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AFR100 PULSE
HARNESSING AFRICA'S FLR SPIRIT

FOREST LANDSCAPE RESTORATION IN THE AFR100 INITIATIVE:
RECONCILING NATURAL RESOURCE CONSERVATION AND HUMAN WELL-BEING

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1. Introduction

Among the overarching objectives of African governments, poverty reduction remains an important goal. Despite the fact that the share of Africa's population living in extreme poverty has been reduced substantially, from 54 percent in 1990 to 41 percent in 2015 (Beegle and Christiaensen, 2019), more African citizens are still leaving in poverty today than in 1990. Furthermore, strategies have been developed to improve food security in the continent. The Malabo declaration of 2014 in Equatorial Guinea committed to ending hunger in Africa by 2025. Although we are three years away from the Malabo deadline, Africa is not on track to meet the food security and nutrition targets of the second Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 2).

In 2020, 281.6 million Africans were undernourished, representing an increase of 89.1 million over 2014 (FAO, ECA and AUC, 2021). Furthermore, 346.4 million Africans suffered from severe food insecurity, and 452 million suffered from moderate food insecurity. Indeed, this has been exacerbated by the Covid 19 pandemic and recently by the conflict between Russia and Ukraine which had disrupted the economic and livelihood opportunities of the urban and rural populations and contributed to the deteriorating food security situation in the continent.

The main argument of this information note is that forest landscape restoration (FLR) under the AFR100 initiative can be a sustainable cost-effective solution to reduce poverty and to improve food security and nutrition, among others, and reconcile natural resource conservation and human well-being in Africa.

2. Deforestation, forest and land degradation in Africa: major causes of the problems

Deforestation, forest and land degradation are very alarming in Africa. According to FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO (2020), from 2010 to 2020, Africa had the highest net rate of forest loss in the world estimated at 3.94 million hectares per year. As much as 65% of productive land in Africa is degraded, while desertification affects 45% of Africa's land area (Quail and Diakhité, 2021). Estimates suggest that Africa has 660 million hectares of degraded land of which 132 million hectares are degraded cropland (FAO, 2021 cited by Quail and Diakhité, 2021). Direct and indirect causes explain the increase in the rate of deforestation in Africa. The direct causes are the unsustainable conversion of forests into agricultural land for subsistence or commercial purposes, the search for fuelwood for cooking food, production of charcoal, uncontrolled exploitation of certain forest species by timber companies, urbanization, the construction of road infrastructure, forest fires and mining. The indirect causes are public policies (example the impact of subsidies on the conversion of forests into agricultural land), market fluctuations (example the impact of the increase in the international price of groundnuts on the nationally cultivated areas) and demographic changes. Degradation of forests and lands causes a major decline in biodiversity and ecosystem services (Wurz, Annemarie et al., 2022). It is very important to note that the Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the AFR100 initiative combat each the effects of deforestation and forest and land degradation.

3. The African Forest and Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100)

The AFR100 Initiative was launched in **December 2015** to address the environmental, social and economic challenges that affect the sustainable management of natural resources in Africa. It is a Pan-African initiative implemented at the national level by **33 African countries** in collaboration with **39 technical partners and 13 financial partners.** Its main objective is to **restore 100 million hectares** of degraded lands and forests by 2030. Currently the 33 countries have committed to restore **129.5 million hectares**, which means that the initial commitment has been **exceeded by 29.5 million hectares**. Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) is a **process** that **restores** ecosystem services and landscape functionality, **boosts and stabilizes** land use productivity, and **enhances resilience** to climate change through the restoration of degraded forests and lands (WRI, NEPAD, BMZ, World Bank, undated). At the regional level, the AFR100 initiative contributes to the African Initiative of Resilient Landscapes (ARLI); the African Union Agenda 2063; the Action Plan for African Landscape (ALAP); the African Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI). At the international level, AFR100 contributes to the Bonn Challenge; the Paris Agreement on Climate; the New York Declaration on Forests; the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration; the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN); and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17.

4. Forest Landscape Restoration to reconcile natural resource conservation and human well-being

4.1. Conceptual approach of AFR100

FLR provides several benefits: Environmental, Social, Economic and Livelihood benefits and AFR100 accelerates FLR on the ground. Thus AFR100 increases the environmental, social, economic and livelihood benefits of restoration of degraded forests and lands. These benefits are: a) Increase in forest cover and carbon sequestration to combat climate change; b) Increase in biological diversity; soil fertility; ecosystems and ecological functions of the forests; air and water quality; c) Increase in employment opportunities for rural communities by providing green jobs to women, youth and marginalized groups; d) Increase in rural incomes; improvement in food security and nutrition; healthy diets; e) Reduction in gender inequality and more autonomy for women; reduction in the discrimination against marginalized groups. This implies that under the AFR100 initiative natural resource conservation and human well-being are taken into consideration **simultaneously**.

Resource conservation means increased forest cover; improvement in biodiversity; carbon sequestration; soil fertility; ecosystem services; water quality, air improvement etc...;

Human well-being means social, economic, livelihood benefits for people residing in the landscape: increase in employment opportunities (green jobs); increase in rural revenues; improvement in food security and nutrition; healthy diets; increase in air and water quality; reduction in gender inequality and discrimination against marginalized groups.

4.2. Necessary actions to better reconcile natural resource conservation and human well-being

What are the required actions needed in order to increase the positive correlation between natural resource conservation and human well-being under the AFR100 initiative? The following sections provide few preliminary insights.

4.2.1. Scaling up FLR on the ground by relying more on women and youth entrepreneurs:

Women and youth entrepreneurs are key players for the fulfillment of countries' pledges to AFR100 by 2030. Furthermore, women and youth entrepreneurs are the most important segment of the population in all AFR100 member countries. Therefore, involving them in FLR implementation will have a long-lasting impact at landscape and national levels. **The Land Accelerator Program** (LAP)[i] and **TerraFund for AFR100** are examples of such efforts by key partners of the AFR100 Initiative".

4.2.2. Increasing resource mobilization to accelerate FLR implementation

The success of FLR implementation relies on the mobilization of adequate resources from **the private sector, financial institutions and country governments.** The private sector operating in the different AFR100 countries should be mobilized by governments to contribute to a national basket fund for FLR. This will allow those companies to contribute to FLR beyond social corporate responsibility (SCR). Furthermore, the very important contributions of financial institutions to AFR100 implementation need to be continued to help AFR100 countries meet country pledges by 2030. In addition, governments should link up with accredited AFR100 technical and financial partners and international initiatives to explore the international carbon market. For example,through the support of WWF, the province of North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) received 1.3 million US dollars from the sale of carbon credits (https://twitter.com/environews_rdc/status/1502287557257830406?s=20&t=meg7shV86i5bMcx_InGv9w).Under REDD+, Gabon is allowed to sell carbon credits worth 90 million tons. If Gabon sells its carbon credits for 25 USD a ton, the country will get 2.25 billion USD (https://www-forbes-com.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/www.forbes.com/sites/kensilverstein/2022/07/24/if-gabons-largest-ever-carbon-credit-sale-works-it-will-be-world-changing/amp/).

5. Conclusions

With the growing poverty, high unemployment, food and nutrition insecurity and other challenges exacerbated by the Covid 19 pandemic, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, deforestation, forest and land degradation in Africa, forest landscape restoration becomes a viable approach for AFR100 countries to diversify their economies; improve human well-being, increase economic growth, increase forest cover; improve food security and nutrition, soil fertility, biodiversity and carbon sequestration to combat the negative effects of climate change.

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