



GA4: Environmental Committee

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Issue: Mitigating the effects of desertification and land degradation in the Sahel region

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Turkish International Model United Nations



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|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Committee:       | Environmental Committee (GA4)                                                      |
| Issue:           | Mitigating the effects of desertification and Land Degradation in the Sahel Region |
| Student Officer: | Can Kuzey Güner – President Chair                                                  |

## I. Introduction

Desertification is a critical topic for the ecological state of the Sahel Region. To put it simply, desertification is land degradation in drylands, which is mainly caused by external factors provided by both human and natural sources, like climate change and wrongful use of land. There are a lot of important factors that come into play in why the Sahel Region is significantly important when it comes to the issue of land degradation. The Sahel is considered to be an ecological transition zone that has problems like, but not limited to, flimsy rain patterns and thin soils.



Image 1: Desertification in Sahel

The main reason that the situation at hand is causing a serious problem for the Sahel region is because of the fact that this region is dependent on farming and herding, which then causes the improper use of land.

Across West and Central Africa, abnormal rainfall, hotter extremes, and at the same time droughts intensify existing land use pressures such as overgrazing, deforestation, and poor land management. Even though it might seem like this issue is not that big of a deal for the international community, the fact that it is an interacting risk makes the stakes higher. Climate change causes land degradation which is one of the main reasons of biodiversity loss due to the fact that land degradation destroys habitats, reduces the ratio of food and shelter in the area and species that need specific conditions to live cannot adapt so quickly to their new habitats which makes the species living there to either migrate or be forced to death, due to these aspects, land degradation increases the risk of extinction.

A significant percentage of the population in the Sahel region heavily depends on agriculture and pastoralism. These civilians need to farm crops and livestock to survive and make a living for themselves; however, land degradation causes damage to farms and rural areas furtherly, leading to soil fertility and



pasture quality decreasing, which causes a health risk and income issue. Even though there are many institutions trying to fix the issue we currently have at hand, just planting trees and trying to restore the areas are not enough to fix the problem. The institutions need to start campaigns to increase the support of the locals and restoration efforts. Environmental problems in the Sahel region cause more than just economic issues. Due to the land degradation in the region, a part of the population lost their homes, leading to them being displaced

It is important not to forget the fact that desertification is a form of land degradation and is also among the reasons why the level of food security decreases in the region. Desertification severely limits the time period in which crops grow, leading to the crops being harvested before they are ripe. This decrease in land quality and productivity causes the households to face tighter food supplies. The tighter food supply in the region causes the prices to increase, making it less affordable for people, which creates a need for humanitarian aid across the region. Farm and herd products become unpredictable due to land degradation, which reduces the investment to the region and might cause poverty to increase.

Desertification is also the cause of sand encroachment and increases the dust in the region, causing the roads to become unsafe due to low visibility. These two factors can also clog canals and raise the maintenance costs throughout the region. These factors also cause the air quality in the region to drop.

It is of the utmost importance that one delegate follows and keeps in mind this year's theme, "Navigating Uncertainty Through Mutual Trust", turning plans formed in the committee to be sustainable ones and trying to be as transparent as possible. Mutual trust is one of the most important factors when it comes to international cooperation, and it is vital for the delegates not to forget this fact while crafting resolutions and debating.

## II. Key Vocabulary

**Desertification:** The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) defines desertification as a form of land degradation in arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas, which is caused by both human and environmental factors. The importance of desertification for the Sahel region is not just the desert expanding, for the Sahel it focuses on, vegetation and water cycle decline in already dry areas, where choosing a way to manage the area could affect the landscape in a negative manner and could have effects on climate variability. What is meant by management choices being able to have a negative effect is choices that lead to deforestation and overgrazing.

**Land Degradation:** To put it simply, land degradation is a long-term reduction or loss of the land's biological capacity and productivity caused by both human and natural factors. It also lowers the ecological integrity



and the value of the landscape, and is not just limited to the Sahel region or deserts. This term is important for the debate because delegates will be talking about erosion, loss in fertility, and vegetation loss, which all fall under Land Degradation. In addition, it is simply what's meant by land degradation; in the Sahel region, all of these examples of land degradation are currently affecting the region and its people. However, it is important to note that land degradation is not just happening and continuing on its own; one of the reasons that it is still happening and no solution has been found is because of the fact that governmental entities are having a hard time trying to adapt to the issue.

**Drought:** Drought is a temporary but prolonged period of time of abnormally low rainfall, which often leads to a shortage of water. A shortage of water causes serious problems for a lot of sectors, especially agriculture. It is not specified as a permanent condition like aridity. Since it's not a permanent situation, it can occur in areas that are both humid and dry. When droughts happen, they disrupt the normal water cycle, reducing the moisture levels in soil, and much more, including disrupting river flows and groundwater levels. However, it is important to note that even though droughts are temporary, their effects can last for years, so this means that droughts should not be taken lightly.

**Aridity:** The main factor that distinguishes aridity from drought is the fact that aridity is a long-term and almost permanent situation. In a region that is considered to be arid, rainfall is persistently low, which is relative to evaporation. Since these factors are low, it leads to naturally dry environments like deserts and such. Due to the low levels of precipitation in arid regions, it is almost close to impossible to sustain vegetation and large bodies of water naturally. However, since aridity is a long-term situation, a lot of plants and animals in arid regions such as the Sahel and Arabian Peninsula have adapted to the dryness, but drought in regions where these life forms have not adapted yet would cause a serious problem.

**Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN):** The LDN act is a policy goal to limit and control the current degradation at hand, basically a policy goal. New degradation in the region is trying to be balanced by restoration so that it balances out the effects of land degradation. One of the other aims of this restoration is to improve the quality and quantity of land resources, maintaining and improving them concurrently. Monitoring and improving this policy is a way that can solve the issue.

**Sustainable Land Management( SLM):** The main goal of SLM is to be able to use soils, water, animals, and plants to meet the basic needs of the population while maintaining long-term sustainability and productivity. It is also an important factor to improve the ecosystem while trying to sustain its functions. When it comes to the Sahel Region, SLM gathers tools that make it easier to do soil and water conservation.

**Great Green Wall (GGW):** The GGW initiative is an African-led initiative to restore land that has gone through land degradation in the Sahel region with a multiarmed approach. This initiative uses agroforestry, water



harvesting, dune stabilization, and green jobs to help the environment of the Sahel. The GGW could be a vital asset in battling the issue.

**Farmer-Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR):** The main objective that guides FMNR is to protect the present. What is meant by this is that the FMNR is trying to protect the current landscapes and trees that the Sahel region has, especially sprouting trees and shrubs on farmland. They use existing root socks and seed banks to grow new trees and try to keep the costs low while doing so, so that the said operations can be sustainable.

**Afforestation:** Establishing a forest on land where historically a forest has not existed. Basically, human made forests to increase vegetation. The aspect that distinguishes it from reforestation is that it does not restore a former forest, it creates a new one.

**Soil Erosion:** The accelerated removal of topsoil by water or wind, which can occur under any circumstance but is intensified by poor ground and land management.

### III. Involved Countries and Organizations

#### Nigeria

Nigeria is one of the vital countries when it comes to the issue at hand due to its geopolitical location in the Sahel region. Nigeria tries to fix the issue by a number of operations, one of these said operations is the National Agency for the Great Green Wall (NAGGW). Another way that Nigeria is operating to fix the issue is through the organization Agro-Climatic Resilience in Semi-Arid Landscapes (ACReSAL), which ties land restoration to water, agriculture, and livelihoods. Nigeria has already called for a global effort to combat land degradation and desertification in the region. To clearly sum it up, Nigeria is trying a multiarmed international approach to defeat the issue however, is still having a hard time trying to fix the issue.

#### Senegal

Senegal is also one of the countries that reside in the Sahel region, which is facing the issue of desertification and land degradation. Senegal decided to use its people to its advantage. The government of Senegal decided to plant species that people value so that it would mean something to them, making the people want to protect the plants, basically tying restoration into daily needs as well. Another reason why Senegal tends to be a bit more ahead when it comes to restoration is because of the fact that they decided on the restoration location, logically planting in the Ferlo.



## Niger

Niger is considered to be the global reference for the FMNR project. Nigeria is also implementing its own initiative to battle the issue of the “Nigerians Nourishing Nigerians” the 3N. The government of Nigeria sees the 3N initiative to be a response to recurrent food crises due to land degradation. So it could be said that Nigeria is leading its own battle against the issue, mobilizing its government.

## Chad

Chad has decided to take the Green Belt as a sort of motivation and vision to battle land degradation and desertification in its country through its GGW agency. Chad initiated sand encroachment checks while also engaging in GGW discussions on a notable level. Research suggests that most of the landscape of Chad is a desert and that the desert is expanding over the years.

## Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso has a lot of experience under its belt when it comes to land degradation and desertification. Burkina Faso uses zai pits and natural regeneration to restore the areas that have been degraded, and also decided to integrate the GGW to work with rural development. Burkina Faso believes that resources generated by agriculture should flow directly to the community. Since the view of Burkina Faso is like this, their environment minister called for a mobilization of resources for communities.

## Mauritania

Mauritania is home to the headquarters of the Panafrican Agency of the Great Green Wall and also runs national GGW programs on its own as well. The presidency of Mauritania has welcomed the GGW accelerator as a tool to increase local investments and strengthen national agencies. Mauritania believes in supporting the GGW so that environmental protection and development gains move together.

## African Union (AU)

The African Union is the biggest region-based body in Africa. Due to this factor, the African Union sets and guides the direction of the GGW across the Sahel region. The main focus of the African Union is to bring together every African country's leaders to agree on new policies, long-term goals, and shared priorities. Last year, the African Union decided to adopt a new 10-year strategy for the GGW. This strategy firstly focuses on what should come first, which is, in this case, restoring land on a big scale, linking restoration to livelihood and markets. Another first step for this 10-year strategy is to improve how progress is being measured. The AU's main goal for this issue is just to keep every member state aligned and on the same page about the said issue.



The AU advocates for cross-border action as well. Since desertification does not have a mind of its own, it does not stop at borders set by politicians, so the union encourages countries to cooperate by coordinating on rangelands and watersheds. It has been seen that when AU advocates for joint operations, it becomes easier for neighboring states to cooperate and align upon the same standards, making it easier to battle with the issue. The AU also fosters bonds between countries so that they can battle the issue in a cooperative way for a long time period.

The AU also keeps track of how countries are doing on their promises, so basically, the AU believes that monitoring and accountability are also an important factor when it comes to dealing with these types of issues. To monitor the progress of these countries, the AU encourages countries to keep track and report on restoration efforts.

### Pan-African Agency of the Great Green Wall (PAGGW)

The PAGGW is a creation of the AU. Its basic purpose is to implement day to day implementation of the Great Green Wall. One of the ways that this organization acts is that it links national GGW agencies with both regional and international agencies so that the efforts are coordinated and aligned with the strategy of the African Union. To put it simply, the AU sets the goal, and the PAGGW sets the route and the necessary tools.

The PAGGW supports countries to battle the issue at hand by multiple factors. The agency helps countries to plan, mainly also helping them to figure out the cost and how the operation would proceed. The PAGGW believes in an approach where agroforestry, water harvesting, and rangeland management are on display. PAGGW is also an organization that believes in evaluation and monitoring frameworks so that the decision makers can see where they need to help the most.

The PAGGW is also considered to be a connector, what is meant by this is that the PAGGW cooperates with UN bodies and regional bodies to align data and other factors so that the whole issue can be fixed cooperatively and with the same understanding.

To clearly sum it up, the PAGGW is the connection between everybody that is fighting against the issue, it is also the main implementer of the African Union's decisions on the issue.

### UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)

The UNCCD is the treaty body that sets the global rules on land degradation and desertification. What the UNCCD actually does is quite simple to understand; it organizes meetings and sets targets for the countries of the Sahel region. An example of a target by the UNCCD is the LDN. The UNCCD also tries to coordinate its partners around the GGW initiative. The UNCCD supports the GGW in a number of ways, but



the most important way that it supports the GGW is the fact that the UNCCD's pages explain the initiative clearly and link it to the GGW accelerator, which is designed to fasten the resilience and restoration across the Sahel.

The UNCCD's stance is quite frank. The goals set to be accomplished by 2030 are not a track, which is a big problem for the Sahel since it is in dire need of predictability in finance and also needs the problem to be solved as fast as it can be. The leaders of the UNCCD specifically said that the need for funds is large and that the private sector might be in play on a significant level. This message by the leaders is seriously important for the delegates because it can open doors for clauses about data sharing and monitoring to be written.

### Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

The FAO is another body that is trying to combat this issue by creating new programs and such. The most vital program that this organization has created is the Action Against Desertification (AAD). The AAD program helps countries and local communities to restore the degraded lands in their regions in a smart manner. This program literally embodies the quote "work smarter, not harder." The AAD produces quality seed and seedlings, supports FMNR, and trains local groups. The FAO sees the AAD to be a partner to the GGW, which means that the delegates can use the AAD in their clauses to be a sort of sustainable and low-cost operation to battle the issues. FAO and its programs are concrete evidence of low-cost solutions that even work at the village level.

"Every single hectare counts and must be counted". This slogan should not be taken lightly, as it clearly illustrates the motive and dedication the FAO has to battle the issue. The FAO has also conducted training for a lot of national experts from all of the GGW countries in using geospatial tools so that they can map the lands that are being used and keep track of the data, tracking change. This data tracking system helps countries show investors and civilians where restoration is actually happening and its benefits, leading to more investors trying to get on the deal.

### Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

ECOWAS develops regional policy and frameworks for the West African countries to follow and adopt. ECOWAS makes it so that the West African countries can work together on problems that cross national borders. When it comes to our agenda, the prime role of ECOWAS is to make sure that the West African countries' policies align with one another. These countries' policies and opinions have to align with each other due to the fact that most of these countries share natural resources like watersheds. Just like other regional and international bodies, ECOWAS also has a plan that is set to finish in the year 2030, a regional climate strategy to be exact. This regional climate strategy's main goal was to call member states to



strengthen the climate services, such as but not limited to: afforestation. The ECOWAS also provides a safe haven for ministers to adopt joint plans so that when a drought hits or resources are on strain countries have a joint plan to reduce the effects and act quickly.

### Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS)

CILLS is one of the international bodies of the region. The CILLS comes up with climate and hydrology forecasts for the Sahel region. The CILLS also manages to track the drought and vegetation in the region and tries to issue early warnings for countries to prepare for drought and such. The concept of an early warning is seriously important for agriculture, water, and disaster management services across the Sahel. The data provided by the CILLS is really important for the governments of these countries since they use it in planning for restoration efforts. The biggest positive factor of the CILSS is the fact that it's a neutral body that helps the information to flow better.

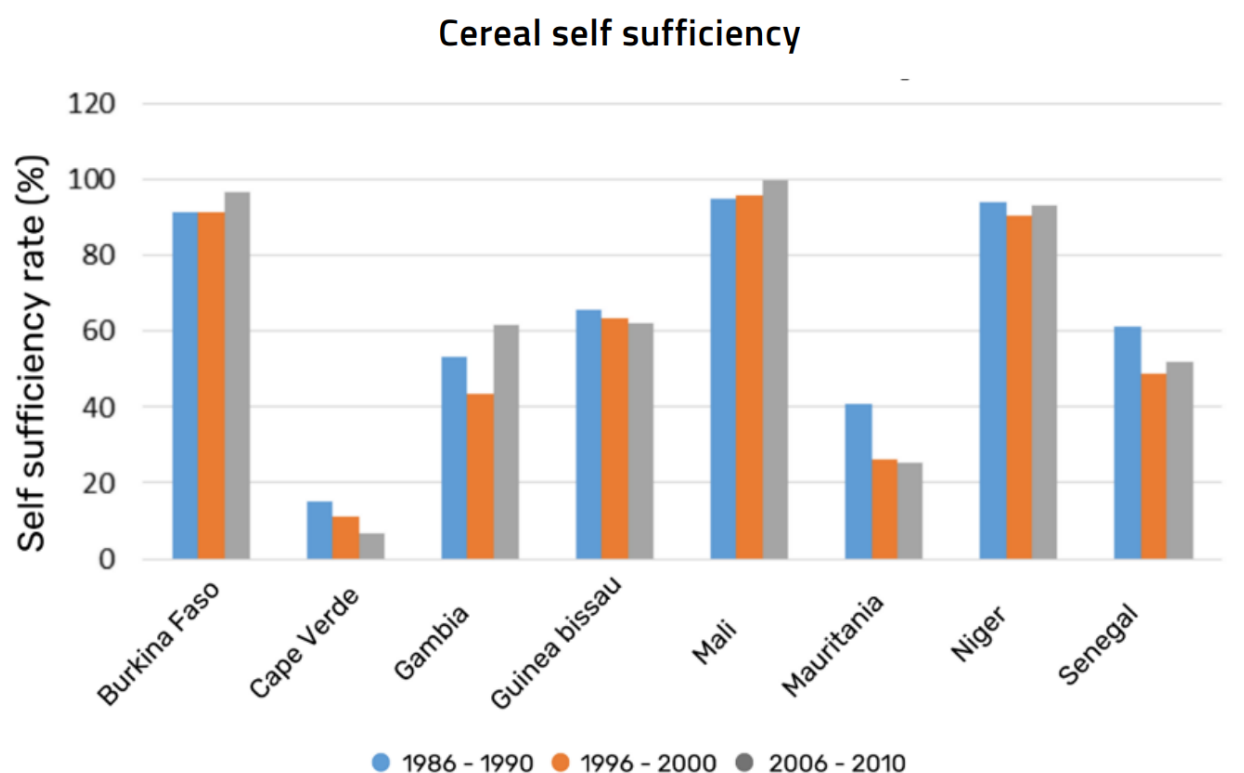


Image 2: Change in food self-sufficiency

## IV. Focused Overview of the Issue

### 1. The Environment and Climate Basics of the Sahel

Sahel is a large region that consists of dry lands that stretches across Africa. This region is considered to be desertic and filled with arid and semi-arid areas. Since most of the areas are desert-like, it means that rainfall levels are low. In these types of settings, even a small amount of difference can make a



huge impact. The things meant by small changes are changes in rainfall and heat. These changes affect soil, vegetation, and water. The UN body that deals with these types of issues is UNCCD, which was mentioned earlier in the report under the involved countries and organizations part.

The climatic issue is separated into 2 parts. First warming happens, which results in the ratio of evaporation in the region increasing, which in addition increases the plant water demand. The next step is the rainfall levels becoming unpredictable, which affects the crops and the rangeland in a negative manner. Studies suggest that the variability of rainfall and heat, with the use of land to amplify the effects of land degradation, and land degradation itself.

Regional bodies seriously have a good impact on early warning systems, helping countries to be able to predict these swings. The CILLS conducts a forum annually to find new, simple operational guidelines, so that countries have guidelines to follow before droughts hit. These types of forecasts are seriously important for farmers and generally agriculture.

The final climatic issue for the Sahel is the sand and dust storms. These sand and dust storms cross borders and become international issues in a short time period. Sand and dust storms have negative impacts on the lives of humans, making daily life way harder than it usually is. It impacts the health of people in a negative way and also disrupts transportation. Sand and dust storms even come with economic drawbacks; for example, sand and dust storms can interfere with solar panels.

## 2. The Effects of Human Factors on the Sahel

Climate variability sets the perfect circumstances for land degradation, but the use of land decides the main outcome. Across the Sahel region, a majority of the population focuses on crops that are rainfed. When the population grows, fields expand into fragile soils. Trees and other plants are cut faster than they can regrow, and grazing in most situations exceeds the maximum capacity of rangelands during poor seasons. Due to these factors being persistent over a period of time, the soil surface tends to crust and erode, which means that the water being fed to the soil is not efficient. The water runs down instead of soaking in. This leads to fertility rates dropping and the roots of plants struggle because of it.

It is easy to spot the degradation of land. The vegetation cover becomes thinner than usual. On top of this, wind and water erosion accelerate. After all of these farms become less viable and productive. In these types of situations, where the land is working against you, it is vital to implement water and land conservation methods. However, this does not mean that the Sahel region does not have its own methods against land degradation; contour bunds and zai pits make it so that the water can infiltrate and concentrate on nutrients. If all of these methods were implemented in a proper manner and sustained over a long period of time, they are pretty solid solutions.



### 3. The Humanitarian Aspect of the Issue

When the degradation of land takes place, one of the usual outcomes is that food security becomes fragile. Due to land degradation, a lot of aspects in agriculture become unpredictable, like harvests and another negative aspect of land degradation is that herds need to travel further, and local prices increase. Humanitarian studies have revealed that the Sahel is predicted to face displacement, poverty and climate shocks; these aspects all amplify each other, which makes it so that these issues can turn from a minor issue to a major international issue quite fast. Degraded land reduces resilience and magnifies the effects of droughts.

The concept known as degradation also changes the patterns of mobility. It is important to note that herds traditionally follow routes that guide them to water; however, since land degradation allows water sources and rangelands to shrink, routes shift, creating changes in mobility patterns.

Health problems are also another issue that the Sahel faces. Sand and dust storms can have negative effects on health. Sand and dust storms increase in areas with degraded lands. Sand and dust storms have negative effects on the cardiovascular and respiratory systems. Other than the health factors, sand and dust storms are problems for transportation as well, since they lower visibility. Airports, roads and solar panels get affected.

## V. Important Events & Chronology

| Date       | Event                                              |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| 12/09/1973 | The creation of CILLS.                             |
| 16/12/1976 | UNGA calls the UN conference on desertification.   |
| 29/08/1977 | UN conference on desertification opens.            |
| 17/06/1994 | UNCCD is adopted.                                  |
| 26/12/1996 | The UNCCD becomes legally binding for all parties. |
| 30/01/2007 | AU endorses the GGW                                |
| 10/22/2014 | AAD is launched.                                   |
| 11/01/2021 | GGW Accelerator is launched.                       |



## VI. Past Resolutions and Treaties

- [UN Resolution - A/RES/79/207](#)

A GA resolution that asks for implementation of the UNCCD in Africa specifically.

- [UN Resolution - A/RES/78/158](#)

This resolution was created to battle sand and dust storms with early warning systems and also called for UN cooperation

## VII. Failed Solution Attempts

The first failed solution attempt is the GGW initiative. The GGW was promising to halt the desertification of the Sahel, restore land, create jobs, secure food supplies and even limit biodiversity loss, however, it failed to deliver. The main reason that it failed was due to the fact that even though they had funding the fund was not reaching the frontlines. The main factor that failed the solution attempts was not that the solutions were not viable or that they were not funded enough, the whole concept of the solutions were wrong. Even when the fund issue was fixed the resources that were acquired with said funds never reached the places that they were supposed to go. Community guidance should have come first before the plantation. All of the failed solution attempts had the same mistake in its core, spending funds in a spoiled manner and none of these said solutions included community guidance. Another reason most of these solutions failed was because of the fact that even though there were early warning systems it was just that. Early warning systems were in place, yes, but there was nothing else, just a warning, no help whatsoever. What is meant by this is that after the early warning systems, there were no other support systems, warnings were not translated into actions, leaving vulnerable communities without help.

## VIII. Possible Solutions

Each country must try to set up a Land Restoration Unit of its own, a dedicated task force reserved just for restoring degraded lands. Such a unit will oversee country-wide activities, manage restoration projects, as well as ensure that policies are appropriately implemented at all regional levels. With a central body reserved purely for restoring lands, governments will find it simpler to centralize decision-making, side-step bureaucratic duplication, as well as impose consistency in long-term planning for a greener environment.

Apart from creating a unit of this sort, it would also be of great importance for the general public to witness transparent as well as just rules, prompting them to engage more vigorously in battling desertification. Farmers as well as other private owners of lands should receive legal coverage, tax benefits,



or other forms of incentives for trees or plants they conserve or grow on private lands. This would instill a feeling of collective responsibility between citizens as well as the government, making environmental protection a national endeavor as opposed to making it a personal responsibility.

Noted earlier in this report, early warning systems are often rendered ineffectual since they lack definite plans of action attached to them. It will therefore be crucial that any decision arrived at by delegates comes with a blueprint attaching early warnings to concrete actions directly. This may range from set-in-stone emergency procedures, procedures for mobilizing communities, as well as instantaneous channels of dissemination to local governments, such that warnings mean prompt as well as concerted action. Another key issue to overcome has been the ineffective international fund distribution. In most instances, the global-aided money fails to reach local communities that are most hit by land degradation. A way to overcome this is by introducing transparent monitoring mechanisms to track the expenses made as well as to ensure local endeavors get a direct boost.

## IX. Useful Links

[Great Green Wall Initiative - UNCCD](#)

[Green Wall Accelerator - UNCCD](#)

[Independent Review of the Great Green Wall Accelerator Final report February 2023 - UNCCD](#)

[Regional Climate Strategy](#)

[Action Plan 2022-2030 - ECOWAS Regional Climate Strategy](#)

[PRESASS 2025 Forum in Bamako: a record-breaking event](#)

[Sand and dust storms - World Meteorological Organization](#)

[Sand and dust storms - World Health Organization](#)

[Sand and Dust Storms Coalition](#)

[WaPOR, remote sensing for water productivity - FAO](#)

[The Great green wall observatory](#)

[Action Against Desertification - FAO](#)

[ACReSAL](#)



[2025 Sahel Humanitarian Needs and Requirements Overview - OCHA](#)

[Annex 3.2 Technical Brief Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration](#)

[Ch8 Niger-FINAL2.docx](#)

[The Regreening Africa App User Guideline](#)

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