

SENEGAL



Hello! My name is Eli and I'm Senegalese. To better understand my country, I recently began asking questions of the adults that I know. It's my pleasure to present to you what I've learned. Pick a topic and start exploring Senegal!



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
développement international



COUNTRY DESCRIPTION

As you can see from the map, Senegal is the most western country in Africa. Senegal is surrounded by Guinea-Bissau to the south, Mali to the east, and Mauritania to the north. Senegal itself surrounds another country called The Gambia. Finally, west of Senegal lies the Atlantic ocean.

My country has a surface area of 196,722 km². In comparison, my mother says that Canada is about 50 times bigger.

The biggest city in my country is the capital, Dakar, where about 2 million people live. It is located in the extreme west of the country, on the coast of the Atlantic ocean. Other important cities are St-Louis, Diourbel, Ziguinchor and Tambacounda.

My country produces peanuts, and exports groundnuts, fish, phosphates, fertilizer, cotton, phosphoric acid, salt, and cement.

Have you already heard about my country's climate? It is characterised by a dry season from November to June, and by a wet season from July to October. The temperature stays between 17°C et 40°C, far hotter than in your country !

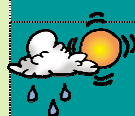


Did you know that?

70% of the Senegalese population works in agriculture. Our crops are very sensitive to changes in climate, and to infestations by crickets. These insects can destroy whole fields of crops. The most recent cricket infestation was in 2003 and 2004.



Surface Area 196 722 km² (Canada : 9 984 670 km²)



Climate Tropical. Rainy season is from July to October.



Temperature Varies between 17°C at the coldest and 40°C



Relief Undulating plains and a mountain range in the south-east.



Natural Resources Millet, peanuts, fish, beef, sheep, etc.



COUNTRY DESCRIPTION

Population

Almost 12 million people live in my country. Young people like me make up a large part of the Senegalese population. In fact, about 2 people out of 5 are less than 14 years of age! Meanwhile, people over 60 years of age make up only 3% of the population. Life expectancy is lower in Senegal than in your country. A person who is born in my country can hope to live to about 60 years of age. In Canada, people can live until almost 80 years of age.

In Senegal, the majority of people get married and couples have an average of 4 children. Sadly, we lack enough teachers for all these children. The majority of children finish school at the elementary level. Only 1 child in 5 continue their studies to the secondary school level. Finally, of these youth only 10% finish their secondary school studies.

Have you ever met a Senegalese person? Many of my people have left Senegal to live in foreign countries. They mostly leave for other African countries, or for Western Europe.

Did you know that?

My country's official language is French. However, if you visit my country one day, you will inevitably hear languages that were unknown to you. You may hear Wolof, Poular, Diolar, or Malinké.

Here are a few words in Wolof that may be useful if you visit Senegal.

How's it going ? : Na nga def?
I'm well : Maa ngi fi (rekk).
Thank you : Jërëjër
Yes : Waaw
No : Déedéet

Salutations are extremely important in my country. In Senegal we say *hello* all the time, to everyone, even to someone we've never seen before and who we'll never see again.



Facts at a Glance



Number of Inhabitants

11,7 millions (2005)



Density (number of people per Km²)

59 inhabitants /km² (2005)



Life Expectancy

56 (2004)



Purchasing Power¹

US \$ 1 720 (2004)



People Without a job

54 % of the population (2003)



People who can read and write

39% of Senegali (2000-2004)



Mortality rate under 5 years of age

137 deaths per 1000 children (2004)



Human Development Index (HDI)²

157th out of 177 countries (2003)



Ecological Footprint³

1,2 (2001)

Population

History

Let me give you a brief summary of my country's history. As you may already know, the first traces of humanity in Senegal, and elsewhere in Africa, date back thousands of years. Various rock and ceramic objects have been found in archaeological digs. They attest to how ancient the early settlements are.

My country has been visited by Europeans since the 15th century,. In 1444, a Portuguese man 'discovered' the mouth of the Senegal River. At the mouth of the river, near Dakar, there is an island called Goree Island. For a long time Goree Island was a transshipment point in the *Transatlantic Slave Trade*. In the Transatlantic Slave Trade local kings sold enslaved Africans to be shipped to the New World (the Americas). This type of slavery was abolished through the collaborative efforts of many people from different races.

In 1600, the Dutch and French chased the Portugese from the coast of Senegal and took control of my country. Sadly, they continued the Transatlantic Slave Trade until the 19th century. In 1898, Senegal became a French colony and remained as such until 1960.

From 1960 to 1980, the great poet Léopold Sédar Senghor governed Senegal in a democratic fashion. Then, in 1980, the existence of more than one political party was made legal. In 2000, my fellow citizens brought Me Abdoulaye Wade to power. This election put an end to forty years of socialist rule. The fight against poverty, improved youth education, employment opportunities, and access to healthcare are among the government's priorities.

For almost two decades there has been an ongoing conflict in Casamance in the south of the country. The people in that region are trying to claim their independence.



Gorée Island



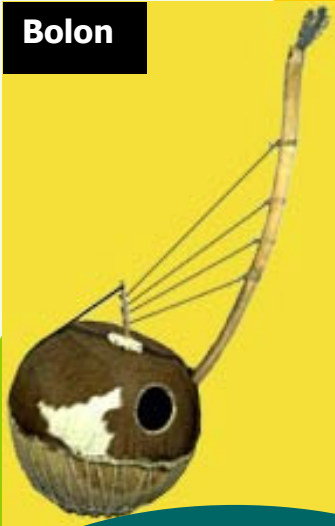
Did you know that?

Goree Island, located across from our capital, Dakar, was the largest transshipment point off the coast of Africa at the time of the discovery of the Americas. Dakar is listed on UNESCO's *World Heritage List*. My father told me that Goree Island serves as a reminder of a sad part of our history. It reminds people of the crime committed against Africans and against all of humanity. Today, it functions as a sanctuary of reconciliation that fosters dialog, debate, and forgiveness between people.

History

Culture

Bolon



Ékonting



Did you know that?

When you shop in Senegal, you must bargain? In my country, the main purpose of bargaining is not necessarily to lower the price. It is above all a social exchange. In bargaining, we take the time to discuss other things with the vendor.

If you want to listen to the Senegalese national anthem, check out the following link : www.au-senegal.com/art_en/hymne.htm



Have you ever heard of *rap* or *reggae*? They are musical genres that are very popular in Senegal. Music and dance runs in our blood. I think that you would really enjoy playing our traditional instruments, such as the tama, the ékonting (violin) or the bolon (bass guitar). Look at the pictures to gain a better idea of what these traditional instruments are like.

Have you ever heard that we Senegalese eat while sitting on the floor? We eat as a family from a large communal bowl placed on a cloth. We usually eat with our right hand; the left hand is reserved for other uses. Rice and millet (a cereal) make up the base of our food. Usually meat or fish is included in our meals.

In my country, the ritual of drinking tea is important. My father prepares the tea. He creates a froth by pouring the tea back and forth between two cups until it has the right taste. Then, he serves the tea in three servings. The first serving is very strong, the second serving is less strong, and the third is very smooth! It is delicious!

The main religion in my country is Islam. 9 out of 10 people practice this religion here in Senegal. Christians are the minority population. Often mixed into these two religions are the rituals and beliefs of **animism** which is still very present in Senegal.



Culture



Challenges

The citizens of my country face many challenges. I'll name a few here :

Since the 1970s, my country has had to deal with a lack of precipitation and this has created serious problems with regards to the supply of potable water. Further, trees are being cut down at a rapid rate in Senegal to increase agricultural land. This deforestation is accelerating the **desertification** of lands. My father explained to me that desertification occurs when water evaporates from the earth, leaving crystallized salt that creates **sterilized soil**. Living conditions are difficult for those of us who are confronted by health and nutrition problems.

On another topic, many countries have diminished their reserves of fish through **overfishing**. In order to satisfy their needs, these countries quickly turned to my country's precious fish resources. Sadly, they continue to use their irresponsible fishing methods here. Overfishing progressively decreases the amount of fish off our coast. Thus, our local peasant fishermen have to travel farther and farther from the Senegalese coast in order to catch fish to eat.

I should also tell you that there are many languages and dialects in my country. Nevertheless, French is the language used in our schools. Most students have never even heard French before they begin their studies at school. Thus, by the time students write their entrance exam for the seventh grade, 3 out of 4 students have dropped out of school for good. Illiteracy, or the inability to read and write, holds back my country's development and causes poverty for a great many families.

Another serious challenge in Senegal is the fact that women make up the majority of people who are poor and illiterate. In 2004, less than 30% of adult women in my country knew how to read and write. Inequality between women and men still exists in Senegal. Society assigns different roles to men and women, and often values women's roles less than men's.

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 international cooperation projects. Here is a project that is very important to many young Senegalese, and that is financed by the Canadian International Development Agency!

The Paul Gérin-Lajoie Foundation, a Canadian non-governmental organization created in 1977, cooperates with local partners in my country to offer quality basic-education services. It's impressive to see what can be achieved when we work together!

A man told me that staying in school is one of the surest ways to break the cycle of poverty and hunger for children and their families. What do you think ?

The literacy program offers reading, writing, and math lessons in addition to artistic and trade skills workshops for at-risk youth from the Saint-Louis region. In 2004-2005, 1043 youth were enrolled in primary and secondary school-level classes in French, and our national languages (Wolof and Pulaar).

You can learn more about this international cooperation project by visiting the following website:

www.fondationpql.ca/fr/outremer/pays_intervention_senegal.htm

Can you imagine how important it is for youth to have access to schooling or professional training? Did you know that in Senegal, at-risk youth are particularly affected by poverty and high illiteracy rates? The ability to read, write, and count guarantees a better future for hundreds of youth.

Lastly, did you know that you can also act to change the world for the better? By recognizing how lucky you are to have the chance to go to school, and by fighting against the prejudices that exist regarding illiteracy, you work towards building a better world for us all!



Solutions

Glossary

Animism :

Attitude, belief, religion wherein animals, objects, and natural phenomena have a spirit.

Colony :

Territory occupied by a foreign nation and placed under its political and economic control.

Democracy :

Political regime wherein power belongs to the people.

Desertification :

Progressive degradation of the soil and its vegetation. Bit by bit, the affected region begins to display the arid characteristics of a real desert.

Export :

Sell and send products outside of the country.

Independence :

Condition of a state that is free from another state's domination. Autonomy and authority over ideas.

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.

Sterile soils :

Soils that are not fertile, not suitable for agriculture.

Overfishing :

Fishing on a large scale that results in the depletion of fish reserves because the capacity of the resource, and the time it takes to regenerate are not respected.

Poaching :

Hunting or fishing without a permit, or in an area or during a time of year when hunting or fishing is forbidden.

Glossary



To learn more about Senegal, check out the following web sites:

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

Purchasing Power¹:

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

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.

A shared story

Oral tradition still holds an important place in the culture of many peoples around the world. The elders tell their treasured stories, myths and legends to the young who will carry these stories and tell them to the generations to come.

Complete the following story on your own or with your classmates. Use your imagination! Find a title for your story. You may even want to act it out as a short skit or a puppet show!

Sitting on the front porch, Sonia was gazing at the starless summer sky. It was very dark. She hoped it would not rain on the next day. It was July, Sonia and her friends wanted to spend the day at the La Mauricie National Park. Spend the day on the lake shore and tan, bathe and have fun. What a pleasure!!

Meanwhile, in a far away country, Joseph was chatting with best friend Konaté and his sister Binta. Their father, Fofana sat in his folding chair, smoking his pipe. The sky was clear, the weather dry and arid. People were wondering when it was going to rain ... The **rainy season** was very late this year. Without rain, no cultures and no harvest. It was really worrying, thought Fofana.

The children were also discussing the disturbing issue. As they walked home from school late in the afternoon, they were thinking "Tomorrow, the holidays! And Fishing parties!" But as they walked by the river they noticed the water level was very low. It was as if the **dry season** didn't want to go. Even frogs seemed to have evaporated under the heat.

Activity

- It's time to go to sleep, shouted Fofana to the children.

Mumbling, the children obeyed. We can never be let alone, thought Konaté.

- Good night, **Bâ**, greeted Joseph.
- Good night, my boy. God bless you. Greet your parents for me, answered Fofana.

Amina, Fofana's wife, came out of the house to join him.

- We have got to do something. The well looks like it is going to dry out soon and we will have to get our water at the spring. You know how far that is, she says.
- I know, answered Fofana. The well digger will come in tomorrow. We will see if he can be of any help. The situation is getting worse year after year.
- I heard them speak on climate change on the radio, said Amina.
- Yes, apparently a big conference was held, answered her husband.
- Peuf, that may be of some use to them but it's never of any use to us, answered Amina, annoyed. Don't forget to call the well digger tomorrow, at least we will know if there is any water left or not.

The next day, Sonia had woken up in a good mood. The weather was beautiful ... she and her friends would go to the Park. In the village of Fofana, it had rained overnight. The ground was still a little dry but the grown ups had decided to go to fields. They hoped for a fine rain to fall again the following days to wet what they had planted. Samba had taken his radio cassette recorder. He heard there were floods in Canada and that the heavy rains had made an area collapse somewhere in South America ... " The Canadians should send us their water and we shall send them our drought " says somebody laughing ...

IT'S NOW UP TO YOU TO COMPLETE THE STORY!!!

Rainy season : Also called « wet season ». Season in which the average rainfall is significantly greater than during the rest of the year. In the tropics of the northern hemisphere, the rainy season begins in May and ends in September.

Dry season : Season in which precipitation is very rare. Days are very hot.

Bâ : Father. It is pronounced Baaa .