



TANZANIA

Area: 364,900 square miles

Population: 59.73 million (World Bank, 2020; estimated to exceed 61 million by 2022).

Capitals: Dodoma (official, legislative), Dar es Salaam (executive, administrative, diplomatic).

Ethnic Groups: 95% Bantu descent (including Sukuma, Nyamwezi, Chagga); and 4% other Africans, including Luo and Maasai (the southernmost Nilotic group); 1 % European/Asian/Arab.

Languages: Kiswahili and English (official languages); Arabic (especially on Zanzibar) and more than 100 local languages

Religion: Christian (61%), Muslim (35%), other (4%)

Life Expectancy: 65.46 years (2019) **Literacy:** 77.9%

Economy: Agriculture and processing; mining (gold, diamonds, iron); salt, soda ash, oil refining, cement, wood industries.

Exports: gold, coffee, cashew nuts, cotton, manufactures

Gini (Income Inequality) Index: 40.5 (comp.US=41.1)

Gender Inequality Index: 0.539 (#130/189; comp. US=0.204 Very High)



Ancient Footprints, Early Voices

The world's earliest footprints of hominid ancestors are preserved at the site of Laetoli in Tanzania. The 88-foot trackway excavated by archaeologist Mary Leakey, together with the finds at Olduvai Gorge, provide the basis for understanding the ancient fossils that shaped the concept of shared humanity over the course of 3.6 million years. More recent evidence from Tanzanian archaeology suggests a world in motion, from the out-of-Africa migrations across the planet to the complex coastal trading civilizations of the Indian Ocean rim.

The linguistic and cultural diversity confirms the role of present-day Tanzania as both an ancient homeland and a cultural crossroads. The characteristic clicks of Hadza-speakers, possibly the origin of all Khoisan languages, are thought to have been adapted as a human-to-human communication strategy that created minimal disturbance during hunting wild game. Nilo-Saharan, Afro-Asiatic, and Niger-Congo (Bantu) speakers brought techniques of ancient foraging of grasses, herding and farming tens of thousands of years ago. Ethnic affiliations and pastoralism have remained important.

Inventiveness continued with the rise of Iron Age techniques among Buhaya, who turned local ores into high-carbon steel for metal tools and weapons. Hand-sewn sailing craft connected foreign ports and urban centers along the East African coast and Zanzibar Archipelago. Manufacture of textiles and the trade in spices and ivory attracted other Indian Ocean merchants to the region's safe harbors amidst coral reefs. The stone-walled island towns of Zanzibar, Kilwa, and Pemba reflect the African origins of a sophisticated commercial network with extensive inland ties that welcomed the arrival of Egyptian, Greek, and Arab traders between the 4th and 14th centuries. Coastal interactions helped produce the rich Swahili language and an urban culture with the ability to unite diverse cultural identities. By the 12th century, Islam had found firm footing in the cultural mix of the coastal ports and monsoon-driven exchanges. The intrepid scholar and world traveler from Morocco, Ibn Battuta, described his 1332 visit to Kilwa. He counted it as one of the most beautiful and elegantly built cities, where gold, timber, iron, cloth, and ivory moved through local ports and supported lavish and opulent lifestyles. At Kilwa, the world traveler prayed with the local sultan Abu al-Muzaffar Hasan in the island's great mosque, now part of an UNESCO World Heritage site.

The Colonial Era

Early Portuguese invaders burned the region's coastal ports to the ground but they failed to seize control of the once lucrative trade. From the 18th century, an Omani empire was more successful in brokering coastal trade, introducing clove plantations and other spices, and exploiting slave labor. By the 19th century, colonial conquest expanded with the efforts of foreign merchants. In the 1820s, American merchants purchased ivory from caravans in exchange for cloth made in New England textile mills. Their merikani cloth became a standard unit of exchange in the slave and ivory trade. The trade was also lucrative enough to attract the interest of Indian financiers, German, French, and British merchants, as well as the Omani Sultan Seyyid Said, who moved his capital to Zanzibar City in 1840 and clashed with British competitors.

After the Berlin Conference (1884-1885), the territory of Tanganyika (today's Tanzania), except for the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba, became a German territory. Railroads were built to further exploit the colony's resources, while the British successfully held on to Zanzibar as a protectorate. African resistance was frequently fierce, including the alliance known as Maji-Maji (1905-1907). Among the celebrated resistance leaders were Mangi Meli, a Chagga chief captured and hanged by the Germans, and Hehe Chief Mkwawa, whose remains were to be returned by agreement in the Treaty of Versailles. After World War I, during which British and Belgian forces fought the Germans on African soil, colonial control passed to the British.

Characteristic of resistance efforts was the activism of nationalist leader and politician Bibi Titi Mohamed (1926-2000), also a fierce proponent of education. As founder of the Umoja wa Wanawake wa Tanzania (UWT), the women's wing of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), she was a close associate of the future president, Julius Nyerere, who was taught Swahili by the women. The women's wing also played a key role in successfully giving women a united voice in anti-colonial struggles. In the 1950s, Bibi Titi Mohamed was approached by South Asian merchants, requesting that she permit them to take a photograph of her holding her hand up to signal the demand for independence. In 1959, the photograph of Bibi Titi Mohamed holding her raised hand to demonstrate political defiance was turned into the iconic kanga cloth with a political message for the masses. The image of the fist held high in the air became a potent symbol of resistance and decolonization around the globe. A major street in Dar es Salaam is named after her and many Tanzanians identify her as the "Mother of the Nation." Printed cotton cloth has also endured as a colorful medium of communication, empowerment, and personal artistry. Thus declares one kanga inscription: "We women want equality, peace, and progress."

After Independence: Modern Footprints

The era of decolonization ended in an independent Tanganyika (1961) and the United Republic of Tanzania (1964) eventually included the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba. Nyerere's African National Union party faced little opposition, leaving the early years of democratic reform the potential for radical departures from the colonial model. Nyerere sought Chinese aid and pursued a socialist and economic self-reliance agenda set out in the Arusha Declaration (1967), a manifesto based on a nationalized economy, free public education, and the embrace of kiSwahili as an official language used for instruction at the primary level. Among the visiting scholars at the nation's intellectually vibrant university was historian Walter Rodney, the author of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972), and a Guyanese revolutionary. His book focused on the pan-African need to overthrow the capitalist system that maintained profound global inequalities. After Nyerere stepped down in 1985, democratic elections have produced multiparty governance and sustained efforts to curb corruption and contribute to regional stability. Tanzania hosted the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (1994-2014) in Arusha. In 2021, Samia Suluhu Hassan became Tanzania's first female president after the unexpected death of John Magufuli. The struggle against the global forces of neo-colonialism has continued with increasing recognition for Tanzanian voices of protest. In 2021, the Tanzanian novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah, 72, won the Nobel Prize in Literature for writing on the impact of colonialism and the footprints of refugees around the world.

--Candice Goucher, December 2021

Further Reading

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Gilbert, Erik, and Jonathan Reynolds, *Africa in World History: From Prehistory to the Present* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2011).

Mwakikagile, Godfrey, *Life Under Nyerere* (second ed.). (Dar es Salaam and Pretoria: New Africa Press, 2006).

Rodney, Walter, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture and Tanzanian Publishing House, 1972).

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