

DESERTIFICATION



Today, more people are aware that desertification is a major environmental problem in all regions of the world. Although people are taking steps to improve the situation, the problem has intensified. You may well feel that you can do nothing to help fight desertification. Yet, you have taken the first step. By reading this article you have become one of an increasing number of people who realize that much of our soil is under threat.

Desertification is land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas. The United Nations has called desertification “a major threat to humanity”. Scientists say that desertification affects about 100 countries. That is, the problem is widespread. Drylands cover about 40 % of the lands of the globe and affect more than 1 billion people. Some of the most affected regions are sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia, and Northeastern Brazil. Each year, 12 million hectares are lost to deserts. We are afraid that one-third of the planet will be desert by 2100.

The causes of desertification are varied and complex. The main reason is the activities of the growing number of human population, especially in poor countries. Many poor countries in Africa suffer from the problem most. They have cut down trees to clear more land for cultivation or to provide firewood and timber. People in these countries also exploit the soil to grow crops. The overused soil is now infertile for growing crops, and it stores less water and produces less grain even when there is enough rainfall. There are now new irrigation systems. However, getting water for growing crops has become more difficult because the amount of rainfall has also decreased making dry areas drier. Modern technology can make the problem worse. In parts of Australia, irrigation systems are pumping salty water and slowly poisoning some farms. Overgrazing is another reason for desertification. The plant cover binds the soil. In many parts of the world, animals have eaten away grasses and plants and left the land barren and unprotected and thus the wind and water have carried away the topsoil, leaving behind dust and sand. We call the problem “erosion”. Global warming contributes to the problem, too. In the last century, average temperatures rose over 1 degree Fahrenheit worldwide.

The global economy is losing \$42 billion each year as a result of this process of degradation. People have abandoned nearly a third of the world’s farmland in the past 40 years because overuse has made the soil unproductive. Drought and famine affect many people and force them to move to cities. In China, the desert has approached within 70 kilometres of Beijing. The country has begun to replant forests. Some parts of Spain are at risk of becoming a desert. NASA says that Turkey will become a desert in 50 years if nothing is done. People can live in almost all parts of Europe whereas many parts of Africa have become uninhabitable. It doesn’t mean that desertification affects African people but not the people in Europe. Dust from Africa reaches Europe through winds and causes health problems and even deaths when it is inhaled. The American Southwest suffers from a lack of water. Scientists say reservoir levels drop as cities like Phoenix and Las Vegas expand and drought could turn into something more permanent. They also think that the lack of water or the overuse of water is going to

be a threat to the United States. In Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece, coastal resorts use too much water to moisten the wilderness. We are also losing the biological productivity and diversity of the Earth as more soil erodes. Many species have already become extinct, that is, disappeared and the process is continuing.

Despite efforts to fight desertification, the world hasn't made much progress. We must make communities more aware and protect and restore dry lands. The World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought (June 17) allows us to inform people about the problem and encourage the world to combat this catastrophe. Our earth's future depends on it.

GLOSSORY

region	: a large area of land
take steps	: begin to do something to solve a problem
a great deal of	: a lot of
arid	: very dry; with little or no rain
degradation	: losing quality or value
varied	: having different kinds of something
complex	: having many parts, difficult to understand
timber	: a large piece of wood
bind	: tie or fasten, keep together
drought	: lack or shortage of rainwater, a long period of dry weather
famine	: lack of food in a large area causing the deaths of people
approach	: come nearer
inhale	: take in air
drop	: go down
expand	: get bigger
species	: different kinds of living things
combat	: fight
catastrophe	: big disaster such as earthquake, flood, etc.

1. Choose the best alternative.

1. It is obvious from the first paragraph that ----.

- A) people are losing interest in the problem of desertification
- B) the problem of desertification is local
- C) there is nothing to worry about our soil
- D) the problem of desertification has grown bigger and bigger
- E) the writer doesn't believe that people can do something to solve the problem of desertification

2. The writer says in the article that ----.

- A) we can prevent desertification when we have enough rainfall
- B) animals have not contributed to the problem of desertification
- C) desertification is the result of one factor: drought
- D) African people know how to use the land
- E) the soil becomes infertile when you use it too much

3. Which of the following is not true according to the text?

- A) The temperatures in the world increased in the last century.
- B) Salty water is not good for farms.
- C) Irrigation systems have brought a new solution to the problem.
- D) Overgrazing has added to the problem of desertification.
- E) Erosion is the result of the activities of the wind and water.

4. According to the text, desertification ----.

- A) results in a growing number of people
- B) has prevented many living creatures from disappearing from the earth
- C) in one continent cannot affect people in another
- D) is mainly the result of lack of water
- E) has led to migrations

ANSWER KEY

1. D 2. E 3. C 4. E

2. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

1. Many of the ---- and starvation are in third-world countries because they don't have enough money and resources to keep their people well-fed and healthy.

- A) crop
B) famine
C) environment
D) globe
E) region

2. The roots of vegetation, such as grass, ---- soil particles together to resist erosion.

- A) combat
B) cause
C) bind
D) suffer
E) restore

3. Some health problems are so severe that they can cause ---- damage and even death.

- A) productive
B) inhabitable
C) barren
D) arid
E) permanent

4. If we ---- everything available, such as trees, water and minerals then we won't be able to leave anything to our children.

- A) exploit
B) store
C) grow
D) drop
E) contribute

5. Experts regularly study the status of wildlife across the world, and they say that a lot of ---- are at risk.

- A) rainfall
B) species
C) drought
D) productivity
E) degradation

6. Although I took a painkiller before I went to bed last night, my pain ----.

- A) affected
B) approached
C) encouraged
D) intensified
E) inhaled

7. A lot of people see factories as a great ---- to environment.

- A) diversity
B) level
C) threat
D) overuse
E) progress

8. They say that the ---- we have experienced this year will probably cause the prices of fruit and vegetables to increase sharply.

- A) cultivation
B) overgrazing
C) grain
D) reservoir
E) drought

9. Our business has ---- as we continue to invest in technology.

- A) expanded
B) protected
C) moistened
D) provided
E) overused

10. If we want our ---- to be fertile, we should let it rest regularly.

- A) irrigation
B) soil
C) effort
D) crop
E) dust

ANSWER KEY

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. D |
| 2. C | 7. C |
| 3. E | 8. E |
| 4. A | 9. A |
| 5. B | 10. B |

3. Choose the correct answer.

1. When you contribute to a problem, you ----.

- A) try to solve it
- B) make it worse

2. When you clear more land for cultivation, you ----.

- A) cut down trees and have more open space to plant crops
- B) clean the environment to protect the land and plants

3. When something makes the soil unproductive, it makes the soil ----.

- A) fertile
- B) infertile

4. If conditions are too difficult to live in a certain place, then this place is ----.

- A) uninhabitable
- B) inhabitable

5. When you note something, you ----.

- A) say something or mention it
- B) agree with something

6. When you encourage somebody to do something, *he / she* ----.

- A) has to do it
- B) can feel brave enough to do it

7. If a land is barren, then it means that ----.

- A) it has lost its biological productivity
- B) you can grow a lot of crops there

8. "Your English is progressing" means ----.

- A) your English isn't improving
- B) you are getting better at English

ANSWER KEY

- | | |
|------|------|
| 1. B | 6. B |
| 2. A | 7. A |
| 3. B | 8. B |
| 4. A | |
| 5. A | |

4. Complete the following sentences with the correct preposition.

1. A lot of people in Africa suffer _____ hunger.
2. Your salary depends _____ your performance at work.
3. Everybody in my family is aware _____ the dangers of smoking.
4. Many of the houses in the town are _____ risk of collapsing when an earthquake hits.
5. Could you please inform me _____ the business opportunities in your country?

ANSWER KEY

- | | | | | |
|---------|-------|-------|-------|----------|
| 1. from | 2. on | 3. of | 4. at | 5. about |
|---------|-------|-------|-------|----------|

5. What do the following conjunctions mean?

although	in contrast
on the contrary	though
whereas	on the other hand
nevertheless	yet

1. People in rich countries can get food easily. **On the other hand**, food is scarce in some poor African countries, so people die of hunger.
2. Mary is lazy **though** her sister, Ann, is industrious.
3. She failed the exam **although** she studied very hard for it.
4. **Tom:** She is ugly and boring.
Sam: **On the contrary**, I find her quite charming.
5. She doesn't earn much, but she loves her job, **nevertheless**.
6. He's not very good at math; **nevertheless**, he plays football very well.
7. My father can read and write. My mother, **in contrast**, is illiterate.
8. He is rather mean, **whereas** his wife is very generous.
9. My sister said the cake was delicious, **yet** she took only a few bites.