

## Are you better off in Japan than Africa?



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The standard of living is a living condition in which someone lives, seen in terms of social status and lifestyles. In other words, it represents how well a society compared to their counterparts. In Economics, the living standard is measurable using Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Index. The GDP measures the total final value of goods and services produced within an economy for a given period of time, usually a year. It acts as an indicator to compare living standards between countries. Other indicators include poverty rate, level of malnutrition, crime rates and incidences of jobless people in an economy.

Crops farming in Africa is susceptible to weather conditions. This resulted in bad harvest accompanied by poor estate management and low education background may be some of the major factors that led to low produce and high poverty rate among African agricultural community. Many children in Africa are vulnerable to widespread diseases due to low nutritional diets. In contrast, children in Japanese schools consume diets that include fish and seafood, seaweeds, soy beans and plenty of vegetables. Due to better diet, it enhances the average life expectancy of Japanese to 84.2 years (reported by World Health Organization, 2018). Thus let us find out if the Japanese are living a better lifestyle and happier than their African counterparts.

There is a growing number of aging population in Japan. According to The Japan Times, the number of Japanese 90 years and above stood at 2.06 million in 2017. Elderly people, those 65 years and above make up a third of Japan's total population (126.8 million in 2017). Across Japan, the population is rapidly aging and this has obviously led to potential burden to the community to care and nurse for the elderly. *Kodokhusi* (a phenomenon where people die alone and remain undiscovered for a long period of time) is an

alarming trend in Japan. There are numerous economic and social factors that contribute to this 'lonely death' trend such as rising cost of living in metropolitan cities, decreasing number of marriages or increasing single people and family members play minimal role in looking after the elderly.

Kenya in Africa is an example of a victim of extreme poverty. Half of its population live below the poverty line. The children have limited access to clean water, healthy food, medical care and education. Some attend man-made schools that look like small huts with no proper facilities. Despite the hardship, financial burden and other difficulties, children in Kenya are taught on the importance of *harambe* (working together). This value is instilled in Kenya, both at schools and in community. Music and art are also important in the Kenyan culture where schools take part and compete for a trophy. In addition, Kenya is best describe by its beautiful nature and wildlife. To name a few are the breathtaking safaris, beautiful plains and savannah, amusing ethnic diversity and friendly people. The nature is majestic and harmonious which all these factors contribute to the well-being of a society.



School that builds children's happiness in a rural village in Tanzania, Africa  
(Photo credit Farrah Shuhaimi MyCorps Africa 2017)

Though GDP acts as an indicator whether a society is better off or worse off than its counterparts, there are non-monetary factors that need to be taken into consideration. The World Economic Forum (2018) reported Japan with GDP ranking third highest in the world in 2017. But sadly speaking, Japan performed poorly on social measures with large gap in income disparity, rising suicidal rates, huge national debts and decline confidence in the government. The Japanese work longer hours with low satisfaction in life and face major economic challenges than their counterparts in Africa or any other less advanced economies.

In a nutshell, the well-being of a society involves personal value judgement. A country with high income per capita like Japan may indicate strong economic confidence for bankers and investors. These developed

**countries specialize in products ranging from food and beverage, automobiles, textiles, telecommunication, transports, health, education and insurance. Nevertheless, they face economic challenges and other social dilemma. These hurdles may create barriers to happiness and work satisfaction in improving a society's well being.**

**As the saying goes, never judge a book by its cover!**