

Independent Review of the Great Green Wall Accelerator

**Final report
February 2023**



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification

For an evidence-based consideration of progress, success and challenges of the Great Green Wall Accelerator and for further enhancing its services, the UNCCD secretariat through its Evaluation Office commissioned an independent external review of the results and performance of the Accelerator so far. This review was conducted in September 2022 - January 2023 by Mr. David Todd.

This document summarizes the main findings, conclusions and recommendations of the independent review. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the UNCCD.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AU	African Union
BRICKS	Building Resilience through Innovation, Communication and Knowledge Services (World Bank project)
CENSAD	Sahelo-Saharan States Community
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (of the OECD)
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
FAPP	Flagship Action Priority Programs
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GGW (I)	Great Green Wall (Initiative)
ha	Hectare
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LCSD	Local Committee for Sustainable Development
LED	Local Economic Development
LULC	Land Use Land Cover
NDVI	Normalised Difference Vegetation Index
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSS	Observatoire du Sahara et du Sahel
PAA (GGW)	Pan African Agency (of the Great Green Wall)
SAWAP	Sahel and West Africa Programme (World Bank)
SLM	Sustainable Land Management
SLWM	Sustainable Land and Water Management
SSB	Sahel-Saharan Band
TA	Technical Assistance
ToC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

1 Introduction to the Review and the Great Green Wall Accelerator

1.1 Focus, Challenges and Methods of the Review

This review has a learning focus, aimed at further development and enhanced functioning of the Great Green Wall (GGW) Accelerator, based on sound evidence and objective analysis. It is organized around the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability: but uses these to suggest a range of options for moving forward with the work of the Accelerator, rather than strictly defined, specific findings and recommendations.

The major challenges experienced by the Review were as follows:

- Need to avoid attempting to assess work of the GGW as a whole, rather than the specific activities and progress of the Accelerator
- Absence of initial precise Terms of Reference and objectives of the Accelerator, against which to assess progress
- Lack of clarity among stakeholders on the relative functions of and relationships between work of the Accelerator and of the Pan African Agency for the Great Green Wall.

The Review attempted to overcome these challenges by establishing key activities, outputs and progress towards outcomes catalysed by the Accelerator to date and considering whether and how these might be promoted and transitioned to other implementers within the Accelerator's intended handover timetable.

Resource considerations meant that the Review did not utilise some methods, which would be appropriate to a full evaluation – notably missions to countries or institutions. As has been customary during the period of COVID restrictions, electronic interviews and meetings replaced these methods and were supported by desk review of the extensive body of documents available on the GGW in general and the Accelerator in particular.

1.2 History and Composition of the Great Green Wall

In order to understand the role and functioning of the Great Green Wall Accelerator, it is useful to briefly review the historical background of the Great Green Wall Initiative and the early activities, achievements and some challenges associated with it. This section provides the early background, whilst the activities of the period 2012 – 2019 are reviewed in Annex One.

In 1998 in Tripoli the Sahelo-Saharan States Community (CENSAD) was created with 30-member states. These included in its northern part most of the North African countries apart from Algeria and in its southern part, the sub-Saharan States on the line of the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea and down to Kenya. The community aimed to create a vision of economic and political integration across what became known as the Sahel-Saharan Band (SSB). In succeeding years, the intention to promote an active coalition of countries to implement

measures to promote the reversal of desertification and the move towards sustainable development became focussed on states on the southern edge of the Sahara, without inclusion of the northerly states within CENSAD.

Among these southern states, the concept of the Great Green Wall was developed between 2005-2007¹. A document of various potential approaches was prepared at the initiative of the General Secretariat of CENSAD and validated by its Executive Council, before being endorsed by the African Union through the Declaration 137 (VIII), taken at the 8th Ordinary Session of the Conference of Heads of State and Government, held in January 2007 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The Pan-African Agency of the Great Green Wall (PAA) was created by International Convention, signed by Heads of State and Government, on June 17th, 2010, in N'Djamena (Chad) and ratified by Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan and Chad. Eritrea signed the Convention, which it later ratified. With the creation of the PAA, the Heads of State and Government intended to provide the Initiative with an appropriate legal, organizational, and institutional coordination mechanism to ensure that the GGW Initiative has the necessary visibility and monitoring expected by its Member States. Within this framework, the PAA is responsible for ensuring the coordination, development and implementation of the Five-Year Strategy, the Action Plan, and the Flagship Actions Priority Programs, as well as for the mobilization of the resources necessary for their implementation.

The PAA is therefore an inter-state organization with international legal capacity and management autonomy, conceived under the auspices of the African Union and the CENSAD. It has four statutory bodies: the Conference of Heads of State and Government, which informs the Heads of State and Government of the African Union Summit of its activities, the Council of Ministers, the Executive Secretariat, and the Technical Committee Experts who support the Executive Secretariat in the preparation of statutory sessions and technical documents². The structure, status and role of the PAA is important to note, since in discussions, this Review has noted some confusion among stakeholders between the multi-layered Agency as a whole and its Executive Secretariat.

At the national level, the PAA should be represented in each of the Member States by a National GGW Structure, in charge of the implementation of Flagship Actions Priority Programs (FAPP) of the national GGW component. At the regional level within countries, governance should be ensured by a Local Committee for Sustainable Development (LCSD) at the level of Integrated Community Units for Sustainable Development (ICUSD) which are intended to constitute the entities at the base of the Local Economic Development (LED) architecture³.

The participation of countries in the GGW Initiative has altered and fluctuated over time. From the original 30 countries of CENSAD, 11 signed for the GGWI. Of these, Eritrea has so far

¹ Source: Great Green Wall Initiative Achievements. 2011 – 2017. Nouakchott. PAA. 2018

² Source: op.cit., P 39.

³ Source: op.cit., P 16

been largely inactive. As reported by the PAA in 2018; “Since 2012, with the upsurge of insecurity, instability and the patchwork of tensions related to the emergence of jihadism and more recently migration issues in Sahelian countries south of the Sahara, a military approach has replaced the vision of integration and socio-economic development and strategic military issues in the delimitation of the Sahelo-Saharan space. From military operations and strategies, the Sahel-Saharan band seems to be reduced to the Barkhane military operation zones and more recently in 2014 to its target zone the interstate group of the five (5) countries of the Sahel (G5 Sahel), Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad)⁴. Since this time, the remaining five countries (excluding Eritrea) appear to have resumed active participation in the Initiative.

1.3 Overall Achievements of the Great Green Wall Initiative as of 2020

In 2020, UNCCD released **the Great Green Wall Implementation Status Report and Way Ahead 2030**. This reported the following key overall results as of 2020:

- 20 million hectares of land have been restored
- over 350,000 jobs have been created
- approximately \$90 million has been generated between 2007 and 2018 through Great Green Wall activities
- at current rates of progress, the restored area will sequester more than 300 million tons of carbon dioxide by 2030, which would represent about 30% of the GGW Initiative's original target.
- To reach the restoration target of 100 million hectares of land by 2030, an average of 8.2 million hectares of land per year would need to be restored at an annual financial investment of US\$4.3 billion.

The 11 participating countries reported widely varying results to the status report, as shown in Figure 1 below. In terms of hectares of land restored, the countries report a range from 130 hectares to 2 million hectares (excluding Burkina Faso, which did not report any land restored). Other achievements, such as the number of people trained, also show huge variation. Without looking into details of the GGW Initiative as a whole, which is beyond the scope of this Review, these figures show that some countries have had a much more fruitful financial relationship with GGW than have others. This in turn suggests that blanket statements concerning the difficulties of accessing “donor” funds are likely to be inaccurate, since countries have performed very differently on this dimension, and some have done well. For example, Nigeria accessed \$600 million plus of GGW funding under the World Bank/GEF SAWAP.

Further, the substantial variations suggest the need to systematically review and calibrate data received to ensure comparability across countries. This points to the importance of a standardised and verified monitoring and reporting system across the entire GGW Initiative, which is currently being trialled by the Accelerator team. However, such a system faces

⁴ Source: op.cit., P 19.

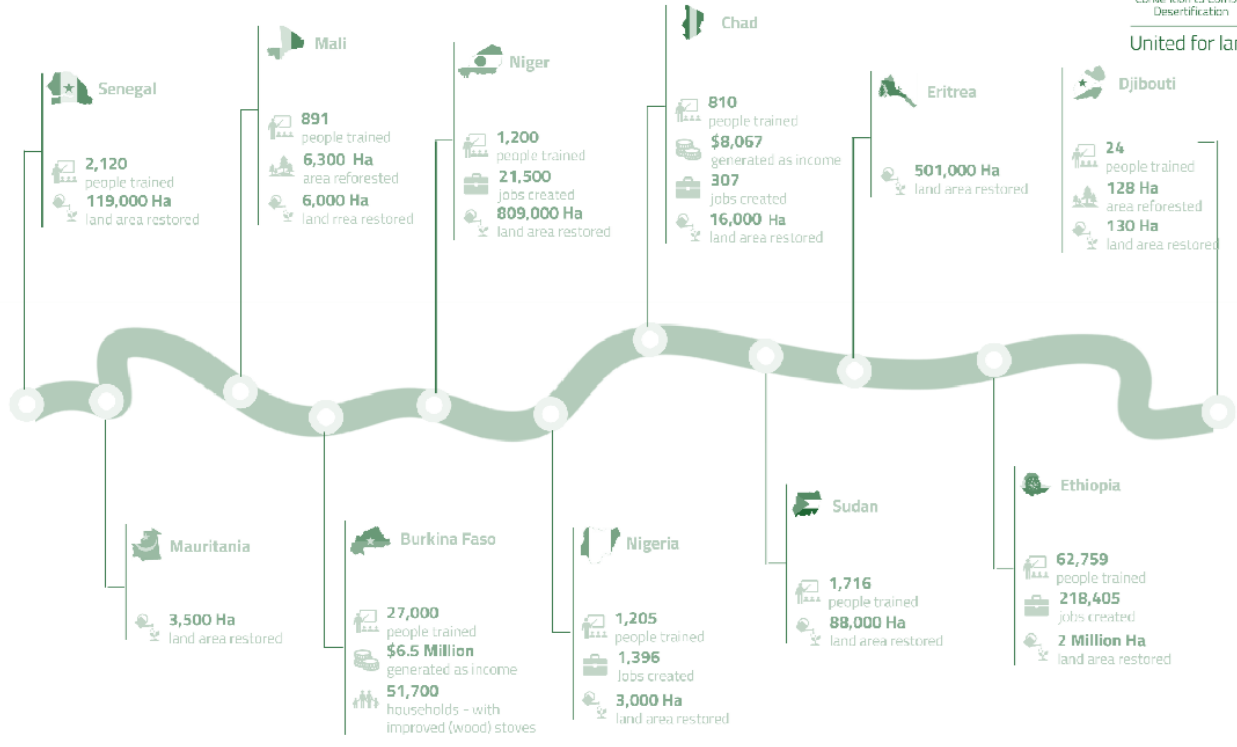
substantial challenges. The earliest concept of the GGW across the 11 participating countries referred to a narrow strip or band of land, which was to be restored through measures such as tree planting. This was gradually expanded into a much broader sustainable development approach, including employment and a wide range of land-based regeneration and production activities. In keeping with this, results reporting also transitioned from a narrow focus on the original band of land and activities to one in which an extremely broad range of changes occurring in the countries were counted as GGW-related, with minimal attempt to trace the extent to which (if at all) the Initiative had actually contributed towards them. Comparability of results over time and across countries is therefore difficult to establish.

Achievement as of 2020.



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United for land



Source : https://catalogue.unccd.int/1551_GGW_Report_ENG_Final_040920.pdf

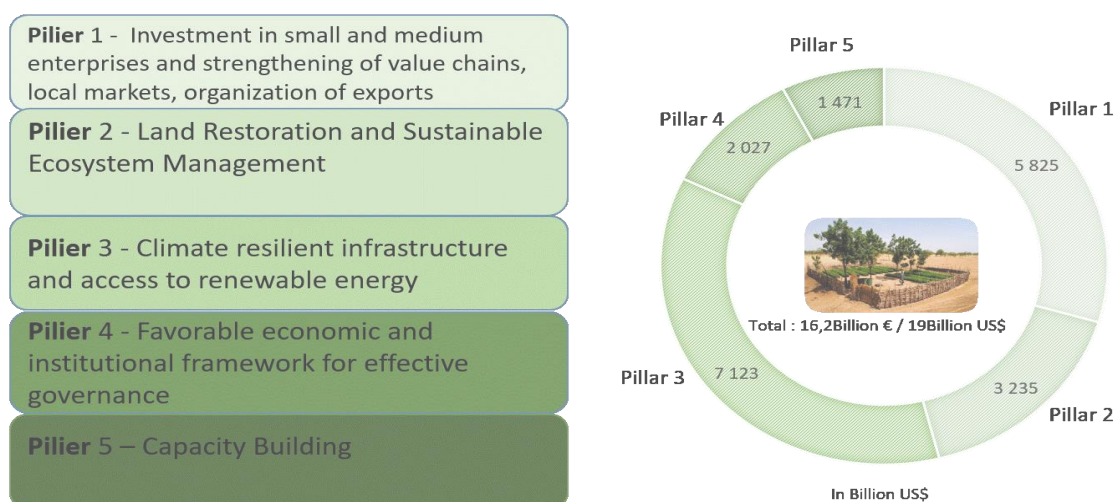
Figure 1: Country level results reported in the 2020 Implementation Status

1.4 Future Focus of the Great Green Wall

Following the release of the 2020 GGW Implementation Status report, the Ministers of Environment of the Great Green Wall countries met and called on the international community *to better coordinate efforts* in order to achieve the Great Green Wall goals by 2030. At the January 2021 One Planet Summit, a GGW Investment Summit led to the announcement of the sums shown in Figure 2 below:

- Total funding of US\$19 billion for the GGW 2020-2025 agenda were pledged.
- 9 international organizations committed to coordinate their efforts with the PAA around 5 pillars of action and 1 common vision.

Figure 2: Funds pledged for the 5 GGW Pillars



An additional € 2.5 Billion were also pledged by the Natural Capital Investment Alliance to invest in value chains and participate in land degradation neutrality efforts.

1.5 Creation of the GGW Accelerator

The One Planet Summit also announced the creation of the GGW Accelerator hosted by UNCCD. This had the broad objectives of setting up a harmonized monitoring and evaluation system around the five GGW action pillars, within the one vision, publishing an annual progress report and organizing an annual follow-up meeting bringing together all stakeholders.

The objectives of the Accelerator were initially listed as:

- Support the efforts of all actors through the harmonization of impact measurement framework
- **Support the Pan African Agency of the Great Green Wall implementation to achieve the GGW initiative through a structured, multi-stakeholder approach based on five pillars**
- Enable a more comprehensive mapping of available funding and projects
- Connect actors to scale up successful initiatives and promote the Sahel as a land of opportunity
- Involve the private sector, civil society and research/innovation in GGW efforts.

It can be seen that these objectives are all highly complex, that some of them are relatively subjective and that assessing progress towards these objectives cannot be approached from a purely “technical” perspective. For example, measurement of the impact of environmental programmes could in theory be achieved, but it is not a field in which consensus is readily attained, even among experts in the same specialisation. Furthermore, measurement of the realisation of environmental impacts is greatly challenged by “trajectories of change,” which refer to the different time scales in which various changes might occur. “Connecting actors,” “involving” and “supporting achievements” can be partially assessed based on perceptual information from key stakeholders. However, challenges might arise in situations, for example, where stakeholders agree that good support has been given but results are weak, or where connections have been made, but to little effect. In most cases, the Accelerator can support progress, but not deliver it.

For a hugely ambitious concept such as the GGW, funding is a core element enabling progress towards objectives. The practice of expressing donor funding pledges at high profile events can give rise to unrealistic expectations among potential recipient countries. An early emphasis of the Accelerator was therefore intended to be clarification of the precise nature of commitments (including the distribution between loans and grants) and tracking of progress towards release of different categories and sources of funds.

2 Key implementation challenges identified for the GGW and role of the Accelerator

2.1 GGW Implementation Pillars and Challenges

As presented in Section 1.4 above, the GGW now covers 11 countries and promotes its objectives through **five pillars**. These pillars offer an organising and funding structure for the Initiative and are discussed below.

Nature of the five pillars

Examination of the five pillars suggests that they are of two types, **sectoral** and **cross-cutting**.

Sectoral pillars:

Pillar 1: business and markets

Pillar 2: ecosystem management

Pillar 3: infrastructure and energy

Cross-cutting pillars:

Pillar 4: governance frameworks

Pillar 5: capacity building.

In 2020, UNCCD released **the Great Green Wall Implementation status report and way ahead 2030**. This identified several *key implementation challenges*, for which additional support was requested:

- **Governance:**

Governance challenges are identified at national and GGW-wide levels.

Pillar 4: focuses on governance and therefore provides support to reduce the challenges.

Pillar 5: focuses on capacity and could provide support on aspects of governance.

- **Monitoring and reporting**

All five pillars require monitoring and reporting, so support should cover them all.

- **Funding**

Countries identified fund flows as a challenge. These would affect all pillars. There could be multiple reasons for this challenge, and support is needed to locate and overcome bottlenecks, which could be at multiple levels.

- **Technical (in relation to restoration projects)**

Technical challenges are only specified in the area of land restoration and ecosystem management and would therefore mainly affect **Pillar 2**. It is probable that, at some level, all of the pillars face technical challenges. However, these have been found particularly difficult to address for Pillar 2, and countries clearly need strong support in this area.

2.2 Relationship between challenges and pillars

Table 1 below tabulates the connections between the five pillars and the four key challenges. It shows that two of the challenges were anticipated in advance, in the sense that they constitute implementation pillars in their own right – governance and ecosystem management. However, two other pervasive challenges, affecting all pillars, are funding and monitoring and reporting. The two are closely connected, through such concepts as

“bankable projects and programmes.” This indicates that the majority of donors will only fund activities, which have clearly stated objectives, identified cause and effect pathways to reach them and well-designed monitoring and reporting systems, capable of tracking and demonstrating progress. In the absence of such features in project designs, funders are unlikely to take proposals to their governing bodies, which will not be in a position to justify approving them.

Pillar/Challenge	Pillar 1: business and markets	Pillar 2: ecosystem management	Pillar 3: infrastructure and energy	Pillar 4: governance	Pillar 5: capacity building	No. of pillars per challenge
1: Governance				*	*	2
2: Monitoring and reporting	*	*	*	*	*	5
3: Funding	*	*	*	*	*	5
4: Technical		*				1
No. of challenges per pillar	2	3	2	3	3	Total challenges 13

Table 1: Relationship between GGW Pillars and Challenges

2.3 Relationship between the Pan African Agency for the Great Green Wall and the Accelerator

It is not possible to review the work of the Accelerator without considering the role of the Pan African Agency, which is intended to take over the functions and activities addressed by the Accelerator. Stakeholders interviewed have reported that, when the African Union set up the PAA, there were disagreements over basic issues such as staffing, and posts needed. It seems that consideration was mainly given to senior appointees with political credibility, irrespective of the nature of work to be done. The Agency therefore appears to be “top heavy”, with an inadequate structure below this to ensure that basic work is completed in good time and quality. A pervasive perspective among external stakeholders is that the PAA as a whole has been insufficiently active in stimulating member countries to actively deliver on GGW objectives. The period of Nigeria’s GGW Presidency coincided with more rapid progress. When Ministers met in Abidjan, President Buhari himself attended, with a set of Ministers, including his finance minister, so that he could understand what needed to be done. Although the senior level of the PAA personnel may have helped to secure indispensable political support for the Agency and the GGW across countries, it does not so far appear adequate to deliver the large volume of technical work, which needs to be completed in timely fashion. In addition to its Executive Secretary, the PAA has only three technical staff to manage the programme, which is not feasible in the long term. Either the mandate of the PAA needs to shrink to match its resources, or country capacity must grow to take over more of the GGW processes or probably both.

The Accelerator was initially envisaged as a backstopping provision for the PAA, since this was seen to have an unclear mandate, limited resources and an inadequate spread of technical skills. The Agency at least needs the capacity to track finance and also results across the GGW,

both of which have been become major areas of support from the Accelerator, as discussed below.

The Accelerator was conceived as a relatively short-term catalytic input to increase the speed at which the GGW Initiative can deliver results. This being so, it will need to “hand over” activities, processes and results areas to the Initiative on its closure, currently expected in 2025. A variety of stakeholders have expressed concerns about the preparedness of the PAA to continue this work at the expected level. To facilitate this process, an Audit of this Agency has been proposed and supported by the African Development Bank. This would assess its capacity in key functions and areas and presumably propose measures necessary to bring the PPA up to the level required to fulfil its mandate and receive funding on behalf of the region. This Audit does not appear to have proceeded as rapidly as intended, and until it is completed and its findings are approved, it appears unlikely that the pace of GGW funding release will increase.

Key stakeholder perceptions of both the Accelerator and the PAA are presented in more detail in Section 6 below.

2.4 Work Programme of the Accelerator

Multiple stakeholders were in favour of some form of mechanism to speed up the operations of the GGW. Accordingly, the concept of an Accelerator was prepared for presentation at the Paris World Summit on Biodiversity, to address challenges that had been highlighted by the GGW Implementation Status Report. Donors were particularly keen, and the French Government pushed the idea strongly at the Summit. It is widely believed that the Pan African Agency was not keen on the idea, since this might be taken to imply that it was not fulfilling its role. Many parties had liked the vision of the GGW, but after ten years of activity, it was not clear where the money had gone and there was thought to be inadequate progress at field level.

However, it appears that the actual operation of the Accelerator was not carefully planned in advance. It had no Terms of Reference (TOR), reflecting the feeling that a distinct TOR might have been interpreted as a critique of the PAA. Furthermore, it did not seem appropriate for UNCCD to draw up TOR for an institution created, but not funded, by donors. Although the French Government promoted the idea of the Accelerator, it made no funds available. UNCCD accepted to host the Accelerator, building on its neutrality, since it is not a resource holder. Initially, the Accelerator had no budget and no staff. UNCCD explored among its donors to find which would be amenable to realigning some existing grants. Ireland (project development and pipeline) and Austria (PAA capacity building and focus on platform to report on GGW progress) agreed to allow some of their funds to be used by the Accelerator. A total of about Euro 2.5 million was initially made available. No donors put in new money specifically for the Accelerator. Such a pot of money could have helped develop objectives and funded activities, so at start-up the Accelerator had no clear mandate, location, staffing or budget. These were worked out in the months after its inception – UNCCD volunteered a location, recruited a small team of staff and secured a basic level of funding.

During its first few months, the Accelerator developed its key activity streams to address the following identified challenges:

- Coordinate the efforts of all actors through the harmonization of **impact measurement framework** (*Challenge: Monitoring and Reporting*)
- Support the implementation of the GGW initiative through a **structured, multi-stakeholder approach** based on five pillars (*Challenge: Governance*)
- Enable a more comprehensive **mapping of available funding and projects** (*Challenge: Funding*)
- **Connect actors** to scale up successful initiatives and promote the Sahel as a land of opportunity (*Challenge: Governance*)
- **Involve** the private sector, civil society, and research/innovation in GGW efforts (*Challenge: Governance*).

In addressing the *GGW pillars*, the work of the Accelerator therefore focuses on the two cross-cutting pillars (governance and capacity building), rather than the three sectoral pillars (business and markets, ecosystem management, infrastructure and energy). However, this focus has substantial implications for the sectoral activities, since these cannot deliver without funding, good governance and effective monitoring and reporting to show the results necessary to raise donor confidence for future funding. In terms of the main challenges identified by the Status Report, the Accelerator specifically targets them all, except for the technical issues related to land degradation and ecosystem management. It is assumed that these are addressed by other units within UNCCD as well as by a variety of funders and other international bodies.

The Accelerator's support in the area of monitoring and reporting could in principle lead to agreed and effective progress – namely an overall set of indicators and measures at outcome level. This would then require major additional capacity building efforts to enable countries, programmes and projects to collect, manage and analyse high quality data. Over time, this could be transferred from the Accelerator to GGW institutions implementing and executing the Capacity Building pillar (notably PAA).

This process has been complex. Each of the donor agencies and financial partners has its own funds and associated reporting requirements. It has been a major challenge to find common data requirements, to report meaningfully on such a major programme. There are 10 donors, 11 countries and 5 pillars – so the results picture has to be simplified. Individual countries would often prefer more detailed data to help their own planning processes, but this will often be beyond national monitoring capacity and resources.

Simplification might have been achieved by the creation of pooled donor funding, with an agreed common reporting framework. This has apparently never been considered. So, as it stands, there are (about) 10 donors, with each using its own financial procedures and reporting requirements. This has been challenging for the PAA, which has little convening power among donors. UNCCD has been able to convene donor meetings at country level to introduce some level of collaboration and predictability, which has been helpful. However, to track fund flows, the Accelerator calls every donor agency every week and monitors progress every month. A basic framework now exists by donor, country and Accelerator pillars

supported. Information on funds provided by donors is systematically monitored against what countries say they have received. This is also helpful at country level, since Ministries of Environment can now demonstrate to Ministries of Finance how much money they are bringing into the country.

However, to date several of the participating countries have proved unable to prepare “bankable” projects and have requested UNCCD support to help in this process. But country capacity is increasing. Between 2009 and 2020 there were about 60 projects funded within the GGW parties. Since then, over 100 activities have already been approved for funding, although most are not yet in the field. One of the objectives of the Accelerator has been to speed up the GGW and this appears to have made progress. The financial aspect is extremely challenging since all donors operate different systems. One positive element is the five-pillar framework adopted by the Accelerator, which gives a basic framework for monitoring.

With regard to field level results monitoring to date, UNCCD is mainly reporting against a “big data” framework, supported by Trends.Earth and other global monitoring systems. If appropriately tailored by the Accelerator to fit the GGW, this level of monitoring is likely to be sufficient for donor and PAA needs, although more detailed technical monitoring should be done at country level. It will take a lot of support from the Accelerator to keep this machinery functioning across 11 disparate countries.

Although addressed as a GGW pillar, governance has still emerged as a major challenge. Further, given the variety, complexity and scope of governance issues raised in the GGW’s 15 years of implementation, this has emerged as ***the defining challenge*** for the future of GGW. Conceptually, funding might be seen either as a self-standing area or as a sub-category of governance, since it is clear that for potential funders, good governance is a prerequisite for financial partnership.

3 Progress Achieved through Accelerator Support

3.1 Support Offered and Implemented

The Accelerator team has built on the findings of the Implementation Status Report and subsequent discussions with a broad range of stakeholders to provide support as shown below. This support addresses the major (non-sectoral) challenges facing the GGW and, if its outcomes are achieved, they could make an important contribution to the future of the GGW. However, to translate the outcomes into sustainable long-term benefits will require an effective hand over of responsibilities to longer term institutions, particularly PAA.

Area in which support offered

Intended Outcome

Governance and advocacy

Strong and inclusive national level GGW coalitions, including private sector and civil society
Coherent and effective overall GGW governance
Targeted and effective advocacy

Monitoring, evaluation, reporting

Harmonized results management framework

Resource mobilisation

Pipeline of eligible and bankable projects

By September 2022, the support areas offered by the Accelerator had been implemented through the following sets of activities:

- *Support to development of national coalitions:*

At the time of this Review, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad had organized national coalition meetings. The example of Niger shows the importance of the Head of State convening ministers to promote the establishment of a national coalition to prepare a national GGW platform integrated into the national development strategy. This provides a foundation on which a pipeline of bankable projects can be prepared.

- *Mobilization of comprehensive set of stakeholders to participate in national coalitions:*

The coalitions need to be far more inclusive than national government institutions. They should include such stakeholders as local elected officials, NGOs, research actors and innovation entrepreneurs. This will give the opportunity for full national ownership, rather than simple approval by Government.

- *Support to development and implementation of mixed funding models:*

Broad-ranging funding partnerships require innovative approaches, supported by adequate fiduciary and contractual precautions. For example, private sector operators may require initial project preparation support and guarantee funds to reduce their risk in entering new fields promoted by the GGW. Central Ministries may require Memoranda of Understanding with decentralized government and non-government partners. These funding approaches may not be available in participating countries, calling for specialist financial support.

- *Support for project preparation:*

UNCCD, through the Global Mechanism, is able to finance the preparation of funding applications to be submitted by national GGW coalitions. States can, through their UNCCD focal point (Ministry of Environment) and their national GGW agency, make requests for such support to UNCCD. The UNCCD will also provide each national agency with a national consultant to support the resource mobilization strategy and the implementation of monitoring and evaluation. Agencies should propose Terms of Reference to initiate the recruitment of these consultants as soon as possible.

- *Preparation of a monitoring and evaluation platform:*

The Accelerator and the agencies will prepare an interim report on the status of the GGW on the new M&E platform. This will enable decision-makers to make strategic choices for 2023.

- *Support to GGW Heroes programme*

This connects outstanding individuals from participating countries with the Initiative, by placing them in targeted activities at the local level, supported with technical, financial and media resources.

Before the Accelerator, much of UNCCD's work with GGW was in the communications area - promoting campaigns such as Heroes, etc. This role is reported to have reduced as the Accelerator became functional, perhaps with some loss to UNCCD as a whole. However, in view of the disproportionate support requirements of the 11 GGW countries compared with the entire UNCCD portfolio, moving some of this across to the Accelerator may be a benefit, freeing up some time of UNCCD staff for other programmes. Even other countries in the West African region, such as Ghana and Gambia, are said to have received less attention because of GGW.

3.2 Overview of country level progress in areas supported by the Accelerator

At country level, the Accelerator team has reported progress in most areas it has supported, as shown in Table 1 below. The major work stream in which most countries have not yet completed intended initial activities is that of monitoring preparedness. Although the Table shows that Accelerator promotion and support has enabled substantial achievements in initiating key national systems, countries will need a high level of continuing assistance to consistently deliver in such areas as functionality of national coalitions, updating of monitoring data, participation of non-state actors, etc. This will need to be offered throughout the Accelerator period and beyond. In this respect, where possible, the Accelerator is collaborating with other institutions to develop relevant support packages. One example is the multi-partner Regional Support Project for the Implementation of Sustainable Land Management and Enhancing the Value of Ecosystems in the Great Green Wall area⁵. Although this aims to address areas significant for the future of the GGW, it is currently at Concept Note stage and its implementation and results cannot be accurately predicted.

⁵ French original: *Projet Régional d'Appui à la mise en œuvre de la Gestion Durable des Terres et la Valorisation des Ecosystèmes dans la zone de la Grande Muraille Verte*

Country	UNEP BASELINE	National Coalitions exist	Project Pipelines	Country Strategy Adapted	Non-State Stakeholders Mapping	Results Management Framework Validated	National RMF Complete	Monitoring Preparedness	Consultant TOR	Consultant Recruitment Launched	Consultant on board	Status of LDN target setting process
Burkina Faso	Complete	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Complete	Yes	Yes	Yes	Complete
Chad	In Progress	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	In Progress	Yes	Yes	In Progress	Complete
Djibouti	In Progress	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	In Progress	Yes	In Progress	No	Complete
Eritrea	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Complete
Ethiopia	In Progress	In Progress	Incomplete	Yes	Yes	Yes	Incomplete	In Progress	Yes	In Progress	No	Complete
Mali	In Progress	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	In Progress	Yes	Yes	In Progress	Complete
Mauritania	Complete	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	In Progress	Yes	Yes	Yes	In Progress
Niger	Complete	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Complete	Yes	Yes	Yes	Complete
Nigeria	Complete	Yes	Incomplete	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	In Progress	Yes	In Progress	No	Complete
Senegal	Complete	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Complete	Yes	Yes	Yes	Complete
Sudan	Complete	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	In Progress	Yes	In Progress	In Progress	Complete

Table 2: Country level progress in activity areas supported by the Accelerator.

An area of high priority to participating countries for support from the Accelerator is that of fund commitments and flows. Expectations were raised at the January 2021 Global Summit by the ambitious level of donor pledges to the GGW. Since that time, countries have expressed the view that fund flows have been slower than they expected. To some extent, this seems to be the result of misunderstandings surrounding the details of pledges, which were not presented at the Forum. Whereas some countries seem to have anticipated the creation of a separate fund for GGW, in fact funds are mainly being negotiated through existing country or regional programming processes of development agencies and financial institutions. These are not normally rapid and usually require extensive planning and negotiations before approval. Further, most bodies have pipelines of activities for which funds have been approved but not yet released, since they form a queue. Furthermore, the division between grants and loans was not specified in the pledging; and countries are often hesitant to accept new loans, particularly in the environmental area. Finally, it is possible that some pledged funds will in fact have to be “re-purposed” from earlier commitments – a process which can take some time.

Taking into account all of the above provisos concerning fund flows, figures compiled and released by the Accelerator **do not confirm that fund flows have been exceptionally slow**, compared with broader international environment and development funding. They show that:

- In January 2021 during the One Planet Summit, several financial and development institutions pledged to support the Great Green Wall with a total amount of **19 655 000 000 US\$ for 2021-2025**.
- By September 2022, financial data collected by the Accelerator shows that **more than half of the total amount pledged has been committed** for activities, which are still under preparation or are under implementation.
- Based on extensive experience in evaluation of environmental and development funding, the consultant considers it normal for such interventions to have a relatively slow start up process, gathering pace in the mid to final years of funding. Figures assembled by the Accelerator show that, despite the effects of the Covid19 pandemic in 2021, most funders continued to honor their commitments to the Great Green Wall stakeholders; with a total amount spent of **US\$ 2 500 447 805**. This shows that **12 %** of the total amount pledged until 2025 had been disbursed in 2021 and early 2022, which does not seem unusually slow considering the relatively large amount of funding, substantial implementation capacity variations among countries, delays occasioned by political instability or change, and the large number and types of stakeholders involved.

The Accelerator has conducted an exhaustive consultation exercise with financial partners and countries to track what has happened to pledged funds and which specific areas they are intended to support. This has brought much greater clarity to progress of fund flows. At the Eighth Ordinary Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the GGW in July 2022, UNCCD made a detailed presentation to the Technical and Financial Partner's Meeting of the current state of fund release by most of the major pledging institutions. With regard to Monitoring and Reporting, the Accelerator has done major work, resulting in production and piloting of a

harmonized results management framework. Support has begun to be offered to national coalitions to develop the capacity to deliver and maintain this ambitious data collection and management exercise, taking account of the substantial variation among member countries in terms of technical expertise and resources available.

3.3 Priorities for Technical Assistance expressed by countries.

The Accelerator team has consulted countries to assess where they prioritise future TA needs. As shown in Figure 3 below, countries see their greatest challenges in terms of identifying “bankable projects” and bringing them to a stage at which funding can be attained from international partners. An underlying weakness acknowledged by many countries is the absence of a coordinated and coherent national strategy and approach to GGW implementation.

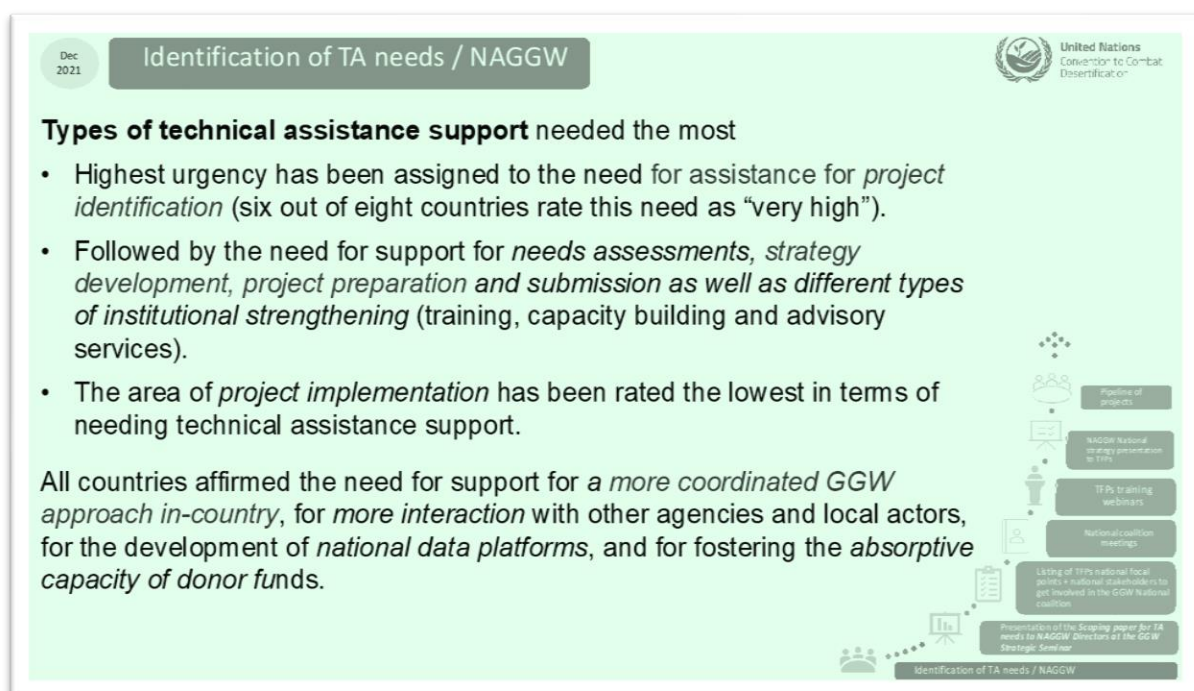


Figure 3: Country priorities for technical assistance under GGW

At the Eighth Ordinary Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the GGW in July 2022, UNCCD announced a programme of support for project preparation. Through the Global Mechanism, UNCCD will finance the preparation of funding applications to be submitted by national coalitions. States can, through their UNCCD focal point (Ministry of Environment) and their national GGW agency, make requests to UNCCD. The UNCCD (through the UN Volunteers Programme) will also provide each national agency with a national consultant to support the resource mobilization strategy and the implementation of monitoring and evaluation. Agencies should propose Terms of Reference to initiate the recruitment of these consultants as soon as possible.

4 Reported Achievements to Date and Future Contributions of the Accelerator

4.1 Achievements

Overall:

At a European Development Days meeting in June 2022, the Accelerator reported the following major achievements:

- a. Creation of the harmonized results management framework
- b. Set up of a coordinated multi-stakeholder approaches
- c. Support to the creation of the GGW National coalitions
- d. Organization of High-level and technical dialogues
- e. Advocacy with financial partners
- f. The non-state stakeholder's study
- g. The GGW Heroes identification ongoing process
- h. Better implication of the scientific community
- i. Impact monitoring
- j. Financial monitoring.

GGW-wide Progress:

- Clarity on what money pledged is new/old/reprogrammed
- Up to date tracking of fund flows
- Knowledge of where donors intend to spend money in terms of the Accelerator pillars and countries
- Regular discussions and information sharing among donor partners and Accelerator team
- Harmonised results framework

Country Level Progress:

- Some engagement of Ministries of Finance and Planning – not just Ministry of Environment
- Increase in National Coalitions to discuss and plan GGW
- One UNV resource mobilisation specialist in each country to help getting planned projects into donor pipelines (increase in country understanding of how different donors work)
- More projects in pipeline
- Accelerator work on tracking donor commitments has enabled countries to understand how much money they can expect to receive
- Gradually increasing acceptance of Accelerator role, as recognition of UNCCD financial and operational neutrality spread
- Anything which reduces difficulty in accessing money is positive. UN convening power in countries has often been useful

- It is possible for country programmes contributing to GGW to be quickly approved and implemented. For example, Nigeria moved quickly and effectively to obtain \$908 m out of the total of \$1.38 billions of World Bank/GEF inputs in the earlier SAWAP project, which has so far been the Bank's major support to the GGW. Countries therefore need to make strenuous efforts to utilise increased project preparation capacity (possibly with donor assistance)

Private Sector:

- Original reluctance of private sector bodies to participate in project preparation gradually being overcome.

4.2 Expected future contributions of the Accelerator

In the near future, the Accelerator has planned contributions in the following areas:

- Assist with development of national coalitions
- Mobilization of non-state actors in national processes
- The implementation of mixed funding models
- UNCCD support for project preparation to GGW Countries
- Preparation of the monitoring and evaluation platform
- The GGW Heroes program

5 Emerging Challenges to Sustainability of Accelerator Contributions

Despite the substantial contributions already made by the Accelerator, it faces several challenges, as follows:

5.1 GGW-wide:

- Accelerator not enough to ensure overall Institutional strengthening of PAA - it has limited focus and resources.
- Accelerator founded to cover weaknesses of PAA - but no clear definition of its objectives.
- Accelerator has no dedicated budget - UNCCD has taken on a highly challenging assignment with limited resource allocations and scope for planning.
- Linguistic and cultural challenges of GGW not well-addressed - PAA is primarily a francophone institution, while most donors use English. Government of France has expressed support, but no funds for Accelerator.
- Still much work needed to establish support of Finance and Planning Ministries for GGW.
- COVID meant that Accelerator team could not conduct country missions for much of its existence, while several countries have unreliable internet connection.
- African Union Council of Ministers requested PAA to conduct an internal audit, but this has not been completed. This appears essential to strengthen donor confidence.
- Countries unwilling to highlight any operational deficiencies in PAA.

- PAA Member State contributions often not paid on time, weakening operational capacity.
- Many countries appear not to understand funding processes – popular misperception that donor fund pledges were transferred to UNCCD for early allocation to countries.
- The substantial re-thinking of the concept of the GGW, from a primary focus on tree planting to a much broader development approach through five inter-connected pillars means that results based management and the specification and collection of data against Key Indicators is a much greater and more complex task than when the GGW originated. This presents a greater challenge, both to the Accelerator to specify Indicators and data requirements and to countries to collect appropriate and accurate information.
- The major expansion of the GGW vision and concept away from a concentration on tree planting has meant that the PAA lacks appropriate staffing to oversee all emerging technical areas.
- As the PAA has become over-stretched to manage all aspects of the GGW with limited human resources, its own contributions have been prone to delays. To avoid slowing down operational decisions, the Accelerator has needed to press ahead with activities before these have been formally approved by the PAA. Since the Accelerator is in principle a “backstopping” and support body, this has sometimes led the PAA to form the view that the Accelerator is over-stepping its role and mandate.
- PAA develops its own concepts outside of agreed country programmes and is frustrated that the Accelerator cannot get these funded, although this appears to be outside of its remit.

5.2 Donor Aspects

- Despite funding pledges, donors initially showed little interest in coordination or communication activities of the Accelerator, contrary to the spirit of the Paris Declaration.
- This was reflected at the One Planet Summit - GGW had already been running for more than a decade. However, the intention of the GGW to develop a coordinated programme across its entire area of intervention has so far been significantly undermined by the location of most projects and programmes within individual donor/partner country programmes; often loosely related to the GGW vision and uncoordinated, even at national level.
- The generation of a major regional programme by amalgamating individual interventions from a broad range of donor country programmes does not lend itself to coordination or coherence. This would have required a different structure – such as a donor pooled GGW fund with an overarching management structure and RBM system; and financial control by an appropriate Trustee, such as the World Bank or African Development Bank.
- The work of the Accelerator with regard to coordination and transparency is therefore always likely to face challenges since it cuts across the original weak design of the GGW financial and partnership system.
- A major element of the felt need for an Accelerator was the reported slow progress of GGW implementation. Donors could have supported the Accelerator by designing and approving accelerated fund access procedures, meeting streamlined bilateral

programme requirements within a GGW-wide financial architecture. Since this was not done, GGW-wide implementation will reflect the sum of the delays of all individual donor funding systems, many of which have themselves been assessed as very slow. This overall GGW funding architecture means that, however effective the work of the Accelerator, its eventual impact on fund flows (and therefore implementation) is likely to be incremental rather than transformational.

- Some donors have found that PAA inadequately promotes unity and coherence among member countries at major meetings, with an over-concentration on specific donors. This has raised concerns about the possible effectiveness of future financial support for the GGW concept.

5.3 Country level

- Although Accelerator work on tracking donor commitments has enabled countries to understand how much money they can expect to receive, they are still frustrated by the lack of fund flow.

5.4 Private Sector

- No Guarantee Fund or other de-risking facility to encourage private sector engagement.
- Private sector project proposals so far have shown inadequate return on investment.

6 Key Stakeholder Perspectives on the Work of the Accelerator and Future Transition to the Pan African Agency

In considering the work and achievements of the Accelerator and the possibility of transferring these to the PAA by 2025, two key factors should be considered. Firstly, the actual recorded activities, resources and achievements of the two bodies and secondly, perceptions of these aspects among key stakeholders. Whilst the “evidence base” of activities and results provide a firm foundation for discussion and decision making, perceptions of achievements and challenges are also of great importance. The latter are presented in the following sections.

6.1 Stakeholder observations on the work of the Accelerator

Stakeholders have varying perspectives on the work of the Accelerator, although broadly positive. Among countries, there was an emphasis on the need for the Accelerator team to make more frequent country visits, to help promote national coalitions and advise on preparing funding proposals. This requirement may be reduced when the UNV support staff to be located in each country through the Global Mechanism is in place. With regard to funding, work already conducted to gather information from technical and funding partners to document fund flows and future opportunities is highly valued by countries.

Partners are appreciative of the proactive approach adopted; although some major funders have already chosen to pursue their GGW engagement primarily through individual country agreements and do not therefore attach high priority to the regular coordination meetings

called by the Accelerator. However, the regular contacts established with the international development community have been credited with helping to somewhat reduce the mistrust among them of GGW processes and activities. Despite this positive assessment of the Accelerator's active approach, some stakeholders saw a downside to its work in terms of the appearance that the Accelerator is now "taking the lead" rather than supporting the PAA to develop its performance. This suggests that there is no package of activities, which the Accelerator could deliver that would meet all of the challenges facing the GGW; leading one international stakeholder to describe its role as "Mission Impossible".

At country level in particular, the substantial work undertaken by the Accelerator team in developing a detailed and comprehensive monitoring system is seen as very helpful, since this is an area that many find challenging. Among international technical and financial partners, there remains scepticism of the system, since they observe that countries show an inclination to include everything, however slight its connection to the GGW.

Although considerable improvements have been made in the overall working of the GGW through the assistance of the Accelerator, stakeholders consider that these cannot be "handed over" to the Pan African Agency in 2025, since it is not resourced to continue the more proactive approach. Furthermore, the confidence placed in the Accelerator does not apply to the PAA and international stakeholders feel that it would require major reforms and improvements before such trust could be built.

An overall question raised by many stakeholders, which is fundamental to the continuation of Accelerator results concerns whether the GGW concept is simply too complex to be coordinated and managed by any institution? Challenges with other multi-stakeholder approaches, such as the MDG Fund, are considered to suggest that there may be limits to the number of agencies and countries, which can collaborate effectively to deliver multiple objectives and that the GGWI exceeds these limits. Advocates of this perspective believe that, whilst the Accelerator has started up or advanced various processes, these will never enable delivery of all of the objectives of the GGWI, since these are too many, too complex and too extensive. Furthermore, they depend on a level of multi-country and multi-institutional collaboration and coherence that cannot be achieved. This viewpoint led one international institution stakeholder to summarise that the Accelerator has helped "to put a little consistency into the chaos of the Great Green Wall."

6.2 Stakeholder observations on the Pan African Agency

Whilst the focus of discussions with stakeholders was on the work of the Accelerator, attention inevitably took into account experiences with and perceptions of the Pan African Agency and the intention to transfer the activities of the Accelerator (or even the Unit itself) to this body in 2025. This section summarises these stakeholder perspectives but does not reflect any factually based analysis of the performance of the Agency, which is beyond the mandate or resources of the Review.

Among international financial and technical partners of the GGW, stakeholders voiced substantial reservations about the PAA, which have led to reluctance to work with it and a tendency to "side line" it from programmes. Although these partners understand that the

PAA is intended to play a key role in international coordination, they do not believe that it has the human and financial resources to deliver this. They note that, underlying this challenge is the fragile financial base of the Agency, which is dependent on contributions from GGW member states. These have been fixed at a level, which is too low to support an institution with major responsibilities and, even at these levels, countries are often in default. Resources available are therefore both inadequate and unpredictable.

Adding to these challenges for the Agency is the perceived high level of competition for regional personnel with an appropriate level of qualifications and experience to function effectively in negotiations with international agencies. Whilst such experts are present, stakeholders suggest that the PAA cannot offer comparable salaries and work environment to those offered by such institutions as development banks, UN Agencies or bilateral donors. The Agency is therefore seen to struggle to recruit and retain the staff it needs to operate effectively. Although GEF has funded “institutional strengthening” of the PAA, this has been limited to provision of a consultant through UNEP, which may be helpful but will not resolve the underlying weaknesses of the Agency.

The consensus among stakeholders in international organisations is that the structural weaknesses of the PAA are reflected in its failure to develop a coherent and convincing long-term investment approach for the GGW. Whilst various donors have attempted multi-country regional programmes in the past, these were not found to effectively promote coherence or complementarity among countries. Where a regional perspective is retained in programmes under development, this may be brought under an “umbrella” approach, which does not require extensive cross-country coordination.

The approach reported by most international partners contacted is to focus primarily on programmes and projects within individual country agreements. These programmes and projects have established and generally understood procedures, together with specific monitoring and reporting requirements. They can be readily adapted to address issues contributing to the GGW vision and as required, progress and results can be aggregated to report on overall contribution to the Initiative. For these agencies, the PAA is “not essential for country programmes to continue”. Rather, it is another layer, with no clear role or contribution. Furthermore, GGW partners have suggested that political instability in some participating countries means that their programmes fluctuate or even halt for a time, while other countries may have strong internal political support, enabling their programmes to move rapidly. In such circumstances, attempts by PAA to impose any broader programme management across the 11 countries are unlikely to bear fruit.

Perceptions of the PAA among participating countries appear more variable than those among international agency partners. One division is based on language. Among Anglophone countries, some expressed that the Agency is more engaged with Francophone countries and that this is reinforced by the fact that all staff members speak French as their first language. Further, documents and communications are said to be mainly in French and meetings are usually held in Francophone countries. In this respect, stakeholders noted that the Accelerator team, although also French speakers, have stronger communication skills in English. This perception of a language-based division is not universal, since Sudan reports PAA as a strong partner and is working with it on an Action Plan for investment.

Some country stakeholders reported that PAA has tried to establish a degree of control over funding processes, whilst at the same time failing to provide adequate support for fund-raising efforts with international partners. In response to this, countries noted little value-added by PAA in terms of access to funds and some stated a preference to deal with potential and actual “donors” directly, with the role of PAA restricted to compiling information on fund commitments and expenditure. In this area, the Accelerator has been active in some countries in helping to promote and organise funding meetings with international partners. This role was expected to have been taken by the PAA, but countries state that it has not delivered. Overall, countries expressed a need for clarification of the precise intended role of PAA with regard to GGW financing and for this to be carefully and realistically matched to its capacity to deliver.

Both international and country stakeholders ultimately attribute the limitations on performance of the PAA to weak political support. The Council of Ministers of the GGW is said to meet irregularly and to have failed to ensure resource viability of the PAA Secretariat. In turn, the African Union⁶, to which the GGW reports, is seen to be lukewarm in its support, failing to elevate the Initiative from the status of an ambitious vision to that of an implementable programme. Overall, there is seen to be inadequate synergy between the PAA and other African entities, including the AU and the African Development Bank.

The overwhelming consensus among stakeholders is that the functions and approaches of the Accelerator cannot be successfully transferred to the PAA in 2025, since the Agency is in no position to absorb them. The Review finds the current stakeholder perceptions challenging for the future of the GGW, since it is difficult to find anyone who sees this transfer as feasible. Among countries and international partners, the major hope to resuscitate the PAA and put the GGW back “on track” rests on the intended implementation of a technical, organisational and institutional audit of the Agency to be conducted by an independent company through competitive recruitment. Countries reported that, although this has been imminent for some time, they have seen no tangible progress.

According to the Terms of Reference for the Audit,⁷ “the Council of Ministers of the GGW, meeting in Nouakchott on July 29, 2021, through Article 2 of Regulation No. 2021/011/CM/PAGGW/NKTT, requested the Executive Secretariat of the Agency to conduct a technical, institutional and organizational audit of the Agency and the GGW national structures”.

Its overall objective is “to carry out a contextual analysis of the institutional and organizational arrangements, functioning and performance of the Regional Structure and the eleven (11) national structures of the Great Green Wall, then to develop operational and coherent solutions capable of strengthening the capacity to carry out the respective missions and to ensure better operational governance and coordination of activities, as well as greater capacity and better visibility in the mobilization of human and financial resources. It will also

⁶ The African Union did not respond to an invitation for a discussion with the Review.

⁷ Consolidated version, June 6, 2022

make recommendations on the synergies needed at the institutional, legal and operational levels with the African Union Commission's GGW component”.

Specific deliverables of the Audit relate closely to the findings of this review, outlined in Sections 7, 8 and 9 below. Two notable elements⁸ are:

- “Propose a new and relevant reorganization of the GGW initiative at the following levels: a) Institutional (decision-making bodies); b) Administrative (organizational chart/organizational structure; required staff and profile of core and non-core staff); c) Unified and modern governance of technical financial resources (identified service centers and innovative programming tools).
- Clarify the institutional and administrative relationships between the President of the Council of Ministers’ Summit, the Executive Secretary and the GGW Directions or National Focal Points”.

Since the Audit has not yet been commissioned and has a timeline of 60 working days, this review considers it probable that agreed recommendations will not be available until the last quarter of 2023. In the meantime, the urgency of PAA strengthening and reform is highlighted by the engagement of new partners with the GGW. In particular, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) is now active through an umbrella programme in collaboration with IFAD. There will be a GCF liaison officer in UNCCD and another in the PAA. Many countries see GCF as a potentially major financial partner, but one whose procedures and requirements are not well-known. The European Union is also preparing a programme, which will cover 20 countries across the region, including many GGW countries.

International Institutional partners are to some extent already anticipating the results of the Audit. They highlight that it is essential to establish trust and confidence in the institutions of the GGW and that, from their perspective, this will require major strengthening of the Executive function – moving from a Council of Ministers to a broader Board, with membership from a range of major African institutions, which are already well-established and trusted in the international development community. If this cannot be achieved, the GGW is likely to simply become an ambitious vision, implemented mainly through individual country programmes, with varying degrees of linkage and contribution to the overall concept.

6.3 View from the Pan African Agency

From the Agency’s perspective, GGW has not seen the funds pledged at the One Planet Summit reaching the PAA or the participating countries. So, the additional manpower brought in by the Accelerator was welcome. However, it has not operated within a coherent overall framework involving the PAA, countries and the Accelerator. Stakeholders want to support the GGW, but there should be coherence about what is provided and how it is provided. Although the objectives of the Accelerator concern PAA’s mandate, it is located in UNCCD, which is not part of that mandate. Therefore, although it is calling many meetings and delivering products, it is not reinforcing the capacity of PAA. The initial rationale for locating the Accelerator in UNCCD was to take advantage of its established position in the

⁸ TOR, Pages 3 and 4.

international development architecture and its contacts with financial partners. However, there was no clarification as to how the Accelerator's work related to the PAA, what were the responsibilities of each partner and how a transition process could be managed, to enable PAA to establish a progressive degree of ownership.

A major underlying challenge remains the lack of resource mobilisation for the PAA Secretariat, which continues to lack both human⁹ and financial resources. Country contributions are intended to support the office, but they are limited, and many are not paid. The overall GGW strategy therefore needs to be changed to enable effective delivery.

It is critical that there should be synergy between all of the parts of the GGW Initiative. If there is no synergy, the Initiative cannot move. The Accelerator is doing valuable work, but this should all be done within the mandate of the Pan African Agency. A summary overview expressed was that: *"If you do something for me, but not with me, you do it against me!"*

Although the PAA reports to the African Union, the Union itself has limited capacity and resources and has not been able to offer sufficient support to help strengthen the Agency. Whilst the Accelerator was intended to contribute to development of the PAA, it has not done this, since most activities have been conducted in parallel, rather than jointly. The Accelerator has been established and managed unilaterally and there has been no mechanism, such as a joint Steering Committee, to guide relationships between the two bodies and their programmes of work. This could have developed and monitored a strategy for transition by 2025 and undertaken a risk assessment of this.

One of the major contributions of the Accelerator was intended to be improved fund mobilisation, but PAA has seen that a funding commitment can take five years to reach the field, so that the intended duration of the Accelerator is too short to effect improvement of fund flows. A further major challenge has been raised by the transformation of the GGW from an Initiative focussed mainly on planting trees to help reduce land degradation and promote restoration to a multi-sectoral development approach. PAA believes that this raises doubts concerning the capacity of UNCCD to support an Initiative, which now goes well beyond its specific area of expertise.

To begin to establish coherence among participating institutions, it would be appropriate to hold a joint meeting of all partners to take stock of what has been achieved, specify the key challenges and make specific plans for the role of each partner and for effective coordination between them, which is currently absent. Within the GGWI, there is so little sharing of information among parties that we should not expect much progress. So, it will be important to share the findings of this Review with the Council of Ministers.

⁹ Staff positions at the PAA Secretariat: Secrétaire Exécutif (SE), Directeur Administratif et financier DAF, Directeur Scientifique et Technique DST, Chef de service Finances, Comptabilité et Passations des Marchés, Chef de service Recherche Développement, Chef de service Planification Suivi & Évaluation.

The Agency is aware of its substantial limitations and hopes that the forthcoming Audit managed by the African Development Bank will specify what these are and what should be done to overcome them. This Audit will cover the following aspects:

- Institutional: inter-relations among parties; including AU and PAA
- Technical: strengthen capacity at national and regional level
- Organisational: expertise available, present and needed

The Audit was recommended by the PAA Council of Ministers in 2018 but has hit a number of delays. PAA originally asked the UNCCD to fund the Audit but was told no funds were available. It was only in 2022 that the African Development Bank agreed to fund the activity and in December 2022 its Terms of Reference were approved.

There is broad frustration among stakeholders at the time delay with the Audit, shared by the PAA. It is hoped that its results and recommendations will raise credibility with the World Bank, GCF and other key institutions and will point to the need to have a properly staffed institution at the heart of the GGWI. Basically, the PAA has only three technical experts at its disposal. There needs to be an established Organisational Framework with more than three experts. Countries are also mostly in the same position – too little technical manpower. The Audit should address these challenges.

7 Assessment of Progress towards Impacts of the Accelerator Using a Theory of Change

7.1 Introduction to the Accelerator Theory of Change

This review has considered the objectives of the Accelerator, its activities, achievements to date, challenges faced and how the work has been perceived by key stakeholders. Although the Accelerator itself has operated without a Theory of Change (ToC) to guide its approach, the Terms of Reference for this review required that it should devise one to help understand the objectives of the Accelerator and how it intends to contribute towards them. In devising this ToC, due account was taken of the relatively small resources, short time span and focused activities of the Accelerator in comparison with the substantial intentions and pledged resources of the GGW as a whole. In this respect, the ToC also provides a means of calibrating how realistic are the expectations of different stakeholders for the Accelerator.

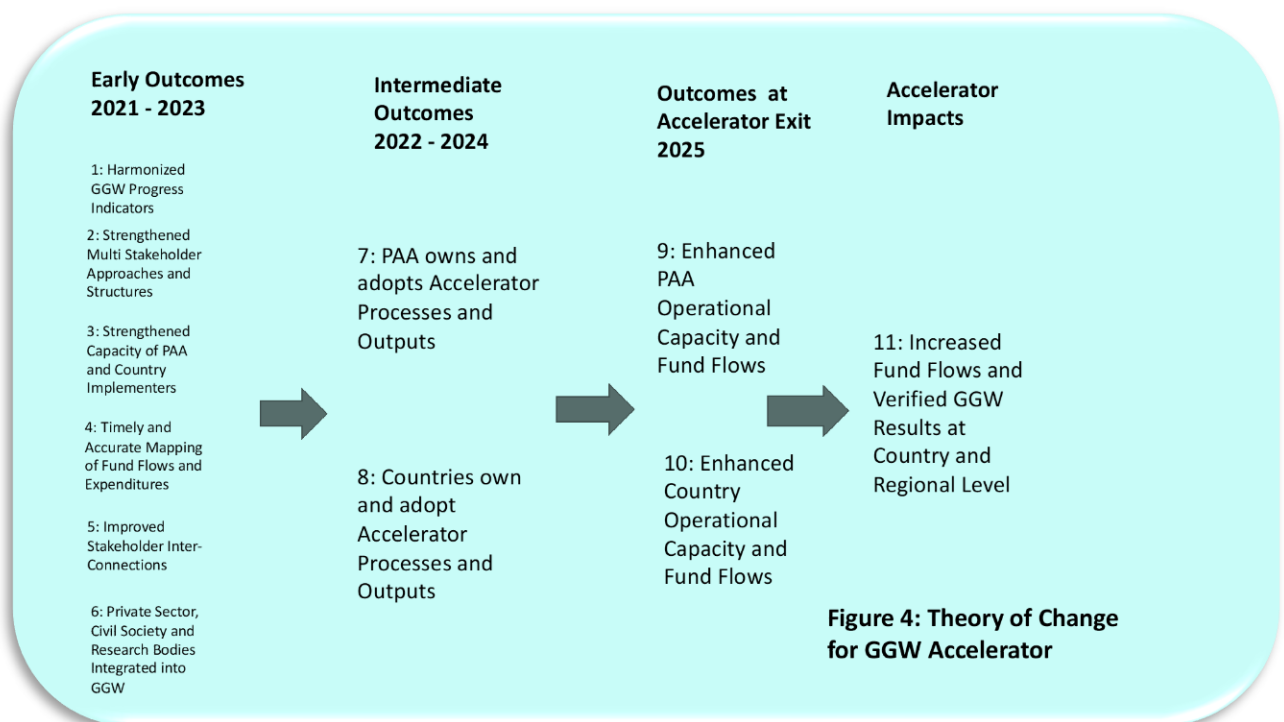
The ToC shown in Figure 4 below highlights specific features of the Accelerator, which seem critical, as follows:

- The Accelerator is a short-term support activity
- It is expected to “exit” by 2025; by which time, its contribution to strengthened GGW activities, systems and procedures should have been “handed over” to the PAA and Country Implementers
- If this “hand over” process leads to full ownership by PAA and Country Implementers, the Accelerator can achieve “institutional impact,” which could have a transformational effect on GGW results in the long term

- If the “hand over” does not lead to such ownership, it is likely that some elements of improvements in GGW processes driven by the Accelerator will remain, leading to incremental effects, which may have limited benefits to GGW results in the long-term
- The ToC should therefore inform issues of ownership, as well as consider the processes and deliverables of the Accelerator itself

7.2 Contribution of the Accelerator to Early Progress Towards Impacts

The Accelerator is around the half-way point of its intended operations, which should transition into the PAA in 2025. The theory shows intended pathways of change to which the Accelerator expects to contribute. Extensive use of Theories of Change by evaluators in the environmental sector have shown that they can indicate from an early stage to what extent an intervention is “on track” towards its intended objectives. This enables corrective actions to be taken to ensure that all necessary pathways are being addressed. The Theory of Change devised for this review is shown in Figure 4 below.



Assessing the progress of the Accelerator against the ToC provided in Figure 4 provides clear indication of variable achievement and an urgent need to rebalance attention, in order to secure progress towards the intended impacts. The review has provided sufficient evidence to categorise progress into three approximate categories – strong, medium and weak. For those areas in which “early outcomes” are expected, progress is rated as follows:

- Strong:**
- 1: Harmonized progress indicators.
 - 4: Timely and accurate mapping of fund flows and expenditures

Medium: 2: Strengthened multi stakeholder approaches and structures.
3: Strengthened capacity of country implementers.
4: Improved stakeholder interconnections
5: Private sector, civil society and research bodies integrated into GGW.

Weak: 3: Strengthened capacity of PAA.

Looking at the two Intermediate Outcomes, expected to be achieved between 2022 and 2024, a clear dichotomy appears. Whilst progress towards country ownership can be considered satisfactory, there is minimal PAA ownership of the Accelerator processes and outputs. This indicates that, unless substantial attention is paid to addressing this change pathway, the “outcomes at exit” cannot be attained, since the Accelerator will not have contributed to the enhanced performance of the PAA, which is necessary to achieve the intended impact for the GGW.

This in turn indicates two potential change pathways. Either review and strengthen the relationship between the Accelerator and the PAA or delink the Accelerator from the PAA and focus exclusively on countries and international partners.

The following section assesses the progress of the Accelerator from a different perspective, that of the DAC evaluation criteria, which are central to this review.

8 Overview of Accelerator Contribution According to DAC Criteria

8.1 Use of the DAC Criteria

The review has considered the performance of the Accelerator according to the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. Although it had more limited scope and resources than a full evaluation, the evidence gathered and analysed proved sufficient to make assessments on these criteria, as shown in Table 3 below.

RELEVANCE			
Response to challenges identified by GGW Status Report:	Focus areas of Accelerator	Assessment	Rating
1: Governance (at country level)	1: Governance (at country level) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the Pan African Agency of the Great Green Wall implementation to achieve the GGW initiative through a structured, multi-stakeholder approach based on five pillars Connect actors to scale up successful initiatives and promote the Sahel as a land of opportunity Involve the private sector, civil society and research/innovation in GGW efforts. 	<p>Much of the work of the Accelerator has focussed on strengthening country level governance. Many stakeholders have reported that the Accelerator’s Governance inputs have been in parallel with those of the PAA, rather than in collaboration with it, which is likely to reduce the relevance of its work in the long-term</p>	Somewhat Satisfactory
2: Monitoring and reporting	2: Monitoring and reporting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the efforts of all actors through the harmonization of results measurement framework 	<p>This has been a major focus of the Accelerator’s work, to some extent conducted in collaboration with PAA.</p>	Highly satisfactory
3: Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enable a more comprehensive mapping of available funding and projects 	<p>The Accelerator has made major efforts to track the progress of funding pledges and to categorize new commitments. It has greatly clarified the status of funds.</p>	Highly satisfactory
4: Technical (in relation to restoration projects)	This is not a priority activity area of the Accelerator.		
Overall rating on relevance			Highly satisfactory
COHERENCE			
Key coherence issues	Reported Performance of Accelerator	Assessment	Rating
1: Compatibility of Accelerator with actions of GGW participants and partners	<p>Accelerator has collaborated closely with participants (specifically countries) and partners (particularly funding and technical).</p>	<p>Countries report varying levels of engagement with Accelerator, but broadly positive. Financial and Technical Partners note greater clarity in terms of fund flows, use and results, which have raised the potential for coherent monitoring and reporting.</p> <p>Common perspective that the Accelerator is leading many processes, rather than assisting PAA to lead them; coupled</p>	Somewhat satisfactory

		with understanding that PAA is currently not in a position to provide such a lead.	
2: Added value of Accelerator to participants and partners	Accelerator aims to add value particularly through clarifying fund commitments and flows, improved monitoring and reporting and strengthened stakeholder participation and collaboration.	Broad appreciation of added value of Accelerator in its areas of focus. However, value added to PAA remains at level of potential, since it is not resourced to continue Accelerator activities at same level during or after “handover.”	Satisfactory.
3: Extent to which Accelerator contributes to current and future governance and management of the GGW	Focuses on specific areas where systematic data gathering and verification could provide the basis for improved governance and management.	Strong progress in developing and piloting a range of tools, (e.g., fund tracking, monitoring and reporting), which have the potential to make a substantial contribution. Not mandated to propose or implement any structural strengthening of PAA, which would be necessary to ensure improved governance.	Somewhat satisfactory
Overall rating on coherence			Somewhat satisfactory
EFFECTIVENESS AND PROGRESS TOWARDS IMPACT			
Key dimensions of effectiveness and progress towards impact	Reported performance of Accelerator	Assessment	Rating
1: Delivering expected outputs and contributing towards outcomes	Although broad areas were identified for its attention at the One Planet Summit, the Accelerator did not have a detailed mandate, programme design or budget. It was intended to help boost performance of the GGW through addressing priorities identified by stakeholders.	The Accelerator has rapidly supported and delivered substantial outputs – notably the Monitoring system and its methodology, clarification of fund flows, processes for establishment of national coalitions for the GGW. Outcomes building on these outputs are much more variable. In some cases, Accelerator reporting on outcomes seems overly optimistic. For example, 8 out of 11 countries are reported to have National Coalitions for GGW, while country interviews suggested that some of these are actually not yet functional.	Satisfactory
2: Adapting to meet newly identified priorities	The Accelerator has developed and specified its intended outcomes on a continuous basis, responding to emerging priorities.	Responding to identified country needs, Accelerator has given priority to assistance in such areas as project	Satisfactory

		identification; needs assessments, strategy development and project preparation.	
3: Awareness and response to unidentified outcomes.	Accelerator reporting does not exhibit attention to unidentified outcomes.	Positive stakeholder perceptions of the activity levels and outputs of the Accelerator have negatively influenced assessments of the PAA. This is unrealistic since the Accelerator benefits from location within an accredited UN agency and financial and technical partner confidence.	Somewhat unsatisfactory
Overall rating on effectiveness and progress towards impact			Satisfactory
EFFICIENCY			
Key efficiency issues	Reported performance of Accelerator	Assessment	Rating
1: Value for money	The Accelerator did not initially have a clear budget or programme. The unit has three staff and reported expenditure of about \$4 million to date. It has delivered a substantial array of products and activities.	There is widespread appreciation among stakeholders of the quality and scope of the Accelerator's work.	Highly satisfactory
2: Timely delivery	Accelerator reports show a comprehensive and varied range of activities, which it has broadly delivered appropriately and on time.	Many stakeholders confirmed timely completion of a range of activities and reports.	Highly satisfactory
3: Comparison with other potential approaches	The Accelerator was developed and prepared for presentation at the One Planet Summit. There is no evidence that alternative delivery approaches were seriously considered.	The main alternative approach could have been through more planned and closer collaboration with the PAA. This might have been more effective in terms of long-term impacts and sustainability but would certainly have been less efficient.	Satisfactory
Overall rating on efficiency			Highly satisfactory
SUSTAINABILITY			
Key sustainability issues	Reported approaches to sustainability of Accelerator contributions	Assessment	Rating
1: Maintaining Accelerator outcomes after project closure	Low coverage of outcome sustainability in key documents. Unclear planning for sustainability of outcomes.	Sustainability of outcomes is best assured through appropriate project design, which ensures continuous	Highly unsatisfactory

		capacity building of long-term institutions, which will carry approaches and activities forward after project closure. There was no clear design for the work of the Accelerator and still less for sustainability of its activities and results after “handover”.	
2: Transition of activities into Pan African Agency	Collaboration with PAA cited in documents, but unclear transition plan, including future human and financial resources.	Transition of activities into the PAA is a hope rather than a plan. No convincing measures have been proposed or taken to ensure that the PAA has the political, financial and human resources necessary to continue the work of the GGW at an adequate level. Although UNCCD has no mandate concerning the PAA, it would be appropriate for it to voice concerns at key fora over the lack of current prospects for sustainability of the work and results of the Accelerator. Financial and technical partners expressed a felt need to minimise collaboration with the PAA because of a “lack of confidence” in its capacity or direction.	Highly unsatisfactory
3: Long-term added benefits to participating countries	Focus on accelerating slow-moving processes at country and regional level	Given the relatively slow pace at which several countries have begun to build political, technical and financial support and capacity for their intended GGW activities, it is clear that 2025 will be too early for the successful transition of support from the Accelerator to the PAA, which will be essential to promote long-term benefits..	Unsatisfactory
4: Sustainable support from international partners for GGW	Focus on improved tracking of contributions of financial partners as well as improved monitoring and reporting systems, to build confidence in GGW, which could promote sustainability.	Whilst many international partners are positive about the work and results of the Accelerator, this has not advanced their willingness to collaborate with or support the PAA. The only potential pathway towards such collaboration depends on an acceptable audit of PAA, with concrete plans to upgrade it into a convincing and trustworthy development partner.	Highly unsatisfactory
Overall rating on sustainability			Highly unsatisfactory

Table 3: Assessment of Accelerator Performance by DAC Evaluation Criteria

8.2 Overall rating of the GGW Accelerator

Overall, the performance of the Accelerator is rated **satisfactory**. This reflects **strong implementation** of a **poorly designed** intervention. The Accelerator is assessed as an attempted **technical solution** to a **political problem**. As such, its contribution towards sustainable outcomes or movement towards the long-term goals of the GGW is severely limited by the lack of international confidence in and support for the PAA, as the intended long-term manager of the Great Green Wall Initiative. However efficient and well-targeted the work of the Accelerator, its results cannot in the medium to long term overcome the weak political support for the PAA, which has translated into wholly inadequate human and financial resources for the complex range of results it is expected to help deliver. This has in turn led many key international financial partners to find ways of supporting the GGW vision without engaging with the PAA. Alternative support pathways mainly focus on individual country support programmes, loosely linked to the GGW and often included in GGW monitoring reports as part of the Initiative. Other approaches have recently included a regional “umbrella programme” implemented and managed by a UN agency, which is again part of the broad GGW vision, but largely outside of the programme of PAA.

9 Potential Scenarios for the Future of the Accelerator Results

It appears that UNCCD has not yet received any tangible suggestions from external stakeholders about the future of the Accelerator. At finance meetings, countries all express their support for UNCCD and the Accelerator, but later confirm that the PAA is the primary Agency which represents them (which is correct). There is therefore an institutional tension between the substantial progress made by the Accelerator in some fields, which appears to place it in a lead position compared with the slower outputs of the PAA and its mandate as a support unit for the PAA. This is unlikely to change, unless PAA is able to deliver more and more quickly.

More broadly, the vision of the GGW faces substantial challenges in view of the fragility and volatility of the region as a whole and internally within some countries. Furthermore, it has been widely noted that much of the progress associated with the GGW has been achieved in participating countries as a whole, rather than in the geographical areas specified as part of it. This may partly reflect that historical trade routes run between north and south, rather than east to west, so that the original horizontal band of the Wall (although covering a huge area) is too narrow to reflect social and economic interactions, including value chains.

Conceptually, the Accelerator is a short burst of energy to help speed up delivery of the GGW concept. The decisive factor will be “what happens next”? The Accelerator is passing on its enhanced knowledge base and systems to the PAA team through formal products as well through a less formal “mentoring” type of approach. In terms of longer-term effects, the Accelerator is supplying valuable inputs, currently contributing towards satisfactory outputs. Whether these feed into eventual impacts across the GGW area largely depends on the willingness and capacity of the PAA to fully adopt the improved approaches and embed them in its operations.

A comparison of potential future options is provided in Table 4 below. These are not exhaustive, and other possibilities or hybrid options may also emerge in discussions following this review.

Table 4: Options to continue the activities and results of the Accelerator

<i>Option No:</i>	<i>Description of option</i>	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>	<i>Assessment</i>
1	Transfer of the GGWA unit to the Pan African Agency ¹⁰	Continuity of Accelerator work. Brings Accelerator and PAA under one management.	Major issues with unit staffing contracts, location, etc. Would existing unit staff accept such a position? If not, recruitment of new staff would remove continuity of the work. PAA would need major budget increase to absorb the unit.	Looks impractical. Highly unlikely existing staff would want to transfer from UN to PAA, or that PAA could finance the positions.
2	Strengthen PAA and transfer activities of unit to Agency	PAA has long-term responsibility for actions currently undertaken by unit, so they must be transferred at some stage.	PAA lacks human and financial resources to absorb increased level of activities, but there is no confirmed plan to strengthen it (other than through collaborative work with Accelerator).	Unrealistic. To date, no tangible plan to strengthen PAA sufficiently to take on its existing workload plus that of the Accelerator.
3	Conclude Audit of PAA and call international summit to define coherent and adequately funded support programme for reformed PAA institution, including political support from African Union, institutional and financial support from AfDB, GCF, etc.	Builds factual basis for internationally agreed and financed support to raise PAA to the level required to fulfil its role for the GGW	Dependent on AfDB to conclude the much-delayed Audit and UNCCD to engage in intensive negotiations to bring a broad range of international stakeholders around the table to take necessary decisions.	If it could be delivered, probably the only effective way forward, which could establish an appropriately managed GGWI, generating increased political and possibly financial support.

¹⁰ This option is specified to take place in 2023 – 2024 in the Terms of Reference for this Review

4	<p>“Business as Usual.” Transfer products such as monitoring system and training results (e.g., project identification and development) to PAA in remaining Accelerator period and continue collaboration with Agency on an ad hoc basis.</p>	<p>Manageable process. Does not require new negotiations or commitments from international stakeholders. Places responsibility with the PAA, which is the mandated authority.</p>	<p>PAA will remain under-resourced to fulfil its mandate.</p> <p>GGW will continue as a set of individual programmes and projects, driven by country or regional agreements with financial partners and loosely connected to the GGW “vision” through imprecise analysis of contributions.</p>	<p>Looks the most likely approach. Meets needs of individual “donors” through country (or regional) programme management and monitoring. Continues concept of GGW at level of vision but does not require major efforts to manage it as an overall and coherent “Initiative.”</p>
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ANNEX ONE

Early Achievements and Challenges of the Great Green Wall Initiative – Experiences of the World Bank SAWAP Programme (2012 – 2019)

The World Bank SAWAP

The earliest large-scale programme in support of the GGW was the Sahel and West Africa Programme (SAWAP) of the World Bank and GEF. Between 2012 and 2019 the SAWAP is reported to have brought 1.6 million hectares under sustainable land management and to have reached over 19 million people.

The SAWAP is the World Bank's main completed contribution to the GGW¹¹, with intended inputs of \$1.8 billion to twelve countries, which included 9 of the GGW countries. In fact, the total actually expended was \$1.2 billion from World Bank loans and \$106 million from GEF grants. However, 60% of these funds were allocated to one project in Nigeria. Furthermore, the SAWAP had broader aims than the original GGW objectives, including substantial urban activities. These and other factors mean that the amount of SAWAP funds dedicated strictly to the Sahelian ecosystems was around \$400 million across 8 countries (average \$50 million per country).

Performance Indicators of the SAWAP:

SAWAP monitoring was based on 4 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

- Increase in land area with SLWM practices in targeted areas, compared to baseline (hectares; reported by crop, range, forest, wetlands, and protected areas)
- Number of direct beneficiaries
- Change in vegetation cover in targeted areas (hectares; generated from vegetation index data (NDVI))
- Change in carbon accumulation rates in biomass and soil, compared to baseline (RC/ha).

Although COVID prevented a detailed evaluation of the SAWAP, a document summarising lessons provides a realistic assessment of achievements, including on the utility and potential accuracy of these KPIs

¹¹ Sustainable Land Management in the Sahel: Lessons from the Sahel and West Africa Program in Support of the Great Green Wall (SAWAP) in 12 countries* (2012-2019). January 2021.

KPI 1: Increase in land area with SLWM practices in targeted areas, compared to baseline (hectares; reported by crop, range, forest, wetlands, and protected areas)

Although GEF grants were consistently focused on expanding the SLWM areas, the World Bank loans these grants were co-financing often had much broader objectives. There were 6 major categories of focus: SLWM specific (5 projects), Agriculture (2 projects), Decentralized Rural Development (2 projects), disaster risk management (DRM) (1 project), Forestry (1 project) and Urban/Suburban Erosion Control (1 project). Although projects not solely focused on SWLM could potentially contribute significantly to the objectives of the SAWAP, competing priorities meant that these were not the main area of implementation. In terms of financing per project category, the majority (about 60%) of the funds were actually focused on urban/suburban erosion control, (all in Nigeria) with SLWM, Agriculture, and Rural Development roughly evenly splitting the remaining funds.

In terms of scale, the Ethiopian SLMP2 stands out clearly as the highest performer in the SAWAP; in itself accounting for 68% of the total hectares of farmer based SLWM practices supported by the programme. Given the huge variety of approaches under SAWAP, its efficiency is difficult to determine. However, a World Bank assessment notes that generally, “SAWAP SLWM interventions per unit costs appear overly expensive when compared to industry benchmarks”.

The World Bank reports¹²: “SAWAP projects have surpassed their initial cumulative targets of 1.3 million hectares of increased land area of SLWM practices. As of 2019, SAWAP projects are on track to establish 1.6 million ha of SLWM practices across 12 countries (larger in area than Lebanon). By 2022, there is anticipated to be 821,527 ha of additional farmland under SLWM and an additional 719,385 ha of public lands (forests, rangeland, protected areas, gullies) under SLWM practices. Although this is a large area, it also represents less than 1% of the farmland of West Africa (roughly 100 million ha) and a small fraction of the 300 million-hectare Sahel”.

KPI 2: Number of direct beneficiaries

The beneficiaries of the SAWAP have been reported as 19.4 million. However, the range of reported benefits is extremely wide, including improved rural roads, schools, etc, and coverage by flood warning systems. If only the recipients of SLWM investments are included, the number of direct beneficiaries is around 1 million people; while the number of indirect beneficiaries is less clear to determine. Even for benefits directly related to SLM, cautionary notes have been introduced by World Bank sources. “For example, in Mali, the total number of reported beneficiaries is around 18,000 people (predominately from training), but the

¹² Op. Cit. No page numbers.

number of land users adopting SLWM practices is less than 2,000, and the number of households gaining access to alternative livelihood activities related to SLWM practices is less than 3,000¹³”.

KP3: Change in vegetation cover in targeted areas (hectares; generated from vegetation index data (NDVI)).

This KPI is intended to measure one of the major objectives of the GGW (and the SAWAP), improved vegetation coverage of former desert lands. However, the World Bank 2020 Lessons documents reports major deficiencies in this measure, with corresponding hesitation about data contained in monitoring reports produced by the SAWAP BRICKS project, which was responsible for reporting progress. Notably:

“For this indicator, the BRICKS SAWAP Monitoring Reports (produced by OSS) rely on Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) statistics showing annual changes in vegetation cover from 2000 to 2018. However, the NDVI is an indication of greenness with most of the signal coming from grass and herbaceous cover. It varies from year to year depending on annual rainfall amounts and distribution, and the NDVI is poorly correlated to other indicators for changes in woody vegetation cover, such as percentage tree cover, biomass or carbon content. The area under shrubs/clear forests, meadows and crops shows very little change from the years 2000-2018, but there are annual changes, which can at least to a certain degree be explained by changes in annual rainfall. For instance, 2011 was a year of poor rainfall and the area under vegetation was around 402 million ha. In 2012, there was better rainfall and the area in this category of land cover immediately increased to 420 million ha, because higher rainfall means more grass. This is not, however, an indication of an actual increase in tree cover of 18 million ha”. To address this issue at least partly, BRICKS (and other experts) have promoted the use of rainfall weighted NDVI.

The SAWAP Monitoring Reports also provide data for a category of “dense forests”, but this indicator fluctuates widely, which illustrates its inaccuracy. The area under dense forests was 51.74 million ha in 2011 and 51.01 million ha in 2012. This represents a loss of 730,000 ha of dense forest in one year. The following year (2013), the area of dense forests is 52.56 million ha., or an increase of 1.55 million ha., compared to 2011. The annual fluctuations in areas under dense cover are not logical and can certainly not be attributed to good SLWM practices as is suggested by the BRICKS Monitoring and Evaluation Report (e.g., page 28 of June 2019 Report)”.

¹³ *SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT IN THE SAHEL: Lessons from the Sahel and West Africa Program in Support of the Great Green Wall (SAWAP) in 12 countries** (2012-2019). No page numbers.

“The BRICKS Project (see below) attempted to apply the NDVI indicator to specific project areas, with limited success. The national projects did not originally make provisions for all project sites to be georeferenced and it was later attempted, with the impetus of BRICKS, to georeference all project sites. However, there was varying success between projects in this exercise”.

KPI 4: Change in carbon accumulation rates in biomass and soil, compared to baseline (RC/ha)

“The BRICKS Progress Reports also present information on carbon accumulation, but implausible data changes undermine the reliability of the data. In reporting the annual MtC by country and year, the annual fluctuations can be significant. For example, it is not possible to go from 3912 MtC in Burkina Faso (2013) to only 2692 MtC (2014), and then back up to 3270 MtC (2015)”. The WB Lessons review notes that: “changes in the land use/land cover (LULC) and the woody vegetation associated with the LULC does not drop so drastically in one year, then somehow recover in the following year. Most of the carbon on the land is tied up in woody vegetation, and in the upper soil profile. Woody vegetation biomass (and carbon) does not fluctuate dramatically from year to year, nor does the carbon in the soil¹⁴”.

The Building Resilience through Innovation Communication and Knowledge Services (BRICKS) project (\$4.6m).

The **BRICKS** project (\$4.6m) was a six-year regional knowledge and monitoring hub; focussed on coordination, monitoring and knowledge among existing regional bodies. It supported the Sahel and West Africa Program (SAWAP) of TerrAfrica, a regional program of 12 World Bank financed country operations plus related partner-supported activities that together contributed to regional and country clients’ Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI) priorities.

It provided a regional learning and M&E structure to support SAWAP national projects. BRICKS funded and convened the partners of the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGW) and the Annual SAWAP Conference. Building this community is reported to have had a transformative effect. It can therefore be seen as a precursor to the Accelerator, which appears to have adopted some of its tasks and roles.

At approval, the BRICKS project had two main outcomes: “to improve accessibility of best practices within the SAWAP Portfolio on sustainable land use and management” and “to improve accessibility of monitoring information within the SAWAP Portfolio on sustainable land use and management”. In 2018, 95% of the SAWAP national team members reported satisfaction with the effectiveness of the services provided by the BRICKS project. The project produced and disseminated 22 learning products out of 30 initially targeted. External experts

¹⁴ Op. Cit. No page numbers.

evaluating the 22 learning products reported that many of these used outdated methods or lessons not applicable to other countries.

BRICKS produced a harmonized M&E framework, which was later adopted by USAID for its projects and used by the African Union to inform the development of an M&E framework for all of the GGW's operations.

Drawing on progress reports and the Implementation Completion Report for BRICKS, the World Bank 's learning review made the following recommendations:

- Overall regional projects like BRICKS need to be better funded and more technically focused to achieve their goals.
- During project implementation, BRICKS assessed country's project needs for regional support, but could only implement 30% of the support requested due to limited financing. Since regional services are costly and time consuming, dedicated budgets in support of regional activities should also be included in national projects.

The BRICKS team found that “monitoring the broad scope of the SAWAP projects was inherently difficult given the number of sectors for project interventions and the broad range of project activities (e.g., rural, development, urban soil erosion, disaster risk management, forestry, agriculture). While this reflects the countries' different priorities, it created constraints for regional entities to tailor knowledge management activities and M&E services for each country”. A recommendation of the Implementation Completion Report (ICR) was therefore to restrict the thematic scope of regional SLWM projects to focus specifically on priorities set by the participating countries. Having more targeted and homogeneous intervention areas could possible help reduce complexity.

SAWAP's experience with Monitoring and Evaluation of GGW activities

With support provided by the regional BRICKS project through Observatoire du Sahara et du Sahel, (OSS), the SAWAP countries adopted a common monitoring framework and a set of key indicators to measure progress in achieving the program's objectives – with varying success. Unfortunately, after 5 years, many projects were not able to provide conclusive evidence about changes in vegetative cover and carbon stocks. Most projects encountered difficulties in collecting baseline information and relied on the use of NDVI data, which is poorly suited to assess changes in tree cover. Although these monitoring technologies were considered advanced in 2012, the satellite technology has since advanced substantially and these approaches are now outdated.

Recommendations from the SAWAP review relevant to the Accelerator:

Technical recommendations:

- In any future SLWM projects, *all sites should be geo-referenced and mapped from the outset*, and baseline information should be collected using a coherent M&E framework. Post hoc attempts to geo-reference project sites were not successful.
- Accurate data on the location of the project sites is needed to properly assess the benefits and to monitor the sustainability of impacts. *The next tranche of SLWM projects should insist on geo-referencing, mapping, and baseline data collection for all SLWM intervention sites and include time-series research on actual changes in vegetative cover, soil health and other multiple impacts of investments.* This would aid greatly in proving attribution for project activities. A second positive impact of geo-referencing and mapping would be the reliability of the data.
- Greater effort should be made to *define the types/categories of beneficiaries and the extent of specific benefits.* While the SAWAP partners did focus on producing numbers related to a few selected indicators, this is a minimal form of impact monitoring. Except for Niger and Ghana, the SAWAP projects have not made significant progress in measuring the actual impact of SLWM activities on crop yields, household income, food security, tree cover and carbon stocks.
- *the status and impacts of the implementation of management plans should be better documented.* While the projects did report on the number of forest management plans prepared and the area of land covered by these plans, the general assumption is that impacts were minimal for forests with only management plans and no monitoring of management plan implementation.
- a more sufficient measurement of the actual impact of training and other capacity building activities should be developed *through Accelerator Support.* SAWAP monitoring reports always mention the number of people and institutions trained and which percentage of the trainees are women. It is useful to know the numbers of people and institutions trained, but it does not inform us about how the beneficiaries of the training activities subsequently used their new knowledge and skills. SAWAP projects invested a considerable portion of financing for training and the long-term effects of this should be assessed and reported,
- *Any future SLWM regional project (follow-up to BRICKS) should be better funded and more focused, with regional activities included in national projects.* The BRICKS project covered a fraction of what partner countries requested and *had a limited budget for the costly and time-consuming tasks required to organize 12 countries in 2 major languages.* Similar to other World Bank regional operations (West African Productivity Project (WAAP), Regional Sahel Pastoralism Support Program (PRAPS)), project designs should consider how to include support for both the regional and national activities. National projects could actually be used to contribute to the budget of the

regional project. If there isn't a strongly focused regional SLWM program, then a regional knowledge management project might not be worth the transaction costs.

- Future SLWM projects should be tracking their impacts on crop yields, household food security, poverty reduction, resilience and more. As was the case with SAWAP, projects should not stop at measuring just hectares of SLWM introduced without measuring some of the impacts of those SLWM measures.

KEY OPERATIONAL LESSONS FROM THE SAWAP

Some key operational lessons from SAWAP, reported by the World Bank include:

- need to **scale up agroforestry practices**
- need to **protect and replenish water sources**
- important to **fight erosion and prepare for natural disasters**
- need to **strengthen land tenure security.**

Of particular interest to the Accelerator is the report that:

“BRICKS produced a harmonized M&E framework, which was later adopted by USAID for its projects and used by the African Union to inform the development of an M&E framework for all of the GGW’s operations”.

ANNEX TWO: Stakeholders Contacted

This list records persons interviewed during the course of the review. Several potential key informants did not respond to the invitation for a meeting,

Name	Position	Responsibility	Institution
Abakar Mahamat Zougoulou	Scientific & technical Director	Regional	PAA
Sakoudia Thiam	Head of R&D	Regional	PAA
Marcelin Sanou	M&E Officer	Regional	PAA
Diop Souleymane	Specialist GIS	Regional	PAA
Mamane Bako Amadou	Director, Administration and Finance	Regional	PAA
Doulikom Adama	National Director	Burkina Faso	NAGGW
Adefires Worku Gizaw	National Director	Ethiopia	NAGGW
Sawsan Abderahim	National Director	Sudan	NAGGW
Adefires Worku	National Director	Ethiopia	NAGGW
Ibrahima Sow	Regional Coordinator for Africa Programs Unit	GEF	GEF
Simeon K. Ehui	Regional Director for Sustainable Development in Africa	World Bank	WB
Madjiguene Seck	Senior Partnership Specialist	World Bank	WB

Maria Sarraf	Practice Manager for the Environment, Natural Resources and the Blue Economy in West Africa.	World Bank	WB
Bernard Crabbé	Team Leader Environment mainstreaming and circular economy	EC	EC
Niclas GOTTMANN	Policy Officer Land and Environment	EC	EC
Maxime Thibon	Climate Finance and GGW	IFAD	IFAD
Pierre Guedaz	Senior Climate Finance Specialist	IFAD	IFAD
Amath Pathe Sene	Lead Environment and Climate for West and Central Africa	IFAD	IFAD
Ibrahim Thiaw	Executive Secretary	UNCCD	UNCCD
Louise Baker	Managing Director, Global Mechanism	Global Mechanism	UNCCD
Birguy Lamizana Diallo	Senior Programme Officer. Global Mechanism. Coordinator of GGW Accelerator.	GGWA	UNCCD
Gilles Amadou Ouédraogo	Monitoring Programme Officer	GGWA	UNCCD
Sarah Toumi	Programme Management Officer	GGWA	UNCCD
Ansgar Eussner	Independent Consultant to GCF	Independent	Consultant