the students what they were talking about. The class monitor told the teacher that the students were talking about the ODI match between Australia and South Africa. The teacher said to the students, “Well today we will learn many things about them in this lesson”.

Africa

Location and size

Africa is the second largest and second most populous continent after Asia. It stretches from 37°21'North latitude to 34° 51' South latitude and from 17°33' West longitude to 51°27' East longitude. It spreads over an area of about 30.36 million square kilometres (20.2% of the world's land area). The equator passes through the middle of Africa and cuts into two equal halves. It is the only continent through which the major latitudes such as Tropic of Cancer, Equator and Tropic of Capricorn pass. Its north-south extent is 7623 km and east-west extent is 7260 km. The Prime Meridian passes near Accra the capital of Ghana in the West of this continent. Africa is located in all the four hemispheres.

The great explorers David Living Stone and H.M. Stanley were the first to explore the interior parts of this continent. The sources reveal that the early human ancestors have lived in Africa for more than 5 million years. Africa is nicknamed as the "Mother Continent" as it was the oldest inhabited continent on Earth. The diverse geographical condition of the Continent is the main reason for heterogeneous culture and home of several ethnic groups in Africa.

Africa is called a Dark Continent. In the beginning the interior of Africa was largely unknown to them. The European explorer Henry M. Stanley was the first to use the term the "Dark Continent" (1878).

The continent of Africa consists of 54 countries. On the basis of their geographical location, the countries are grouped as

- a) West Africa
- b) North Africa
- c) Central Africa
- d) Eastern Africa
- e) Southern Africa.



The north-western African countries of Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Mauritania and Tunisia are collectively called 'Maghreb' which means west in Arabic language.

Physiographic Divisions

Africa consists of mixture of land forms such as mountains, plateaus and plains. The following are the 8 major physical divisions of Africa. Madagaskar is the major island of Africa.

1. Sahara

The world-famous Sahara Desert is located in the northern part of Africa. It is one of the largest hot deserts in the world. It has an area of 9.2 million sq km. The Sahara is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean in the west, the Red Sea in the east, the Mediterranean Sea in the north and Sahel in the south. This desert covers the areas of 11 countries: Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Western Sahara, Sudan and Tunisia.

It consists of many topographical features such as mountains, plateaus, ergs, oases, sand-and gravel-covered plains, salt flats, basins and depressions. Mount Koussi, an extinct volcano in Chad, is the highest point in the Sahara with 3,445 m and the Qattara Depression in Egypt is the Sahara's deepest point (133 m below sea level). Nile and Niger rivers run through the desert.

Atlas Mountain lies in the north- west of Africa. It is a young fold mountain. It separates the Mediterranean sea and Atlantic ocean. The highest point is Mount Toubkal (4167m).

2. Sahel

Sahel means border or margin. Sahel is a semi-arid tropical Savanna region lies between the Sahara Desert in the north and Savanna grassland in the south. It stretches east-west for a distance of 4000 km and covers an area of 3.0 million sq km. It is largely a semi-arid belt of barren, sandy and rocky land. This region marks the physical and cultural transition between the more fertile tropical regions in the south and desert in the north.

3. Savanna

Tropical dry grasslands with scattered trees are known as 'Savanna'. It is located near the equator and covers almost half of the area of Africa. This grassland is found in the regions just north and south of the rainforests that lie along the equator. Trees are the main features of the landscape in some parts of the savanna, while tall grass covers the other areas. Animals of many species graze in this zone. The Serengeti Plain is one of the largest plains in Savanna. This is called the 'Open Air Zoo'.



4. The Great Rift Valley and the Great Lakes of Africa

A rift valley is a large crack in the earth's surface formed by the shifting of tectonic plates. One of the major geographical and geological features of Africa is the Great Rift Valley. It stretches from northern Syria in Asia to central Mozambique in Africa for a distance of 6400 kilometers. It runs through the eastern Africa and contains many lakes.

The African Great Lakes are a series of lakes found in the rift valley. The water in the Great lakes of Africa constitutes about 25% of the planet's unfrozen surface fresh water. There are seven major lakes in this region.

Lake Victoria of this region is the largest fresh water body in Africa and second largest in the world, next to Lake Superior in USA. It is the source of river Nile. The other lake in the valley is Tanganyika which is the longest and deepest fresh water lake in the world. Lake Albert, Lake Edward, Lake Kivu, Lake Malawi, and Lake Turkana are the other important lakes in Africa.

The glaciers on the top of Kilimanjaro have been disappearing since 20th centuries. If this trend continues, Kilimanjaro summit will be ice-free by 2025.

5. East African Highlands

Most African mountains are found in these high lands. It stretches from Ethiopia to Cape of Good Hope. Mt. Kilimanjaro (5895m) is the highest peak located in these highlands. Mt. Kenya and Mt. Ruwenzori are the major mountains located in these high lands. This region is sparsely populated and covered with rich grassland, forests, streams and waterfalls of natural scenic beauty. It enjoys misty mornings and fresh mountain breezes which attract large number of tourists from other parts of the World.

6. Swahili Coast

Swahili coast is located along the shores of East Africa. It stretches about 1,610 kilometers along the Indian Ocean from Somalia to Mozambique. It was a region where the Africans and Arabs mixed to create a unique culture referred to as Swahili Culture. People of this coast are also called 'Swahili'.

7. The Congo Basin or Zaire Basin

Congo Basin lies on the both sides of the the equator in west Central Africa. It comprises an area of more than 3.4 million square kilometres and covered with dense evergreen forest. It provides food, shelter, medicine, water, and materials for over 7.5 million people. It is the world's second largest river basin next to Amazon.



8. Southern Africa

Most part of the Southern Africa is a plateau region. *Drakensberg Mountain* is found in the eastern portion of the escarpment. It extends from north east to south west for 1125 km. Its highest peak is Thabana Ntlenyana (3482m). This region is covered with grasslands known as 'Veld'. Kalahari Desert lies in the south and Namib Desert is along the south -west shore of Africa. Kalahari Desert in this region is not actually a desert, but a bushy scrubland situated between the Orange and Zambezi Rivers.

Sheep rearing in semi –arid region of South Africa is called 'Karoos'.

Drainage of Africa

1. River Nile

The Nile is the longest river in the world with a length of 6650 km. It has two main tributaries. They are the White Nile, which originates from Burundi, and the Blue Nile, which originates from Ethiopia. These two join and form the Nile River at Khartoum, in Sudan. It flows towards northward and drains into the Mediterranean-sea. Nile is known as the "**Father of African Rivers**".

The country Egypt is called the "Gift of the Nile" as it is the lifeline of the Egypt. Without Nile the Egypt would have been a desert.

2. River Congo or Zaire

Congo is the second largest river of Africa after Nile. Its length is about 4700 km. Congo rises in the highlands of North Eastern Zambia between lakes Tanganyika and Nyasa. It flows through West Central Africa and drains into the Atlantic Ocean.

3. River Niger

Niger is one of the major rivers in West Africa and rises from the highlands of Guinea. It flows for about 4184 km and finally drains into the Gulf of Guinea on the Atlantic Ocean.

4. River Zambezi

The Zambezi River is the fourth longest in Africa. It rises in the north western Zambia. It is about 2574 km long and drains into the Indian ocean. The world famous waterfall 'Victoria' is formed by this river at the height of 108 meters. It is called the Southern Africa's "**River of Life**".

River Limpopo and river Orange are the other important rivers of Africa.



Climate

Africa is divided into six major climatic zones. They are:

- **Arid and semi-arid climate:** Northern Africa and Southern Africa have this climate. Rainfall is scanty in this part.
- **Tropical savanna climate:** It is found from 100-200 latitudes on either side of the equator. It is a tropical wet and dry climate.
- **Equatorial climate:** It is found in the equatorial region covering the Congo River basin and east African highlands. Temperature and rainfall are high all the year round in this region
- **Temperate climate:** It prevails in southern tip of South Africa. Since this part is located on the coast, the climate of this region is equable.
- **Mediterranean climate:** It is found in the north-western and south western tips of Africa. These regions get rainfall in winters while in summers it is hot and dry.
- **Tropical Monsoon climate:** It is found in the eastern shore of Africa. Summers are hot with monsoon winds bringing good rainfall while winters are cool and dry.

Flora and Fauna

African vegetation develops in direct response to the interacting effects of rainfall, temperature, topography and type of soil. Forests cover about 20% of the total land area of the continent. The flora and fauna currently found in Africa are descended from plant and animal species that were present in the continent when it was separated from other land masses during the break up of Gondwanaland.

Baobab, Fever tree and Sausage are the major trees of Africa. There are over one million species of animals in Africa, including both

- the heaviest (elephants) and
- the tallest (giraffes) land animals on the earth.
- White Rhinoceros,
- Western Green Mamba,
- Zebra,
- African Elephants,
- chimpanzee,
- gorilla,
- Wildebeest,
- Hippopotamus,
- and Giraffe



are the major animals of Africa.

- Bonobo,
- Wild Dogs,
- hyena and Lemur are the typical animals of Africa.

- *A hot and dry dusty local wind blowing from the Sahara desert to Guinea coast is called 'Harmattan'.*
- *A hot local wind blowing from Sahara to Mediterranean Sea is called 'Sirocco'.*
- *Tropical rain forest is called the 'Jewel of the earth' and the World's largest pharmacy.*

Agriculture

Agriculture is a major economic activity of the African continent. Wheat is grown in the temperate grasslands, Mediterranean region and the Nile valley. Rice is cultivated in Guinea coast, Mozambique, Madagascar and Nile valley. Maize and millets are grown all over the plateau regions. Cotton is the chief cash crop of Africa. Egypt and Sudan cultivate the best quality long staple cotton in the world. Coffee is grown in Ethiopia. Ghana is the chief producer of cocoa. Oil palm is cultivated in West African countries. Sugarcane, rubber, sisal and tobacco are the other major crops and are mostly grown in East African countries.

Minerals

Africa is rich in few mineral deposits. The region at the south of Sahara and the plateaus of Africa are the major mineral regions of the continent. Diamonds are found in South Africa, Congo, Botswana, Sierra Leone and Angola. Kimberly in South Africa is the important producer of diamond. Angola, Nigeria, Gabon and Congo have more oil reserves. Gold is found in South Africa, Namibia, West Africa and Ghana. Chromium, cobalt, copper, iron ore, manganese. Zinc and nickel are scattered across the continent.

Transport

Transports play an important role in the economic development of a region. The physical features and slow economic growth hinder the transport system in many African countries.

1. Land ways

Roadways and Railways in Africa are poorly developed due to the presence of many barriers. It is very difficult to lay the roads and rails across the deserts and the dense forests. South Africa, Kenya, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Nigeria have roadways and railways to some extent.



2. Waterways

Africa has trade routes between Asia and Australia in the east, Europe in the north and America in the west. The major sea ports of Africa are Durban, Dares Salaam and Mogadishu on the Indian Ocean, Port Said, and Alexandria, on the Mediterranean Sea, Cape Town, Algiers and Abidjan on the Atlantic Ocean.

3. Airways

They connect the capital cities of Africa and the other parts of the world. The major international airports of the continent are Cairo, Johannesburg, Nairobi, Dakar, Addis-Ababa, Casablanca, Durban, Douala and Logos.

Population

Africa is the world's second most populous continent. The United Nations estimated the population of Africa as 131 crores in 2019. The population is unevenly distributed due to physical barriers. The population density in Africa is 45 persons per sq km. 41% of the population lives in urban and 59% in rural areas. Nile delta region and South Africa are the densely populated regions of Africa. Nigeria is the most populous country of Africa followed by Ethiopia.

The major tribes of the world are called the first indigenous people. These people have a strong sense of their own identity as unique with their own lands, languages and cultures. Afar, Fatwa, Bushmen, Dinka, Masai, Pygmies, Zulu, Tswan, and Efe are the major tribes of Africa.