

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. The left side shows a large, rectangular field with a grid-like pattern of crops, possibly a vineyard or orchard. The right side features a cluster of small, round, dome-shaped huts, likely a traditional settlement. The ground is a mix of green and brown, indicating different types of vegetation and soil. The overall scene suggests a transition from a traditional, possibly less productive, agricultural system to a more modern, organized one.

Grey

to

Green

REVOLUTION



ICRISAT

Annual Report 2001

Time Bomb Ticking at the Earth's Arid Edges

Hunkered in the 10 percent of vast, sand-blown Niger that is marginally arable, Amassagal's story is one of constant battle with the coming desert. The village was settled by nomadic Bella people about 80 years ago, after a brutal drought burned up millions of acres of grazing lands, killing thousands of people, camels and cattle.

In a tale repeated endlessly all over the scorched Sahel, men and women no older than 40 lament the drying of their world. Grasses were once waist high, they say. Trees once threw broken shade for the entire 3-mile walk to a main road. Back in the era of gazelles and wild pigs, children knew what meat was.

Farmer Zakara's ancient mother, Bibata Mahaman, hunched outside her hut, bolstering her spirits with stories of the famines she has outlived:

Kourou kaforoun, or "pull and throw away," because there were so many dead that the weak survivors could only toss the bodies in the bush.

Tamaba nyeze, or "a franc is better than a parent," because children were abandoned when families roamed the towns and deserts to beg or work.

Kanta kalage, or "let it grow back" because the starving were admonished to wait before eating the last tree leaves.

Sitting in the sparse shade of an acacia, Zakara nodded, smiling at the memories. He is a quiet man, as farmers often are.

Paul Salopek – Pulitzer Prize, 2001 - Chicago Tribune, March 25, 2001.

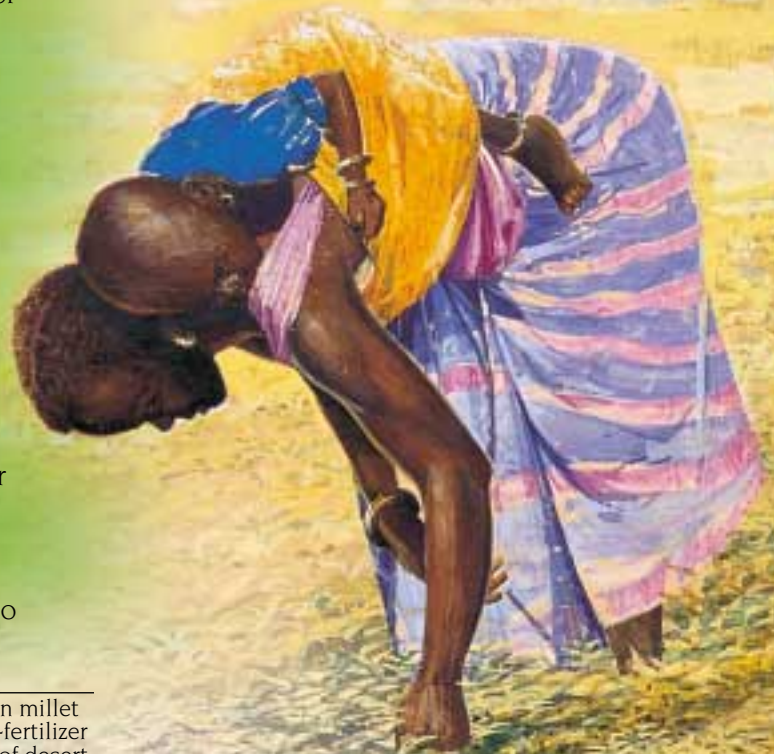
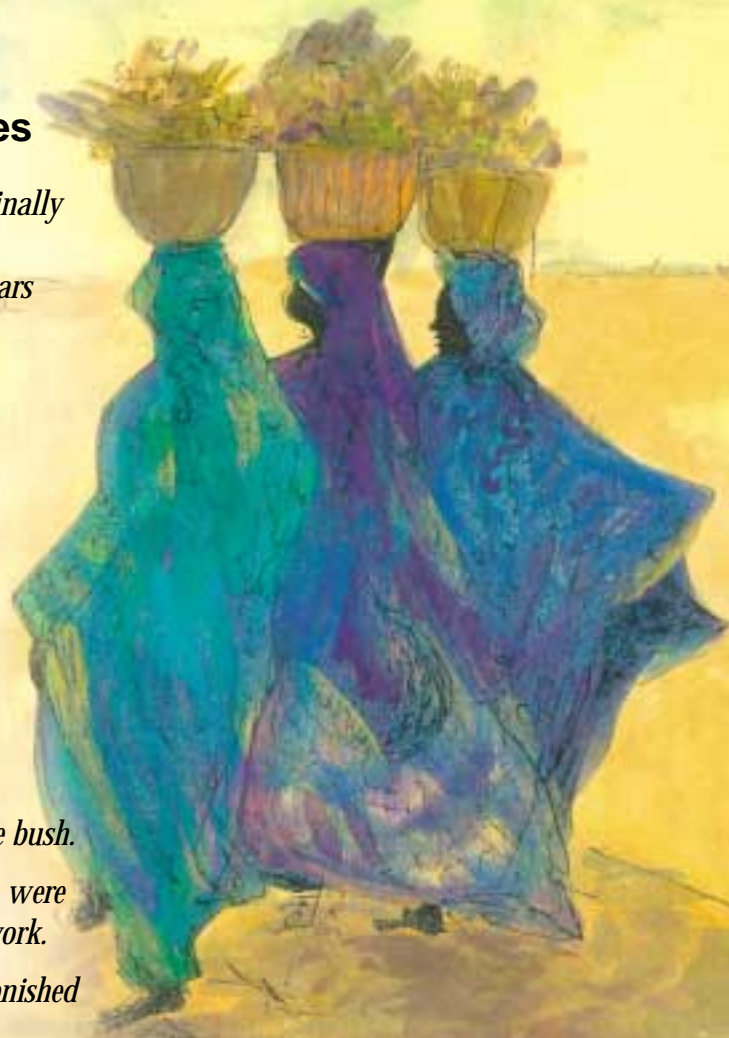
The CGIAR Desert Margins Program

"ICRISAT scientists are working to break the age-old link between drought and famine," said Mr. Ian Johnson, Vice President of the World Bank and CGIAR Chairman, at the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), held in Bonn, Germany, from 11-22 December 2000. He described the many activities borne of partnerships that are helping those living life on the edge.

The CGIAR's Desert Margins Program, convened by ICRISAT, is helping some of the poorest countries in the world (Botswana, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mali, Namibia, Niger, Senegal, South Africa, and Zimbabwe) to implement science-based solutions to the problems of desertification. The Program engages these countries with eight CGIAR Centers, six advanced research organizations, and six major nongovernmental organizations.

Additional targeted support from development investors is critically needed to help rescue those clinging by a thread to the arid edges of the earth.

Cover: Aerial photos (150 m) showing benefits of fertilizer micro-dosing on millet in Kara Bedji village, southwest Niger (right) compared to traditional no-fertilizer practice in Banizoumbou (left). Fertilizer micro-dosing saved thousands of desert margin farmers from major crop losses during the drought of 2000 (see page 6). Photo: Prof. Dr. Andreas Bürkert, University of Kassel, Germany.



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