

Independent Review of the Great Green Wall Accelerator February 2023

Summary of the main findings and conclusions

The Great Green Wall (GGW) is a pan-African initiative to restore and sustainably manage land in Sahara and the Sahel region to address land degradation and poverty, seeking to generate approaches and lessons that can be replicated elsewhere. Eleven countries in the region participate in the Initiative, and in 2010 they established a Pan-African Agency of the GGW to coordinate its implementation and support resources mobilisation.

In September 2020, the Ministers of Environment of the GGW countries met and called on the international community to better coordinate efforts following the release of a progress report on the GGW and the challenges it highlighted. In January 2021, at the One Planet Summit hosted by the French President Macron, several multilateral and bilateral organizations pledged over 19 billion US dollars for the GGW. The establishment of a Great Green Wall Accelerator was announced, to help all actors for the Initiative to better coordinate, monitor and measure the impact of their actions. The Accelerator unit has been initially set up to the UNCCD in April 2021, with the aim for it to be transferred to the Pan-African Agency later on.

To make an evidence-based consideration of progress, success and challenges of the Accelerator and to further enhance 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 and conclusions of the independent review. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the UNCCD.

1. Overview of Progress in Areas Supported by the Accelerator

The Accelerator team has built its priority areas of support on the findings of the 2020 GGW Implementation Status Report¹ and subsequent discussions with a broad range of stakeholders as shown below. This support addresses several key challenges perceived to be facing the GGW. If the Accelerator outcomes are achieved, they could make an important contribution to the future of the Initiative. However, to translate the Accelerator outcomes into sustainable long-term benefits for the GGW countries, its responsibilities have to be effectively transferred to longer term institutions, specifically the Pan-African Agency (PAA) for the Great Green Wall.

¹ <https://www.unccd.int/resources/publications/great-green-wall-implementation-status-way-ahead-2030>

In the area of governance and advocacy, the GGWA has supported the generation of strong and inclusive national level GGW coalitions, including private sector and civil society; coherent and effective overall GGW governance; and targeted and effective advocacy.

In the area of monitoring, evaluation, reporting, GGWA has supported the development of a harmonized results management framework

In the area of resource mobilisation, GGWA has promoted the establishment of a pipeline of eligible and bankable projects

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.

| 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 1: Country-level progress reported by the Accelerator in its key support areas

Participating countries have identified as their priority area for Accelerator support the perceived need to enhance fund commitments and flows. Expectations were raised at the January 2021 One Planet Summit by the ambitious level of donor pledges to the GGW. However, countries have expressed the view that fund flows since this event have been slower than they expected. Accordingly, 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. 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. This has brought much greater clarity to progress of fund flows.

Several GGW countries have reported that donors have informed them that they are not producing proposals for “bankable projects.” In response to this, the Accelerator played a role in developing a support system (through the UNCCD Global Mechanism), under which each country will be assisted by a UN Volunteer with appropriate expertise to help it build necessary project concept documentation.

With regard to Monitoring and Reporting, the Accelerator has again done major work, in collaboration with countries and the PAA, resulting in production and piloting of an ambitious Harmonized Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.

On the basis of documentary evidence, including presentations at many meetings at national and international levels, the Review has assessed that **the Accelerator has been extremely proactive and has delivered a high level of expertise to the areas it has addressed.** This has been broadly confirmed in discussions with a range of stakeholders in countries, as well as key financial and technical partners.

Whilst the proactive approach of the Accelerator has been well-received by stakeholders contacted, most also stated concerns about the relationship between the Accelerator and the PAA. This is commonly voiced in terms of whether the two bodies are acting in collaboration or in parallel; and whether the Accelerator is intended to support the PAA through joint activities or simply by taking over some of its workload. Some see the Accelerator as the “lead agency” in those key fields that were progressing slowly before the Accelerator started.

It was far beyond the mandate of this Review to conduct any assessment of the performance of the PAA. However, documentation, stakeholder interviews and discussion with PAA Team members all confirmed that the Agency (specifically its Secretariat) is not adequately or reliably resourced in terms of personnel, skill sets or funds, to successfully deliver all that is expected of it. This has promoted a low level of confidence among its intended partners, leading to a range of approaches, particularly by potential funders, to reduce engagement with the PAA. This raises fundamental questions concerning the future of the GGW Initiative. These questions are outside of the scope of this Review, except insofar as they jeopardise the sustainability of the achievements made by the work of the Accelerator. Looking at these achievements, this Review concludes that they all need maintenance in the short, medium and long term and that this cannot be provided under the current plan to handover its responsibilities to PAA as it currently stands by 2025.

2. Assessment of Performance of the GGW Accelerator

This review assessed the contribution of the Accelerator against the evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, progress to impact, efficiency and sustainability. Below is an overview of the key findings. The assessment applies the standard evaluation rating scales from “highly unsatisfactory” to “highly satisfactory”.

Table 2: Assessment of Performance of the GGW Accelerator According to the Evaluation Criteria

| Relevance of the Accelerator | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| Focus areas of the Accelerator | Assessment | Rating |
| <p>1: Governance (at country level)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the PAA 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.</p> <p>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> | <p>Somewhat Satisfactory</p> |
| <p>2: Monitoring and reporting</p> <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> | <p>Highly satisfactory</p> |
| <p>3: Funding</p> <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> | <p>Highly satisfactory</p> |

| Coherence: Compatibility of Accelerator with actions of GGW participants and partners | | |
|---|---|------------------------------|
| Reported performance of Accelerator | Assessment | Rating |
| Accelerator has collaborated closely with participants (specifically countries) and partners (particularly funding and technical). | <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 with understanding that PAA is currently not in a position to provide such a lead.</p> | Somewhat satisfactory |
| 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 |
| Focusses on specific areas where systematic data gathering and verification could provide the basis for improved governance and management. | <p>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.</p> <p>Not mandated to propose or implement any structural strengthening of PAA, which would be necessary to ensure improved governance.</p> | Somewhat satisfactory |

| Effectiveness and progress to impact | | |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| Reported performance of Accelerator | Assessment | Rating |
| <p>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.</p> | <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> | <p>Satisfactory</p> |
| <p>2: Adapting to meet newly identified priorities: The Accelerator has developed and specified its intended outcomes on a continuous basis, responding to emerging priorities.</p> | <p>Responding to identified country needs, Accelerator has given priority to assistance in such areas as project identification; needs assessments, strategy development and project preparation.</p> | <p>Satisfactory</p> |
| <p>3: Awareness and response to unidentified outcomes: The Accelerator reporting does not exhibit attention to unidentified outcomes.</p> | <p>Positive stakeholder perceptions of the activity levels and outputs of the Accelerator have negatively influenced assessments of the PAA.</p> <p>This is unrealistic since the Accelerator benefits from location within an accredited UN agency and financial and technical partner confidence.</p> | <p>Somewhat unsatisfactory</p> |

| Efficiency | | |
|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| Reported performance of Accelerator | Assessment | Rating |
| <p>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.</p> | <p>There is widespread appreciation among stakeholders of the quality and scope of the Accelerator’s work.</p> | <p>Highly satisfactory</p> |
| <p>2: Timely delivery: The Accelerator reports show a comprehensive and varied range of activities, which it has broadly delivered appropriately and on time.</p> | <p>Many stakeholders confirmed timely completion of a range of activities and reports.</p> | <p>Highly satisfactory</p> |
| <p>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.</p> | <p>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.</p> | <p>Satisfactory</p> |
| Sustainability of the Accelerator contributions | | |
| Reported approaches to sustainability | Assessment | Rating |
| <p>1: Maintaining Accelerator outcomes after project closure: Low coverage of outcome sustainability in key documents. Unclear planning for sustainability of outcomes.</p> | <p>Sustainability of outcomes is best assured through appropriate project design, which ensures continuous capacity building of long-term institutions, which will carry approaches and activities forward after project closure.</p> | <p>Highly unsatisfactory</p> |

| | | |
|---|---|------------------------------|
| | There was no clear design for the work of the Accelerator and still less for sustainability of its activities and results after “handover”. | |
| <p>2: Transition of activities into the Pan-African Agency: Collaboration with PAA cited in documents, but unclear transition plan, including future human and financial resources.</p> | <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> | Highly unsatisfactory |
| <p>3: Long-term added benefits to participating countries: Focus on accelerating slow-moving processes at country and regional level</p> | 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 |
| <p>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.</p> | 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, which could sustain its benefits. 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. The Accelerator was not designed, mandated or resourced to enable sustainability. | Unsatisfactory |

3. 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.

4. Options to Continue the Activities and Results of the Accelerator

Building on the assessment, the implications for the sustainability of gains made and progress towards intended impacts are presented in the next page as a range of options to move forward.

Table 3: Options to Continue the Activities and Results of the Accelerator

| Option No.: | Description of option | Strengths | Weaknesses | Assessment |
|-------------|---|--|--|--|
| 1 | Transfer of the GGWA unit to the Pan African Agency ² | Continuity of Accelerator work. Brings Accelerator and PAA under one management. | PAA would need major budget increase to absorb the unit, and the PAA and Accelerator functioning would need to be streamlined. | Highly unlikely that PAA could finance the additional positions, or that existing GGWA staff would want to transfer from UN to PAA. |
| 2 | Strengthen PAA and transfer activities of GGWA 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). | 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 GGW 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 Audit and UNCCD to engage in intensive negotiations to bring a broad range of international stakeholders around the table to take necessary decisions. | Would establish an appropriately managed GGWI, generating increased political and possibly financial support. |
| 4 | “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. | Manageable process. Does not require new negotiations or commitments from international stakeholders. Places responsibility with the PAA, which is the mandated authority. | PAA will remain under-resourced to fulfil its mandate. 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. | Continues current operations of individual donors through country (or regional) programme management and monitoring. Continues concept of GGW at level of vision but does not provide for a coordinated and coherent Initiative. |

² This option is specified to take place in 2023 – 2024 in the Terms of Reference for this Review

Annex: Note on the objectives, scope and methodology of the Review

This review has a learning focus, aimed at further development and enhanced functioning of the 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.