



Perceptions of life in Africa – how do we know what life is like in the countries of Africa?

Even if we have not visited a place, we all have an image in our minds of what that place is like – this what we mean when we say, this what we **perceive** the place to be like. Where does this information come from? Unless you know someone who has visited a place, it is likely that you will form your opinions from the media – what you read, what you hear and what you see. Sometimes an 'expert' may tell you about a place – your teacher for example. These experts may or may not have visited a place but they have learnt something about it and they share their knowledge and understanding about that place with you.

When we learn about a place for the first time, what is the best source of information? Who do we trust?

When we have only small pieces of information, it does not help to give us a fair impression of what a place is like. If the information we use contains **bias**, we may get the wrong idea about what the place is like.

Africa is a **continent** but often the media talks about Africa as if it is one **country** and is all the same everywhere you go. As a general rule, the media loves reporting 'bad news' and only rarely reports 'good news'. Have a look at the table of words below which are taken from a single web page from the BBC news website.

- a) What impression does it give you about life in Africa? Use some of the highlighted words in your answer.
b) Choose some of these words to write a paragraph of your own about life in Africa or try to describe the image of life in Africa that is created by the use of this set of words.

Note: The word 'Aid' refers to money or food sent to help people in African countries and the word 'Aids' refers to the disease which kills millions of men, women and children in Africa each year.

Ethiopian hardships	Zimbabwe in meltdown	Starting from scratch
Food crisis	Village's food shortages	Hunger and misery
History of drought	Struggling to eat	Animals starve
Aid figures	Lesotho starves	Drought-stricken community
Affected countries	GM struggle	Food aid addiction
Recurring hunger crisis	Hungry herders	Zambia: fertile but hungry
Digging for scarce water	Deadly daily poverty	More harm than good
Dried-up riverbeds	Battle with Aids	The struggle to survive