



SIX QUESTIONS TO MONIQUE BARBUT, CEO OF THE GEF,
ON THE GREAT GREEN WALL



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1 Monique Barbut, we are hearing a lot about the Great Green Wall. Can you explain the concept to us ?

The Great Green Wall is an initiative spearheaded by African Heads of State to combat soil degradation in a zone spanning Senegal to Djibouti. The wall is a visual concept symbolizing the collective work we all have to do in order to combat environmental degradation, in particular desertification and the poverty in rural areas.

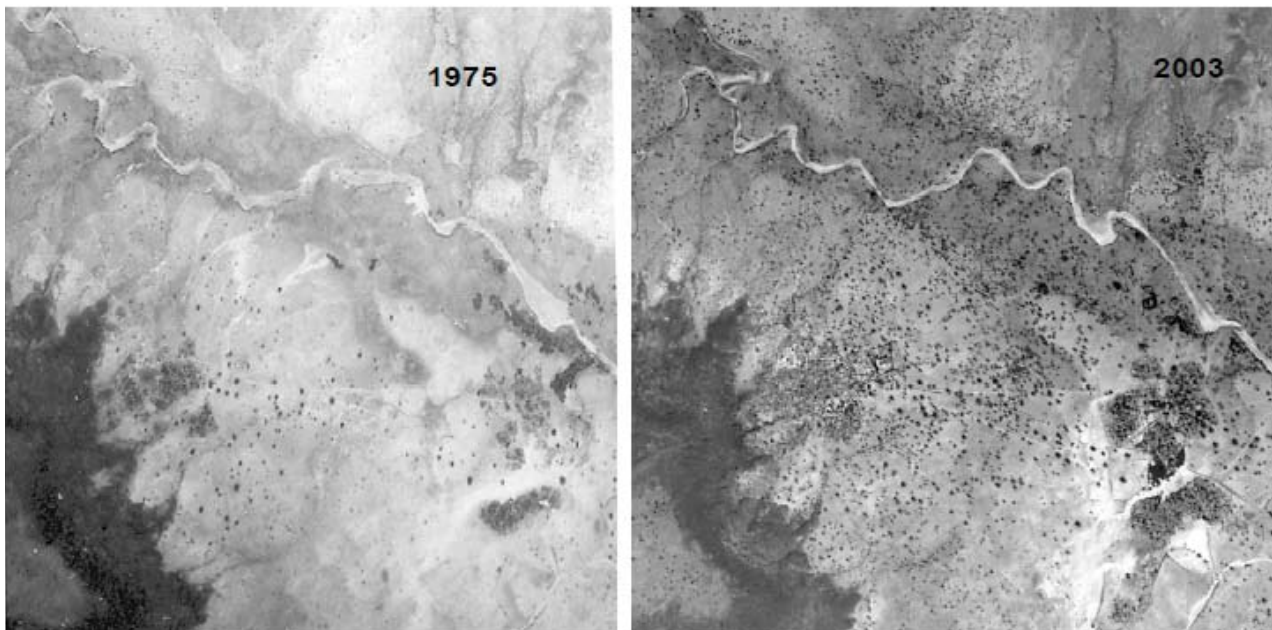




Do you support the Great Green Wall?

As Chairperson of the main financial facility for international conventions on the environment, I am pleased that Heads of States are joining forces to target an environmental problem that is having very adverse effect on their territories. This action sends a strong message to which the international community must respond. I have reformed the GEF to ensure that the countries identify their own priorities and decide on the projects they wish to implement, in conjunction with GEF agencies and their partners. This is the approach I am taking. Consequently, I have announced that we stand ready to provide support, should countries so desire. It will therefore be up to the countries to decide whether they wish to develop one or several projects in the context of this program and to assign some or all of their financial allocations to the Great Green Wall.

GALMA, 1975–2003 (EXAMPLE OF THE IMPACT OF ANR)



Impact of Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR) in Niger—1975 to 2003 (Sahelian Study—2006).
Courtesy Gray tappan USGS EROS Data Center



As far as forests are concerned, will you finance a tree planting drive throughout Africa?

The response is very clear: we are not financing an all-out tree planting drive from Dakar to Djibouti. The countries have enough experience to know what has and has not worked in the past thirty years in the areas of soil conservation, land management, and agroforestry. Countries such as Niger have blazed the trail for us. Do you know that in places such as the Zinder region, tree density is much greater now than it was in the mid-1980s? This is not the result of a tree planting effort, but rather the work of small farmers to promote natural regeneration. A more productive approach seems to be to work with these farmers to find technical solutions, particularly long-term land and financial solutions, in order to save the trees. The key factor is often to determine who has the right to use trees and tree products. Natural regeneration in a farming context thus offers a host of advantages to local communities and to the global environment such as greater yield, improved soil fertility, reduced erosion, fodder availability, income diversification, shorter wood collection time for women, greater resilience to climate change, greater biodiversity, etc.

In the context of TerrAfrica, we have financed several projects of this nature with the World Bank or IFAD,¹ with priority being given to land management and agroforestry approaches. Countries are also sending us very interesting findings from studies conducted in Mali or Burkina Faso. These findings are also borne out of projects supported by the development partners—American, German, French, Danish, Dutch, Swiss, etc. All the development agencies working on sustainable soil management issues are also moving in this direction. The GEF will invest money in approaches that have proven to be effective.

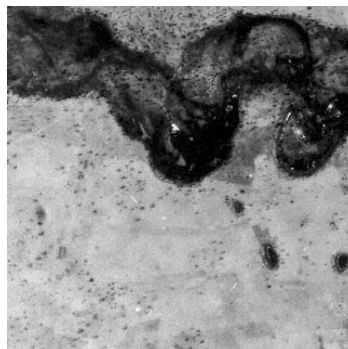
1 IFAD: International Fund for Agricultural Development

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The sum of US\$119 million has been reported in the press. Will the GEF channel this sum toward the Great Green Wall?

I have indicated that it is up to the countries to decide how much they want to invest in the Great Green Wall, based on their available allocation of resources under the fifth GEF replenishment. The sum of US\$119 million corresponds to the total amount that the GEF is providing to the eleven countries² involved with the Great Green Wall. Following the N'Djamena summit in June 2010, when this figure was reported in the press, I wrote to the eleven countries in question to find out how much they wanted to allocate to the Great Green Wall. Most are currently preparing their national priorities for the fifth GEF cycle. I expect these priorities to be communicated to us during the first quarter of 2011. We will discuss amounts at that time.

The GEF Secretariat is willing to offer incentives to supplement available resources in the context of national systems for the allocation of resources (STAR). For example, if a country decides to allocate a significant amount of its resources to land degradation, biodiversity, or climate change, we can add resources for International Waters or Climate Change Adaptation.



Another example in Zinder in 1975 and 2005
(Chris Reij, com. Pers., Courtesy Gray tappan USGS EROS Data Center).

2 Refers to the eleven countries bordering the Southern Sahara zone that participate in the Great Green Wall Initiative: Burkina Faso, Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sudan.

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Are you going to fund a Great Green Wall Pan-African agency or Great Green Wall national agencies?

The projects funded by the GEF fall within the purview of strategies that reflect the thrust of international conventions on the environment. We try to finance local and national activities with the aim of improving the global environment. We do not, in general, fund the secretariats of conventions or the operating expenses of regional or national agencies.





What would be the ideal project to finance in the context of the Green Wall?

It is difficult to identify an ideal project that is applicable across the board. We will have to wait for national priorities in order to discuss project details. Furthermore, problems will be tackled differently depending on the country or region. Ethiopia's proposals in terms of its projects will not necessarily be relevant to Nigeria or Mauritania.

I can, however, address the broad framework in which the GEF wishes to participate. As I mentioned earlier, the GEF is funding additional (or incremental) costs to supplement government projects, most often with assistance from different partners. For example, the GEF might participate in a national agricultural or food security program with the assistance of various donors, in order to strengthen the services provided by ecosystems, test or promote sustainable soil and water management practices, and develop incentive systems to promote sustainable agriculture and livestock production. The project would be heavily oriented toward having an impact on land and maintaining a variety of landscapes and uses. This impact would be measured by an environmental monitoring system that would likely be developed at the sub-regional program level. The rule of thumb would be participatory approaches and accountability would reside with local organizations or women's groups, which would be strengthened.



Millet cultivation and agroforestry parkland of *Faidherbia albida* giving an impression of a "vegetal wall", Commune de Doungou, Département de Matameye, Région de Zinder.
Courtesy of « Chambre d'Agriculture du Niger ».

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