

Prayers and Reflections

OPENING PRAYER

Dear Lord,

As our minds and hearts approach a region scarred by colonialism, environmental degradation, conflict, and poverty, we ask for greater awareness and understanding.

Let us remember the gifts and beauties of Western Africa, that we might stand in solidarity and help those who live there to restore the dignity and health of land and people that is meant to be.

Amen.

REFLECTION

“Africa bears the scars of its long history of humiliations. This continent has too frequently been considered only for selfish interests. Today Africa is asking to be loved and respected for what it is. It does not ask for compassion, it asks for solidarity.”

John Paul II, *Angelus*, September 24, 1995

CLOSING PRAYER

A Prayer for Africa

O Lord, Creator of the entire world,
O Loving God,
This prayer is for Africa.
Bless the plains, rivers, trees
And all the African lands.
Bless the birds, fish and animals
That bring beauty and abundance to Africa.
Bless O Lord,
Your children in Africa.
Dry their tears,
Bring hope into their hearts,
Health and safety to their lives,
Food and water for their nourishment.
Bring peace to their countries
And still the guns of war.
Bless us, O Lord,
And heal your continent of Africa.
Renew the land, renew the spirit
Of all those who are wounded in any way.
May justice roll down like water
On the parched ground of your beloved
Africa. Amen.

Activities

1. Begin with Opening Prayer and Reflection on page 1 of this unit.
2. Break your group or class into small groups.
 - a. In small groups, have participants take turns reading the country profiles on page 3 and discussing the following questions:
 - What strikes you about these countries? What did you learn?
 - What are some similarities among these countries?
 - What important changes have taken place in their histories?
 - How have natural resources played a role in the conflict in some of the countries?
 - Why does Pope John Paul II call for solidarity with Africa, not compassion, in the opening reflection?
3. Have the group members individually take the quiz on page 4 and then discuss the answers.
4. On page 5, have group members read the information and answer the questions together.
5. Read the Mali Traveler's Log on page 6.

Ask participants what they found most interesting in this log. What was expected, what unexpected?
6. Case Study and Role Play:
 - a. Have participants read out loud the Education and Environmental Degradation study on page 7.
 - b. Cut out and hand out the role cards on page 8. (Photocopy this page several times if you will have several small groups do this exercise.)
 - c. In small groups, have each participant read over their role, then have a debate.

AND/OR: allow six role players to present their perspectives on and have your entire group debate and vote a solution.
5. Ask for some last thoughts on the importance of natural resources to West Africa.
6. End with the closing prayer on page 1.

Quiz Answers

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1. Diamonds | 11. Peanuts |
| 2. The Gambia | 12. Socialist |
| 3. Western Sahara | 13. Morocco |
| 4. Mali | 14. Sahara Desert |
| 5. Slavery | 15. Islam |
| 6. the Spanish | 16. Mali |
| 7. Guinea-Bissau | 17. Mining |
| 8. Guinea | 18. Guinea-Bissau |
| 9. Senegal | 19. Mauritania and Senegal |
| 10. Descendents of former slaves and indigenous persons | |

West Africa (II)

GUINEA

Population: 8,500,000 *Language:* French
Guinea's independence in 1958 came with a proclamation from its leader Ahmed Toure that "We'd rather be poor and free than rich and enslaved," leading to the severing of ties with the French community. Since Toure's death in 1984, the country has shifted from socialist to free market economic policies, which have not proven effective in lessening the burden of poverty. This mineral-rich (25% of income is from mining) and mostly Muslim country was once a part of a Malian empire which flourished between the seventh and fifteenth centuries.

GUINEA-BISSAU

Population: 1,500,000 *Language:* Portuguese
Guinea-Bissau won independence from Portugal in 1974 after a long struggle led by the country's widely supported left-wing political party. But continuous coups, the last of which was in 2003, and political instability have marked the post-independence history. As a result, the country is poor even by West African standards. There are several ethnic groups, the largest being the Balanta people.

MALI

Population: 13,000,000 *Language:* French
Historically, Mali was a thriving empire; in the 14th century, for example, the Malian city of Tombouctou (also known as Timbuktu) was home to a university that rivaled Oxford. Now, however, it is one of the poorest countries in the world. Since independence from France in 1960, Mali has suffered droughts, rebellions, a coup and a 23-year-long military dictatorship. An era of civilian-run democracy began in 1992, and conditions in the country have since been steadily improving. Mali is predominantly Muslim.

MAURITANIA

Population: 2,900,000 *Language:* Arabic and Wolof
In the Middle Ages, Mauritania was the cradle of the Almoravid movement, which spread Islam throughout the region, even to Spain. The country is ethnically split, with the government being dominated by the Moors of the Northern region, who are mixed Arab and black. The Southern blacks were enslaved by the Moors until 1980. Mauritania won its independence from France in 1960 and has since suffered from political repression and a highly centralized government.

SENEGAL

Population: 10,100,000 *Language:* French and Wolof
Achieving its independence from France 1960, Senegal has always been politically progressive, practicing free media and multiparty politics, unlike most countries in the region. There have been severe issues with encroachment, or expansion, of the Sahara Desert caused by drought and exploitation of the land, and clashes with rebel separatist groups in the southern region. The most recent elections in 2000 ended 40 years of socialist rule.

SIERRA LEONE

Population: 5,000,000 *Language:* English and Krio
Since independence from the British in 1961, diamond-rich Sierra Leone has been plagued by acute political instability. The country emerged in 2002 from ten years of devastating civil war, funded largely by the sale of so-called "conflict diamonds." The country's population is divided between descendants of former slaves and local indigenous groups.

THE GAMBIA

Population: 1,400,000 *Language:* English
One of the smallest countries in Africa, The Gambia is surrounded on three sides by Senegal. The Gambia gained independence from the British in 1965, surviving pressures to merge with Senegal. A merger actually occurred in 1982, but was given up in 1989 amidst Gambian fears of being swallowed up. Even though the country surrounds the River Gambia, little of the land is arable and the country depends on exporting peanuts for its survival.

WESTERN SAHARA

Population: 7,900,000 *Language:* Kinyarwanda
Western Sahara was colonized by the Spanish. After some years of both national and international resistance, the Spanish withdrew in the 1970s, only to be replaced by Moroccans interested in annexing the land. The subsequent war for independence waged by the Sahrawi people against Morocco has ended, but the issue has still not been solved, stalled by stubborn Moroccan settlers, huge populations of refugees, and endless UN bureaucracy. Western Sahara, therefore, is still not technically a country. The Sahrawi people are Moors, descendants of both Africans and Arabs.

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West Africa (II) Quiz

1. Sierra Leone's 10-year civil war was largely funded by the country's resource of _____.
2. _____ is surrounded by Senegal on three sides.
3. _____ is not yet officially an independent nation.
4. In the fourteenth century, _____ was home to a university that rivaled Oxford.
5. In Mauritania, _____ was legal as recently as 1980.
6. Western Sahara was colonized by the _____.
7. _____ won independence from Portugal in 1974.
8. The first president of _____ guided his country away from a strong connection with its former French colonizers.
9. The country that has most embraced free media and multiparty politics is _____.
10. What two populations make up part of Sierra Leone? _____
11. The primary export in The Gambia is _____.
12. In Guinea, the shift from _____ economic policy to a free market economic policy has not lessened the burden of poverty.
13. In the Western Sahara, the issue of settlers from _____ has stalled the ability of the country to achieve independence.
14. In Senegal, there have been serious environmental problems with the encroachment of the _____.
15. During the Middle Ages, Mauritania was the cradle

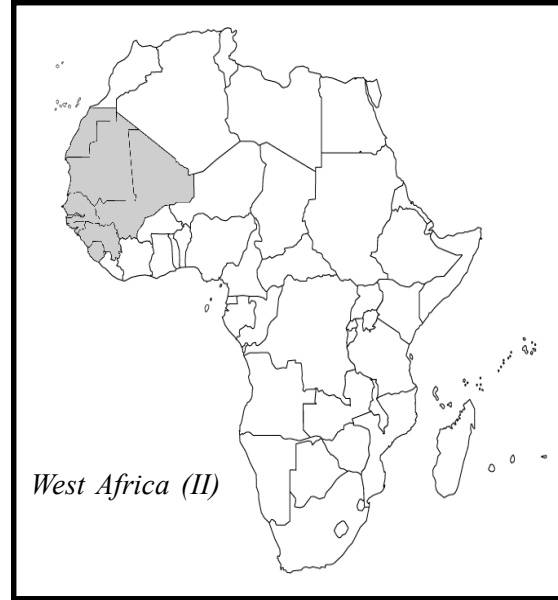


of a movement to spread _____ throughout the region, reaching even to parts of Spain.

16. Timbuktu is a city in _____.
17. One-fourth of Guinea's export earnings come from _____.
18. In _____, continuous political instability has left the country poor even by West African standards.
19. Wolof, the language of the Wolof people, is a majorly spoken in both _____ and _____.

West Africa (II)

“History has marked the relations between Africa and [the West], between our peoples, countries and institutions, sometimes with serious damage to human dignity. Today unemployment, exclusion, the crushing burden of debt, corruption, exploitation of people, the pillaging of natural resources, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the lack of access to health care as well as illiteracy are all challenges that must be tackled. They cause us pain, too, and we express our solidarity with all those who are victims of these problems. These evils demand vigilant attention by us and by governments and international institutions.”
 Message of 1st Symposium of Bishops of Africa and Europe, Nov. 16, 2004



	Life Expectancy (years)	Population Living on Less Than \$2/day	Adult (15 & older) Literacy	Health Expenditure Per Person (US\$) Per Year*	Population with Access to Improved Water Source**	Population Malnourished	Telephone Mainlines (per 1000 people)
Guinea	48.5	unknown	41%	\$56	48%	32%	3
Guinea-Bissau	45.0	unknown	40%	\$12	56%	unknown	10
Mali	48.4	91%	26%	\$32	65%	20%	5
Mauritania	51.9	69%	41%	\$52	37%	12%	10
Senegal	52.3	68%	38%	\$56	78%	25%	25
Sierra Leone	34.5	75%	36%	\$24	57%	47%	5
The Gambia	53.7	83%	38%	\$51	62%	21%	26
U.S.	76.9	--	99%	\$4,449	100%	--	667

Source: UN Human Development Index, 2003

*Includes both private and public health expenditures.

**Improved water source merely means that there has been some form of structure constructed to assist with accessing water, such as a well dug into the ground. This does not mean the water is immediately safe for consumption.

ACTIVITY

Answer the following questions:

Why do you think the life expectancy in Sierra Leone is so low? If needed, refer to country briefs on page 3.

What effects has low life expectancy had on malnourishment in Sierra Leone? Why would this be the case? What other factors in the chart might be related?

What effect do you think the number of telephone lines in these countries has on these countries' ability to conduct business and commerce?

How are the bishops of Africa and Europe (see quote at top of this page) reflecting CST when they speak of Africa's challenges?



Mali

Traveler's Log 1/12

I landed at the airport in Bamako, the capital of Mali, and quickly began my trip here with a guided taxi drive around the city. There are statues and monuments to Malian heroes all over Bamako, as well as several museums that were constructed by the last president. Bamako also has a few enormous markets with everything from dead fish to live chickens to used clothes to car parts.

My first night, I stayed in Kati, a town of about 60,000 just outside of Bamako. The next morning was Sunday, so I went to mass in a big outdoor Catholic Church where there were paintings of black Mary and Jesus. The priests, one French, one Columbian, and one Malian, all spoke in French (the official language) and Bambara, the most commonly spoken national language. All of the women and most of the men wore very colorful outfits with giant shawl-like shirts over wrap skirts and headwraps of the same fabric.

On Monday I left the Bamako area to Segou, which took four hours by bus. Segou is the capital of an ancient kingdom, also called Segou. Bambara is the main ethnicity



and language here. I coincidentally came on market day, which meant the city was packed with vendors and people shopping. Segou is

located on the River Niger, which is a lifeline for all of Mali. There are beautiful sandy beaches and elaborate homes where the colonialists once lived.

From Segou it was a three-hour bus ride to San, a town where I stopped for lunch. On the side of the road, I was frightened by two people who looked like they were fighting, but then they burst out laughing. One of the locals saw my confusion, and explained to me that in the 1300s, an emperor was afraid of ethnic tensions in his empire, so he established this tradition of "joking cousins," where people from one ethnicity, when they meet someone from another ethnicity, must jokingly tease each other to diffuse tension! Apparently there has been no ethnic violence in the last seven centuries, so it must be working.

From San, it was another three hours to Mopti, where I stayed for a day. Mopti is also on the River Niger, and is a popular stopping place for many tourists. They come here to take a river cruise for a few days (Mali style, with very basic accommodations) to Timbuktu. There are also taxi boats on the Niger, called Pierogues, that take people to markets (see photo).

From Mopti, I rode for about an hour and a half to Djenne. We had to cross the Niger on a ferry (which took a little while) because the bridge recently collapsed and is being repaired.

Djenne is a beautiful old city. In the center is a giant mosque that I, a non-Muslim, was not allowed to enter. It looks like a giant sand castle with elaborate doors (see photo). The legend goes that after failing to prevent a sand mosque from collapsing, they made a human sacrifice and then built the mosque. When I left, I was told that if I look to my right (toward Mecca) and not behind me, my wishes will come true.

From Djenne, I travelled eastward to Dogon Country, home of the Dogon peoples. I climbed a huge sandstone cliff, and was able to see tombs and beautiful houses carved into the sides of the cliff. On the way down, I met a *vieux sage*, a wise man who makes piles of sand with sticks and stones, and at night throw peanuts on them. In the morning, after the foxes have eaten the peanuts, they can read the answers to many questions through the sand art.

In Dogon Country, I also had the chance to visit a school. During the Middle Ages, Mali was home to a thriving empire with one of the best universities in the world. Today, Mali is one of the least educated places in the world, though the situation is gradually starting to improve again.



Many schools have even introduced a new pedagogy that includes the official use of ethnic languages in education, a unique reality for Africa. I ate a traditional meal at the school, sitting in a circle with the school kids and using my hands to eat the

potatoes and peanut and beef sauce, though everyone thought it was funny because adults usually do not eat with the children.



After departing the Dogon Country, I went up North to the Sahel, the border of the Sahara. I spoke with locals regarding their problems with deforestation and desertification; the desert is quickly expanding, leaving people without land or livelihood. Then, I headed back to Bamako and flew out.

Case Study: Education and Environmental Degradation in Mali

The following explores the challenges of desertification and deforestation in northern Mali:

“My name is Mohamed Aboubaerine. I am a Tuareg tribesman, and I gain my livelihood and support my family by herding cattle along the southern fringes of the Sahara desert in northern Mali, in an area called the Sahel. “Sahel” is an Arabic word meaning shore, because we live on the “shore” of the Sahara desert. My people have a long tradition here. For centuries, we traveled in caravans along trade routes across the Sahara, bringing luxury goods from Tombouctou and Djenne to cities near the Mediterranean Sea. I am Muslim, like most people in my tribe. In Tuareg culture, we men wear veils of cloth across our faces but not the women. These veils are traditionally believed to ward off evil, but also protect our faces from the harsh wind and sands of the Sahara.

Long ago, most of these caravans were made obsolete by the advent of trade by sea. Most Tuareg are still somewhat nomadic, herding cattle and goats, though many have settled and become farmers or businessmen. Those of us who are still pastoralists, however, are having our livelihood and way of life challenged by local environmental problems.

Every year, a continuing drought and exploitation of the land causes the reaches of the Sahara to expand. Farmers have given up on cycling their land, due to very little fertile land. Previously, the most common practice was to have several plots of land, and every year farmers would only plant crops on some of it, allowing other plots to regenerate with nutrients. But now, there are too many people and too little land, and so farmers are planting everywhere they can. After this is done for a number of years, the soil goes bad and crops do not grow.

But people tell me that this isn’t the only problem. I am accused of being a part of the problem as well, because I graze my cows on fertile land. When you add this to the excessive cultivation of crops, it just makes things worse.

The final factor that has added to our problems is deforestation. As the local population grows, there becomes more and more need for firewood, which we use to cook our food. Because of this, trees in the area are disappear-



ing rapidly, and every year it has become more difficult to find wood, causing us to spend much of our time walking in search of it.

All of these issues related to imbalances in the local environment are making our lives more difficult, and have even caused some conflicts. The competition for land and wood can become so intense that violence has broken out between Tuareg tribesmen and some of the black agriculturalists who feel that their land is being threatened by our animals. These issues are not just about my livelihood and ability to support my family; they are about being able to continue my way of life.”

SIGN OF HOPE

Stop Sahel is a well-established Malian organization started in 1984. One aspect of its work is developing environmental teams of local people who become involved in starting tree nurseries, composting, honey extraction, soil conservation, and mud-stove building to reduce the need for firewood. Stop Sahel works in three distinct zones, one of these being the Circle of Kita in Western Mali.

Kita is very isolated with poor communications by road. During the rainy season it is almost impossible to leave the villages to travel to Kita town. The work of Stop Sahel in this area has been key to educating the population about how to stop desertification and deforestation, securing a better future for generations to come.



JOURNEY THROUGH AFRICA

ACTIVITY: *Stopping Environmental Degradation*

<p>You are: A pastoralist (cow herder) in the Sahel, on the border of the Sahara Desert</p> <p>Your role: For centuries your family has been pastoralist, meaning that you breed and sell cattle for your livelihood. The land, however, is becoming more and more arid, forcing you to travel further and further in search of a good place to graze your cattle. Recently, a cousin of yours was killed when he was confronted by a farmer whose land his cattle were grazing on. There have been tensions with the farmers, and it is difficult because everyone needs the land.</p>	<p>You are: A farmer in the Sahel, on the border of the Sahara Desert</p> <p>Your role: Good land has become more and more scarce in your area. Your father had three sons, so you share the land you inherited with two brothers. Every year, your land produces a little less, as the soil gradually becomes less nutrient rich. Now it is becoming difficult to feed your family, and the excess crops do not fetch a high enough price in the market to pay for your children's school fees. On top of all this, the pastoralists with their cows have been wandering further and further in search of good grazing land to feed their cattle, and you have found them several times grazing on your land.</p>
<p>You are: A representative of the Malian government's ministry for the environment</p> <p>Your role: You have recently received a new research report that indicates that the Sahara Desert is expanding at a faster rate than ever. You blame the villagers who live along the borders, because if it weren't for their cutting down of trees and exploitation of the land, the Sahara would not be spreading so quickly. You agreed to meet with this group to hear their opinions, but wish to make it illegal to cut down any trees in order to slow desertification.</p>	<p>You are: A representative from the UN Convention to Combat Desertification</p> <p>Your role: You have come here to learn about the problems of desertification and deforestation in Mali, and to help diffuse tensions between the agriculturalists and pastoralists who are competing for the land. You are aware that the government is considering a ban on cutting down firewood, but realize that this is a difficult issue because people in the villages need the wood to cook their food. You are hoping to find some consensus and more creative ideas, such as seasonal planting of more trees, production of more conservative stoves, and agreements as to how to share the land.</p>
<p>You are: A woman responsible for gathering firewood</p> <p>Your role: It is the responsibility of women in Mali (like most of Africa) to gather firewood, and in the last few years it has begun to be more and more difficult to do this because the trees are being depleted. As the population has grown, the demand for wood has grown with it. You spend several hours of every day walking to the nearest grove, though it soon will be gone and you will be forced to walk even further. You are interested in leading community efforts to act on this problem so that your children can have a better future.</p>	<p>You are: A representative from Stop Sahel, the organization featured on page seven of this unit.</p> <p>Your role: You are here to explore the option of starting another chapter of Stop Sahel. You have heard of many of the tensions in this area, and think that the work of your organization could help. You are willing to introduce new composting technologies to local communities, which would help to fertilize the land and make it more able to grow better crops. You also want to collaborate with people here to find new stove-building techniques that will work for them and require less firewood. Finally, Stop Sahel can help build tree nurseries so that the effects of deforestation can be limited.</p>