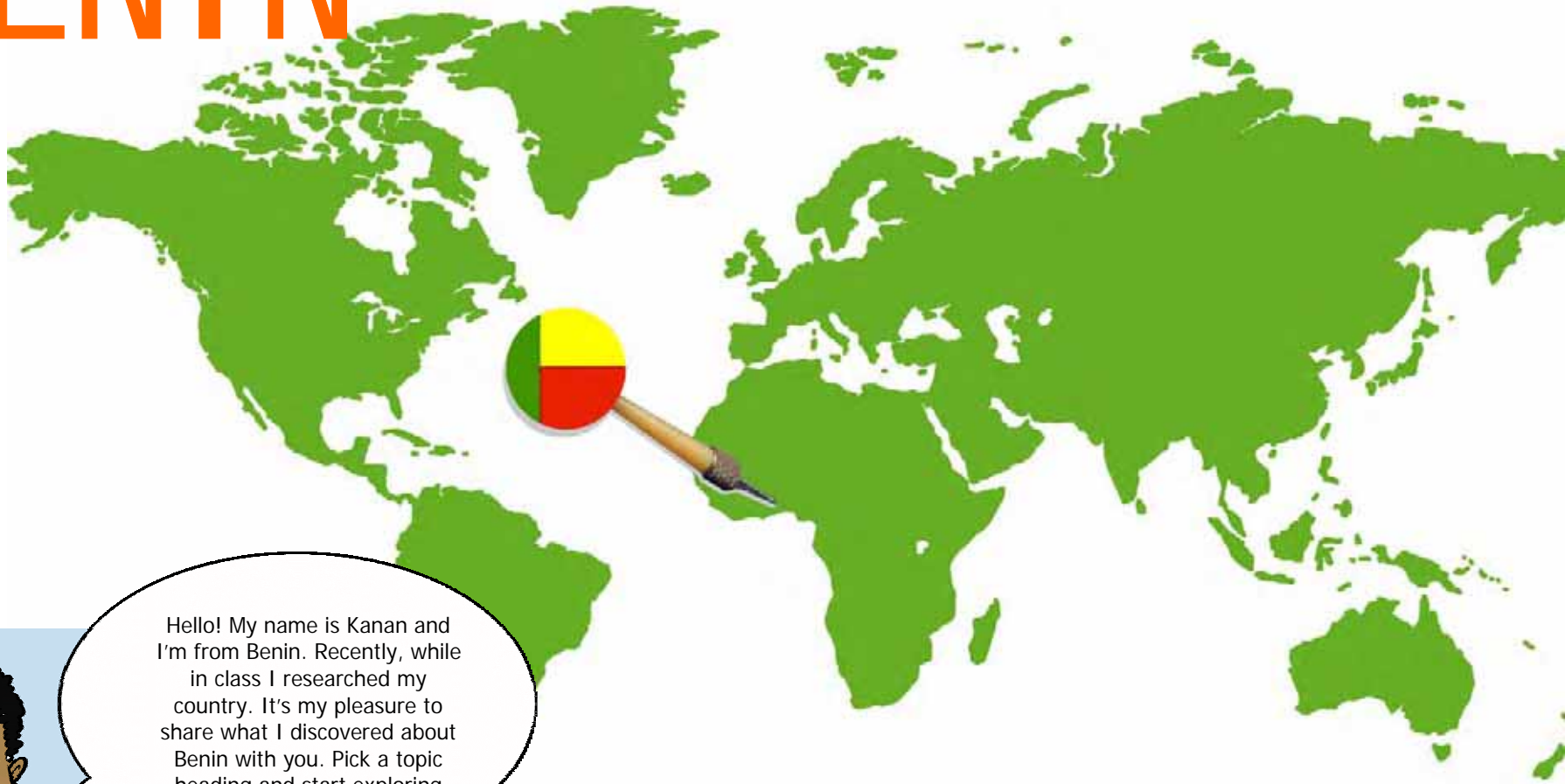


BENIN



Hello! My name is Kanan and I'm from Benin. Recently, while in class I researched my country. It's my pleasure to share what I discovered about Benin with you. Pick a topic heading and start exploring Benin!

The Country Fact Sheets series is presented to you by the Réseau In-Terre-Actif and produced with the support of the government of Canada through the Canadian International Development Agency



Canadian International
Development Agency

Agence canadienne de
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COUNTRY DESCRIPTION

As you can see from the map, the *Republic of Benin* is situated in West Africa. It is bordered by Burkina Faso and Niger to the north; the Atlantic Ocean to the south; Togo to the east, and Nigeria to the west. Before 1975, the country was called *Dahomey*, the name of an ancient kingdom that was situated in the centre of the country.

My country has a surface area of 112 620 km². In comparison, my uncle told me that Quebec is about 15 times bigger. My country stretches 700km in length and varies from 125km to 325km in width. There in Canada, the distance between Trois-Rivieres and the bridges of Quebec City is about 125km.

Porto-Novo is my country's capital. *Cotonou* is the biggest city and it is located at the edge of the Atlantic Ocean. It has a port and the city is the economic centre of the country. Other important cities are Parakou, Abomey, and Ouidah.

The main food staples of the Beninese are cereals (millet, sorghum, and corn), starches (manioc, sweet potato), leguminous plants, peanuts, vegetables and palm oil.

Benin also produces cotton and nuts for exports. Peanuts, cocoa, coffee, and tobacco are also produced to this end, but to a lesser degree.



Did you know that?

In my country, the average daily temperature ranges between 22 and 34°C. That's hotter than in your country, isn't it? Benin has two distinct climatic zones. In the south, the humidity level is always high, between 65 and 95%. There are two dry seasons and two rainy seasons (April to mid-July and from mid-September to October). To the north, there is only one dry season in the year, while the rainy season lasts from June to September.



Surface Area

112 620 km². (Canada : 9 984 670 km²)



Climate

Tropical; humid in the south and drier in the north. There are two rainy seasons: from March to July, and from September to November.



Temperature

Varies between 20 et 34 °C.



Relief

The north is more rugged than the rest of the country.



Natural Resources

Yams, cotton, manioc, peanuts, beef, oil, gold, etc.

COUNTRY DESCRIPTION

Population

More than 7.5 million people live in my country. The biggest city, Cotonou, has a population of nearly 1.2 million inhabitants. The majority of Beninese, 7 out of 10, work in agriculture.

One thing about my country's population in particular is that it's made up of many ethnicities. There are almost 50 different groups that speak different languages in Benin. Among the languages used, Fon is the most important since it is spoken by almost one person in four. It is followed by Yorouba, Bariba, and Adja which are all spoken by at least one out of ten Beninese. In order to communicate with people from different ethnicities and to understand what is being said on the radio, the television, and at work, understanding and speaking French is a must in the city. Many Beninese have difficulty speaking and understanding French.



Population

Did you know that?

Most people in my country are very poor but have lots of time to themselves? Therefore, we Beninese spend lots of time making conversation with one another. For us, interpersonal relationships are very important and we take the time to say hello to one another, even if we see each other often.

A proper salutation is comprised of at least three to four sentences. Without a doubt, you will notice how obvious this is! One way of saying hello is to observe what the other person is doing at that time, and then to ask them what they're doing to start the conversation. We also observe what the person is doing and then wish them good luck in whatever they're doing.

Here are a few words that may be useful if you visit my country. Practice saying them!

Are you there? : *A do fine a?*
 Yes, I'm here : *Eeen, un do fi*
 Are you doing something? : *A de u wa?*
 Yes, I'm in the middle of doing something : *Eeen, Un de u*
 I hope it is working out for you (literally : « good walking ») : *Kud'afo*
Oooooooo (just to say: I heard what you wished me) : *ooooOOO*

Did you know that there are over 200 ways to say hello in Yoruba ? Here is a list ; have fun trying to pronounce the words ! If you want to learn more about Yoruba, you can visit the following Website:
www.wordpress.com/tag/yoruba/

Saying hello to someone who just saw you : *Ku Okan ni bé*
 Saying hello to a parent or friend who just came back from a trip: *Ku Afojuba*
 Good luck : *Ku Erire*
 Happy Birthday : *Ku Odun*
 Hello : *Ku Arô*

Facts at a Glance



Number of Inhabitants 8,4 million (2005)



Density (number of people per Km²) 74 inhabitants/km² (2005)



Life Expectancy 54 years (2004)



Purchasing Power¹ US\$ 1120 (2004)



People Without a job 33% (2004)



People who can read and write 34% (2004)



Mortality rate under 5 years of age 152 deaths per 1000 child (2004)



Human Development Index (HDI)² 162th out of 177 countries (2003)



Ecological Footprint³ 1,0 (2001)

History

Let me give you a brief history of my country. Humans have been living in Africa and Benin for a very long time. Researchers have found Human remains dating back to prehistoric times (more than 12 000 years)! The first Europeans (Portuguese and French) to arrive in the area were traders. They also participated in the *Black slave trade*.

The Black slave trade consisted of buying African slaves from local kings and then selling them elsewhere (ex. : in the Caribbean). It was a tragedy. Benin was one of the biggest slave trading centres in West Africa. Ouidah, a city on the coast of Benin, was the entry port for the slave ships. A monument has been erected in memory of all the slaves; it reads « The point of no return ».

In the middle of the 19th century (1851), France colonized my country. This means that they occupied it, and imposed their laws here. Up until 1960, Benin was a French colony. On the 1st of August, 1960, Benin gained its independence. It was then named *The Republic of Dahomey*.

Door of «No way back»
Ouidah



Symbol of Benin's ancient
civilization



Military parade on the
Independence's day



From 1960 to 1972, there was a succession of governments. In 1972, a military government took control and with a number of intellectual groups, installed a socialist republic. In 1975, my country adopted its current name: Benin. In 1991, Benin had its first democratic elections. Today, my country is considered a model democracy for the rest of the continent. Despite this, it remains a poor and developing country.

History

Culture



Did you know that ?

The artists in my country create a large variety of handicrafts that enable tourists to discover my people's culture and history. If you ever visit Benin, you can buy beautiful souvenirs such as wooden sculptures, pottery, jewellery, tapestries, brightly coloured hand-woven linens and more !

If you would like to listen to Benin's national anthem, click on the following link : www.david.national-anthems.net/bj.htm

Beninese fish either in the sea or in lagoons. Fishing in the sea is dangerous because of strong sea currents, particularly along the coast. Fishermen fish from dugout canoes with nets.

Fishing in lagoons is done with the help of smaller dugout canoes and nets that fishermen set up within mangroves. They mostly catch crabs and shrimp. After a day's fishing, they have to sell their catch quickly because they have nowhere cool to store it.

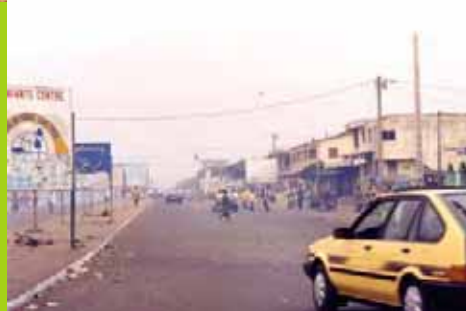
People in my country grow corn, millet and yams as their main staples. These crops constitute the foundation of our meals.

Our national sport is football. I think you call it "soccer" in your country.

Have you ever heard the rhythmic music of Africa? In Benin, when night falls people often dance to the sound of a *Djembe* (tams-tams) and a *Balafon* (a type of xylophone) in the village square. Other evenings, they listen to a Griot (a person who is a poet and sorcerer) sing while accompanied by their *Kora* (a string instrument).

The main religions that are practiced in Benin are *Voodoo*, Christianity, and Islam. Benin is the birthplace of voodoo. Almost half the country's population belongs to this religion.

Culture



Challenges

People in my country face many challenges. I'll list a few here:

Due to the poverty and economic crises that affect my country, the city of Cotonou does not have the means to pay for a garbage collection system like those in Canadian cities. The city gained the nickname "The Himalaya of Garbage" a long time ago because of the mountains of garbage that accumulate just about everywhere.

In Benin, cotton is the only product that is grown on large tracts of land across the country. This is what is called a "monoculture". One of the consequences of a monoculture is soil exhaustion. By cultivating the same crop all the time, the soil loses its fertility, and is transformed into desert. This means that there is less arable land to cultivate crops. Thus, food is more expensive and hard to find, especially for poor people.

The increasing size of large Beninese cities has resulted in an amazing increase in the number of cars used for transportation. For the most part, these vehicles are old cars that have been imported from Europe. They have been poorly maintained, they run poorly, and they create a lot of pollution (exhaust emissions, noise pollution, oil leaks etc.). Consequently, the air quality in Benin's large cities is poor. This situation has many health impacts on people living in the cities, especially children. For example, many more people are afflicted with respiratory diseases in Cotonou than elsewhere in the world.

My father told me that Benin possesses enough water resources to meet its own needs; however, many people do not have access to potable water. In Cotonou, almost 3 in 10 families do not have access to running water. Thus, most people are forced to buy water from illegal vendors, or they collect water from polluted water sources that are often far from home. The consumption of contaminated or untreated water puts people's health at risk, especially children.

Finally, Benin also has a high maternal mortality rate, a high infant mortality rate, and a high rate of female illiteracy. Another problem is that Cotonou's port suffers from coastal erosion.

Despite these difficulties my people are full of spirit, and are warm and welcoming. I hope you will visit us one day!

Challenges

Solutions

My country benefits from various international cooperation projects with different countries and organizations, including Canada and Canadian organizations. Here's a project that is very important for the children of Benin!

In collaboration with the Canadian International Development Agency, UNICEF has been working in my country for many years. It has been working with our local organizations to implement sustainable projects regarding health and nutrition in Benin. It's amazing to see what they have been able to achieve together so far!

UNICEF has been working to improve child survival rates and development in Benin. It has managed to implement a vaccination, prenatal care, and infant illness management program. The main illnesses targeted were malaria, pneumonia, and diarrhea.

This program is very important to the people who benefit from its services. In certain regions of Benin, before the UNICEF program the mortality rate of children under the age of five was 19 out of 100 births. The UNICEF program has reduced mortality rates and malnutrition in children by providing a supply of iodized salt and vitamin A supplements to counter paludism, and through vaccinations to combat other diseases. Can you imagine how important it is to a parent to see their child healthy and no longer suffering from illness?

To learn more about UNICEF and its projects in Benin, check out the following site:

www.unicef.org/infobycountry/benin_1511.html

Lastly, did you know that you can also work towards a better world? By paying attention to the impacts that your actions can have on the environment and by changing the way you act (through recycling, composting, consuming less, buying local products, etc.) you contribute to the well-being of the planet!



Solutions

Glossary

Exports :

Goods and services produced domestically and sold to customers in other countries.

Lagoon :

Body of water that is generally shallow and is separated from the sea by a coral reef. This body of water through linked to the sea and is brackish (a mixture of sea water and freshwater).

Malaria :

An illness transmitted by mosquito bites in tropical and subtropical regions. Symptoms include anemia (light headedness, shortness of breath, tachycardia etc.), as well as other general symptoms such as fever, chills, nausea, flu-like illness, and in severe cases, coma and death.

Mangroves :

The only trees that grow in salt water. Mangroves protect tropical coastlines from storm surges, and their extensive root system attracts a variety of shallow water gamefish.

Socialism :

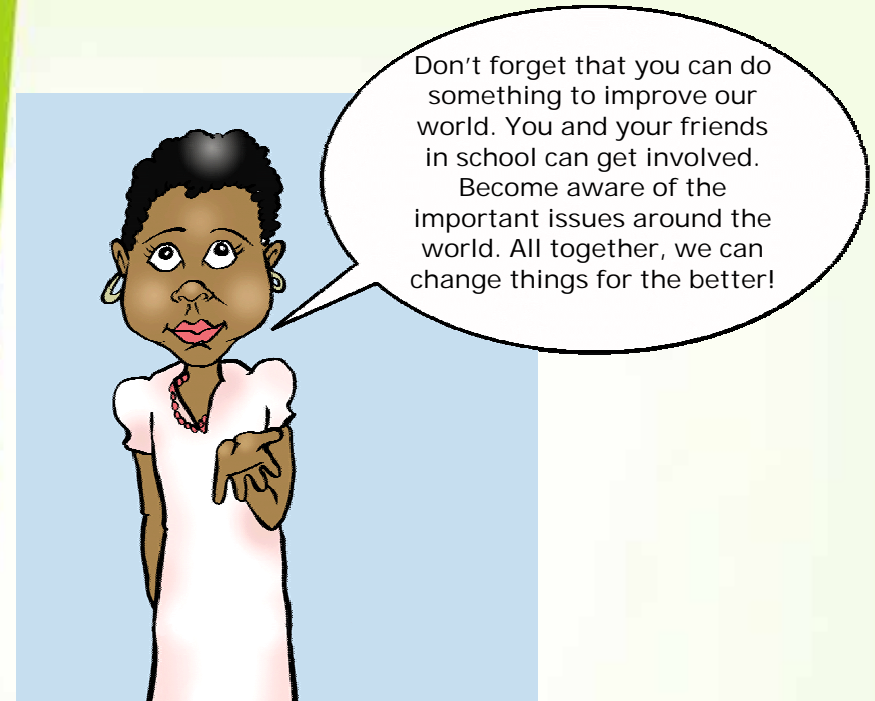
Political system that is opposed to capitalism and in which the means of production are owned and controlled by the state. Aims to create a just society without social classes, where everyone has the same amount of wealth.

Voodoo :

Voodoo is a name attributed to a traditionally unwritten West African spiritual system of faith and ritual practices. Like most faith systems, the core functions of Voodoo are to explain the forces of the universe, influence those forces, and influence human behavior.

Purchasing Power¹ :

Purchasing power is the capacity to buy goods and services with a given income.



To learn more about Cameroun, consult the following sources:

- ✓ www.in-terre-actif.com/english
- ✓ www.ethiquette.ca
- ✓ www.equiterre.org/
- ✓ www.amnesty.org/
- ✓ www.acdi-cida.gc.ca

Human Development Index ² :

The Human Development Report issued by the UN, which classifies 177 countries according to life-expectancy, education, literacy, and income.

Ecological Footprint³ :

It measures how much land and water area is necessary to provide one person's sustenance.

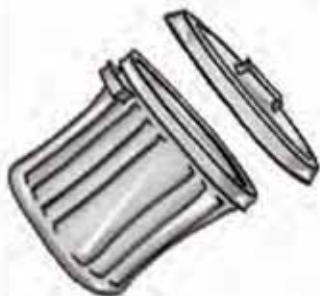
Glossary



6. Urbanisation makes it difficult to manage waste in developing nations.
True or False?

True. Every day, 160,000 persons leave the rural areas for the urban centres.

5. The United States with 9.7 hectares per individual. In comparison, the average Brazilian footprint is of 2.2 hectares by individual. (2002).
5. Which country has the highest ecological footprint?



7. Poor people suffer the most from the damages caused by the environment.
Vrai ou faux?

True. Yet, 20 % of the poorest are responsible of only 3 % of the carbon dioxide emissions.



Visit the **Educational Toolkit on recycling** at
www.in-terre-actif.com

4. In many world regions, some children search the dumps for waste that they can recuperate.
True or false?

False. The southern countries consume less, hence their garbage contains less packaging waste.

3. Poor countries have a lower percentage of organic waste in their garbage production than rich countries.
True or false?

8. In general, rural areas produce more garbage than urban areas.
True or false?

False. The consumption level is generally lower in rural areas.



1. 20% of the global population consumes 86% of the planet's natural resources.
True or false?

On average, 420 kg which is the equivalent of the weight of 5 or 6 adults.

2. What is the total amount of garbage produced by one Quebecer in a year?



Instructions

1. Cut out the game along the dotted line.
2. Place the game face down. Join two opposite corners and fold to obtain a diagonal line. Unfold and repeat with the remaining corners. These two diagonals will mark the middle of the square.
3. Fold the four corners by bringing them to middle of your paper.
4. Turn your paper face up and fold the four corners of this new square towards the centre once again.
5. Fold this small square in two so that it becomes a rectangle.
6. To play, put your thumbs and indexes under the folded strips.

To Play

1. Ask someone to choose a number between 1 and 10.
2. Open and close your game the number of times corresponding to the number chosen.
3. Ask the player to choose one question.
4. Ask the question.
5. Unfold for to check the answer.