African Union Great Green Wall Initiative Strategy and Ten-Year Implementation Framework:

Enhancing Ecosystems Restoration and Livelihoods Resilience (2024-2034)

Summary Brief

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

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The Great Green Wall Initiative is a flagship initiative of the African Union, initiated in 2007 to respond to the increasing threat of advancing desertification. Initially envisaged as a long band of narrow tree plantations in the Sahel and Sahara, today the Great Green Wall Initiative has evolved into a mosaic of different land uses, aiming to restore agricultural, pastoral, dryland and forest lands in support of healthy ecosystem functions and services, while strengthening people's livelihoods, well-being, and resilience against the myriad of stresses and shocks to which the region is prone.

From its original form, the Great Green Wall Initiative has evolved both in its approach, ambition, and geographical reach. The transition from the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and Sahel Initiative to the Great Green Wall Initiative, signifies an evolution towards a more comprehensive, continent-wide approach to environmental sustainability. Along with the original 11 member countries associated with the Pan African Agency of the Great Green Wall the Great Green Wall Initiative now encompasses an additional 25 countries from North, East, Southern and West Africa. An additional three countries including South Sudan, Kenya and Uganda have expressed interest at this stage.

The **11 countries in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, members of the Pan-African Agency of the Great Green Wall.** Burkina Faso, Chad, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sudan. Many of these countries were the pioneers of the Initiative.

Other **Pioneer-countries** which are not part of the Pan African Agency: Algeria, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Libya, Egypt, The Gambia, Tunisia, Somalia and Côte d'Ivoire. South Sudan, Kenya and Uganda have expressed an interest in joining.

The countries that were part of the **Sahel and West Africa Program and BRICKS projects** in support of the Great Green Wall, financed by the Global Environment Facility and the World Bank included **Benin, Ghana, and Togo** (in addition to the other Sahel and West Africa Program countries that are members of the Pan-African Agency of the Great Green Wall already mentioned).

The **Southern African countries under the auspices of Southern African Development Community** and with support from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Global Mechanism of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. This includes: Angola, Botswana, The Union of the Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Figure 1. The current membership of the Great Green Wall Initiative.

Realising the extraordinary potential of a continent-wide response to land degradation, desertification and climate change, and cognisant of the need for its urgent revision, the African Union Commission developed a revised framework to serve as the overarching coordination agenda for the Great Green Wall Initiative. This Strategy encourages an integrated and holistic approach to land rehabilitation and climate-resilient development among its Member States, Regional Economic Communities, Agencies and partners.

Furthermore, this coherent approach guides integrated development planning at various scales to support the combined priorities of sustainable land, water and biological diversity management, climate adaptation and mitigation, and human well-being. The Great Green Wall Initiative's natural focus on landscapes and their inhabitants, including tens of millions of smallholder farmers, pastoralists, and the residents of rural market towns, makes it a radically new approach for achieving restoration at scale.

Aligning with existing policies, programmes, projects and commitments

In support of the African Union's efforts to reach and exceed its ambitious objectives over a ten-year timeframe, this Strategy outlines an overarching continental vision and clearly sets out a number of key objectives, priorities, and approaches to achieve this. Backed by a long-term implementation plan, this Strategy also attempts to expedite the operationalisation of commitments and activities and align implementation partners with the priorities and goals of the Strategy.

In realisation of a shared vision for a prosperous, secure, inclusive and innovative future for Africa, and based on the aspirations of the African Union's 2063 Agenda, this Strategy builds on the continent's commitment to simultaneously ensure an effective multilateral approach to addressing land degradation, loss of biological diversity, water scarcity, as well as to ensuring people's livelihoods and jobs are protected and that broad-based climate-resilient development is enhanced

through the achievement of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals. This Strategy seeks strong alignment with Member State commitments to global agreements, such as to the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; to the targets of Land Degradation Neutrality under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification; and towards the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, as well as the goals set under the Decade for Ecosystem Restoration.

In addition, the Strategy seeks to complement other green and sustainable development policies and projects of the continent (Figure 2). This Strategy does not intend to replace existing institutions or set up new structures. It has been developed to enhance existing initiatives and to strengthen coherence and coordination across plans, policies and projects.
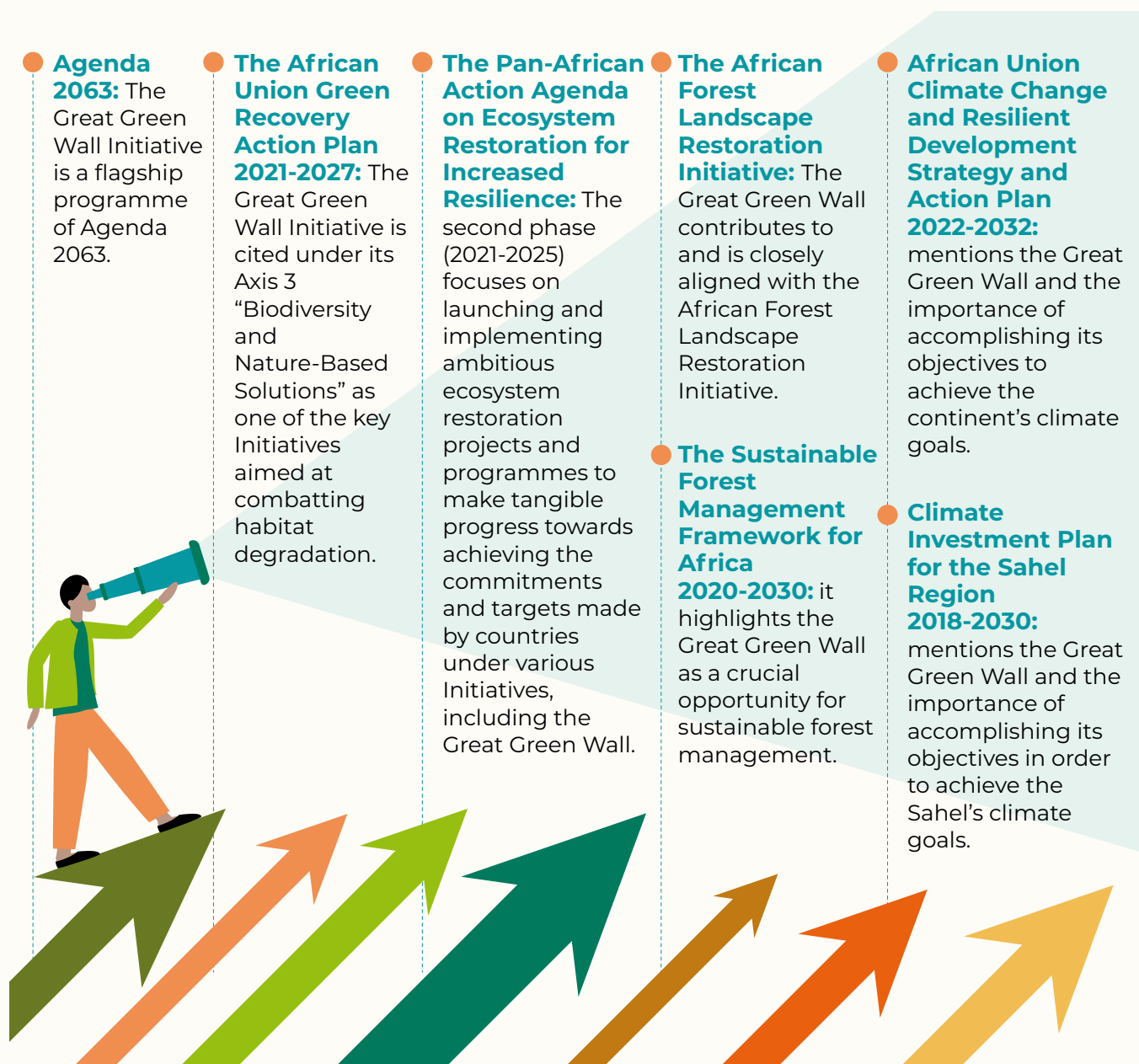
● **Agenda 2063:** The Great Green Wall Initiative is a flagship programme of Agenda 2063.

● **The African Union Green Recovery Action Plan 2021-2027:** The Great Green Wall Initiative is cited under its Axis 3 "Biodiversity and Nature-Based Solutions" as one of the key Initiatives aimed at combatting habitat degradation.

● **The Pan-African Action Agenda on Ecosystem Restoration for Increased Resilience:** The second phase (2021-2025) focuses on launching and implementing ambitious ecosystem restoration projects and programmes to make tangible progress towards achieving the commitments and targets made by countries under various Initiatives, including the Great Green Wall.

● **The African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative:** The Great Green Wall contributes to and is closely aligned with the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative.

● **The Sustainable Forest Management Framework for Africa 2020-2030:** it highlights the Great Green Wall as a crucial opportunity for sustainable forest management.

● **African Union Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2032:** mentions the Great Green Wall and the importance of accomplishing its objectives to achieve the continent's climate goals.

● **Climate Investment Plan for the Sahel Region 2018-2030:** mentions the Great Green Wall and the importance of accomplishing its objectives in order to achieve the Sahel's climate goals.

Figure 2. The Great Green Wall is a contributor to indicative African plans, actions, frameworks and strategies.[1]

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1. **Regreening Africa. 2023.** Regreening Africa Final Report. CIFOR-ICRAF.

Responding to megatrends: the current state of play

This Strategy responds to the multiple emerging and accelerating crises and megatrends facing the continent today. These include, among others, economic recovery in a post COVID-19 world, increasing migration and conflicts, a steady rise in global autocracies, emerging issues associated with artificial intelligence, global financial instability, and rising deficits in food, water, work, safety and security.

Socio-ecological systems globally are facing numerous threats and high rates of degradation, while Africa's climate impacts, especially in arid and semi-arid environments, are significant, wide-ranging and potentially catastrophic. The climate change impacts are expected to interact with and exacerbate existing drivers of migration like poverty, conflict, lack of opportunity, and political marginalisation.

Between 2004 and 2022, there was an increase in undernourishment in most African regions.[2] Further, there was a three-fold increase in the number of disaster displacements to 7.4 million, the highest figure ever reported for the region (Figure 3).[3] As the impacts of climate change increase, the potential for forced displacement and migration increases, with more people adding pressure on host communities and a higher likelihood that tensions rise (Figure 4). Wars and conflicts are concentrated disproportionately in dryland regions, while countries experiencing armed conflicts are disproportionately affected by climate variability and extremes.

Gender inequality continues to be a concern, though progress has been made in some areas, such as women's political representation. Inequalities in access to education, healthcare, and basic services persist, with marginalised groups, including ethnic minorities and refugees, facing disproportionate challenges.
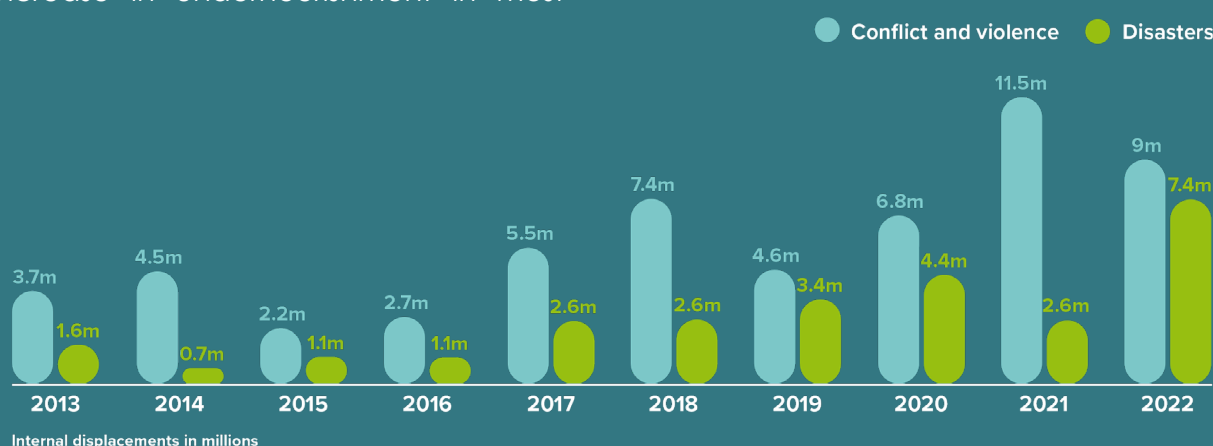

Conflict and violence   **Disasters**

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Conflict and violence	3.7m	4.5m	2.2m	2.7m	5.5m	7.4m	4.6m	6.8m	11.5m	9m
Disasters	1.6m	0.7m	1.1m	1.1m	2.6m	2.6m	3.4m	4.4m	2.6m	7.4m

Internal displacements in millions

Figure 3. Internal displacements by conflict, violence and disasters in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2013-2022.[3]

2. **FAO. 2023.** Suite of Food Security Indicators. In: FAOSTAT. Rome. [Cited 12 July 2023].
3. **GRID, 2023.** Internal displacement and food security. Global Report on Internal Displacement.

Legend:
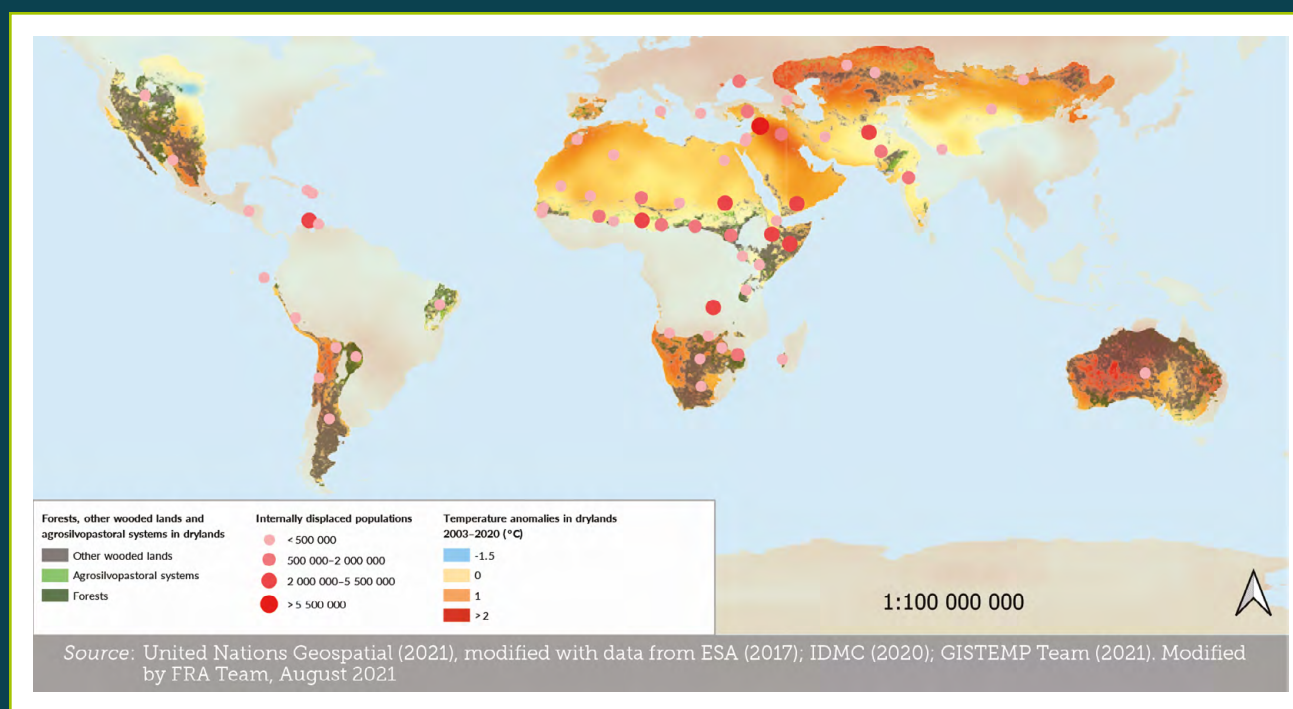Forests, other wooded lands and agrosilvopastoral systems in drylands
- Other wooded lands
- Agrosilvopastoral systems
- Forests

Internally displaced populations
- < 500 000
- 500 000–2 000 000
- 2 000 000–5 500 000
- > 5 500 000

Temperature anomalies in drylands 2003–2020 (°C)
- -1.5
- 0
- 1
- > 2

1:100 000 000

Source: United Nations Geospatial (2021), modified with data from ESA (2017); IDMC (2020); GISTEMP Team (2021). Modified by FRA Team, August 2021

Figure 4. The interconnection between temperature anomalies and internal displacement of populations in dryland forests and other wooded lands and agrosilvopastoral areas.[4]

Restoring the health of landscapes and the environment can mitigate different facets of these polycrises, simultaneously building resilience, biological diversity and water security, while providing numerous stabilising benefits to the communities whose lives and livelihoods depend on the underpinning ecosystem functions. Also, such landscapes will be much better able to resist the encroachment of deserts and the trend towards rising populations coupled with unsustainable land management and the climate crisis. A more thorough treatment of the socio-ecological data and trends can be found in the full Strategy document.

African drylands cover two-thirds of the continent and are home to two-fifths of the population.[5] The drylands experience variable rainfall, regular droughts and flooding leading to food shortages, water scarcity and some of the world's highest levels of poverty, which in turn lead to humanitarian crises and migration. As such, these vulnerable landscapes are targeted by the Great Green Wall Initiative to build prosperity and resilience. Box 1 describes some of the key characteristics of Africa's drylands.

4. **FAO, CGIAR and CARE. 2021.** Deploying a humanitarian–development–peace nexus approach: Exploring, strengthening and reviving dryland ecosystems – Forestry discussion paper. Rome.

5. **FAO. 2019.** Trees, forests and land use in drylands: The first global assessment. FAO Forestry. Paper No. 184. Rome.

BOX 1. Key characteristics of African drylands

Drylands are defined as lands where the ratio of annual precipitation and the mean annual potential evapotranspiration, also known as the aridity index, is no more than 0.65. African drylands cover two-thirds of the continent, including three-fifths of its agricultural land, and are home to two-fifths of the population. In addition, if 'presumed' drylands (areas that contain dryland features but with an aridity index greater than or equal to 0.65) are taken into account, the area covered is far greater (Figure 5).[5]

Dryland areas are hyper-arid, arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid, and are regions where primary production is limited by water availability. These areas are also characterised by low and erratic rainfall, droughts, heatwaves, and occasional floods. The distinct biophysical features of drylands make them highly susceptible to the negative impacts of climate change. Upsurging temperatures, changes in precipitation and rainfall patterns, land use, nutrient availability, atmospheric carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions, are key driving factors of unprecedented dryland expansion. In addition, drylands are associated with substantial land degradation and are extremely vulnerable to severe environmental shocks. In 2021, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations reported that in Africa, up to 65% of productive land is degraded, while 45% of the continent's land area is experiencing spreading desertification.[6] Soil erosion has long been recognised as a major process of land degradation resulting in losses of productivity and biological diversity, decreased resilience of landscapes and increased vulnerability to climate change. Despite this, the results from a global assessment demonstrate that African drylands are not wastelands, but productive landscapes with considerable economic potential and environmental value.[5]

Figure 6 shows the drylands of Africa with land use delineations. As expected, these hyper-arid and arid areas are dominated by other land and grassland areas, and semi-arid and dry sub-humid categories are dominated by grassland, followed by forestland followed by cropland.[7]

Model simulations clearly show that continued global warming will make the earth's drylands drier over time. Climate models predict high evapotranspiration and lower soil moisture levels in arid and semi-arid regions of Africa, suggesting some tropical grasslands could become drier and unsuitable for farming.[8]

6. **Berrahmouni, N. and Mansourian, S. 2021.** Review of forest and landscape restoration in Africa. Accra. FAO and AUDA-NEPAD.

7. **Sacande M., Guarnieri L., Maniatis D., Marchi G., Martucci A., Mollicone D., Morales C., Oubida R.W. and Paus Diaz A.S. 2022.** Africa Open Data for Environment, Agriculture and Land (DEAL) and Africa's Great Green Wall. Rome, FAO.

8. **Schmidhuber, J., and F.N. Tubiello, 2007**: Global food security under climate change. *Proc. Natl.* Acad. Sci., 104, 19703-19708, doi:10.1073/pnas.0701976104.
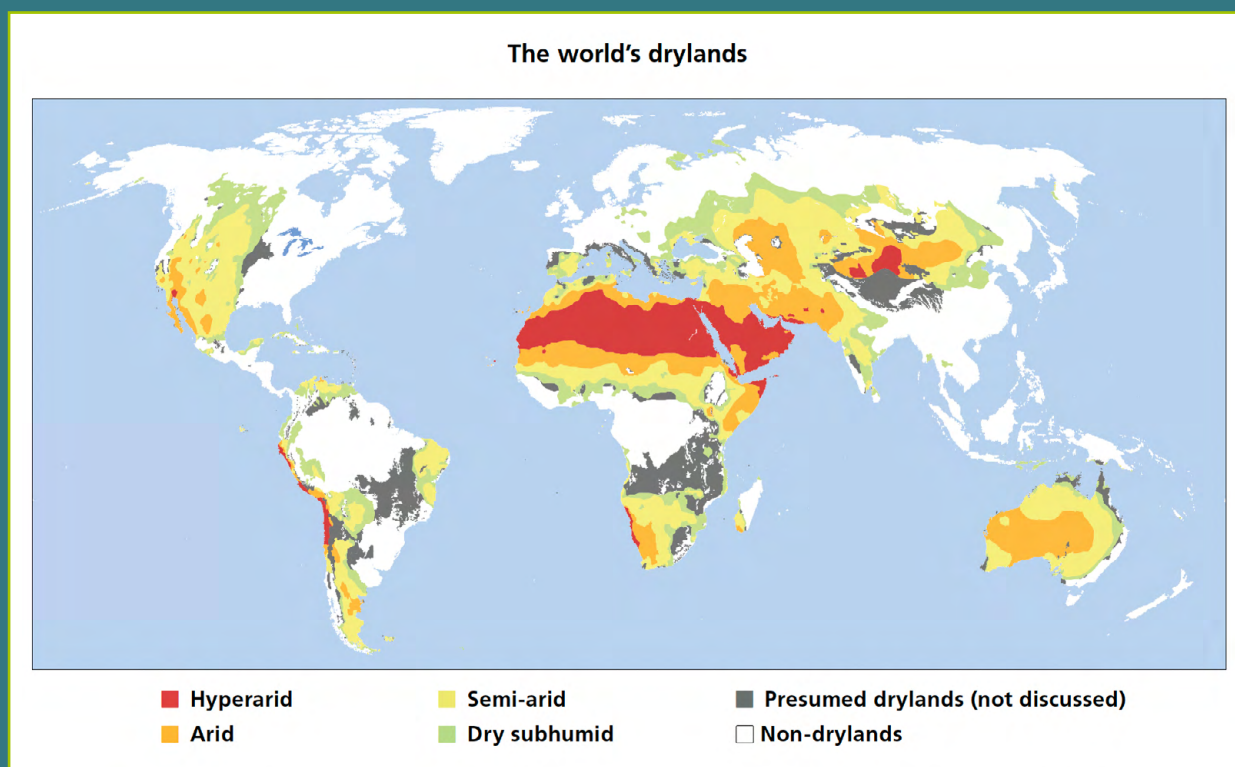
The world's drylands

Hyperarid   **Semi-arid**   **Presumed drylands (not discussed)**

Arid   **Dry subhumid**   **Non-drylands**

Figure 5. Global drylands featuring the different types of African Drylands.[5]
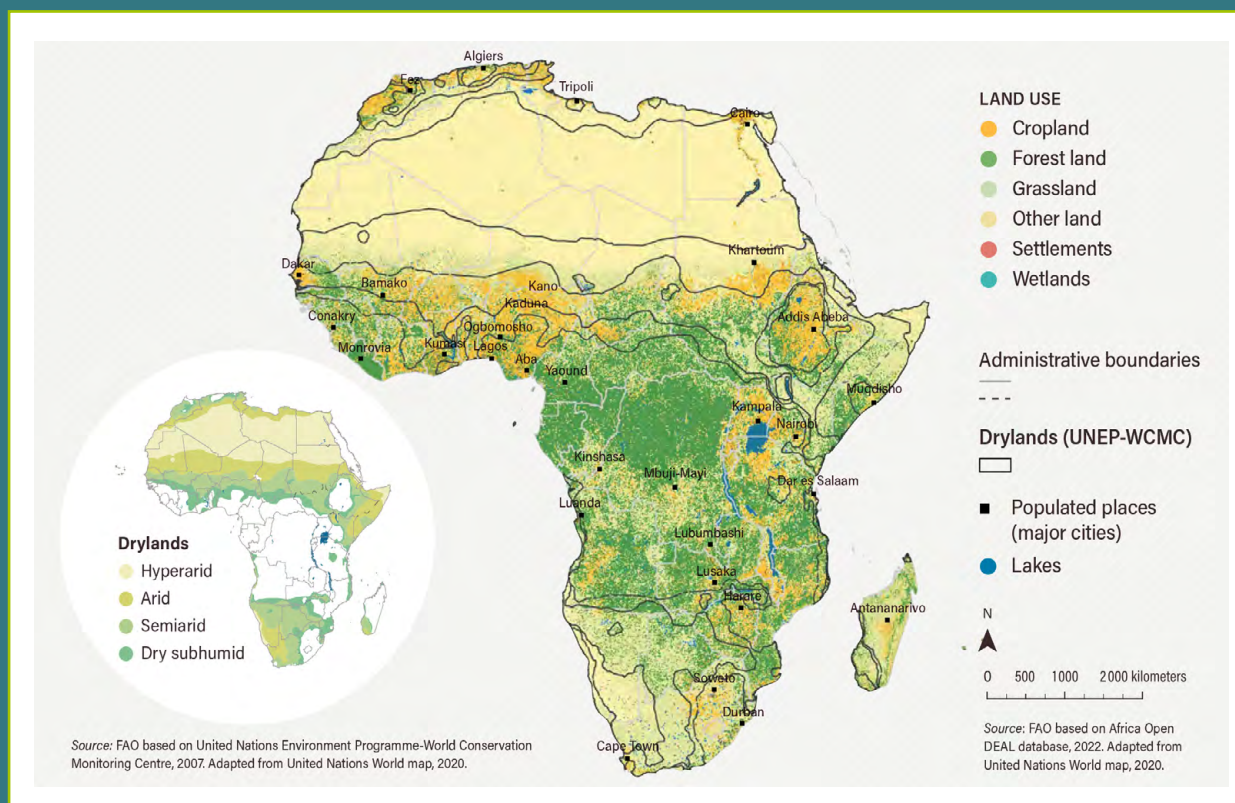

Figure 6. Map of land use delineations in Africa with dryland boundaries.[7]

STRATEGIC FRAMING OF THE GREAT GREEN WALL INITIATIVE STRATEGY

This Strategy is a ten-year strategic planning document (2024-2034) that defines the main priorities, intervention areas and action areas required to scale up land restoration and resilience building activities associated with agricultural, grazing, and forest landscapes across the African continent. This Strategy is designed as a living and evolving document to keep pace with the latest science, technological advancements and other global, continental, sub-regional and national developments. As such, the Strategy will be revised every five years.

Aspirations and objectives of the Strategy

VISION

By 2034, Africa's dry regions are transformed into socially, economically, and environmentally resilient and stable regions.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE

Enhance the resilience of communities, ecosystems, and economies in the African drylands by improving the living conditions of populations, improving the state and health of ecosystems, advocating and mobilising resources, strengthening institutional collaboration and promoting policy coherence.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

Promote locally led land planning, land restoration and resilience building initiatives and nature-based entrepreneurial and livelihood activities that improve the well-being and incomes of communities, as well as empower them, particularly women and youth.

Catalyse inclusion, alignment, cooperation and ownership of land restoration and resilience-building in related strategies, policies, programmes and plans.

Promote policy coherence, alignment and a common narrative in strategies, policies, programmes and plans.

Invest in, and scale up, nature-based practices and inclusive landscape approaches to sustainable land, water and biodiversity restoration and management to support resilient value chains.

Enhance Africa's capacity to mobilise resources at multiple scales.

Develop, invest in, and support, economic and environmental infrastructure facilitating the move to a green and circular economy.

Enhance the linkage and effective collaboration among community, practice, science, policy and private sector stakeholders fostering knowledge sharing and learning from experience and building upon a harmonised knowledge management system.

Encourage systems-oriented, cross-sectoral and coordinated decision-making and adaptive management environments that facilitate the integration of activities across all stakeholders, sectors and scales.

AXIS 1
Enhancing leadership, governance and political commitment

AXIS 2
Co-design and deliver pathways toward transformative restoration, resilience and development

AXIS 3
Enhancing the means of implementation for resilient landscape restoration

AXIS 4
Leveraging existing initiatives

Principles

The Strategy articulates and builds upon clear principles including:

- Africa-led and Africa-owned;
- Promotion of African integration;
- Promotion of cultural values of African people;
- Solidarity;
- Subsidiarity;
- Local ownership and leadership, inclusive and people centred approaches;
- Gender transformative approaches, equity and benefit sharing;
- Respect and integrate traditional and indigenous knowledge, practices and preferences;
- Develop and enhance diverse partnerships;
- Address justice and equity and ensure just transitions for scaling up land restoration;
- Intersectionality;

- Transparency, accountability, efficiency and adaptive management;
- Align plans and priorities to a whole of economy and systems approach;
- Promote effective collaboration and coordination across disciplines, sectors and institutions;
- Employ structured evidence- and experience-based approaches that link science, practice and policy;
- Develop capacities, shifting behaviours, sharing knowledge and scaling practices that work;
- Promote secure access and use rights to land, trees and other resources;
- Promote labour intensive investments;
- Promote shared value, environmental and social governance;
- Attract and deploy capital.

Stakeholders and beneficiaries

The success of this Strategy is highly contingent on the active commitment and involvement of the beneficiaries and stakeholders in its development and implementation. The main beneficiaries of the Great Green Wall Initiative are smallholder farming, fishing and pastoralist households, as well as other participants in rural economies and landscapes. However, many local, regional, national and international institutions will also benefit from the restored landscapes of the Great Green Wall and are key stakeholders to ensure its success. These other beneficiaries and stakeholders represent international bodies and government decision makers, technical agents and non-governmental and civil society organisations, science and academic institutions, community-based and farming, pastoral and forest-dweller organisations, women and youth groups, the media, rural businesses, other private sector bodies, and various financing and investment entities. Defining the respective roles and responsibilities among diverse stakeholders and beneficiaries is important for designing structured coordination and collaboration between all parties.