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The Great Green Wall

Press Kit

**United Nations Convention
to Combat Desertification
(UNCCD)**



United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification

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PRESS RELEASE

Embargoed Until 11 January 2020, 14:00hrs GMT

GREAT GREEN WALL RECEIVES OVER \$10B TO REGREEN THE SAHEL- FRANCE, WORLD BANK LISTED AMONG DONORS

Bonn/Paris, January 11, 2021 – The ambitious Great Green Wall for the Sahel and Sahara Initiative (GGW) has received at least 10billion* United States Dollars in new funding. The funding will fast track efforts to restore degrading land, save biological diversity as well as create green jobs and build resilience of the Sahelian people.

Emmanuel Macron, President of France, made the announcement at the just concluded One Planet Summit for Biodiversity co-organized by France, the United Nations and World Bank.

The GGW snakes along the southern margin of Africa's Sahara Desert running from the Atlantic coast to the Red Sea. The Great Green Wall Accelerator makes up 30 per cent of 33 billion United States Dollars needed to achieve the Great Green Wall's ambitions for the year 2030.

Mohamed Cheikh El-Ghazouani, President of Mauritania and current chair of the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Pan-African Agency of the Great Green Wall, welcomed the Accelerator program on behalf of the region.

"We welcome the announcement of the Great Green Wall Accelerator Initiative, whose objective is to release an initial contribution over the period 2021-2025, to give effect to the commitments of the financial partners in a coordinated framework," said Ghazouani.

"The mobilization of this additional funding through an innovative approach will certainly contribute to the achievement of the Great Green Wall goals, which aim by 2030, at the restoration of 100 million hectares of degraded land and the creation of 10 million green jobs.... This initiative will certainly facilitate the alignment of our partners' interventions, in response to the concerns raised by our Ministers of Environment at the last Great Green Wall Conference," said Ghazouani.

Ghazouani stressed that it would "enable our countries, in accessing the necessary funds, to increase local investments within the framework of the five pillars adopted and to strengthen the capacities of the national agencies of the Great Green Wall. In this context, I would like to suggest the establishment, in each of our countries, of a biodiversity Fund into which we will contribute a portion of the resources resulting from the cancellation of our debts. Cancellation that we call for with all our hearts."

"Pandemic recovery is our chance to change course. With smart policies and the right investments, we can chart a path that brings health to all, revives economies and builds resilience. Innovations in energy and transport can steer a sustainable recovery and an economic and social transformation. Nature-based solutions – such as Africa's Great Green Wall – are especially promising," said António Guterres, UN Secretary General.

Since its inception in 2007, the Great Green Wall (GGW) has partnered with stakeholders to regreen the region and create an 8,000 km long world wonder involving at least 11 countries and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

The GGW Initiative, now well into its second decade, is an African-led flagship program demonstrating how to harness the power of nature to provide policy solutions to multiple and complex environmental threats, such as land degradation, desertification, drought, climate change, biodiversity loss, poverty and food insecurity, simultaneously. The GGW has inspired many African countries which are now associated with it and its work is contributing to the implementation of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework. GGW is among the iconic global campaigns targeted for completion during the Decade of Ecosystem Restoration ending in 2030.

PRESS RELEASE

The virtual 'One Planet Summit' for biodiversity held on January 11, 2021 in Paris was an opportunity to raise the level of ambition of the international community in protecting nature, while responding to the new questions raised by the COVID-19 pandemic as we collectively mobilize resources to build back better and improve livelihoods in the Sahel through the Great Green Wall Initiative. The summit is mobilizing resources, heads of government and partners as well as leaders of international organizations, financial institutions, the business sector and NGOs to make commitments for concrete action to preserve and restore biodiversity, to make strong new announcements and to launch transformational initiatives for nature.

ENDS

NOTE TO EDITORS

* President Macron will announce the final figure raised by the Summit at about 14:00hrs GMT.

Background Information about the Great Green Wall and the Great Green Accelerator is provided in the press kit.

This press release was revised and reflects a new quote issued by the Secretary-General.

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ABOUT THE GREAT GREEN WALL

The Great Green Wall Initiative is greening the Sahel, restoring degraded lands and providing decent livelihoods for its people, snaking the Sahel all the way from Senegal in the West to Djibouti in the East, restoring degraded lands and providing jobs and opportunities for millions of people in Africa.

The Great Green Wall is an African-led movement launched in 2007 by leaders from the Sahelian countries, with an epic ambition to grow an 8,000 km natural wonder of the world across the entire width of Africa.

In a post COVID context where Sahelian countries are struggling with budgets and funding, this accelerator will help meet financial requirements and turbo charge the achievement of its goals. To complete the GGW, it is estimated that USD 33 billion US dollars of investment – from private, national and international sources will be needed.

The Great Green Wall

What is the Great Green Wall (GGW) ?

The Great Green Wall is an African-led initiative, which aims to restore the degraded landscapes of the Sahel – one of the world’s most impoverished regions.

People in the Sahel region of Africa live off the land – in a literal sense - and depend on its productivity for their everyday survival. Consider that 80% of the population here still rely on rain-fed agriculture for work but 65% of African land is degraded.

In last 30 years, the region has been devastated by severe droughts and massive loss of fertile land due to climate change, over-farming and unsustainable land management practices.

But people are fighting back: The aim is to restore 100 million hectares and create 10 million jobs by 2030.

Already much has been achieved – In Senegal, more than 12 million trees have been planted; In Ethiopia, 15 million hectares have been restored. Nearly 18% of the Wall is estimated to be complete. Once complete, the Wall will stretch an extraordinary 8000 km across the entire width of the Continent – a new world wonder for a modern age.

The Wall is a compelling symbol for all humanity that we can take action against our degrading planet. If the world’s poorest can do it, so can we all.

History of the Great Green Wall

The Great Green Wall has evolved over the years. Although the initiative was officially launched in 2007, Africa’s vision of a ‘Great Green Wall’ dates back decades to the 1970s, when the Sahel was rocked by successive droughts, and vast swathes of fertile land started to become severely degraded. In only a few years, this once lush and verdant region, that for generations had supported millions of livelihoods, turned increasingly dry and barren.

The main causes: the combined effects of poor land management practices, overgrazing, population growth and the emerging threat of climate change caused vast areas of land to be degraded in the Sahel.

Without sufficient productive land to grow food or sustain decent lives, a spiralling cycle of poverty quickly emerged.

In the face of increasingly desperate circumstances, community leaders and political visionaries such as Burkina Faso’s revolutionary leader, Thomas Sankara, started to look for a long-term solution.

In the 1980s, the extraordinary idea of transforming the region’s degraded landscapes through a ‘Great Green Wall’ stretching across the width of Africa, from Senegal in the West to Djibouti in the East, started to gain traction.

But it took another two decades before the idea was actually realized – when former President Obasanjo of Nigeria and President Wade of Senegal put it firmly on the international agenda once more at the 7th Summit of the Heads of State of CEN-SAD in June 2005.

Finally, in 2007, the initiative was officially endorsed by the African Union and a decade down the line we see that there are now more than 20 countries involved and supported by the international community.



Why is the Great Green Wall Important?

Land degradation is a crisis of mammoth proportions. 65% of African land is currently degraded, jeopardizing the livelihoods of nearly two-thirds of the Continent's population. When you consider that 80% of Africa's economy depends on a climate-sensitive natural resource base like rain-fed, subsistence agriculture – then you start to understand the implications of land degradation on the workforce here.

Millions of people – particularly rural youth – are currently facing an uncertain future due to the lack of decent rural jobs and continuous loss of livelihoods due to land degradation and falling yields. If we don't act, frustrations will boil over with more migration and more conflict over a shrivelling resource base.

This is the backdrop of what land degradation tangibly means in the Sahel. Ignoring the plight of jobless young people in sub-Saharan Africa is a recipe for political instability and global insecurity. The Great Green Wall is one piece in the puzzle in providing genuine alternatives for people increasingly seeking 'a way out' of abject hopelessness and desperate poverty.

In Africa, 200 million of the 375 million young people entering the job market over the next 15 years will be living in rural areas. Such a fast-growing young population makes rural employment crucial for easing rural-urban migration.

What is the progress to date?

The Great Green Wall Implementation Status and Way Ahead to 2030 report, the first comprehensive status report of the GGW states that close to 18 million hectares of land has been restored, over 350,000 jobs have been created and around USD 90 million in revenues has been generated from 2007 to 2018 through the GGW activities.

The report also states that land restoration positively impacted 15 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The USD 90 million generated, for instance, helped to reduce rural poverty, SDG Goal 1.

The Great Green Wall

Over 220,000 people have received training on sustainable production of agro-pastoral and non-timber products, benefitting the SDG Goal 12 on responsible consumption and production.

What are the ultimate ambitions of the Great Green Wall?

By 2030, the Great Green Wall aims to:

- ☐ **Restore 100 million hectares of currently degraded land**
- ☐ **Sequester 250 million tonnes of carbon**
- ☐ **Create 10 million jobs in rural areas**

The Great Green Wall contributes to 15 of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals and as such is one of the world's truly most transformative projects.

As such, the Great Green Wall aims to:

- Grow Green jobs, providing decent work for young people on a Continent where 60 million are set to migrate to Europe in the next two decades (UK Ministry of Defence)
- Grow Food security, for the 20 million people who go hungry every day (UNOCHA)
- Grow Drought resilience in the face of total crop failure
- Grow access to renewable energy, helping to power communities towards a brighter future
- Grow resilience to climate change in a region where temperatures are rising faster than anywhere else on earth
- Grow a new world wonder – a symbol of hope that humanity can fight back against climate change and a degrading planet and create something extraordinary.

Why should the world care about the Great Green Wall?

We live in a globalized world, where the degradation of land in the Sahel has implications not just on people living there, but for humanity as a whole. Just look at the European migration crisis. People sometimes fail to notice that the vast majority of migrants originate from dryland areas - from Senegal, Gambia, Nigeria etc, this is not to say that climate change or natural resource degradation are the only push factors.

Considering the fact that 80% of jobs in the Sahel are in agriculture – when land does not produce any longer for the people who depend on land for survival, people have to look for alternatives.

The UK Ministry of Defence predicts that 60 million people will migrate from degraded parts of Africa to Europe by 2045, unless action is taken. The alternative is often even worse. Competition and conflict over the productive resources that remain is growing. Lake Chad, one of the region's lifelines, has lost 90% of its surface area in less than a generation due to desertification and climate related processes.

It is no coincidence that the terrorist group, Boko Haram, is especially active in the area around the shrinking lake. For African youth in particular the potential for radicalization or conflict is not an abstract or distant threat. It is daily reality. Ignoring the plight of jobless young people in sub-Saharan Africa is a recipe for political instability and global insecurity.

The Great Green Wall is one piece in the puzzle in providing genuine alternatives for people increasingly seeking 'a way out' of abject hopelessness and desperate poverty.



PHOTO: UNCCD/Makewaves Media

In a speech about the Great Green Wall in March 2018, the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins put it very well when he said:

“We are one global family: we must recognise that the problems faced by a farmer in Niger are our problems; that the struggles of women in Mali to live decently are our struggles; that the hunger of a child in the Sudan is our hunger.”

Is there enough water to sustain the Great Green Wall?

Each country has designated a protected area dedicated to activities along the Great Green Wall, managed by the local communities themselves. Obviously, we are talking about very arid, dry areas.

But there are annual rainfalls here too – and a unique practice known as rainwater harvesting which collects the heavy annual rainfall and distributes it through irrigation systems is one of the ways in which the Great Green Wall is sustained.

A number of innovative as well as traditional practices like the Zai are used in places like Burkina Faso.

This is mainly used in highly degraded lands, and is a technique of digging small, half-moon shaped holes in the soil to retain runoff while adding manure to increase soil fertility.

To date, more than 3 million hectares of Burkina Faso barren land have been rehabilitated this way – benefiting thousands of people. The Zai is a proven way which allowed the Burkina Faso farmers to increase their income but also to slow down a rural exodus and strengthen the country’s food self-sufficiency. 8 Sahel countries are now successfully replicating this technique.

In addition, many of the species selected along the Wall are drought resistant, like the acacia Senegal or the moringa requiring very little water in any case. All of the trees planted serve a purpose for the local communities, whether that be economic, nutritional or environmental.

The Great Green Wall

How are communities being educated about the value of trees?

It is an African-led process – but with international support by development agencies including the United Nations and the World Bank. A key component of the project is on capacity building, knowledge management and education.

This ensures that the value of the trees that are being planted is intrinsically tied in with the broader programme. There is a major exchange programme between communities across the Wall to continually generate and share new and innovative ideas that ensures that education spreads far and wide across the Sahel and that ultimately the best practices for sustaining the Wall are continually scaled up to communities who need them most.

What are the indicators to achieving the 2030 ambitions?

□ **Global awareness to build political momentum** – The Great Green Wall is a genuine human wonder to rival any other in history.

We need global awareness about this initiative, so we can build a popular movement that awakens the planet and so people everywhere can take action.

□ **Investment** – To fulfill the ambitions of the GGW, we need to restore almost 10 million hectares of

land every year. Governments and development agencies need to step up action to protect the future of millions of young people in Africa, but also to help meet global targets on climate change, and alleviate problems that will not simply go away and the affect us all, like migration, insecurity and terrorism.

Equally, development aid must increasingly be matched by private investment if we are to succeed in realizing this bold ambition.

How did countries historically at war agree on the project?

Historically, the Sahel is a region that has been beset by terrible inter-ethnic conflicts. The fact that countries have come together behind this pan-African initiative is hugely encouraging and symbolizes incredible unity of purpose.

This mass act of collaboration was rubberstamped at the African Union in 2007, and so far, has held strong. So severe is the issue of natural resource degradation in the Sahel, that there is a realization amongst African leaders that these challenges can only be faced and tackled effectively collectively.

What is so striking about the Great Green Wall is that it is a shared political vision of African leaders and millions of ordinary people. An 'African dream' to transform an impoverished region on the frontline of climate change into a resilient hub of flourishing economic activity.

How will the wall be maintained upon completion?

Community management is at the heart of the Great Green Wall, so the very design of the project is about a self-sustaining future that not only grows trees, but also grows livelihoods – and paid jobs - for people in rural areas. Not imposed solutions, but locally designed and driven ones.

To give one example, the Great Green Wall is partnering with an international 'superfood' giant called Aduna, which is creating thousands of 'land-based green jobs' through the establishment of sustainable value chains for lucrative dryland products like Baobab, moringa, and super-cocoa that are then sold on the international market. At the same time, communities there contribute to the Great Green Wall vision by planting and nurturing trees, as they have an incentive at the end from a livelihood perspective to ensure that the trees are not cut down but instead protected as a vital source of their daily incomes.



□ **Sustained Political commitment from GGW countries** - Ultimately, this is an African-led initiative for Africa's future – and countries must continue to show genuine political ambition to ensure that this African dream turns into a reality.

The progress to date offers considerable hope, but the focus must remain.

□ **Focus on job creation** - Young people must be given the chance to bring their natural capital back to life and into production. With the right type of investments in land, rural infrastructure and skills development, the future of the Sahel can be bright.

A greater emphasis must be placed on **creating jobs** – tangible opportunities for building on the 'cash for work' schemes already in place on the GGW. One example of this could be the development of value chains to connect local smallholders with lucrative international global markets for desirable products grown in the region, and along the Great Green Wall itself.



What are the objectives of the Great Green Wall Accelerator ?

The first objective is to link up more effectively the already available financing sources with the available project opportunities.

This requires sound coordination among current partners, funders, implementors and beneficiaries under the GGW program.

The second objective is to record and bring in new sources of funds for the GGW program.

This involves both proper tracking of ongoing activities of multilateral and bilateral ODA partners that may already support the GGW objectives as well as mobilizing additional financial resources from private and public sources for GGW implementation. The GGW Accelerator will not channel any funding directly or seek to establish new funding mechanisms.

How will the Great Green Wall Accelerator function?

The Great Green Wall Accelerator will work in intervention areas by:

- (a) Tracking financial commitments and disbursements for activities that support the GGW objectives;
- (b) Tracking implementation progress in beneficiary countries against the GGW results targets;
- (c) Providing technical advice to GGW partners concerning causal pathways, results indicators, reporting frameworks and monitoring activities;
- (d) Supporting the GGW countries in resource mobilization
- (e) Carrying out public information campaigns and targeted advocacy efforts for the GGW program.

Links to resources

1. About the Great Green Wall - [Access Great Green Wall Website](#)
2. Great Green Wall Initiative - [Access UNCCD Website](#)
3. UNCCD Publications - [Access UNCCD publications](#)
4. Great Green Wall News and Resources - [Access Resources](#)
5. Request for UNCCD Interviewee - [Access forms](#)

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