

**AFRICAN UNION**

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**Virtual Ministerial Conference  
of the Great Green Wall Initiative Countries, International and  
Regional Partners**

7 September 2020

13:00 – 15:00 GMT

**Welcome Remarks  
by  
H.E. Ambassador Josefa SACKO**

**Commissioner, Rural Economy and Agriculture**

**African Union Commission**

- ◆ **Deputy Secretary General of the UN, H.E. Amina Mohammed**
- ◆ **H.E. Marieme Bekaye, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, Mauritania**
- ◆ **Excellencies, Ministers of various sectors in charge of the Great Green Wall initiative**
- ◆ **H.E Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**
- ◆ **Prof. Abdoulaye Dia, Executive Secretary, Pan-African Agency of the Great Greet Wall**
- ◆ **Director Generals and National Focal Points for the Great Green Wall Initiative**
- ◆ **Our International Development Partners, Civil Society Organisation and Collaborators**
- ◆ **Ladies and Gentlemen**

1. By your very presence in this meeting, I assume that we are all healthy and keeping safe from the COVID-19 Pandemic.
2. Let me thank the UNCCD Executive Secretary for organising this very important forum to mobilize resources and launch the Impact Assessment Report on the implementation of the Great Green Wall Initiative. We thank the Government of the Republic of Ireland for the financial support that has enabled us to undertake the assessment and production this report.
3. The outbreak of the Coronavirus is having devastating effects on the global economy and disproportionately impacting Africa, and especially those in the dry lands who are mostly involved in informal economic activities for their livelihood and subsistence. Implementation of field activities has been brought to a halt as a result of various national measures aimed at containing the spread of the virus. The crippling effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy has also reduced financial support to the Great Green Wall at national level. This has also be hit by the diversion of resources to the health sector. I am however glad that we are slowly learning how to co-exists with the coronavirus under the so called 'new normal'. What is required now is

to accelerate economic recovery and to rekindle the field based activities for the Great Green Wall. The Initiative has huge potential to contribute towards green recovery from the pandemic, as one of the Nature Based Solutions. In some Communities, the Initiative is their main life-line, we have to do all it takes to start implementation again.

4. Resource mobilization remains at the center of addressing the daunting challenges of land degradation and desertification. This is more so now as the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic has depleted national resources, and priorities have also changed. Governments are under immense pressure to respond to emergencies instead of focusing on long-term sustainable programmes such as the Great Green Wall. Now more than ever before, we shall require to join forces, work more collaboratively, promote more synergies and innovation. Let us also avoid duplication of efforts and focus on each partner's clear mandate. *Time for Business as Usual is over.*
5. The Africa Union Commission welcomes the production of this seminal report which was a collaborative effort of all the partners involved in the implementation of the Initiative. We also welcome the production of the Pan African Agency 2021 – 2030 investment plan and the SADC Great Green Wall initiative implementation strategy.

### **Excellencies, Honourables, Ladies and Gentlemen**

6. The results of the study on the impact assessment of the Initiative- a decade of implementation have shown positive impacts in enabling regional and national policies for land restoration, on job creation, poverty alleviation, wealth creation. The report demonstrates that with adequate resources, the GGWSSI stands to transform the dry lands of Africa. This is why we welcome the organisation of this forum and endorses all resource mobilisation efforts
7. However, there are some aspects of the report that I have to point out that need re-consideration, these shortcomings includes, limiting the assessment to the 11 countries, signatories to the protocols of the Pan African Agency and paying little attention to regional and national policies and efforts of policy makers. These 2 elements have the potential to enhance the distorted views that have rocked the initiative over the years.

8. I highly recommend that in future, we do a more comprehensive and inclusive assessment so that no countries or regions are excluded. There is an urgent need for these gaps to be filled.
9. As you may be aware, the Africa Union Commission in collaboration with the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) have facilitated the extension of the GGWI to Southern Africa, which is also severely affected by land degradation, Desertification, drought, dust and sand storms. We call on all our partners to join us in this endeavor and extend their support to that region too.
10. At the AU Commission, we remain fully committed to strengthen and enlarge the GGWI partnership across Africa in various domains including Agriculture, energy, tourism, water resources management, etc. We are particularly interested in engaging the World Bank, EU, GEF and the GCF for enhanced partnership on resource mobilization.
11. As I end by Statement, Let me once again thank all of you, our Ministers, Partners and especially AU member states, the EU, the World Bank, UNCCD and FAO,.
12. I wish us all very fruitful deliberation and look forward to an outcome that will enhance support to our Member states in the implementation of the initiative and the sustainability of the dry lands in Africa.

Thank you  
Merci Boucou  
Obrigado  
Shukuran