

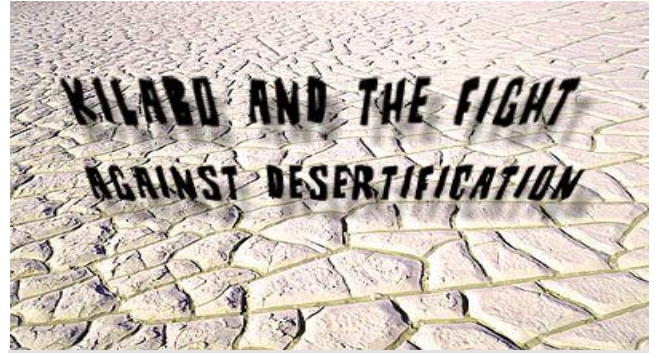
STUDENT'S HANDOUT



Background Information

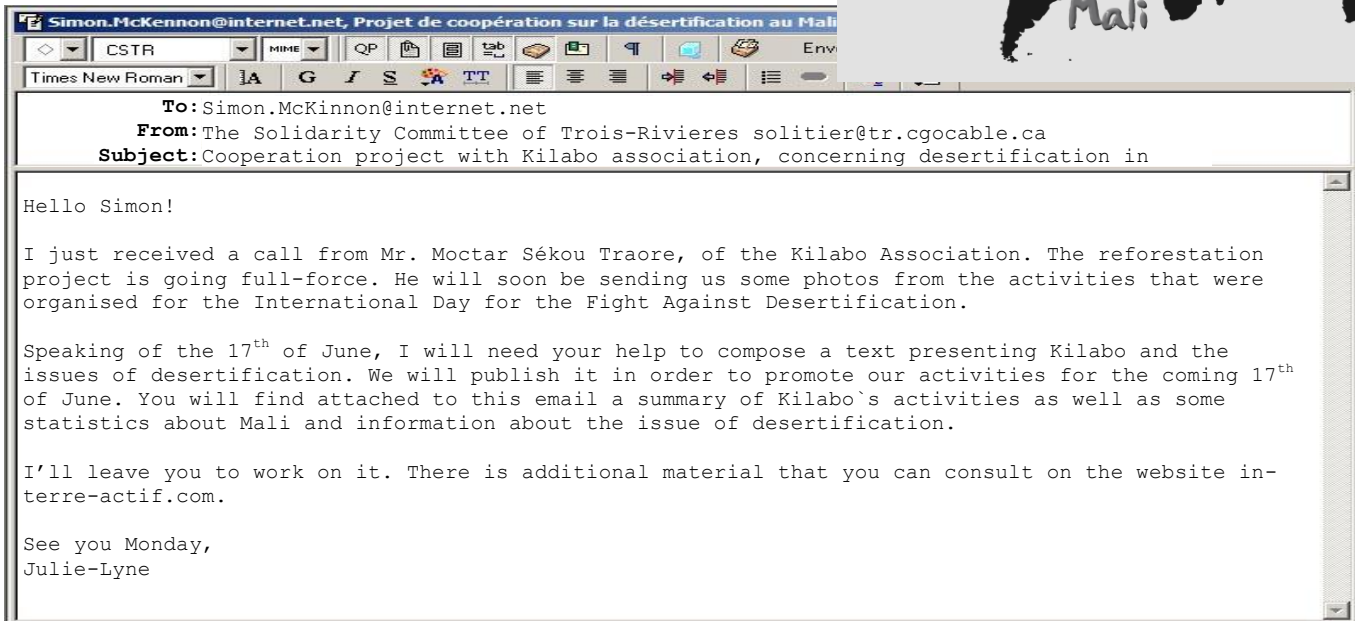
Desertification is the gradual degradation of fertile soils in arid and semi-arid zones of the planet. It is a natural process, is provoked by difficult climatic conditions, and causes soil erosion and dryness. Now, however, humans and their activities are the principal cause of this process. Desertification is a wide-reaching problem, affecting more than a billion people according to estimates. Impoverished people living in rural areas of developing countries are the most vulnerable and most seriously affected.

Source: CIDA 2002; UN: International Year of Deserts and Desertification 2006.



Instructions

Using the following information, write a 250-word text about desertification in Mali and the related issues.



Organisation: Kilabo (Bamako, Mali)

Description: The organisation works with rural development, encouraging the initiatives of local inhabitants while aiding structures that are already in place. Kilabo also helps with the organisation and training of local inhabitants concerning agricultural techniques and simple technologies.

Project Goals: Contribute to the establishment of a project promoting environmentally friendly living.

Areas of Intervention: Fighting against desertification and promoting the environment.

Intervention Area: Segou.

Mali	
Region	Official Language
Sahel, Subsaharan Africa.	French, Bambara.
Capital	Contributions to Gross Domestic Product
Bamako.	Agriculture 36 %
Area	Industry 27 %
1 241 231 square km.	Services 36 %
Population	
13.4 million.	
Population Density	
11 inhabitants per square km.	
Urban Population	
32 %.	

Source : CIDA, 2004

Desertification

Natural Causes: Extreme rains, violent winds, and high temperatures cause dryness and erosion of soils.

Other causes related to human activity:

Greenhouse gases provoke global warming, which worsens the situation of drought in semi-arid and arid zones, and speeds the desertification of vulnerable areas.

Poor agricultural practices do not allow soil to rest and recover. The soil loses nutrients and organic matter essential to plant growth. This overexploitation is directly related to poverty and living conditions that push rural populations to intensively work their land in order to attain a subsistence living.

Over-consumption and the mechanisms of international trade often lead to the short-term exploitation of local resources, where insufficient resources are available to generate or restore the soils. The globalisation of markets has led developing countries to concentrate on the commercial production for export of a few select crops.

Deforestation worsens desertification by eliminating the roots of trees and other plants that normally hold the soil in place, preventing erosion caused by wind and running water. These plants and their roots also hold water within the soil. Inhabitants of the Sahel region of Africa use wood for cooking and house construction, which seriously aggravates desertification. Poverty also pushes them to exploit the scarce resources of the region, putting the long-term survival of the families in jeopardy.

Consequences: Approximately 135 million people have become environmental refugees, and risk having to abandon their land. In Mali, over half of the population has already moved to the cities. Disappearing forests and soils that are losing their productivity aggravate the problems of food security, malnutrition, hunger, famine, water scarcity, and poverty. Desertification can cause social, economic, and political tension, and contribute to more serious conflicts.

Map: *Deserts of the World*



AN INITIATIVE OF THE
In-Terre-Actif Network of the Comité de Solidarité/Trois-Rivières



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