

# Harvest in the desert

This assembly is intended to accompany the Diocese of Carlisle Harvest Appeal 2016. It focuses on the work of Christian Aid in Mali which, along with CMS work in Argentina, is the focus of the appeal.

## MATERIAL REQUIRED:

- The *Harvest in the Desert* presentation available online at <http://bit.ly/1U7cS2V> .
- Card/paper to make voting cards marked 'grow' on one side and 'no' on the other.
- Cress seeds, plant pots and soil (optional – but if doing this at Harvest time, use cress as it can grow well all year round).
- Sticky notes and a map of Mali (optional).

## Assembly presentation

**Show slide 1.** Hand the pupils voting cards as they come in to the room or have voting cards on their seats ready. Introduce the assembly by explaining that it is Harvest; a time in the year when we celebrate the food that we eat and give thanks for the way it has grown. Not only is it a time to celebrate that we have food – it is also a moment to think about where the food we eat comes from and the journey it has made to reach our plates.

Play 'grow or no.' Using their voting cards, ask the pupils to use their decision-making abilities to assess if they think crops could grow in the conditions shown in **slides 2–7** of the *Harvest in the Desert* PowerPoint presentation. As you go through the slides, encourage the students to explain their reasoning, so that everyone builds an understanding of the best conditions for crops to grow. Put emphasis on the importance of them using their voice – through the voting card – to make known the answer they think is right.

**Slide 7** is an image from Mali, the country we are focussing on this Harvest. Do students think that crops would grow easily here? *In fact, it is possible to grow crops in all the environments shown, but each one has its own set of challenges and requires some clever planning and extra effort to achieve a good Harvest.*

*Mali is a landlocked country in West Africa. Some people in this country really struggle to grow enough food to eat. As we've discussed, most plants need lots of specific things to be able to grow well, with sunlight, rain and rich soil being some of the most important elements. While Mali has a LOT of sunlight (the temperature can rise to more than 40°C there, which is VERY hot!), it does not get much rain at all.*

*Temperatures have risen and it has become harder to tell when the rains might come as the rain has become more unpredictable. The country has suffered from some major droughts, where it didn't rain for so long that the soil completely dried up. Millions of people were left hungry as the crops didn't grow properly. The unpredictable weather conditions – alongside the hardships presented by armed conflict in some parts of the country – make it a really challenging place to live.*

Ask the pupils if they can think of any reasons why the weather might be changing so much in Mali? *Across the world, the climate is changing, and this is causing the weather to change in different places – some places are getting hotter and drier, and some are getting more rain than they used to. In places where it is already difficult to grow food, the weather changing is an extra challenge that can make*

life even more difficult. Amazingly though, even in this very dry landscape, with the right tools in place it is possible to grow things (it just takes extra hard work and determination).

**Slide 8.** One of the ways that communities in the Dogon Valley, in the middle of Mali, help make themselves stronger and more resilient in the face of challenges is by sharing what they have. Villages are split into 'cikedas' – these are groups of families who join together and work in the fields communally as a team, growing, sharing and cooking the food together. If the crop fails then the cikedas work together to come up with a solution. As a last resort each cikedas will pick one young, strong man to go and look for work, possibly in a neighbouring country like Ivory Coast so that they can send any money earned back to the cikedas so that they can buy food. Because life is so tough in this area of the world, it's important to help each other in order to survive.

**Slide 9.** One thing that does grow really well in the Dogon Valley is shallots (a type of onion) – the area is quite famous for them! This is

Hama Kelepily with his grandmother Tomey. When Hama got really sick with malaria, an illness carried by mosquitoes, his grandmother was able to buy medicine for him, which made him better. She was able to buy the medicine with money she had saved from selling the shallots and chillies she had grown.

In the past, women in this part of Mali have not had very much say about life in their village; they traditionally had little or no access to land, and so had not been able to grow their own food. Christian Aid worked with a local organisation called Actions pour la Promotion Humaine (APH) to set up a women's association and persuaded the men to give the women some good land to grow vegetables on. Women were also given training on how to cope with the changing climate. Now they can grow food and sell it! This means more people are growing food so the village can keep going in the hungry season. And, importantly, women feel that their voices are finally being heard and so they feel more included in the village. Being resilient and producing a good harvest is all about being adaptable and working together as a team.

## Reflection

Ask the pupils to close their eyes and to think about how they felt when they were able to make their voice heard by voting in the 'grow or no' game. Reflect for a moment on how important it is to have a voice, and how Tomey, Hama's grandmother, must feel now she and her friends are listened to and are able to contribute more greatly to the village through having their own patch of land and market garden. You could ask pupils to write down on a sticky note what they are thankful for after hearing about harvest in Mali, and about the stories of Hama and Tomey and their village. You could stick these on a map of Mali, alongside prayers for this community and for climate change.

## Action

- Use the cress seeds to encourage the class to think about whether resources are better shared, and ask them to explain why sharing might work better. Students could plant some seeds in pots in the assembly to visually demonstrate how this works.
- Can you take small actions that together with other people make the world a better place through one million ways? Find out more online at [www.christianaid.org.uk/onemillionways](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/onemillionways)
- Donate to the Bishop of Carlisle's Harvest Appeal 2016, raising money for Christian Aid and CMS. You could have a bake or garden sale to celebrate Harvest. You could even have a go at making the traditional Malian meal of 'Toh'. Toh forms the staple diet of the Dogon people and is often eaten with sauce made from baobab leaves at festival time. You can download the recipe and find a leaflet with more information on both projects featured in this appeal from the Harvest Appeal page of the diocesan website (<http://bit.ly/1U7cS2V>).

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