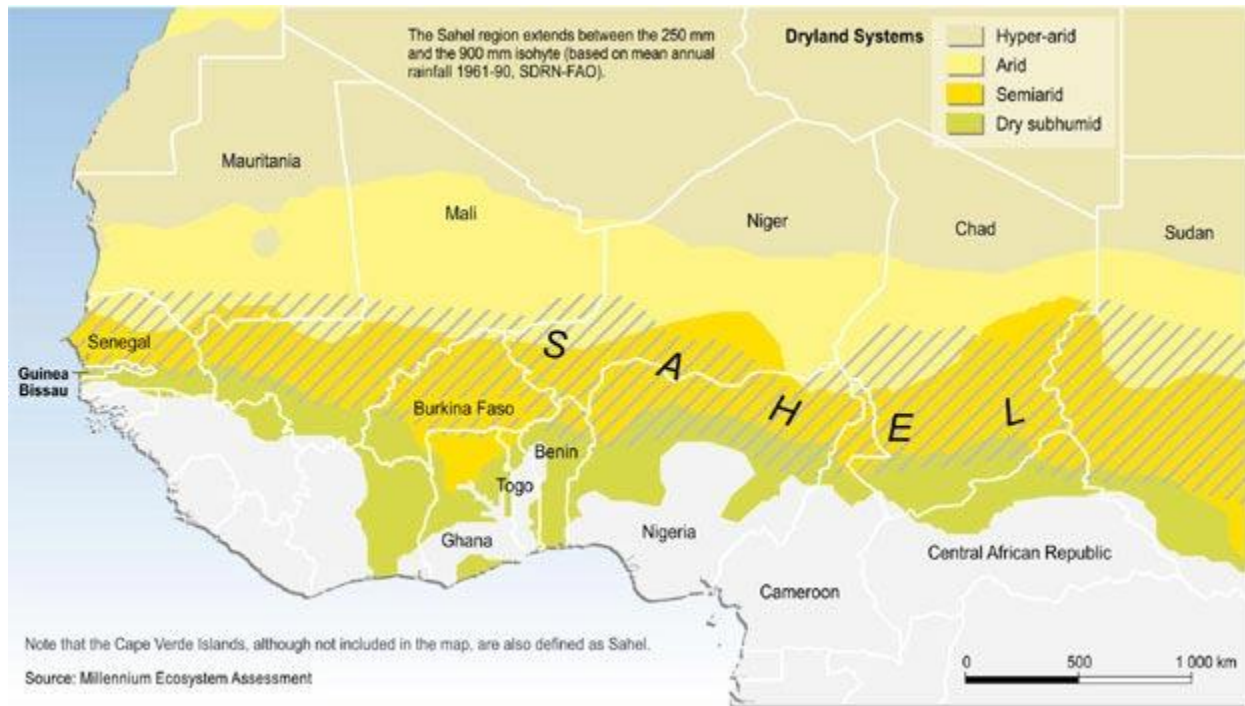


# The Sahel – Tropical Hot Desert Case Study [LEDC]



The Sahel is an area of land south of the Sahara, running from Mauritania in the west, through Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, Sudan and across to Ethiopian in the west. The Sahel is roughly 5,400km long and covers an area of about 3 million km<sup>2</sup>. The Sahel receives between 200mm and 600mm of rain annually. The vegetation is mainly savanna (grassland) with some areas of woodland and shrub land. The people of the Sahel are traditional semi-nomadic herders. In recent years the Sahel has been suffering from increasing soil degradation and desertification.

Grass cover is fairly continuous across the region, dominated by annual grass species such as Acacia are the dominant trees. During the long dry season, many trees lose their leaves, and the predominantly annual grasses die.

The Sahel was formerly home to large populations of grazing mammals, along with large predators like the African Wild Dog, Cheetah, and Lion. The larger species have been greatly reduced in number by over-hunting and competition with livestock, and several species are vulnerable, endangered or extinct. The seasonal wetlands of the Sahel are important for migratory birds moving within Africa and on the African-Eurasian flyways.

The main reasons for increasing soil degradation are:

- Population Growth (the population of the region is growing at about 3% a year and doubling every 20 years)
- Deforestation (much of it caused by people collecting firewood)

- Overgrazing (some of this is caused by loss of land to National Parks and tourist developments and commercial farms)
- Colonialism - the creation of borders forced people more into villages making them less nomadic and placing greater pressure on the land.
- Rising temperatures (greater evaporation) and reduced rainfall (droughts)
- Storms - the rainfall that does take place tends to be in shorter more intense storms that can lead to water erosion.

Desertification has caused many problems in the Sahel, causing Famines, Dust storms, Conflicts over diminishing resources.

A number of solutions have been suggested to solve the problem of soil degradation and desertification including:

- Population control in that area
- Finding alternatives to firewood e.g. solar cookers
- Improved farming techniques e.g. reduced grazing numbers

- VATSAL SAGPARIA