



Africa & the World

The Great Green Wall

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Ps.24:1



- 46% of Africa's land is degraded, jeopardising the livelihoods of nearly 65% of the Continent's population;
- 20 million people are on the verge of starvation across the Sahel - drought is a major factor;
- 60 million people are expected to leave degraded areas of Africa in the next two decades;
- By 2050 the Sahel's population is expected to rise from the current 100 million to 340 million - amplifying socio-political risks;
- Temperatures are expected to rise between 3 - 5 degrees C by the end of the century in the Sahel.

The Great Green Wall has the potential to mitigate or even reverse the effects stated in the above points.



AFRICA IS GROWING A WALL

It is not made from concrete or barbed wire fences. The "Great Green Wall" of Africa is an African-led project with an ambition of gigantic proportions. It was initiated in 2007. Thirteen countries are now cooperating in planting a "wall" of drought-resistant trees (mostly Acacia) from West to East Africa – just under the southern edge of the Sahara desert. It will stretch from the Atlantic coast of Senegal to the Red Sea of Djibouti.

The project aims to grow an 8,000 kilometre "belt" of trees across the entire continent of Africa. It will be 15 kilometres in width.

The over-all goal of the project is to fight the effects of climate change by reversing desertification. In this process, the Leaders point out that the Great Green Wall is more than about protection from the wind-blown sand. It is a holistic pro-



gramme – a “mosaic of sustainable actions” which promotes poverty alleviation and human development. It brings food, jobs and better health to impoverished communities. It promotes peace and security to flourish. It will lessen mass migration for those who are unable to live off the land due to increased droughts and dwindling agricultural yields. And – most importantly – it brings HOPE for the future.

BENEFITS: The Great Green Wall (GGW) initiative provides many benefits. Forecasts suggest that the 13 countries involved will sequester as much as 250 million tonnes of carbon through its evolution, contributing to a significant reduction in greenhouse gases and thereby combating Climate Change. The Wall will also make an invaluable contribution to the global social order by reducing the causes of migration, conflict, political tensions and unrest that inevitably accompany the displacement of peoples.

When completed, the GGW will green 100 million hectares of degraded land in the world’s poorest region thus creating ten million jobs in rural areas, sustaining families and communities and also reducing the food insecurity that causes starvation, migration and conflict.

Some of these benefits are already visible in villages in northern Senegal. Here indigenous Acacia saplings, planted as part of the Wall, are thriving. As a result restored land has created space for growing vegetables that add vital nutrients to a local diet that is normally dominated by milk and meat. Surplus produce is sold on local markets. The renewed land is contributing to a local economy and local well-being. People no longer have to leave home seeking work in cities; families and communities can stay together.

“When I was young, there was more water in the village and we produced our own crop of millet,” says Khaira Haidara, vice president of the local women’s organisation remembering the past when rainfall patterns were more regular.

“This project has brought positive changes to our lives, giving us different things to eat, and now we worry less about food.”



WHO SUPPORTS THE PROJECT

The *United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification* (UNCCD) is currently leading a public awareness campaign to alert people to this African initiative and to invest in it. It states that, under the leadership of the African Union, partners at present include the European Union, the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the UN, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of France, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the Royal Botanical Gardens of Kew, the Sahara and Sahel Observatory and the World Bank Group.

A ROLE FOR IRELAND

The Irish Government has already agreed to part-fund a UNCCD Documentary aimed at raising awareness and greater global support for the Great Green Wall. It is being urged to become more directly involved in the project itself. In doing so it could go a long way in implementing Ireland’s first ever and recently published

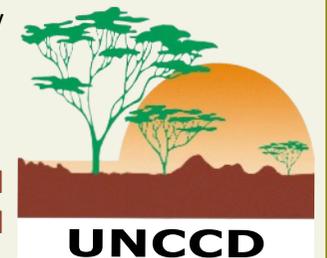
National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals. This outlines Ireland’s intentions in regard to tackling key issues affecting people and the planet including poverty, hunger, health and well-being, education, gender equality, water, energy, employment, inequality, consumption, climate, the sea, the land, peace and justice, and partnerships.

The Great Green Wall addresses most of these Goals and, for Ireland, is an opportunity to promote justice and to make a real difference in Africa. This fact was emphasised at a recent event organised by the SMA and hosted by Áras an Uachtaráin to inaugurate the SMA’s Laudato Tree Project. Those attending were addressed by President Michael D. Higgins and Monique Barbut, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. On the next page are excerpts from the addresses they gave on this occasion. These emphasise both the importance of the project itself and Ireland’s role in making it a success.

SUCCESS STORIES TO DATE: According to a report by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) on the progress of the Great Green Wall in March 2018:

- Ethiopia**, has restored 15 million hectares of land; **Senegal** has restored 4 million hectares and planted 12 million drought resistant trees;
- Niger** has restored 5 million hectares of land, directly improving food security of 2.5 million people;
- Burkina Faso** – 3 million hectares restored;
- Nigeria** – 5 million hectares restored.

Once complete, the Great Green Wall will stand as a true human wonder - a global symbol to inspire all of us.



“The Great Green Wall promises a brighter future for rural youth in Africa and a chance to revitalize their own communities providing a ribbon of hope, Uniting young people around a common, epic ambition: to ‘Grow a 21st Century World Wonder’, across borders and across Africa. (Monique Barbut)

“We are one global family: we must recognise that the problems faced by a farmer in Niger are our problems; that the struggles of women in Mali to live decently are our struggles; that the hunger of a child in the Sudan is our hunger; and that we owe to each other a imprescriptible ethical duty to act to overturn injustice and put in its place an economic and social order capable of meeting the needs of all our peoples, without imperilling the natural systems on which we all, ultimately, depend. And I put it to you, as President of Ireland, how do we want to be seen from abroad, giving a lead in matters like this which a country like ours, given our population size, given our record, can do so well.”

(President Michael D Higgins)

“The great Green Wall is an idea we can all truly embrace, a powerful symbol that a better future full of hope and possibility is firmly in our grasp.” (Monique Barbut)



President Michael D Higgins with Monique Barbut at the inauguration of the SMA Laudato Tree Project

A Project for Justice

As a project that, on a global scale, promotes human dignity, the common good and also care for creation, the Great Green Wall exemplifies what Pope Francis meant when, in *Laudato Si*, he said; *“Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society.”* Paragraph 91

During the forthcoming World Meeting of Families, the SMA will, in partnership with the UN Convention for Combating Desertification (UNCCD), highlight and promote the Great Green Wall as a way of promoting Justice in the world and especially in Africa.

