



Africa's Great Green Wall Initiative: a model for restoration success

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The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative was launched to address the increasing challenges of land degradation, desertification and drought, climate change, food insecurity and poverty in more than 20 countries. Restoration of agro-sylvo-pastoral landscapes and degraded lands is one of the priority interventions initiated, enabling the springing up of green nests of life. When complete, the Great Green Wall of Africa will reverse the seemingly unstoppable desertification and address the development of its drylands' inhabitant rural communities. Today's planting of modest seedlings will grow into vast mosaics of forest and agroforestry landscapes and grasslands, which will provide essential ecosystem goods and services, restore lost livelihoods and create new wealth. The ambition of reforestation efforts within this initiative – the like of which the world has never seen before – sounds like an impossible dream. However, learning from past mistakes and capitalising on current advancement in science and technology, it is a reality that is taking root. Following a successful restoration model that RBG Kew experts have devised, we are helping to mobilise, train and support communities in four border regions in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. In collaboration with FAO, the Millennium Seed Bank Partnership is using its unique expertise to ensure that seeds of environmentally well-adapted and economically useful local species are collected and planted in communal gardens and village agroforestry systems managed by the communities themselves. In our first year, an estimated total of 162,000 seedlings and 61 kg of seeds from 40 useful native species, including grasses for livestock, have been planted to cover 237 ha of farmer-managed land in 19 villages. The keen interest it has created has indicated that these figures will rise five-fold in the second year. These green bricks are the foundations of the living wall that will eventually reach across the Sahel and beyond.

Keywords: restoration, seed germination, Sahel, plantation, native species, local communities, Great Green Wall