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NEAR EAST FORESTRY AND RANGE COMMISSION**TWENTY-FIRST SESSION****THIRD NEAR EAST FORESTRY WEEK****Amman, Jordan, 26 - 30 January 2014****THE GREAT GREEN WALL FOR THE SAHARA
AND THE SAHEL INITIATIVE****Secretariat Note***Summary*

- The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative is an African Vision and response to the threats posed by desertification, land degradation, droughts, biodiversity loss, climate change, poverty, food insecurity and migration in Africa. This note gives an overview of relevant developments and actions taken by FAO and its partners in support to the implementation of the Great Green Wall Initiative.

I. The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative

1. Desertification, land degradation and drought are at the core of serious challenges and threats constraining sustainable development in Africa including Near East countries. These problems have far reaching adverse impacts on food security, human health, economic activity, natural resources and the environment, physical infrastructure, and national and global security.
2. African Heads of State and Government endorsed in 2007 the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative, developed as a response to tackle the detrimental social, economic and environmental impacts of land degradation and desertification in over 20 countries in Africa. This initiative aims at addressing the impacts of aridity, low land productivity, desertification and climate change, as well as to secure sustainable livelihoods in the Sahara and the Sahel region. From an initial idea of establishing a simple barrier of trees from east to west across the African desert, the vision for a Great Green Wall has evolved, with the full support of FAO, into a more comprehensive and integrated approach: a mosaic of sustainable land and water management interventions at a landscape level (including sustainable forest and rangeland management and restoration, agroforestry, soil and water conservation, establishment of safety nets and socio-economic structures to help improve people's access to markets and social economic services, etc.) adapted to local ecosystems, tailored to the needs of communities and providing greater resilience and long term solutions to the effects of

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drought and land degradation.

3. FAO has been supporting the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative since its launch, through two complementary African Union Commission projects: a technical cooperation project involving five countries (Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Mali and Niger) and the other one co-funded by the European Union and the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD and implemented by FAO benefiting eight countries (Algeria, Burkina Faso, Egypt, The Gambia, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal and Sudan).

II. Achievements so far

4. FAO's direct support through the above projects was key to putting in place an enabling environment for the African Union Commission, the Economic Community of West African Countries, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the Arab Maghreb Union, and the 13 African countries for the effective implementation of the initiative. FAO support has led or significantly contributed to the efforts to achieve:

- A harmonized regional strategy validated by the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) in September 2012 and by the African Union Assembly in 2013; reflecting a shared vision on the initiative and the approach, means and capacities needed to successfully implement it. The Great Green Wall global goal is “to improve resilience to climate change of human and natural systems in the Sahel-Saharan zones through sound ecosystem management and sustainable development of resources, safeguarding of material and immaterial rural heritage and enhancement of the quality of life and livelihoods of communities”.
- Capacity development and communication strategies and plans in support of the implementation of the initiative.
- Validated Great Green Wall National Action Plans in eleven countries (including Ethiopia and Egypt). Algeria, Mauritania and Sudan are currently finalizing their action plans.
- A portfolio of projects for the implementation of the initiative was developed at country and trans-boundary levels and resources are being mobilized with partners for their implementation.
- A project was recently approved under the EU-ACP (European Union - African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States) collaboration programme¹, entitled “Action Against Desertification for sustainable livelihoods and productive and resilient landscapes in 8 ACP countries: Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Fiji, The Gambia, Haiti, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal”. This project of a €20 million funding will become operational as soon as the contribution agreement between FAO and the European Commission is signed in 2014.
- Increased coordination between financial and technical partners (including FAO, European Union, World Bank, the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD, the GEF, the Walloon Region of Belgium, the Royal Botanic Gardens of Kew and others) and African technical and political institutions (African Union Commission, CILSS, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the Observatory of the Sahara and the Sahel, etc.);
- an International Great Green Wall Forum on “Forging innovative partnerships for the implementation of the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative”² was co-

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/documents/aap/2013/pr_aap_2013_intra-acp_p2.pdf

² www.fao.org/partnerships/great-green-wall

organized by FAO and the Global Mechanism of the UNCCD at FAO in Rome on 16-17 December 2013, under the auspices of the African Union Commission. The Forum was a timely opportunity to share results reached so far and keep the momentum high and to call upon all partners for an enhanced commitment and collaboration for the implementation of the Great Green Wall Initiative on the ground.

5. The Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative, and the fruitful cooperation between FAO and the African Union Commission, are concrete examples of how FAO can work with member countries at national and regional levels, as well as efficiently partner with international, regional and sub-regional organizations in Africa and in the Near East to develop South-South cooperation, support capacity development and knowledge management, and inspire long-term solutions to combat desertification and promote sustainable livelihoods to end hunger and poverty in Africa.

III. Points for consideration

6. The Commission Members may further wish to report back on the implementation of the Great Green Wall initiative and share experiences on similar initiatives in their countries.

7. The Commission may wish to discuss how to boost the finalization of the planning and implementation of the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel initiative or of similar initiatives in their respective countries.

8. The Commission may wish also to discuss how to intensify the regional cooperation within the Near East Region to better use regionally available resources to combating land degradation and desertification and enhance South-South cooperation.