

## Africa is taking ecosystems and landscape restoration in its own hands

Nearly two thirds of Africa's land is degraded. This is all the worse since the rural population, and here, above all, smallholder farmers and households, heavily depend on healthy soils and tree cover. Our authors show how the continent is responding to the challenge by implementing forest landscape restoration initiatives, one of the most recent ones being AFR100.

By Mamadou Moussa Diakhité, Teko Nhlapo, Petra Lahann, Diana Mawoko and Camilla Shiluva Holeni

Rural communities in Africa depend predominantly on forests for everyday upkeep and survival. Locals in rural African communities regularly go out into the forests searching for batches of firewood for their next meal, while others collect mushrooms, fruits, nuts, berries and herbs to sell locally in order to earn a living. Therefore, forests carry within them the well-being and livelihoods of the populations in the African continent. A further important function of forests in Africa is their job creation potential. The timber production sector employs tens of millions of people, and therefore households, through small-scale wood collection, charcoal production, transportation and retail.

The rural population receive around a quarter of their income from the collection and direct trade of plant seeds, shoots and roots, mushrooms, wildlife and insects. Non-timber forest products are also harvested and traded as medicine, decorations, essential oils and skin-care products. In Africa, we use a lot of palm oil in our products, which is derived from the palm tree forests. Some families make their living by picking fruits from these palm trees and using them to make and locally trade palm wine – an alcoholic drink that is popular in the West Africa region. However, the predicament that arises is that with this high demand of services from our forests, we are faced with an increased rate of deforestation and a rapid degradation of our forest landscapes.

### A vicious circle of poverty and overexploitation of resources

Every year, nearly three million hectares of forests and land are lost on the continent, accompanied by an annual estimated three per cent drop in GDP owing to soil and nutrient depletion. The result of this process is that nearly two-thirds of Africa's land is degraded, with millions of people facing hunger, malnutrition and poverty, who in order to survive have to further deforest and often overexploit the continent's natural resources. These actions not only intensify the effects of climate change, but



An oasis in the Kanem Region of Lake Chad Basin. Women from the local village participating in the Great Green Wall programme.

Photos: Andrea Borgarello for TerraAfrica / World Bank

also severely hinder economic development and threaten the ecological functions vital to the economies of African countries.

Rural smallholder farmers and households suffer most from degraded land as their activities are largely dependent on stable weather patterns, healthy soils and tree cover, as well as water. Framework conditions such as governance of natural resources and policy coherence often do not favour restoration at scale, and numerous other barriers impede progress. These barriers include weak institutional coordination, inadequate mechanisms of devolution to local resource users and insufficient economic incentives for local and foreign investments in sustainable land management. These issues, which occur at global level, have led to increasing awareness regarding the potential for forest landscape restoration (FLR) to generate numerous benefits for people and support progress towards multiple national targets and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), addressing issues such as food security,

poverty reduction, land rehabilitation, regeneration and restoration, biodiversity conservation and climate resilience. Various global and regional restoration initiatives have emerged from this (also see upper Box).

### The African response

For African countries too, there are numerous opportunities to scale up forest landscape restoration by restoring both deforested forest lands and degraded agricultural as well as pastoral landscapes where the tree cover has been depleted. Africa is unique in that it has the largest restoration opportunity of any continent in the world, with more than 700 million hectares of degraded landscapes that can be restored. Experiences in numerous countries, including Malawi, Rwanda, Ethiopia and Niger, to name a few, have demonstrated that FLR delivers a wide range of benefits and can be achieved on millions of hectares. Successful experiences with proven restoration practices

such as Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR; see article on page 19), Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR), etc. improved management of small-holder woodlots, re-forestation, evergreen agriculture with inter-cropped trees, and associated sustainable land and water management (SLWM) practices, such as water harvesting and erosion control, have been documented, along with practical steps that can be supported to catalyse their adoption at scale. One major effort that was already launched in 2007 is the Great Green Wall Initiative (see bottom Box).

The Africa Forests and Landscapes Restoration Initiative (AFR100) is a more recent measure. It was launched in December 2015 during the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference's Global Landscapes Forum. The fact that 28 African countries as of today have joined the initiative and have committed to restore a total of 113 million hectares of degraded forest lands by 2030 as well as the progress already made in the first four years is extremely promising. To date, 20 partner countries have completed their restoration assessment by using ROAM (Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology). This methodology was designed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the World Resources Institute (WRI) and supports countries in identifying and analysing areas that are primed for forest landscape restoration. Using this assessment countries have started developing national FLR strategies in consultations with all relevant national stakeholders which will guide and coordinate the implementation activities.

In terms of implementation, each country has its own strategy, depending on the presence of technical and financial partners and their needs as well as opportunities. Some governments, such as Malawi, have allocated funds for FLR implementation activities, while other countries work together with the private sector and governmental and financial partners like the World Bank, the German Development Ministry (BMZ), the German Environment Ministry (BMU) or the Global Environment Facility (GEF). FLR Implementation on the ground follows the FLR strategy and is guided by the countries. It is typically conducted by the government itself through tree planting campaigns, by the over 30 technical partners, such as the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), WRI, IUCN etc., by private sector companies, or by local partners, such as grass-roots organisations, communities, women associations or youth groups.

### Bridging financial and capacity gaps

However, AFR100 does face challenges which need to be addressed in the upcoming years in order to be successful so that all countries can reach their goals in FLR implementation. It is noticeable that technical and financial partners are not equally present in partner countries. While some countries have the support of more than ten technical and financial partners, such as Kenya, Madagascar, Tanzania, other countries have either no partners to assist them or just one or two, like Benin, Ivory Coast and Mozambique. AFR100 will need to work on ways to improve technical and financial assistance for countries where technical assistance is absent or underrepresented. This also would allow to address the issue of lack of local and national capacities for FLR implementation and good practices in some of the partner countries.

AFR100 is working to bridge this gap by organising knowledge exchanges such as webinars that we have planned between our partner countries and financial partners in order to enhance access to funding opportunities. Another way AFR100 bridges the financing gap is through the annual Land Accelerator, an AFR100-partner-led endeavour to train entrepreneurs from African countries through business planning and incubation sessions. So far, the Land Accelerator, organised by WRI and Fledge (a global network of company accelerators and seed funds), has taken place twice in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2018 and 2019. Out of the 335 businesses that applied to the 2019 Land Accelerator, 14 entrepreneurs from eight African countries came to Nairobi to pitch their ideas to a room full of investors. Building up on this success, the development agency of the African Union – AUDA-NEPAD – aims to expand the Land Accelerator in the years to come.

In conclusion, we can agree that significant additional work is needed to take stock of the successful cases of forest landscape restoration, expand communication, advocacy and outreach, and support the implementation of comprehensive strategies and concrete plans to trigger the widespread adoption of FLR practices. The AFR100 Initiative will accelerate restoration to enhance food security, increase climate change resilience/adaptation and mitigation, support biodiversity conservation and combat drought, desertification and rural poverty.

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### Global and regional restoration initiatives

Dozens of national governments have made commitments to restore deforested and degraded lands as part of global and regional restoration initiatives, including the **Bonn Challenge** which was launched in September 2011 and endorsed and extended by the **New York Declaration on Forests** of the 2014 UN Climate Summit. The Bonn Challenge targets the restoration of 150 million hectares by 2020 and 350 million hectares by 2030. It is supported by the **Initiative 20x20**, seeking to bring 20 million hectares into restoration in Latin America and the Caribbean by 2020. The **AFR100** Initiative also backs the Bonn Challenge.

### The Great Green Wall Initiative

The Sahel is a region with very sensitive human and environmental dynamics. It is one of those extremely fragile ecosystems where the signals of climate change have been most apparent. The region has gone through major drought periods, and rain shortage is identified as an ongoing crisis for the Sahel. The region is stricken with multidimensional poverty and, at the same time, is faced with a steady population growth continuing into the next century. The Sahelian community is heavily dependent on natural resources for agriculture and/or livestock production as these are its main source of livelihood. However, most of the agriculture is rain-fed, which makes production challenging given the region's low rainfall patterns. The increasing demand for natural resources is resulting in a continuous pattern of land degradation in the Sahel.

In response to this plight, the African Union launched the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI) for the Sahel and the Sahara in 2007. The objective of this African-led initiative is to restore Africa's degraded landscapes by planting an 8,000 km-long line of trees and plants across the entire Sahel, from the Atlantic coast of Senegal to the east coast of Djibouti. The initiative aims to curb desertification and transform millions of lives in one of the world's poorest regions. So far, around 1,000 kilometres have been planted and provided food security, jobs and a reason to stay for the millions who live along this forest line.