

Forum: Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

Issue: Discussing the MEDC's role in the establishment of the Great Green Wall

(GGW)

Student Officer: Eda Ünan

**Position:** Deputy Chair

## Introduction

Africa is the region where desertification is most severe in the world. About two-thirds of Africa is made up of dry land, and three-quarters of the dry land that is used for farming has already started to lose its usefulness (Population Reference Bureau, 2001). Over the period spanning 1990-2015, Africa experienced a substantial 12% reduction in income due to desertification. Forward-looking

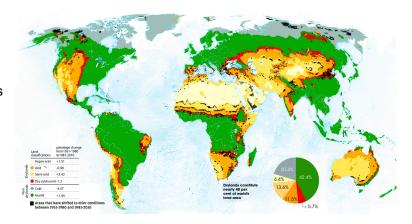


Figure 1: The map classifying nations according to percent change of dryness from 1951-1980 to 1981- 2010 (Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, 2018)

projections for 2079 forecast costs equivalent to 16% of the continent's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), indicating a profound and enduring impact (Bocconi University, 2023). Desertification has a multifaceted effect on the domestic population's lives since most of the revenue of the nations in Africa, especially the Sahel region, is dependent on agriculture as posed in the economies of Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs).

Socioeconomically, population growth and the decline in agricultural productivity have put communities' ability to improve their standard of living in jeopardy. This, along with the absence of viable alternatives and fundamental social and economic infrastructure, accounts for the continuation and worsening of poverty in rural areas. When it comes to addressing the extreme poverty that exists in some areas, the majority of local development projects and programs prioritize economic solutions like infrastructure or other income-generating activities, often ignoring the ecological factors that are essential for the long-term preservation of natural resources. (FAO, 2008)

The establishment of the Great Green Wall (GGW), which is led by the African Union, was started in 2007 to improve millions of lives in the Sahel and restore the continent's devastated landscapes. The plan is to reforest land to stop desertification. By 2030, the goal of the GGW effort is to trap 250



million tons of carbon, repair 100 million hectares of damaged land, and generate 10 million green jobs. This large-scale initiative, which is being carried out in 22 African nations, plans life for thousands of villages around the continent. (UNCCD)

Although the GGW has gained international recognition, the funds allocated for the project have not been enough for the creation of a wall covering the Sahel region. Therefore, More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs) have given extensive support to raise funds by conducting summits and projects to reforest Africa. These efforts have accelerated the initiation of the project since nations have created the Great Green Wall Accelerator, which helps identify areas for improvement and possible funding.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

**Desertification:** "the process by which land changes into desert, for example because there has been too much farming activity on it or because a lot of trees have been cut down" (Cambridge Dictionary)

**Grazing:** "the vegetation on pastures that is available for livestock to feed upon" (Collins Dictionary)

**Reforestation:** "the conversion of previously forested land back to forest" (Britannica)

**Deforestation:** "the intentional clearing of forested land" (National Geographic)

**Sustainability:** "In 1987, the United Nations Brundtland Commission defined sustainability as 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' " (UN)

## **General Overview**

## The Aim of the Establishment of the Great Green Wall

Desertification is one of the biggest problems facing humanity over the past 20 years, one for which the world development community has not yet found a workable solution. The harshness of the 1968–1973 Sahelian drought, which claimed the lives of nearly 150,000 people and millions of cattle and other animals in the area, was the catalyst for this. Since then, the Sahel region—which stretches from Cape Verde in the west to the Horn of Africa in the east—as well as other parts of Africa, particularly southern and eastern Africa, which stretches from the Kalahari in the west to Madagascar in the east, have been severely affected by drought. The situation is becoming worse as in the Sahel region 650,000 km² of land, once suitable for agriculture or intensive grazing has been lost over the last 50 years, and this number is increasing every year (Geo Press). 34.2% of the continent's surface, or 10.3 million km², is in risk of becoming desertified, namely Mediterranean Africa, the Sudano-Sahelian area, and Africa south of the Sudano-Sahelian. The manner which desertification proceeds through the channels of land abuse and overuse of natural resources reveals the role that



man plays in generating it. (M.B.K. Darkoh, 1988)

#### **Historical Importance**

Sahelian land degradation can be linked to past socio-political instability. Pastoralists who were nomads used to wander the region in search of water. Their lifestyle's environmental impact was dispersed over a large geographic area due to their mobility.

By defining national borders and restricting nomadic mobility, colonial powers changed this way of life and concentrated the native population's environmental effect on narrower areas. Villages were formed by herders who started to settle in the area. Their overgrazing reduced the amount of vegetation in the region, and their farming methods depleted the soil of its nutrients. Demand for feed, agricultural land, and firewood increased along with sedentary people; as a result, trees were chopped down, further reducing soil quality and productivity (Stewart, 2008).

Pastoralism and subsistence farming are continuing practices in many societies, however, they are frequently impacted by colonization and the potential for economic growth. One of the best instances of such a society is the Sahelian people. They use agriculture and husbandry as their source of income since most of the countries in the Sahel region are LEDCs that are not economically developed enough to shift to other sources of employment. Because their livelihoods depend directly on the productivity of the soil, desertification and degradation are major issues.

Too little money is made by most people to save for the future. As an alternative, they use their animals as bank accounts, selling one to fund a family member's wedding or illness. The financial stability of these individuals suffers when the land does not yield enough to maintain these animals. These people's economic and social stability would be in grave danger if the consequences of a changing or extremely variable climate destroyed their natural landscape through drought, desertification, or flood. To safeguard these vulnerable people, sustainable methods of reducing the consequences of a highly changeable climate are required, particularly as it relates to land production. (Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa, 2015)

Several years before the United Nations Conference on Combating Desertification (UNCCD), which was held in Nairobi in 1977, the concept of a greenbelt first emerged. The idea was mainly to safeguard metropolitan areas and vital infrastructure from erosion, sand encroachment, and desertification by reforestation. These major projects, which were pushed by governmental involvement and intended to provide a public environmental service, included the greenbelt in Nouakchott (built in 1975), the green dam in Algeria (built in 1971), and the greenbelt in Niamey (built in 1965).

Early 20th-century initiatives in North Africa were centered on reforestation attempts to safeguard coastal communities and fight sand encroachment. In a similar vein, peri-urban green belt initiatives that addressed the demand for resources like firewood, as well as environmental conservation, were



started in Sahelian Africa in the 1960s. These programs started out as simple protections but eventually expanded to incorporate output targets meant to raise local wages.

The greenbelt concept has existed for three to four decades. Local communities have recognized a genuine need, as shown by ecological deterioration, and States and their development cooperation partners have responded. Still, significant work remains. The green belt efforts had a number of drawbacks that limited their efficacy despite their admirable goals and early achievements. The ecological coherence of massive reforestation initiatives, like Algeria's green dam, which frequently upset preexisting ecosystems and disregarded the input of local populations, was one of the main challenges. Furthermore, poor planning with respect to land ownership, ecological implications, and community involvement resulted in difficulties with implementation and restricted long-term sustainability. The contributions collected are insufficient to meet requests. Moreover, there were management and logistical challenges as protection-focused initiatives gave way to production-focused ones. The efficacy of the green belt programs was sometimes, specifically in those sprawling across England and Algeria, weakened when the initial aims of environmental preservation and sand encroachment prevention were eclipsed by those of economic growth. In addition, the green belt initiatives faced challenges with post-investment administration and upkeep, especially in peri-urban and rural regions where resource scarcity and poverty impeded continued care for the planted vegetation. Even with attempts to include local communities and implement sustainable management techniques, these programs' long-term survival was sometimes in doubt.

Olusegun Obasanjo, the president of Nigeria, presented his idea of ecological restoration in 2005 to



stop the Sahel region from being desertified. He suggested building a green wall of trees to encircle the whole continent of Africa, measuring 15 kilometers in width and 7,600 km in length.

The GGW was originally widely advocated by former Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade, who is also credited with giving the project its name. Senegal took the lead in putting the formal tree-planting phase into action, beginning in 2008. Senegal planted 20,234 hectares (50,000 acres) of trees as of 2011, which is about equivalent to planting 2

million trees annually.

In order to fulfill the increasing requirements associated with growth, and sustainable development in the majority of Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD) nations, where the majority of the population lives in rural areas, extensive measures needed to be taken to avoid desertification and deforestation. To solve this problem, the Great Green Wall initiative was designated as one of the main programs of the CEN-SAD Summit of Leaders and Heads of State, which took place in June



2005 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. In order to meet the needs of the CEN-SAD member states for sustainable development, the CEN-SAD General Secretariat directed the Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS) Executive Secretariat to gather all the necessary materials for a review that would refine the Great Green Wall program's concept and the appropriate orientations for its implementation.

With 8,000 kilometers planned between Senegal in the west and Djibouti in the east, the Great Green Wall project aims to build a wall of trees and other vegetation across the Sahel. The effort intends to increase food security, counteract desertification, rehabilitate damaged land, generate jobs, and support sustainable development in the area by the planting of trees, shrubs, and grasses. In addition, the initiative intends to help local populations adapt to environmental difficulties and function as a buffer against the effects of climate change, including floods and droughts. (FAO, 2008)

#### Limitations to the GGW

The Great Green Wall initiative has several challenges and limitations that could slow its advancement, despite its ambitious goals. Finding sufficient finance for a project of this size is the biggest of these difficulties. The effort needs continuous funding to succeed over the long run, but finding steady funding is still a big challenge. The Great Green Wall's installation might be delayed and less effective if there are insufficient financial resources.

The GGW has effects on resource scarcity as well. The villages' water supply is heavily depleted by GGW during the summer season. The population's and their animals' needs, together with those of the project, are too much for water sources to handle. Since the governments are the source of the GGW, it can be deduced that water has to cover the governments' needs, which outweigh those of the public. By extending the search for water and reducing their time for other potentially profitable endeavors like education, commerce, or better health, the GGW has successfully excluded the village population from water sources and sparked a sense of time poverty.

Because there is less space available to surround the communities, grazing patterns have changed. It is possible to obtain a permit to remove grass from within a GGW property, but the villages will either disregard this permit or it will be fake, poorly publicized, or issued by familial relations. These once-open areas have been acquired and fenced off, which is a clear affront to the cultural institutions that control the local social constructions surrounding land usage and ownership. Men from nearby villages of the GGW claim that, after the lack of access to water, the largest issue the program has brought to the community is the enclosed areas acting as the GGW's tree stands. (Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa, 2015)

Lastly, difficulties pertaining to ownership rights and land tenure may make it difficult to build the Great Green Wall. Legal problems and conflicts may arise due to intricate land tenure arrangements and conflicting rights to land. To overcome these obstacles and ensure the initiative's success, it is imperative to make land tenure arrangements clear and include local populations in decision-making procedures.



#### **MEDC's Involvement**

Solving these limitations is possible to an extent with MEDC's and international organizations' help. Notably, Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, has raised a hefty amount of money for the funding of the GGW to make Africa combat desertification.

According to an article from UNCCD, a major announcement about the Great Green Wall for the Sahel and Sahara Initiative was made during the concluded One Planet Summit for Biodiversity, which took place in Paris and was co-organized by France, the United Nations (UN), and the World Bank, on 11 January 2021. The program has attracted at least \$14.326 billion USD in additional investment, according to French President Emmanuel Macron. (UNCCD) This represents a significant step forward in the mission to preserve biodiversity, repair degraded land, and improve the lives of populations in the Sahel.

The disclosed funding investment, which is a component of the Great Green Wall Accelerator program, makes up thirty percent of the \$33 billion USD required to meet the ambitious objectives of the initiative.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres emphasized, during a panel at Columbia University, the need to use natural solutions, such as the Great Green Wall, in the post-pandemic rehabilitation process. (UN, 2020) He highlighted how wise investments and policies may support social and economic change while tackling environmental issues.

The Great Green Wall project, which was launched in 2007, has served as an example of African-led initiatives to address poverty, drought, desertification, and climate change. Involving at least 11 nations and collaborating with stakeholders, the effort has served as an inspiration to many throughout the continent and aided in the execution of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Global leaders, organizations, and stakeholders had the chance to reaffirm their commitment to sustainable development and biodiversity protection during the virtual One Planet Summit. There is a renewed emphasis on nature-based solutions and ecosystem restoration as seen by the mobilization of substantial financial resources and the introduction of ground-breaking programs like the Great Green Wall Accelerator. (UNCCD, 2021)

#### **Green Wall Accelerator**

In order to drive the objectives of GGW to new levels, the Great Green Wall Accelerator represents an innovative approach. This project, which functions as a multifunctional and multi-stakeholder platform, integrates new political determination into the funding and implementation of the Great Green Wall. Its primary objective is to synchronize the initiatives of various financial partners and stimulate cooperative efforts on several fronts. In its basis, the Accelerator aims to strengthen the Sahel region's resilience against climate change by addressing urgent environmental, social, and economic



issues.

Enhancing agricultural output and maintaining the region's distinctive biodiversity are two of the Great Green Wall Accelerator's main objectives. The project seeks to mitigate desertification and land degradation, which are serious challenges to the region's lives and economic stability, by concerted measures. In order to increase regional economic resilience and lessen the negative effects of climate change, the Accelerator will invest in ecosystem restoration and promote sustainable land management practices.

Improving food security and promoting economic growth in remote Sahelian communities are other top priorities for the Accelerator. The effort aims to lessen reliance on cash crops that provide little benefit to the local community and increase sustainable economic alternatives by assisting small and medium-sized farmers, bolstering value chains, and encouraging local markets and exports. This strategy not only improves food security but also helps to reduce poverty and empower local communities economically.

The Great Green Wall Accelerator places a high priority on efforts to reduce climate change in accordance with global climate targets, realizing the critical role that sustainable land management and land restoration play in this respect. The program seeks to support international efforts to mitigate climate change and enhance resilience in vulnerable areas by encouraging soil carbon sequestration, easing access to renewable energy sources, and constructing climate-resilient infrastructures. Additionally, the Accelerator aims to lessen the burden of migration and advance social stability in the Sahel by addressing the underlying causes of migration, especially from rural regions.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) oversees the Great Green Wall Accelerator, which is organized around five main pillars: "investment in small and medium-sized farms and strengthening of value chains, local markets, organization of exports (Pillar 1), land restoration and sustainable management of ecosystems (Pillar 2), climate-resilient infrastructures and access to renewable energy (Pillar 3), favorable economic and institutional framework for effective governance (Pillar 4), capacity building (Pillar 5). The UNCCD also works closely with the Pan Africa Agency for the Great Green Wall (PAAGGW). The Accelerator intends to measure advancements, assess effects, and guarantee accountability via continuous analysis and monitoring in order to promote sustainable development in the Sahel and advance the Great Green Wall goal. (One Planet Summit)

#### **Social Outcomes and Economic Developments**

Significant economic and social prospects have been brought about in the villages where GGW is being implemented. These changes mostly originate from the development of jobs, increased tourism money, and the possible establishment of mobile phone services in the area. The generation of 40 to 50 employees in every village connected to the GGW project is one of the most significant effects. These jobs offer a variety of responsibilities, such as planting and tending to seedlings in the tree nursery or working as garden managers, cleaners, cooks, parcel guards, drivers, mechanics, and



animal caretakers in the Eaux et Forêts (Water and Forests) centers.

The inclusive employment approach of the GGW, which involves men and women in a variety of positions, is a significant factor in its economic benefit. Senegalese society customs have traditionally assigned particular jobs to particular genders, but the GGW initiative breaks down these barriers by enabling women to work in the tree nursery in addition to being chefs and cleaners. While men and women have slightly different tasks in the tree nursery—for example, males prepare the soil and water it, while women may prepare the seeds and plant them—their combined efforts increase the workforce's variety and productivity.

Local economies now have much more spending power due to the jobs created by the GGW. Villagers have more money to spend on local products and services as they receive pay for their involvement in GGW activities. In addition to helping individual individuals, this revenue infusion promotes stability and growth in the local economy as a whole.

Additionally, the availability of mobile phone coverage in GGW-affected areas creates new opportunities for economic growth. Enhanced connectivity via telecommunications infrastructure helps local entrepreneurs and makes business transactions easier by providing access to information, financial services, and markets. In addition, this improved connectivity facilitates telecommuting, e-commerce, and mobile banking, all of which would strengthen the general economic development and resilience of the areas surrounding the Great Green Wall. (Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa, 2015)

With the aid of MEDCs, limitations can be diverted to positive social and economic effects. An example, through France's co-organization of the One Planet Summit, \$14.326 billion USD has been raised for the development of the project. Further incentives regarding the continuation of the project is essential to be provided with the lead of MEDCs that can attract attention through political and charismatic power.

# **Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

## **France**

The Great Green Wall Accelerator was presented on January 11, 2021, during the One Planet Summit, at the initiative of France. The intention is to revitalize this venerable African Union project.

At that time, the French President pledged to keep a close eye on developments regarding the Accelerator's implementation and donor mobilization.

The Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs convened institutional stakeholders, civil society, researchers, and a few funders who were dedicated to the GGW on September 6, 2021, at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Marseille. The broad enthusiasm for this program was reinforced at this first meeting of Accelerator stakeholders since its introduction, as the Minister stated that the



GGW is "one of the keys of the future of the Sahel." This incident demonstrated the necessity of broad stakeholder engagement and mobilization in order to advance the initiative's implementation, which calls for more regional collaboration in order to successfully assist the civilians. (Ambassade de France au Royame-Uni, 2021)

#### Senegal

Between 2008 and 2021, Senegal reforested 57,000 hectares, or a little over 4,000 a year, with some plots replanted (Sarr 2020, 2022). Reforestation was made achievable by breeding 15,032,350 seedlings in nine nurseries and fencing the plots (Sarr 2020). During the rainy season (August and September), government agents, commune residents, young volunteers, and students planted plants. From a sustainability viewpoint, plots planted throughout the year must be monitored, maintained, and refilled due to shrub death, animal movement, etc. Throughout the whole route, men and women reside, tend animals, and occasionally farm in Senegal, where the GGW operates. The GGW in Senegal builds multifunctional gardens in which women in impacted areas plant and harvest fruit and vegetables for use or sale at weekly markets (Billen 2015). This income-generating activity empowers women and permits straw to be gathered in GGW plots during the lean season. Thus, without discussing success or failure, the GGW has significantly improved ecological restoration and people's living circumstances in Senegal (Turner et al. 2021).

#### **Nigeria**

The project was first introduced by a Nigerian president, and the nation continues to exist as a participant of the GGW. Nigeria signed the Act creating the new agency in 2015. Nigeria is a signatory to the African Union's Great Green Wall effort, known as the Pan African Great Green Wall (PAGGW). The program's goal is to solve the serious issues brought on by climate change, which have produced poverty, desertification, and drought in the eleven northern frontier states of Nigeria: Adamawa, Borno, Kano, Katsina, Jigawa, Sokoto, Yobe, Zamfara, Bauchi, and Gombe. The agency started afforestation in 2017 with the release of cash, planting 26 million trees. The Ecological Fund Office and the Natural Resources Development Fund provided funds for this project. (Vanguard, 2023)

### Timeline of Events

2005	President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria proposes the idea of ecological restoration.
2007	Official launch of the Great Green Wall initiative by the African Union.
2008	Senegal begins the formal tree-planting phase of the Great Green Wall.



2015	Nigeria establishes the Pan African Great Green Wall (PAGGW).
January 11, 2021	One Planet Summit in Paris announces significant investment for the Great Green Wall initiative.
June 2021	CEN-SAD Summit of Leaders and Heads of State designates the Great Green Wall as a key program for sustainable development.
September 2021	Stakeholders meeting at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Marseille.

## **UN Involvement**

Through its Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the United Nations (UN) has been actively involved in helping the GGW effort. The GGW's importance in preventing desertification and land degradation throughout Africa has been acknowledged by the UNCCD. It has given member nations a forum to work together on putting the GGW into practice, encouraging communication, coordination, and information exchange among interested parties. The Great Green Wall Accelerator was established with the help of the UNCCD Secretariat in order to gather resources, plan initiatives, and fasten the achievement of GGW objectives. Furthermore, the UNCCD has played a role in tracking and analyzing GGW initiatives, determining how they affect rural livelihoods, food security, and land restoration.

Initiatives connected to global warming have benefited from the knowledge, resources, and technical support of several other UN agencies and programs. In order to support GGW goals and address the issues of desertification and climate change in Africa, these organizations—which include the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the World Food Programme (WFP)—have concentrated on topics like agroforestry, sustainable agriculture, water management, and climate adaptation. These UN organizations have cooperated and formed alliances in order to further the goals of the GGW and encourage sustainable development in the area.

### **Relevant UN Documents**

UN Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa (12 September 1994, A/AC.241/27)



Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly (18 February 1999, A/RES/53/191)

A thorough report on desertification in Africa by UNCCD:

## **Treaties and Events**

#### Pan African Great Green Wall (PAGGW)

Africa's Pan African Great Green Wall (PAGGW) is a project that aims to stop land deterioration and desertification, especially in the Sahel. Its goal is to establish an extensive forest belt that stretches over many African nations. In order to address environmental issues including desertification, drought, and land degradation, the PAGGW promotes reforestation, sustainable land management techniques, and ecosystem restoration. In line with the objectives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union's Agenda 2063, this program places a strong emphasis on cross-border collaboration and integrated methods to achieve sustainable development.

#### **One Planet Summit**

The One Planet Summit is a worldwide forum for securing financial, technical, and political support for environmental preservation and climate action. It brings together world leaders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government officials, and stakeholders from the commercial sector to take steps to combat climate change and save the environment. The summit addresses a number of environmental concerns, such as deforestation, ocean conservation, biodiversity loss, and sustainable land management.

# **Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue**

As explained in the whole report, there are previous attempts from MEDCs to support the GGW. Since it is still standing, and the

## **Possible Solutions**

Since the GGW is still standing and is continuing to be built, MEDCs can find ways to aid the project socially and economically. Similar to the action that France took in attracting investors for a fund, a ground for negotiations or talks should be established first. Delegates can think of conducting summits or talks, as well as UN-based or national NGOs that would gather money and ideas to support the cause.

Since the social structure of the African continent is different from that of the MEDCs, education projects to educate the community about the project and reforestation could be done to support the planting of new trees in the GGW.



Lastly, funding is needed to keep the project alive; therefore, Member States could attract private investors to donate to the project, as well as develop research and innovation practices about the cause in this way. To create new technologies and solutions for ecosystem restoration, sustainable land management, and climate change adaptation, research institutes, and innovation centers need to be funded.

## **Notes from the Chair**

The GGW is an enormous project that encapsulates a whole region. It should be preserved and brought attention to in order to save Africa from desertification.

You can check these links for further research:

- https://www.fao.org/3/ax355e/ax355e.pdf
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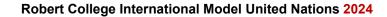
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