



GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY
INVESTING IN OUR PLANET

The Great Green Wall Initiative

Supporting Resilient Livelihoods and Landscapes in the Sahel

Over a decade ago, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), in close partnership with the World Bank, invested in what has become a landmark project for Africa and the world—the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI) in the Sahara and Sahel.

Today, with the involvement of a growing number of countries, international agencies, and local

communities across the Sahel, life has started coming back to the land, bringing improved food security, jobs, and stability to people's lives.

There is an immense opportunity to build on this success by scaling up investments for the GGWI and making a significant contribution to a green and blue post-COVID-19 recovery in the region.



A Renewed Vision of the Great Green Wall Initiative

Over the past few years, national governments in the Sahel region have sought to re-energize their commitment to the GGWI, including a call for stronger collaboration with development partners. Building on more than a decade of investments in innovative practices, tools, and policy options for combating land degradation, the countries have sent a clear message about their desire for transformative change. The GGWI remains a powerful and clear vision that embodies the aspirations for a prosperous, resilient, and sustainable Sahel. Its achievement will enhance not only the social and economic well-being of the Sahelian people but also generate tangible environmental benefits for the planet.

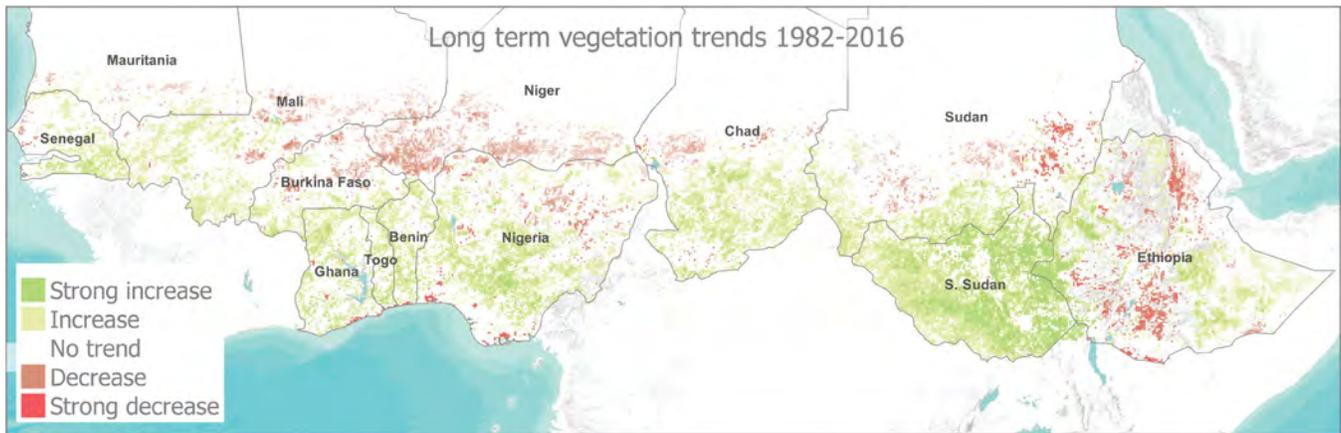
Throughout its history, the GEF has been a strategic partner of the GGWI countries and provided more than \$800 million in grants through diverse projects and programs.¹ These investments have leveraged an additional \$6 billion from national governments, development partners, and other multilateral sources in support of the GGWI. These resources have helped improve landscape resilience and livelihoods, which has reduced poverty and enhanced both food and water resource security. This, in turn, has helped countries increasingly adopt innovative practices

for improving crop and livestock productivity and restoring degraded lands. Much remains to be done. However, progress to date through collaborative action affirms the potential of targeted investments to support actions on the ground.

Against this backdrop, countries across the region are increasingly demonstrating strong political will through commitments under the major multilateral agreements. These comprise the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Sustainable Development Goals, and other important initiatives such as the Bonn Challenge and AFR100 for landscape restoration.

The value of these commitments is crucial for ensuring countries take ownership of investment priorities. This is critical for harnessing emerging technologies and innovations to deliver global environmental benefits. Moreover, it also lays a foundation for addressing multiple social and economic needs in the GGWI countries, including poverty reduction, food security, diversification of livelihoods, and job creation. A coordinated approach involving all major stakeholders is advancing integrated approaches to promote systems transformation.

1 https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/publications/gef_great_green_wall_initiative_august_2019_EN_0.pdf



We acknowledge Jorge E. Pinzon and Compton J. Tucker for providing the AVHRR NDVI3g time series.

The GGWI has evolved from its initial vision of a tree planting venture to one focused on integrated approaches to natural resource management for transforming livelihoods and landscapes. Recent discussions between donors and GGWI countries has led to a further renewal. The initiative has set goals to restore 100 million hectares of degraded land, sequester 250 million tonnes of carbon and create 10 million green jobs in rural areas by 2030. To support these goals, the countries under the leadership of African Union have established a political and technical governance framework. At the regional level, this includes the Panafrican Agency of the Great Green Wall steered by the Heads of States Summit of 11 countries. At national level, the Great Green Wall National Agencies are coordinating the initiative.

As a financial mechanism of several multilateral environmental agreements, the GEF is well placed to harness the commitment by world leaders and development partners for scaling up actions and integrated solutions by GGWI countries. In accordance with its mandate and the principles of country ownership, the GEF has identified major opportunities for achieving significant outcomes in the Sahel:

- Comprehensive land-use planning to better target and scale up integrated natural resource management, including practices for conservation, restoration, and increased resilience.
- Policy options to increase tenure security and rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including harmonization of land-use practices and reduction of conflict between resident and nomadic communities.

- Policy options to unlock market opportunities and innovative financing for diversified livelihoods of smallholder farmers and pastoralists.
- Strengthened platforms and institutional frameworks for technical and policy support, capacity building, and knowledge management and exchange across the region.
- Support for climate change adaptation and resilience priorities that help people, communities, and ecosystems of the Sahel to address negative impacts of climate change and reduce vulnerability.
- Replication and scaling-up of successful blended finance structures that seek to address land degradation and biodiversity loss in Africa.
- Promotion of private sector engagement opportunities across landscapes and through value chains in the Sahel that encourage cooperation at a regional scale and thus strengthen national-level initiatives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely hampered economic and social activities, affecting implementation on the ground. As governments strive to cope with the pandemic's massive impact on societies, the GEF has worked to ensure that its work and partnerships are not disrupted. It is adapting to the rapidly changing situation by integrating responses to the COVID-19 pandemic into its business processes. Together with partner countries, the GEF has been investigating how the effects of the pandemic, including risks, impacts, and opportunities, can be harnessed for a green and blue post-COVID-19 recovery that further increases resilience to disruptive events.





GEF's Ongoing Work in Advancing the GGWI Agenda

The GEF's Integrated Approach Program on Fostering Sustainability and Resilience for Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa (FS-IAP) is a multi-agency effort. It promotes sustainability and resilience through management of the natural resources—land, water, soils, trees, and genetic resources—that underpin food and nutrition security in the region. The program, launched in GEF-6, covers 12 countries across the drylands of Sub-Saharan Africa. Six of these countries (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Ethiopia) are in the Sahel and West Africa region.

The Impact Programs in the current Seventh GEF Replenishment Cycle (GEF-7) provide opportunities for Sahelian countries to program resources to support objectives of the GGWI. This is especially the case for the Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program led by the World Bank; and the Dryland Sustainable Landscapes, led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Both programs employ an integrated approach to implementing sustainable land management and delivering on voluntary Land Degradation Neutrality targets set by countries. Restoration of productive landscapes features as an important element, especially in degraded agro-forestry systems. Also, many GGWI countries, such as Ethiopia (\$600 million) and Nigeria (\$250 million), have already initiated follow-up sustainable land management operations at large scale using World Bank financing. This illustrates the leveraging effect of previous programs over time.

Further, a \$2 million project entitled "Harnessing the Great Green Wall Initiative for a Sustainable and Resilient Sahel" is being implemented with the support of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The project provides an opportunity to engage with all GGWI stakeholders to foster meaningful dialogue with countries, and flesh out a longer-term vision. Ultimately, it will serve as the vehicle for a program that could mobilize larger investments. In addition to directly linking with other ongoing efforts, the GEF considers this initiative as crucial for generating valuable information and knowledge. This will feed into the strategic planning

process for its Eighth Replenishment Cycle (GEF-8) starting in July 2022. The initiative will also ensure the inclusion of interests and commitments from Sahelian countries and diverse international partners

Strengthening Collaborative Engagement and Support for the Great Green Wall Initiative

With growing momentum for increased support to the GGWI from the global community, this is a timely opportunity to aspire for greater ambition for transformational change in the Sahel. In January 2021, President Emmanuel Macron of France and other world leaders announced the Great Green Wall multi-actor Accelerator at the One Planet Summit. This initiative seeks to facilitate the coordination and collaboration of donors and stakeholders involved in the GGWI. The recent pledge of over \$19 billion in funding from a coalition of the Green Climate Fund (GCF), international development banks, and governments sends a clear message that such aspirations are becoming a reality. It also reinforces that the GGWI is more than just a tree planting venture. Rather, it is an attempt to mobilize and engage the Sahelian people to transform large areas of their region into hubs of climate-resilient and economic growth with multiple benefits for people and the planet.

There is no doubt that progress and achievements over the last decade can only be consolidated and scaled up through continued strong support. As such, firm engagement is needed by development partners, international financing initiatives and the private sector. In addition, a coherent coordination mechanism must link all Sahel countries in the implementation of the GGWI. In that context, consideration should be fully given to the 2022–2023 Roadmap of the GGWI Executive Secretariat Program and related priority action areas. These were adopted by the Heads of States and Governments of the Pan African Agency of the GGWI, held in December 2021 in Nouakchott, Mauritania.

Financial needs for achieving impactful outcomes at scale are estimated to average between \$40–130

million per country annually. This level of financing will need to be mobilized from diverse sources both domestically in the countries and internationally by partners. A concerted and coordinated effort by key international partners is needed, including the GEF, GCF, international financial institutions (IFIs), bilateral partners, development agencies, the private sector, and the GGWI countries. In this regard, the proposed Great Green Wall Accelerator Strategy and its five pillars present a forward-looking, ambitious, and collaborative framework that could be potentially strategic for the next phase of the GGWI.

Discussions are already taking place to enhance partnerships and collaboration toward the implementation of the GGW Accelerator. It will be equally important to establish such coordination mechanisms at national levels with all relevant stakeholders. These should include GGW Focal points, GEF and GCF Focal Points, local governments, civil society organizations and the private sector, youth, and women organizations.

The GEF is committed to engage with the GCF, other IFIs, and development partners on a coordinated approach to ensure greater synergy and economies of scale in supporting the GGWI countries. This includes support for policy options to unlock market opportunities and innovative financing for diversified livelihoods of smallholder farmers and pastoralists. Private sector engagement is key to linking smallholder producers and pastoralists to markets, promoting sustainable supply chains, and creating stable revenues with agricultural commodities.

To mobilize private finance at scale, the GEF's experience in supporting accelerator initiatives can be instrumental in attracting investment in new frontier areas such as land degradation. GEF support may take the form of both grants and non-grant instruments such as debt, equity and risk mitigation products to create adequate risk/return profiles for private finance investors.



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Key areas for collaboration include:

- Private sector engagement organized around corporate commitments to sustainability and on progress toward resilient production systems. This involves creation of value chains and landscape opportunities at all scales, across current and emerging commodities in the Sahel. Multi-stakeholder platforms can also include financing to help incubate and accelerate projects with the aim of creating a track record of bankable projects.
- The GEF's Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF) offers opportunities to address specific elements of the GGW Accelerator Strategy. The LDCF has been making innovative climate adaptation investments in GEF-7, including in Sahel countries. This has laid the foundation for multi-partner programs in the GGWI countries as part of the GGW Accelerator and in line with GGWI countries' climate change adaptation plans. The LDCF is exploring the potential for a substantial investment to enhance multi-partner cooperation with the GCF and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). This aims to address gaps in adaptation support, and to help inform GEF engagement and investments in these countries.

These efforts will pave the way for more extensive engagement with other stakeholders, and for greater coordination and partnership. The GEF experience as a multilateral partnership offers an appropriate anchor for countries, enabling them to harness these opportunities in a coordinated and coherent manner. Ultimately, this will help countries leverage and upscale impactful investments of the

GEF and its long-standing partners such as IFAD, the World Bank, FAO, UNEP and GCF, including through cooperation with the LDCF.

All these partnerships will be critical for applying best practices, ensuring multi-stakeholder involvement for a comprehensive approach to knowledge management and capacity building, and for building back better and a healthy green recovery.

The challenges across the Sahel remain daunting. Yet with new investments, collaboration, and support for the next phase of this unique Africa-led initiative, the Great Green Wall can turn the dream of its founders into reality.

The Global Environment Facility was established on the eve of the Rio Earth Summit to tackle our planet's most pressing environmental problems. Since then, it has provided more than **\$21.7 billion** in grants and mobilized an additional **\$119 billion** in co-financing for more than **5,000 projects** and programs. The GEF is the largest multilateral trust fund focused on enabling developing countries to invest in nature, and supports the implementation of major international environmental conventions including on biodiversity, climate change, chemicals, and desertification. It brings together 184 member governments in addition to civil society, international organizations, and private sector partners. Through its Small Grants Programme, the GEF has provided support to more than 26,000 civil society and community initiatives in 135 countries