

# Regional Policy Coherence for the Great Green Wall Initiative: Restoring Land and Sustaining Peace: *The Great Green Wall and the Climate–Peace–Security Nexus in Africa*

07 POLICY BRIEF

## OVERVIEW

The escalating climate change crisis is an existential threat to mankind. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports that the climate has warmed by 1.1°C in more than 2000 years and is on course to exceed 1.5°C unless global emissions are cut by 43%, thereby aligning to a net-zero pathway by 2050.<sup>1</sup> Due to limited adaptation capacity, Africa bears a disproportionate brunt of climate change's widespread impacts, resulting in significant losses and damages.<sup>2</sup>

As the climate crisis accelerates, climate change is threatening continental stability and development through amplified security risks that are increasing across

the African continent. Based on the **Africa Climate Security Risk Assessment (ACRA)** and the Report of the Chairperson of the African Union (AU) on the Climate Change, Peace and Security Nexus, this brief outlines key recommendations and actions for the AU to adopt and operationalise as it strengthens its responses to address the impacts of climate change on peace, security and development in the implementation of the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI).

To address climate change impacts in Africa, ambitious adaptation and mitigation actions are crucial. This aligns with the principles enshrined in the Paris Agreement, particularly Article 7.1 on the Global Goal on Adaptation<sup>3</sup> and Article 8

1. [https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC\\_AR6\\_WGI\\_SPM.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_SPM.pdf)

2. [https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/outreach/IPCC\\_AR6\\_WGII\\_FactSheet\\_Africa.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/outreach/IPCC_AR6_WGII_FactSheet_Africa.pdf)

3. <https://unfccc.int/topics/adaptation-and-resilience/workstreams/gga>

on Loss and Damage<sup>4</sup>. Mobilising climate finance resources for Africa necessitates adherence to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities under Article 9 of the Paris Agreement.<sup>5</sup> Climate finance will bolster the scaling up of resilience, adaptation capacity, and climate-proofing of vulnerable communities. This, in turn, will contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and minimising global warming towards security and stability.

Nonetheless, climate-related security risks are already being felt across the continent, particularly around natural resource competition, access to food, water and energy, migration and displacement, extreme weather events, and armed groups.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, insecurity and

conflict are further driving environmental degradation, and reversing climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts.<sup>7</sup> Efforts to adapt to climate change and addressing these climate-related security risks must be massively scaled up.

Drawing on the ACRA study, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Ground for Peace Study,<sup>8</sup> the 27th Conference of the Parties (COP27) Climate Responses for Peace,<sup>9</sup> the COP28 Declaration on Climate Relief Recovery and Peace,<sup>10</sup> and the AU GGWI Strategy and Ten-Year Implementation Framework, the following recommendations outline key areas for the AU to advance peace-positive ecosystem restoration and livelihoods resilience in Africa.



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Never before have so many people been affected by land degradation and drought. Forty per cent of fertile land is now degraded and the results are dire: rising inequalities, people hungry, people displaced; livelihoods and businesses threatened, environments destroyed; and the foundation of peace, stability and security rocked”

Ms Amina J. Mohammed, United Nations Deputy Secretary General at the UNCCD COP16.

4. <https://unfccc.int/documents/631661>

5. [https://www.ipcc.ch/apps/njlite/srex/njlite\\_download.php?id=5114](https://www.ipcc.ch/apps/njlite/srex/njlite_download.php?id=5114)

6. [https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC\\_AR6\\_WGI\\_SPM.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_SPM.pdf)

7. <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/climate-related-peace-and-security-risks-in-africa/>

8. [https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2024-12/Peace%20Forest%20Initiative\\_Ground%20for%20Peace\\_full%20report\\_UNCCD.pdf](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/2024-12/Peace%20Forest%20Initiative_Ground%20for%20Peace_full%20report_UNCCD.pdf)

9. [https://www.cccpa-eg.org/pdf\\_read\\_download.php?type=read&newFileName=Climate+Responses+for+Sustaining+Peace+Initiative&file=5190\\_10103324.pdf](https://www.cccpa-eg.org/pdf_read_download.php?type=read&newFileName=Climate+Responses+for+Sustaining+Peace+Initiative&file=5190_10103324.pdf)

10. <https://mpf.undp.org/news/cop28-declaration-climate-relief-recovery-and-peace>





## NAVIGATING THE NEXUS: CLIMATE, PEACE, AND LAND DEGRADATION IN AFRICA

Africa's converging climate, peace, and security challenges are increasingly shaping policy agendas at both national and transregional contexts. The AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) has identified climate change as a critical driver of insecurity and is currently developing a Common African Position on Climate, Peace and Security (CAP-CPS). Concurrently, the AU's GGWI, under its new 2024–2034 Strategy and Implementation Framework, is emerging as a flagship platform for integrated responses to climate-security risks through land restoration.

Land and forest degradation has become a significant conflict risk multiplier on the continent. It is both a consequence and a driver of conflict, exacerbated by maladaptive coping mechanisms,

violent competition over scarce resources, and governance vacuums in vulnerable and post-conflict areas. Degradation may result directly from conflict, through physical destruction of landscapes, military equipment, and fires, or indirectly via the collapse of land management systems. In some cases, armed actors exploit land and forests for control or extraction, while communities facing ecological collapse may turn to alternative governance arrangements to secure access and survival. Weak institutions and deep inequalities further intensify these dynamics.

There is growing recognition, among scholars, African institutions, and international bodies such as the UNCCD, the United Nations Security Council, and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), of the

interlinkages between climate change, conflict prevention, and sustaining peace. While land and ecosystem restoration are increasingly seen as critical to addressing the climate crisis, their potential contributions to peacebuilding and regional cooperation remain underexplored. This policy brief aims to help fill this gap by making a case for land restoration as a strategic lever for advancing peace, security, and sustainable development in Africa.

Initiatives such as the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021–2030), the Peace Forest Initiative launched by the UNCCD in 2019, and the AU's Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (ABSAP) provide important entry points for mainstreaming land restoration in conflict-sensitive contexts. Drawing on the ACRA, the GGWI, and comparative experiences

from Latin America, this brief outlines actionable pathways to align the GGWI with the CAP-CPS and other continental frameworks.

Africa's escalating climate-security risks, including desertification, food and water insecurity, migration, and violent conflict, pose existential challenges to peace and development. The GGWI, with its expanded scope across 42 countries and alignment with major AU strategies (on climate change, biodiversity, green recovery, and sustainable development), offers a critical mechanism to respond. By embedding climate-security considerations into GGWI implementation, and coordinating efforts across the AU and its partners, Africa can advance an integrated agenda of restoration, resilience, and peace.

## AFRICA'S CLIMATE SECURITY RISKS AND PATHWAYS

The ACRA outlines a growing pattern of climate-exacerbated threats that erode the foundations of stability, particularly in areas at risk, experiencing and recovering from conflict and instability. These risks are not abstract. They manifest through concrete disruptions to livelihoods, governance, and peace processes across the continent:

- Desertification and land degradation are expanding across the Sahel, Horn of Africa, and Southern Africa, reducing land productivity and fuelling intercommunal conflict. Over 45% of Africa's productive land is degraded, directly affecting nearly 500 million people (UNCCD, 2024).
- Water stress, due to erratic rainfall patterns, droughts, and over-extraction, is intensifying competition over shared basins such as the Nile, Niger, and Lake Chad, leading to diplomatic strain and localised violence.



- Food insecurity affects over 280 million Africans, driven in part by climate-induced crop failures and disruption of pastoral systems (FAO, 2023). This exacerbates existing inequalities and weakens household resilience.
- Rural to urban migration and cross-border displacement have been triggered by climate shocks, especially drought and floods. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2022) reports that over 7.5 million Africans were displaced by disasters and climate impacts in the past year alone.
- Natural resource-based conflicts are on the rise, particularly in agro-pastoral regions where farmers and herders increasingly clash over shrinking access to land, water, and grazing corridors.
- Recruitment into armed and extremist groups is increasingly linked to climate-affected livelihoods. Young people in degraded, economically marginalised zones, especially across the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin—face limited alternatives and are vulnerable to exploitation by violent actors.



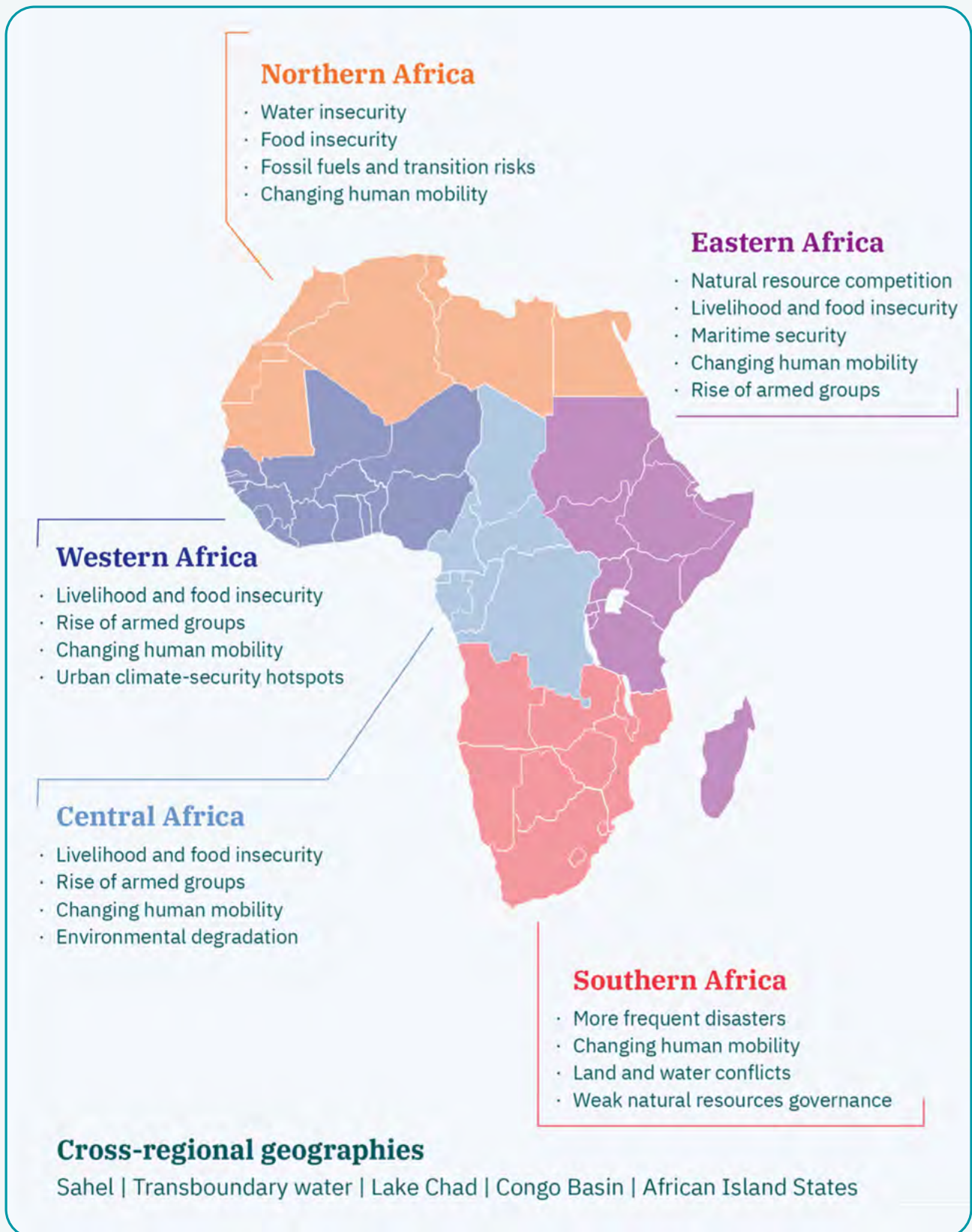


Figure 1: Africa's Climate Security Risk Pathways (Adelphi, 2024)

These risks are most pronounced in regions where environmental degradation and climate risks intersects with weak governance and entrenched social inequalities. The GGWI spans many of these high-risk zones and offers a strategic platform to address root causes through integrated land-based peacebuilding approaches.



## LAND DEGRADATION AND CLIMATE AS A SECURITY RISK

Land degradation across Africa's drylands is a growing driver of vulnerability and instability. It affects more than 65% of the continent's land area and directly undermines livelihoods, food and water systems, and community cohesion. Climate change compounds these risks, further eroding the resilience of populations already exposed to vulnerabilities, conflict, and displacement. The following security pathways are critical to understanding the broader implications of land degradation:

- **Resource scarcity and livelihood collapse:** Declining soil fertility, reduced grazing land, and limited water access undermine agricultural and pastoral productivity. This forces rural households to adopt negative coping strategies or migrate. The resulting livelihood insecurity can escalate tensions, particularly where resources are contested.
- **Displacement and institutional strain:** Loss of productive land drives internal displacement and transboundary migration. This places pressure on service delivery, fuels competition over basic resources, and challenges the legitimacy of local authorities. Vulnerable states are particularly at risk of breakdown under such cumulative stress.
- **Youth disenfranchisement and recruitment risk:** In degraded environments with weak governance, young people face limited options for dignified employment. The absence of green jobs and income opportunities increases the risk of recruitment into armed groups or informal economies. Addressing this requires linking restoration to education, skills development, and livelihood access. The absence of viable green jobs is a key entry point for radicalisation.
- **Breakdown of traditional conflict resolution:** Environmental degradation disrupts long-standing land-sharing and grazing arrangements. Where

customary institutions are eroded and formal governance is weak, disputes are more likely to escalate. This is especially evident in regions with seasonal pastoralist-farmer interactions.

- **Ecosystem collapse and intercommunal conflict:** As ecosystems decline—whether wetlands, forests, or rangelands—so too does the carrying capacity for diverse livelihoods. This can heighten tensions between groups competing for dwindling natural resources. In vulnerable communities, these pressures often intersect with ethnic, political, or economic grievances.

### The GGWI as a Climate-Security Platform

***“The Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI) offers a unifying platform for sustainable development and poverty reduction policies and activities in the drylands of Africa. Designed as part of the acceleration of the implementation of the UNCCD, the GGWI provides a point of mutual convergence and synergy for the Rio Conventions and the SENDAI framework for disaster risk reduction. It holds enormous potential to achieve food security, reduce conflict, and build resilience through landscape restoration and the diversification of agriculture and production systems.”*** — Africa Climate Security Risk Assessment (ACRA)



## THE GREAT GREEN WALL INITIATIVE: A PLATFORM FOR PEACE AND RESILIENCE

Now entering a critical decade of implementation, the GGWI serves as the AU's flagship initiative to scale up land restoration, strengthen livelihoods, and foster ecological and social resilience across the continent. Its 2024–2034 Strategy and Implementation Framework engages 42 Member States and sets bold targets: restoring 100 million hectares of land, creating 10 million jobs, and sequestering 250 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. As a multisectoral platform, the GGWI increasingly provides an entry point for integrating peacebuilding and climate security into sustainable land management, particularly in vulnerable and conflict-affected areas where degraded ecosystems intersect with social tensions and institutional weakness.

Four Strategic Axes of the GGWI Strategy:

- 1 Leadership and governance:** Foster policy coherence, security-sensitive planning, and multi-level coordination.
- 2 Transformative restoration and livelihoods:** Promote land-based value chains, youth and women's inclusion, and climate-smart agriculture.
- 3 Finance and partnerships:** Mobilise funding, engage communities, and align regional efforts.
- 4 Knowledge integration and scale:** Use evidence, innovation, and local expertise for resilient implementation.



The GGWI enables multiple peace-positive pathways:



### Pathway 1: Restoring natural buffers to reduce conflict

- Rehabilitated land increases the availability of resources, reducing competition over water and pasture.
- Agroforestry and soil fertility improvements lessen community tensions, especially in transhumance zones.



### Pathway 2: Rebuilding social cohesion through participation

- Community-led land restoration fosters cooperation, inclusiveness, and local trust.
- Integrated natural resource governance enhances cross-border collaboration.



### Pathway 3: Supporting livelihood resilience and migration alternatives

- Jobs and nature-based enterprises deter youth recruitment into armed groups.
- Empowering women and youth strengthens adaptive capacity and economic inclusion.

*In Niger and Mali, joint GGWI-supported restoration interventions, such as drought-resistant crop planting and erosion control, have enhanced food security, boosted incomes, and supported community cohesion. Transboundary initiatives, including agroforestry along the Niger-Nigeria border and reforestation along the Senegal-Mauritania corridor, have contributed to reducing tensions and resource-based disputes while fostering cross-border collaboration.*

In Niger, afforestation projects (2006–2020) involving 26 rural communities across 6 regions led to the first-ever carbon credit payment (USD 450,000), supporting regeneration and livelihood benefits. — UN Habitat, 2022

## STRATEGIC INSIGHTS AND OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

### Key Strategic Insights

- **Restoration is a frontline tool for breaking cycles of conflict and social inequalities.** Land degradation contributes directly to displacement, conflict, and livelihood collapse. Strategic land restoration, when linked to peacebuilding, can interrupt these cycles and provide pathways to resilience building.
- **Peace-positive nature-based solutions (NbS) remain underdeveloped.** Although NbS are gaining traction in Africa, few are designed to deliver measurable peace dividends. The GGWI can pioneer conflict-sensitive NbS approaches that reduce competition, foster inclusion, and build trust.

- **Carbon finance and restoration investment rarely reach high risk, vulnerable and conflict-affected settings.**

Due to institutional risks, many such countries are excluded from climate and carbon finance. The GGWI can serve as a pilot to test Article 6, REDD+,<sup>11</sup> and the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100) integration under conflict-sensitive safeguards.

- **Transboundary landscapes offer entry points for ecological diplomacy.** Shared ecosystems, such as river basins and grazing corridors, are hotspots of cooperation or contestation. The GGWI can promote joint restoration and mediation mechanisms that defuse tensions and build regional peace.
- **The GGWI provides a tangible platform to implement the CAP-CPS.** The CAP-CPS offers political vision but needs operational grounding. The GGWI can translate this vision into transregional, national, and community-based action, measurable co-benefits, and cross-sector alignment.

*The Ground for Peace Initiative, launched by the UNCCD and partners, explores the climate-security nexus through land restoration. Focused on fragile regions—including the Sahel and Horn of Africa—it promotes peace through inclusive, conflict-sensitive approaches to land governance and rehabilitation. The initiative highlights the role of landscape restoration in conflict prevention, social cohesion, and peacebuilding. Its findings demonstrate that degraded land is not only an ecological issue but a peace and security concern. The GGWI can directly benefit from Ground for Peace methodologies such as participatory planning, local peace committees, and early warning integration. — Ground For Peace, UNCCD, 2024*

## Operational Recommendations

- **Integrate climate-security into GGWI planning:** Use ACRA-informed tools to conduct climate-security risk assessments and prioritise restoration in areas affected by conflict and transhumance. AU Member States should mainstream conflict sensitivity in GGWI operations.
- **Align with the CAP-CPS and support AU-led coordination:** Position the GGWI as a demonstration site for operationalising the CAP-CPS. Establish a GGWI Peace and Security Technical Working Group co-led by the AU, the United Nations Climate Security Mechanism (UNCSM)<sup>12</sup> and the UNCCD, with AU Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Member States.
- **Provide targeted readiness support for vulnerable and conflict-affected areas:** Develop tailored technical and financial support to help countries recovering from or at risk of conflict implement climate-resilient restoration. This includes support for carbon market access, conflict-sensitive land use planning, and inclusive project governance.

11. Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, plus the sustainable management of forests, and the conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

12. <https://www.un.org/climatesecuritymechanism/en>



- **Promote peace-positive nature-based solutions and carbon restoration pathways:** Design NbS with peace outcomes in mind, including resource co-management and inclusive benefit-sharing. Align GGWI with REDD+, AFR100, and Article 6 pilots to demonstrate co-benefits and attract finance in conflict-sensitive ways.
- **Operationalise early warning and peacebuilding tools:** Integrate climate-conflict early warning systems with local knowledge, the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), and REC platforms. Support peacebuilding training and dialogue mechanisms in GGWI landscapes to manage land-related tensions.
- **Strengthen transboundary cooperation and mediation:** Use the GGWI as a vehicle to support ecological peacebuilding in shared river basins, grazing corridors, and border zones. The African Union Commission and RECs should promote joint restoration programming and land governance harmonisation.
- **Expand monitoring systems to track peace co-benefits:** Develop indicators that measure peace, inclusion, and governance impacts of restoration alongside biophysical metrics. AU and partners should invest in data systems for learning, transparency, and accountability.
- **Leverage GGWI programmes as entry points for peace mediation and dialogue:** Use GGWI implementation processes, especially community engagement, land use planning, and transboundary activities, as platforms to facilitate dialogue and conflict mediation. Local and regional actors, including RECs and national peace infrastructures, should be equipped

to use restoration as a soft-entry mechanism to rebuild trust in fragile or contested areas. This also includes supporting reforms that secure land rights, particularly for women, youth, and marginalised groups. Link GGWI efforts to national land policy updates and ensure peace-sensitive land access protocols are embedded.

- **Facilitate inclusive land governance and tenure security:** Support reforms that secure land rights, particularly for women, youth, and marginalised groups. Link GGWI efforts to national land policy updates and ensure peace-sensitive land access protocols are embedded.

#### Transboundary Dialogue Through Pastoral Resilience in Central Africa, West Africa and Sahel:

*In February 2025, the United Nations Offices for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and for Central Africa (UNOCA) convened a workshop in Dakar to strengthen peaceful coexistence between farmers and herders and improve transboundary transhumance governance. The workshop gathered over thirty participants, including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Sahel Climate Commission, civil society, and United Nations partners. Participants highlighted that poorly managed land access and livestock mobility are significant drivers of tension and proposed harmonised ECOWAS-ECCAS protocols, resilient agro-pastoral systems, and mediation mechanisms as a way to use land governance as an entry point for dialogue, peacebuilding, and sustainable development across West and Central Africa. — UNOWAS, 2025*



## CONCLUSION

The GGWI represents a unique and timely opportunity to address the climate, peace, and security challenges facing the African continent. It offers a vehicle not only to restore degraded land and build sustainable livelihoods, but also to prevent conflict, promote cooperation, and support recovery in post-conflict settings. However, to realise this potential, implementation must move beyond ecological restoration alone and embrace a peace-responsive approach.

The recommendations outlined in this brief are not exhaustive but provide a foundation for aligning restoration efforts with Africa's broader peace and resilience agenda. By embedding conflict-sensitive planning, expanding access to climate finance in

fragile, conflict-affected, and vulnerable settings, leveraging platforms like REDD+, AFR100, and Article 6, and strengthening institutional coordination, the GGWI can serve as a model for climate action that also builds lasting peace.

As the AU advances the CAP-CPS, the GGWI offers a practical testbed to demonstrate what integrated action looks like. The AU Commission, in partnership with Member States, RECs, the UNCCD, the UNCSM, and development partners, should seize this moment to institutionalise climate-security foresight, invest in community resilience, and ensure restoration becomes a tool for cooperation.



In collaboration with:



For additional information about the meeting and how you could get involved, please contact:

**Harsen Nyambe Nyambe**

Director, Sustainable Environment  
and Blue Economy

Email: [NyambeH@africa-union.org](mailto:NyambeH@africa-union.org)

**Dr. Jihane El Gaouzi**

Head of Sustainable Environment  
Division

Email: [ElgaouziJ@africa-union.org](mailto:ElgaouziJ@africa-union.org)

**Leah Wanambwa Naess**

Senior Policy Officer and Focal Point for  
the Great Green Wall Initiative

Email: [Wanambwal@africa-union.org](mailto:Wanambwal@africa-union.org)