



Chair Report

MS African Union

Chairs: Grace Kottak and Ryan McCord

The primary role of the [African Union](#) is to realize Africa's potential and facilitate the cooperation and integration of African states to drive Africa's growth and economic development.

REPORT: Desertification in the Sahel/Central Africa

Introduction

Desertification- land degradation in typically dry areas, resulting from factors such as drought, deforestation, climatic variations, human activities, and inappropriate agriculture- poses and exacerbates a variety of economic, social and environmental problems, and has been a topic of concern and debate for world leaders and organizations alike.

Desertification can be tied to changes in weather patterns, manifested through the excessive build-up of heat on the earth's surface, meteorological changes which result in a reduction of rainfall, and reduced cloud cover, all of which results in greater evaporation rates. ([2.1 | 15](#)) Human activities such as deforestation, overgrazing and poor cropping methods, which reduce water retention in soil, serve to heighten the prevalence of the issue.

General Overview

The Sahel region is comprised of the semi-arid sector between the Sahara Desert of North Africa and the Savannas of West Africa. 83 percent of rural Sub-Saharan Africans are dependent on livelihoods from the land, yet 40 percent of Africa's land resources are currently impaired. The Sahel and Central African regions have experienced desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD) and the subsequent effects for decades and in prolonged periods of time. Droughts in this territory span far beyond months or even years. They have occurred regularly over the past 12,000 years, and in turn, produced a number of adverse effects, such as; poverty, poor health, a lack of food security, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, reduced resilience to climate change, and



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forced migration. Desertification also yields degraded economic activity, physical infrastructure, natural resources, and national and global security.

The Sahel and Central Africa are currently experiencing one of these droughts, the inception of which pinpointed to the late 1960s, as published by the Joint Institute for the Study of the Atmosphere and Ocean (JISAO). JISAO asserts that, with the exception of a period of five years, all years since 1970 have seen a deficiency of rain. One of the most relevant explanations derives the origin of the prolonged period of drought to a change of temperature in the region's surrounding oceans.

When formulating different ways to resolve this issue, consider the following:

- Is the country I am representing affected by desertification? If so, are there any national policies already in place to address this?
- Beyond finding ways to prevent desertification, how can I promote the improvement of living conditions for affected populations?
- What would an effective approach look like at the national level? The sub-regional level? The regional level? The international level?
- How can I build capacity in regards to this issue? How can research and technical development, awareness, and the provision and mobilization of resources impact those in the region?
- How can I involve local populations in solution oriented action?

It is also imperative to consider the manner in which desertification leads to a host of social issues. For example, terrorist groups such as Boko Haram have continuously taken advantage of young, impoverished men in this territory- by promising food and other basic necessities- and compelled them to join their cause. This further heightens the general sense of instability present in the region. When approaching the issue of desertification, consider ways to support those in danger of exploitation.

Major Parties Involved

Irish government: The Global Mechanism is simultaneously implementing a 1.2 million Euro grant from the Irish government in support of the Great Green Wall.

Ethiopia: 15 million hectares of degraded land restored, land tenure security improved.

Senegal: 11.4 million trees planted, 25,000 hectares of degraded land restored, and 20,000 jobs created.

Nigeria: 5 million hectares of degraded land restored and 20,000 jobs created.



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Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger: approximately 120 communities involved in creating a green belt of over 2,500 hectares in previously degraded drylands. More than two million seeds and seedlings have been planted from fifty native species of trees.

World Bank: The World Bank supports the direct implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) through its lending and non-lending activities, the Global Environment Facility, and support to the Global Mechanism (GM) of the CCD. The GM was established to facilitate the rationalization of resource allocation and the mobilization of additional resources to combat land degradation and poverty.

NEPAD: NEPAD, or New Partnership for Africa's Development is an economic development program of the African Union. NEPAD was adopted at the 37th session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in July 2001 in Lusaka, Zambia, and has provided significant contribution to initiatives centered on desertification eradication.

Timeline of Key Events

1952: The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and Sahel Initiative (GGWSSI) gains its roots. British environmentalist Richard St. Barbe Baker advocated for a continuous line of trees to be planted and maintained along the Sahel to block wind-carried sands and sediments from the Sahara and further mitigate wind erosion.

1977: Representatives at the United Nations [Conference on Desertification](#) discuss the historical background, process, and effects of desertification, and enact a plan of action.

June 17, 1994: The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was adopted in Paris, and put into force on December 26, 1996.

2007: GGWSSI is launched by the African Union Assembly.

2014: Action Against Desertification is launched and implementation by the FAO and partner organizations begins

May 2-7, 2016: First international conference on the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and Sahel Initiative (GGWSSI). Attended by experts and researcher from Member states, regional economic communities, the African Union Commission, NEPAD, and development partners. The aim of this conference was to secure confirmation of political commitment, create a roadmap for transformational action on the local level, adopt a framework for the results of initiative, and pursue further GGWSSI communication and knowledge management.



Past Attempts at Resolving This Issue

Numerous different approaches and action plans have been enacted to address the issue of desertification in the Sahel and Central African region. One of the most prevalent and controversial is the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and Sahel Initiative ([GGWSSI](#)). The Great Green Wall is an African-led movement centered around the ambition to grow an 8,000km expanse of trees across the entire width of Africa. Many disregard this course of action as there are a variety of perceived practical and ecological inhibitors. In contrast to the GGWSSI, yet dependent on the same motivating factors, are farmer-managed natural regeneration (FMNR) systems. This process involves farmers themselves, protecting and managing trees of species which regenerate naturally on their farmland. Beyond the predicted ecological benefit, FMNR is believed to bolster Sahel/Central African communities. This process decreases wind speed and subsequently reduces a farmer's costs as well as the level of wind erosion. Furthermore, some trees fix nitrogen into the soil, resulting in improved soil fertility and crop yields. This will serve to lessen the prevalence of famine, and equip farmers with the ability to sell surplus crops as an additional source of income, reducing poverty rates. Many believe this to be a simple and cost-effective solution. Others aim to implement a long-term integrated set of strategies that concurrently focus on the increased productivity of land and the rehabilitation, conservation and sustained management of both land and water resources.

[Resolution 47/188](#): Established an intergovernmental negotiating committee for the elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification in countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly those in Africa.

Suggested Websites

- <https://www.unccd.int/actions/great-green-wall-initiative>
- <http://www.fao.org/3/ap603e/ap603e.pdf>
- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00380768.2015.1025350>
- https://www.wearewater.org/en/the-sahel-desertification-beyond-drought_318262
- <https://au.int/en/newsevents/30271/first-international-conference-great-green-wall-sahara-and-sahel-initiative-ggwssi>
- https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/inline-files/ICCD_COP%2813%29_L.18-1_716078E_0.pdf
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