

Study on Sub-Saharan Africa: Lower chances of individual prosperity in regions far from the coast

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The further people in Sub-Saharan Africa live from the coast, the greater

the likelihood of a comparatively low standard of living. This is the conclusion reached by economists at the University of Bayreuth in a study of 17 African coastal countries published in the *Review of Development Economics*. Proximity to ports attracts people with higher levels of knowledge and education, promotes the growth of cities and the expansion of infrastructure, and thus increases prosperity. To achieve similar standards of living, geographically determined disadvantages in regions of Africa far from the coast would have to be offset by targeted measures, which often do not happen.

The study draws on data encompassing 128,609 people in 11,261 locations in 17 coastal Sub-Saharan African countries. Overall, the data cover a 20-year period. The analysis reveals a statistically [significant relationship](#) between distance from the [coast](#) and the standard of living of private households. The closer people settle to ports, the more likely they are to own radio and television sets and motor vehicles. The farther they live from the coasts, the less likely they are to have full- or part-time employment. The scarcity of money, medicine, food, and water also increases with distance from the coast.

"Previously, in development economics research, there has been evidence that ports, as national and international trade centers, positively affect standard of living in the immediately adjacent inland region, and that more distant regions are significantly less likely to reap these benefits. We have contributed new evidence on this in other research as well. In our current study, however, we have for the first time been able to demonstrate significant correlations between people's individual prosperity and their distance from the coasts. Factors that play a central role and are significantly strengthened by proximity to ports are education and knowledge, urbanization, and infrastructure," says Prof. Dr. David Stadelmann, Professor of Economic Policy & Economic Development at the University of Bayreuth.

Using statistical calculations, he and his research assistant Frederik Wild have succeeded in clearly distinguishing the impact of coastal proximity on the prosperity of the population from the influence of other factors relevant to prosperity. These include, for example, climate and [extreme weather events](#), people's access to rivers and lakes, the fertility of arable land, the risk of malaria, and [landscape features](#) that promote or hinder the movement of people and goods. The effects of demographic features such as the age structure of the population, settlement density, and proximity to major cities were also considered.

The two authors included data from surveys conducted by the Pan-African opinion research institute "Afrobarometer." Among other things, these included the assessment of organizations that serve cross-regional economic integration. "People in Sub-Saharan Africa who are farther from the coasts are more inclined to describe their respective regional economic communities—the Regional Economic Communities—or even the African Union as a whole, as helpful for their country. This expresses the expectation that regional economic integration can help strengthen trade in regions that are far from the coast and are thus disadvantaged," says Frederik Wild, who is studying trade integration in Africa as part of a research project in the Africa Multiple cluster of excellence at the University of Bayreuth.

The Bayreuth development economists emphasize that isolation from the coast by no means inevitably means people will be less prosperous. "Our research in recent years has shown that good governance also has a significant impact on the standard of living of the population. Political leaders at both national and regional levels can, for example, compensate for the economic disadvantages caused by unfavorable geographic factors by specifically strengthening access to [educational institutions](#), developing infrastructure, providing advantageous investment conditions, and curbing corruption," Stadelmann explains.

More information: Frederik Wild et al, Coastal proximity and individual living standards: Econometric evidence from georeferenced household surveys in sub-Saharan Africa, *Review of Development Economics* (2022). [DOI: 10.1111/rode.12901](https://doi.org/10.1111/rode.12901)

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