

Spotlight on Desertification

For the past two weeks, some 2,000 delegates from almost 200 countries have been wrestling with one of the most complex and pressing environmental problems of the age: desertification. The eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), which concludes today in Madrid, has discussed enhancing efforts against land degradation, amidst general agreement that the pace of implementing the UNCCD is too slow. More than 250 million people are directly affected by desertification, while a billion are at risk of being so.

Here, we focus on reasons why desertification is proving such an intractable problem. These articles are some of the highlights from a project on land degradation that has been carried out over the past year by IPS in conjunction with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Cause: deforestation

ENVIRONMENT-NIGERIA: Rich in Oil, Dependent on Firewood

Toye Olori

LAGOS - It is a paradox of note: the fact that while Nigerians live in the world's sixth-largest oil producer, most of them still rely on wood for their fuel.

<http://mdg.c.topica.com/maahRazabBfAnbJq0EHb/>

Cause: overgrazing

Q&A: "The Sahel Should Already Have Been Green"

Interview with Franziska Kaguembèga Müller

COTONOU - For 'newTree-nouvelarbre', a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that works largely in Burkina Faso, good fences don't only make good neighbours -- they also make a line of attack against land degradation.

<http://mdg.c.topica.com/maahRazabBfAobJq0EHb/>

Cause: climate change

DEVELOPMENT-COTE D'IVOIRE: Dwindling Rains, Falling Harvests

Fulgence Zamblé

FERKE, Northern Côte d'Ivoire - Every day as he leaves his house for the fields, Ousmane Soro is plagued by questions: "What will become of my harvests for sweet potatoes, sugar cane and mangoes this year? Will I be able to meet my family's needs?"

<http://mdg.c.topica.com/maahRazabBfApbJq0EHb/>

Cause: population pressures

BURUNDI: Population Growth and Poor Farming Methods Weigh on the Land

Jérôme Bigirimana

BUJUMBURA - In Busoni, northern Burundi, the Mbarushimana clan is

receiving a hard lesson in the limits of natural resources. Three sons, and other relatives, are trying to survive on land inherited from their father, amidst doubts that the small property is up to the task of supporting them.

<http://mdg.c.topica.com/maahRazabBfAqbJq0EHb/>

Cause: poverty

Q&A: "People Often Cannot Avoid Putting at Risk the Natural Resource Base Upon Which They Depend"

Interview with Farhana Haque-Rahman

COTONOU - With the World Day to Combat Desertification set to take place shortly (Jun. 17), efforts are gearing up to highlight the threats posed by land degradation in much of Africa -- as well as initiatives to safeguard against desertification.

<http://mdg.c.topica.com/maahRazabBfArbJq0EHb/>

Cause: bad politics

ENVIRONMENT-SOUTH AFRICA: Political Sins Continue to Scar the Land

Moyiga Nduru

JOHANNESBURG - While South Africa's "homelands" -- areas formerly set aside for blacks -- have been relegated to the dustbin of history for more than a decade, their legacy lives on in the form of land degradation, and even desertification in northern and eastern parts of the country.

<http://mdg.c.topica.com/maahRazabBfAsbJq0EHb/>

Consequences: migration and conflict

WEST AFRICA: Stock Farmers Migrate From Difficulties, To Difficulties

Aly Ouattara and Michée Boko

KORHOGO, Northern Côte d'Ivoire - No more grass for livestock to graze on. No more water, either. More than 50 stock animals dead. For farmer Samba Diallo, staying in Burkina Faso was no longer an option.

<http://mdg.c.topica.com/maahRazabBfAtbJq0EHb/>

What works against desertification? What doesn't?

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ENERGY-CHAD: A Solution to Deforestation That Some Also View as a Problem

Michaël Didama

N'DJAMENA - It's affordable, and central to stopping deforestation in Chad. But, butane gas has a long way to go before it becomes a household staple in this Sahelian country: many Chadians have a fixed belief that gas is simply too dangerous to use.

<http://mdg.c.topica.com/maahRazabBfAubJq0EHb/>

ENVIRONMENT-BURKINA-FASO: A Pilot Project That Defies Desertification

Michée Boko

COTONOU - The village of Guié in central Burkina Faso may not have much name recognition in the grand scheme of things. But for more than a decade, this community has been the site of an initiative that provides hope in the fight against desertification.
<http://mdg.c.topica.com/maahRazabBfAvbJq0EHb/>

ENVIRONMENT-BURUNDI: Urban Waste Becomes Urban Fuel
Jérôme Bigirimana

BUJUMBURA - Several months ago, residents of the Burundian capital, Bujumbura, were struggling with disposal of household waste. The Municipal Technical Services (Services techniques municipaux, SETEMU) weren't able to deal with all the refuse -- and health conditions in the city were deteriorating.
<http://mdg.c.topica.com/maahRazabBfAwbJq0EHb/>

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