

Commentary on the Crazy Climate poster

This information sheet gives you more details about the issues and stories covered in the Crazy Climate poster.

Drought

Parts of Africa have always had freak weather events, but now the weather patterns are becoming increasingly extreme and erratic. In 2006, countries in east Africa (including Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea and Uganda) suffered the worst prolonged drought in 20 years. Around 11 million people went hungry after the rains failed two years running. Many families lost their only source of income as hundreds of thousands of livestock died. The countries featured in the case studies are Senegal and Mali.



Christian Aid/Sarah Filbey

Christian Aid in Mali

'In the Sahel, water really does equal life.'

Armand Kassogue

Armand Kassogue is the director of Christian Aid partner **Action pour la Promotion Humaine (APH Bandiagara)** in Mali. He is pictured standing with desert stretching out into the distance behind. Armand grew up 1km from the place where the photo was taken, in a village called Kokolo. A decline in rainfall, combined with desertification and deforestation, caused the forest and a large pond where animals used to drink to disappear.

APH works with inhabitants of the isolated communities located in the arid and rocky Dogon Plateau region. It teaches people ways to care for the local environment, such as protecting existing trees, since it is difficult to grow new trees in such harsh conditions, as well as techniques such as vegetation planting to make the land more productive and make best use of the little rain they do receive.

Christian Aid partner the **Mali Folke-Center (MFC)** works with local communities to promote the sustainable management of natural resources and to develop ways to use these resources to boost local economies. Projects include protecting the environment, getting access to clean drinking water, training in using new technology, and providing 'clean' energy, such as solar power, to rural communities that currently have no electricity supply.

Kadija Keita, a midwife, believes her work has been transformed by the solar-lighting system installed by the MFC. She says: 'For me, light equals life'. She recalls, with sadness, how one infant died shortly after birth, because she could not see properly and so did not identify the problem until it was too late.

Dr Ibrahim Togola, MFC's director, has pioneered the use of renewable energy – from the sun, wind and bio-fuel – in poor communities.

'Climate change for us is like living with HIV,' he says. 'We are seriously sick, we are going to get hurt more and more, and it is not in our control. We have to know how we can adapt our life to these conditions.'

The southern village of Tabakoro, where MFC has its training centre, demonstrates the full benefit of renewable technologies. Solar-powered pumps, connected to a deep borehole, supply clean running water. This drastically cuts down the time and effort that women have to spend fetching water. For many, this allows them time to attend evening adult literacy classes, which are lit by solar power. Younger students of the school also take advantage of these lights to study later into the evening.

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The most valued resource is the health centre with its solar-powered light and refrigerator. It is run by Dr Ismail Diarra, who was born in the village. He is in no doubt about the value of being able to react quickly, with light to work by and a refrigerator to store medicines: 'The night before last a child was brought here with a very high fever in a chronic stage of malaria. Because of the light and the drugs, we were able to save that child's life.'

Christian Aid partner **The Group for Research and for Technical Applications (GRAT)** in Mali helps rural communities develop alternative ways of earning a living, alongside traditional

methods. Yusuf's father, Souleymane, is a fisherman of the Bozo tribe. A decline in rainfall has led to a drop in the water levels of the Niger River, which has had an impact on the numbers of fish. Souleymane found he could no longer support his family with his fishing catch. GRAT provided him with an irrigated rice plot and taught him effective farming techniques. Like many others, Souleymane's family no longer relies solely on fishing for survival.

'Before the project, our food would only last three months,' he says. 'Now our crops provide enough to feed my family for at least nine months and I can fall back on fishing to cover the rest of the year.'

Christian Aid in Senegal

In northern Senegal, Christian Aid partner **Union pour la Solidarité et l'Entraide (USE)** runs seminars to teach local communities to prepare seed nurseries, and plant and graft trees. Each participant is given a toolkit and will share their knowledge with their village, encouraging more people to plant trees and combat desertification. Growing fruit trees, like mango trees, is also part of this scheme. The fruit provides additional food and another source of income for families.

USE also provides literacy classes, which Fatimata and Aissata attend (see *Fatimata's story*), and teaches the community how to make their own energy-saving stoves out of natural materials. These stoves use less wood, so reduce the amount of time needed to collect it, giving families more time to work on craft projects which help earn money.



Christian Aid/Sarah Filbey



Christian Aid/Elaine Duigenan

'Planting this tree is very important. I hope that the seed we are planting today will help to bless future generations.'

A participant from the USE tree-planting seminar

Mali

Background information

At nearly twice the size of France, the landlocked Republic of Mali is one of the largest west African countries, but has fewer people per square mile than any other.

The northern region of Mali is nearly all Saharan desert, and most of the middle belt is part of the Sahel, a transition zone between the Sahara desert and the wetter regions to the south. Mali's major geographical feature is the Niger River, which runs right up to the edge of the Sahara and then veers south into the Atlantic Ocean. In the upper southern region, the Niger and Bani rivers join to form a rich inland delta, but it is only in the lower southern regions where rainfall is more reliable than there are small pockets of natural forest.

Climate

Although it cools down a little towards the end of the year, the temperature in Mali, particularly in the north, is incredibly hot, often above 40°C. The humid rainy season is from June to September, although this really only applies to the south. In the Sahel, rain can be variable, and is particularly scarce in the north. Dusty *harmattan* winds blowing off the desert between December and February cover the sandy cities with a fine layer of dust.

Problems include:

- **desertification** – more than 65 per cent of the country is now desert or semi-desert. The rapid desertification of Mali is due to on-going droughts, over-grazing, topsoil erosion, harsh desert winds, and the scavenging of trees for firewood. Mali is almost totally without lush forests or abundant wildlife. In fact, Baoulé National Park, 130km northwest of Bamako, is about the only relatively fertile spot in Mali and home to a few lions, giraffes, buffalo and hippopotami.
- **locust invasion** – locusts invaded the Sahel region in August 2004. Significant amounts of crops were damaged. Mature locusts laid eggs and new swarms of 'hoppers' were formed in October. National and local authorities worked hard to combat the locusts, with support from the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation. Local farmers played their part by burying the hopper locusts in trenches, digging up and destroying eggs, and capturing the flying locusts with nets.

Carbon footprint

According to the *UNDP Human Development Report 2006*, the average annual CO₂ emissions per person in Mali are 0.1 tonnes. Compare this figure to the UK (9.4 tonnes) and Ireland (10.3 tonnes) figures.

North Senegal

Background information

Senegal is situated at the most western point in Africa. It is a mainly flat country, with two main rivers; the Casamance River in the moist, tropical south and the Senegal River in the dry, arid north. It is smaller than the UK with a landmass of 196,200 sq km (75,750 sq miles).

Climate

The climate is hot and tropical, with a rainy season from May to November and a dry season from December to April dominated by a hot, dry, *harmattan* wind.

The north of Senegal is semi-arid – flat, dry and sandy. The region is part of the Sahel, a transition zone between the Sahara desert and the tropical green forest that borders the maritime coast. The Sahel area is predominately savannah with sparse vegetation of grasses and shrubs. It only receives between 100-500mm of rain per year, which is slowly decreasing. Rains fall mainly during the months of July, August and September.

Life in the region is difficult and precarious. Problems include:

- **lack of water/access to water** – since 1972, when the north suffered a severe drought, there has been an ongoing lack of rain. This has only been made worse by the lack of wells and maintenance of them.

- **poor infrastructure and lack of training** – there is a lack of storage for crops, lack of access to certain areas because of poor roads, and lack of training in management of the environment and economy.

- **deforestation** – after Senegal obtained its independence from France in 1960, the government issued permits to cut down trees to produce charcoal. Following a lack of regulation and a misuse of these permits, entire forests have been destroyed.

- **desertification** – the majority of people are nomadic farmers. The people and their livestock move according to the rain. Unfortunately, the large numbers of livestock have overgrazed the land, making the problem of desertification worse. It is estimated that the desert is encroaching at a rate of 300 metres per year.

With the Sahel region becoming more arid and the weather patterns becoming harder to predict, it is difficult to develop the area.

Carbon footprint

According to the *UNDP Human Development Report 2006*, the average annual CO₂ emissions per person in Senegal are 0.4 tonnes. Compare this figure to the UK (9.4 tonnes) and Ireland (10.3 tonnes) figures.