

12.1 What are the challenges and opportunities facing Africa?

In this unit, you will learn about:

- ▶ the physical and human geography of Africa
- ▶ Africa's colonial history
- ▶ about some of the challenges facing the continent
- ▶ about some of the opportunities to develop and change.

- A** Nigerian novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, talks of 'the danger of a single story', from her experience of living with her college roommate, when attending university in the USA



My roommate had a single story of Africa. In this single story there was no possibility of Africans being similar to her, in any way. No possibility of feelings more complex than pity. 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 ... 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.

We are all connected to Africa. Between 1 and 2 million years ago the first species of humans appeared in Africa and eventually spread around the world. Africa is the second largest continent in the world, by area and population; home to 1.2 billion people in 54 countries, speaking 1,500 different languages. Africa is rich in natural resources. But the continent is often viewed in a stereotypical way by other parts of the world (see A). While Africa does indeed face enormous challenges, not every African is in need, nor is every African nation in crisis. In this unit you will investigate Africa as a geographer, challenging stereotypical views to reach your own conclusions in Lesson 12.10.

Challenges and opportunities facing the continent

Many countries and regions in Africa do face a number of challenges. As a result, it is often viewed as a country rather than a continent (see B). In this unit you will investigate the diversity of the countries and people, to discover how they are looking to the future to overcome these obstacles.

Africa is not a country

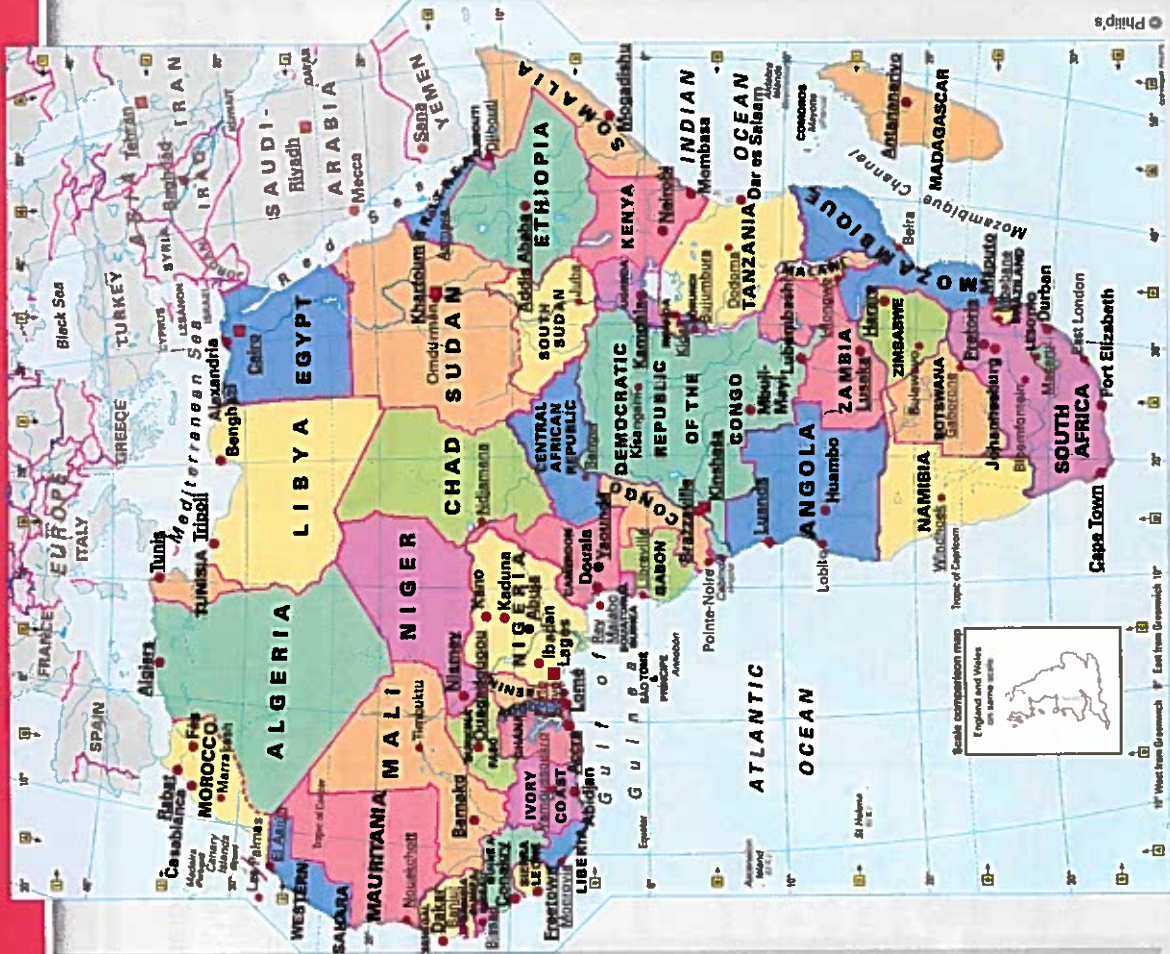
There are 54 states on the continent, yet the media insists on referring to it as one place.

Many public figures and journalists have no problem describing someone from Botswana as a person from Mauritania as 'Africans'. They probably wouldn't call them 'Americans' if they were from Brazil and the United States, even though the distance between the two is the same – and the economic conditions as different.

You don't have a film called *Out of Asia* and you rarely go to *Oceania* on holidays (instead you talk of vacations in Australia, New Zealand or another island). Yet for a continent of one billion people three times the size of the US, it's no problem to call it by one single name – 'Africa'! This is hugely detrimental to many countries. When a civil war starts in the Central African Republic (Africa!), it negatively impacts countries as far away as Senegal (Africa!) and Lesotho (Africa!). This has to change.

B Article from *The Guardian* online, 24 January 2014

- d) What does stereotyping mean?
 e) Think back to your answers to question 1. Identify ways these may have been influenced by stereotyping.
 f) Look at the vision statement for this course and write a list of the aspects of being a geographer that challenge stereotypes.
 3 Read Article B.
 a) Why do many people view Africa as a country rather than a continent?
 b) Why is this a problem?
 4 Look carefully at the atlas map, C. Find and label the following on an outline map of Africa:
 a) the Equator and Greenwich Meridian



C Political map of Africa, Philip's Essential School Atlas

- b) the largest and smallest African countries, and their latitude and longitude
 c) the seas and oceans that surround the continent
 d) the countries at the following coordinates:
 i) 22° S 18° E ii) 28° N 2° E
 iii) 1° N 38° E iv) 3° S 23° E
 5 a) Visit the Dollar Street website (www.gapminder.org). Search for two families in Africa – one poor, the other more wealthy.
 b) Compile a list of similarities and differences. Reread A and B.
 6 Explain what you have learnt today that challenges stereotypical views of Africa.