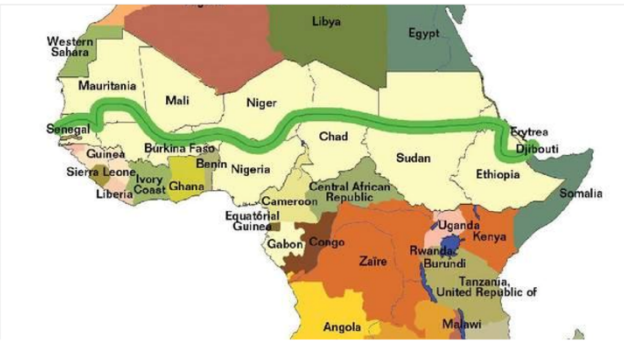
# Revitalizing the Great Green Wall Project


## Authors

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### Introduction

Since the 1970s, several initiatives have been launched to slow down desertification, such as the Great Green Wall in China which aimed to contain the Gobi Desert, and the Green Dam in Algeria, which aimed to limit the spread of the Sahara. But the Sahelo-Saharan Great Green Wall project stands out for its international character, involving eleven African states. Stretching from Senegal to Djibouti, this ambitious project aims to create a green corridor more than 7,600 km long and 15 km wide, while improving local living conditions, food security, and peace.




Officially launched in 2007 with a target date of 2030, the Great Green Wall project is currently significantly behind schedule, and thus urgent action is needed to give it new momentum. This advocacy paper aims to provide local, regional, and international policymakers with useful tools on updating the project, and calls for greater interstate cooperation to ensure its success.

### I/ The urgent need to revitalize the Great Green Wall project

It should be emphasized that, although at first glance the Great Green Wall project appears to be confined to the Sahel-Saharan zone, the consequences of its failure would extend far beyond the states directly concerned: all territorial levels would be impacted in multiple ways. First, at the local level, the failure of the project would result in increased poverty and food insecurity, particularly with the loss of temporary green jobs linked to reforestation, and populations would also suffer from continued soil degradation, loss of biodiversity, and increased difficulty in accessing water, which would limit their resilience to climate change. Second, the failure of the project would have consequences at the regional level: the fragmentation of efforts among Sahel countries would slow down the fight against desertification, amplifying conflicts over natural resources and worsening population displacements as well as the security risks that accompany them. This could lead to

lowered confidence among international investors, a loss of financing opportunities, and thus a reduction in regional sustainable development efforts. Finally, at the international level, the failure of the project would amplify land degradation, dramatically reducing the region's capacity to contain carbon emissions and mitigate climate change.

Moreover, the failure of the project would weaken global climate commitments by limiting carbon dioxide sequestration and exacerbating migration flows to Europe and other regions, resulting in global humanitarian and security implications.

However, the assessments of the Pan-African Agency and the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) are pessimistic about the progress of the Great Green Wall project: they attest that fewer than 18 million hectares have been restored out of the 100 million expected, that only 350,000 jobs have been created out of the 10 million hoped for. Additionally, most of the promised funding has either not arrived or has been used for other purposes.

It is therefore imperative to consider different possibilities to revitalize this project.

## II/ Ways to revitalize the Great Green Wall project

Originally conceived in the 2000s, the Great Green Wall project must be updated to take into account the numerous environmental, economic, and political developments that have taken place since then.

### 1)Ways to adapt the project to technological developments

On the technological front, the use of new and more appropriate techniques that meet the imperatives of climate change should be considered.

The Great Green Wall Observatory already uses certain cutting-edge techniques such as remote sensing and a Big Data platform to monitor vegetation growth and manage interventions more precisely. The management of the limited resources available should be rethought and adapted by integrating technologies such as drone agriculture (already used in Morocco), satellites, and artificial intelligence.

Innovations in smart agriculture could optimize water consumption, accelerate the detection of needs, and mitigate the impacts of scarcity and drought. For example, in China's Ningxia Autonomous Region, seven cities have adopted an innovative project to plant 15 million hectares of desertified land in order to improve food security in the region. The automation of this project has demonstrated surprising efficiency, especially given the limited resources in desert regions. The Great Green Wall project should be revitalized with new strategies like smart replanting, could accelerate its progress, increase innovation, reduce costs and help it become more efficient.

### 2)Ways to adapt the project to geopolitical upheavals

On the geopolitical front, the Sahel-Saharan region has experienced intern and external upheavals that have profoundly affected the political life of the states directly involved in the Great Green Wall project. This has negatively altered relations between these states, as well as their relations with third countries and international institutions, significantly hampering the growth of the project.

Indeed, the areas accessible to the Great Green Wall project have been greatly reduced due to the spread of internal and international conflicts that are undermining many of the states participating in the project. In Niger, for example, most projects have been suspended or significantly slowed down, because of the Islamic rebellion. Conversely, the examples of Ethiopia and Nigeria, also parties to the project but with a more favorable geopolitical situation, demonstrate major progress in terms of soil regeneration.

In order to counteract the harmful effects of these geopolitical risks on the Great Green Wall project, one solution would be to identify peaceful zones free from armed conflict, and make them priority "model" areas in terms of development. Successful implementation in these areas could have a positive effect on more unstable areas, making it possible to capitalize on immediate opportunities to generate concrete, visible, and measurable successes, and demonstrate to other political regimes what they could gain from collaborating on the project.

The identification of peaceful priority zones would also make it possible to develop decentralized cooperation between cities in participating states with cities in third countries. For example, certain French cities which have cooperated for decades with cities in West African states whose relations with France have recently deteriorated, could redirect their ties to cities in states that are less affected by conflict and maintain better relations with France. This could enhance the ability of local authorities to participate in the project.

### 3)Ways to improve the project's governance

Finally, there are multiple ways to improve the governance of the project.

There are several weaknesses in the current financing strategy of the project. On one hand, there is a clear gap between the amounts promised by the international donors involved in the project and those actually allocated to the project's stakeholders. This is evident in the $4.2 billion announced at the 2015 Paris conference, of which only $149 million had been received by 2019. Similarly, only $2.5 billion was paid out in 2023, compared to the $14.3 billion originally allocated at the 2021 One Planet Summit. Most of the funds are promised in the excitement of international conferences and summits. It would be useful to refer to the practices of other institutions involved in international projects, which are accustomed to using detailed provisional budgets and ensuring closer monitoring of the receipt of funds. Furthermore, the funds actually allocated to the project and made available are not always used effectively to achieve the project's objectives, due in part to corruption and the risk of misappropriation of climate funds in Africa (Transparency NGO, 2023). We must implement reliable mechanisms to ensure that funds reach their destination and that already-disbursed funding be devoted entirely to land restoration operations.

The role of multinational companies in implementing the project could also be improved, for example purchasing carbon credits, which are increasingly used by large companies to offset their greenhouse gas emissions. This practice, promoted and regulated by international law, has been the subject of much attention during the various COPs. Transposing this mechanism to the Great Green Wall project would offer the possibility of commercializing areas that have already benefited development, as well as using the resources generated.

Finally, the evaluation methods used in the Great Green Wall Project should also be updated: it should no longer be based exclusively on the single criterion of the volume of activities such as the number of trees planted but rather on the criterion of the concrete and sustainable results of these activities: regeneration of vegetation, reduction in soil degradation, boosting the local economy, or improving food security, the true objectives of the project.

## CONCLUSION

With five years to go until 2030, the Great Green Wall remains a fragile dream. Financial, political, and environmental difficulties have slowed the realisation of its objectives. In order to breathe more life into this project, it is important to adopt a more collective approach, increase transparency, and rethink geopolitical and governmental strategies, taking into account technological advances. Innovation is essential to see this project through to completion and rebuild trust and credibility. Failure looms on the horizon, with rampant desertification, famines, and conflicts spilling far beyond the Sahel, threatening the global climate and leading to mass migration. It is essential to emphasize community and international solidarity. Collective mobilization can enable us to make progress more effectively. The Great Green Wall project constitutes a prime example of this.

Decision-makers, let us act now to finally turn the Sahel green, pacify the region and honor our global pact. Otherwise, history will judge our failure as collective.

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