



Empowering communities to regreen their Sahel

In the drylands of the Sahel, land degradation is one of the biggest threats to the traditional livelihoods of millions of people. In Niger, Burkina Faso and Senegal - countries highly affected by droughts and food insecurity - the loss of productive and fertile land threatens both farming communities and (semi-) nomadic pastoralists. Regreening degraded land to stop further advancement of the Sahara requires locally rooted restoration techniques. In this programme, our partners successfully apply Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR). This means it is fully led and owned by the local community, including farmers, cattle-herders, women and the younger generation.



Programme

Communities regreen the Sahel.

Goal

Regreening 200,000 hectares in Burkina Faso, Niger and Senegal through farmer-led regreening by and for communities, to combat desertification and restore degraded land.

Achievements

So far, over 10.000 farmers have been trained on regreening techniques, and by the end of 2019, almost 45.000 hectares are subject to regreening.

Partner

Both ENDS, in collaboration with local partners CRESA in Niger, SPONG in Burkina Faso and IED Afrique in Senegal.





Central to Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration, is the idea to allow nature to do the work and let the dormant but still active 'underground forest' of roots, stumps and seeds sprout spontaneously. Solely planting trees to regenerate the ecosystems is not feasible in drylands due to lack of water, recurrent spells of drought and degraded soils. The concept of FMNR is old, yet simple, and involves three important steps: 1) protecting existing trees, 2) allowing the seedlings that sprout to the surface to grow, and 3) planting tree species that have seriously decreased over time. This is combined with various agro-ecological anti-erosion measures like the 'demi-lune' (half-moon) or a row of stone bunds to retain water which will help to recover degraded land.

These farmer-led, low-cost and low-tech methods together will enable the tree and shrub vegetation to recover, eventually increasing soil fertility. In return, these soils will boost production, leading to improved food security and ecological stability.



Farmers and nomads

Whilst farmers work the land, nomadic pastoralists often raise cattle to migrate with it across the Sahel. Farmers consider their farmland their property, and pastoralists see all nature as public space that cannot be exclusively owned. Although national and regional policies have aimed to organise grazing corridors, those different views have often led to conflicts over access to water, use of land for cultivation and grazing grounds. To bring these two communities together and make them see that they can benefit both by working together, is a key challenge. An agreement between farmers and nomadic pastoralists to protect the regrowth of seedlings during the first 3 to 4 years from being trampled by a passing herd of cattle however, is critical. The reward for both of them comes in a few years, with pastoralists gaining access to more fodder for their cattle whilst farmers are gaining access to the herds' fertile manure.

Involvement of women and youth

Building a 'Regreening model' with a strong basis also implies the involvement and commitment of women and the youth within the community. Women play a crucial role in the cultivation of certain crops, the collection of nuts and seeds, and especially in the production of derivative products like oil and soap or livestock feed from the harvested produce. The aim is to unite them in cooperatives and community-based organizations, which makes their role and impact more tangible. The younger generation is getting more and more involved by learning skills regarding georeferencing and the use of satellite tools, technical services for forestry and water management, and working within the supply chain of forest products.

Village committees and local ownership

A landscape-level solution for restoring degraded land, led and implemented by the whole community is what Both ENDS envisions. The ownership of the processes must be with local people. To achieve this, it is important to reach out to the right people. Not only locally elected officials like mayors, but also the customary chiefs of municipalities, villages and different ethnic groups. Local authorities participate in training sessions and join field visits. They share their experiences in Village Committees and update village chiefs on the progress of farmer-led regreening activities. This is how local formal and customary policymakers get involved in the project and are more likely to support and adopt these initiatives.

The title of the program “Communities Regreen the Sahel” is very much appreciated and many actors involved testified that it is indeed the real approach of the programme: the empowerment of communities to govern the community’s natural resources themselves.



“My name is Saidou Nallah, I am practicing FMNR since I received the training of the programme.

Before, I used to remove all young shoots from my field, but this year I adopted this technique. This is my field, which is covered with ‘trees’. I observed a change because before, the wind stopped the growth of the millet as it covered it with sand. This forced me to repeat the sowing once, twice or even three times a year. This year the trees have protected the seedlings and I have not done any reseeded. I observed that millet plants close to trees grow more and give good growth and large ears compared to crops on bareground.”

What is 'Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration'



FMNR is a generic term for a variety of 'farmer led greening initiatives'. FMNR is always community based, low-cost and low-technology, and enhances local food security and ecological stability in the long run.

The key are farmers and their conviction of the importance of having trees on their farms. The ownership lies with local people through the establishment of Village Committees, which form the backbone of Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration and which monitor the implementation. An important factor for success is an agreement between village farmers and other land users like cattle herders and nomadic populations on land use and the protection of seedlings from 'cattle & axe', especially during the first period of 3 to 4 years. The reward is a growing resource cake for all: pastoralists gain access to more biomass (fodder), while the farmers gain access to the herds' manure (droppings left behind).

