

# Communities Regreen the Sahel

Growing buffers to ensure food security, livelihoods and biodiversity

Programme 2017-2027

***Ecosystems in the drylands of Sub-Sahara Africa are regenerated and rural communities are socially and ecologically resilient. They are backed by inclusive land and climate governance which results in large scale land restoration and an increase in agricultural production, food security, household revenues and biodiversity.***



FMNR in practice in Niger

## **LAND DEGRADATION IN THE SAHEL**

In the drylands of the Sahel, land degradation is one of the biggest threats to the livelihoods of millions of people. In Niger, Burkina Faso and Senegal, countries which are highly affected by droughts and food

insecurity, the loss of productive and fertile land threatens the livelihoods of both farming communities and pastoralists. Unsustainable agricultural practices such as the cultivation of non-indigenous and irrigated crops, as well as overgrazing, are major drivers of land degradation. This process is exacerbated by climate change,

causing even more erratic rainfall patterns, longer periods of drought and unpredictable growing seasons. This situation is typical for most countries that are part of the Sahel desert, which stretches from Ethiopia to Senegal.

## **TURNING THE TIDE**

Luckily, there are promising initiatives to turn the tide. In various countries in the Sahel, vast tracts of land have been restored by the local population by nurturing what spontaneously springs from the soil and protecting the sprouts from cattle and hazards. Central to this Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration is the idea to allow nature to do its work and let the dormant but still active 'underground forest' of roots, stumps and seeds sprout spontaneously. Generally speaking, 'just' planting trees as a means to regenerate ecosystems is not feasible in drylands due to a lack of water, human capacity and recurrent spells of drought.

## **GROWING GREEN BUFFERS**

The current programme 'Communities Regreen the Sahel: Growing buffers to ensure food security, livelihoods and biodiversity' is funded by DOB Ecology. With this 10-year programme,

Both ENDS and local partner organisations in Niger, Senegal and Burkina Faso want to create all the necessary conditions for a snowball effect for Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration on a large scale in these three countries.

We are convinced that on a community scale, Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration is a powerful means of resilience to climate change, enhancing food security and increasing incomes. As this programme was designed by, and will be implemented by all the partners, the word 'we' refers to the whole consortium.

Within the following 10 years we aim to reach the following:

- A total area of 200,000 hectares divided over three countries has been restored using Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration by and for communities.
- There are laws, policies and support programmes in place in three countries (local up to international) that support Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration.
- Farmers applying Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration are organised and have access to markets for (added-value) FMNR-products.

## WHO BENEFITS?

**Small-scale subsistence farmers (male and female)** are the key actors in the Regreening programme. This group develops the skills to regreen their land through Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration, and at the same time increase food production.

**Cattle-herders and livestock farmers** are omnipresent in the dryland areas of Niger, Burkina Faso and Senegal and will clearly benefit in the long run as well. It's very important to also involve nomadic cattle-herders right from the beginning and seek ways to find temporary short-term as well as long-term solutions with them. In these Sahel countries, **women** play a vital role in farming food crops, animal husbandry, harvesting and production of non-timber forest products, processing and provision of basic needs such as water and firewood for their families. Obviously, women should be part of the implementation of FMNR, and get their equal share of decision-making- and negotiation power. All **other members of the community** will also benefit from this programme, as they will be encouraged to play a role in value addition activities such as the sale of FMNR products. And last but not least the programme focuses on **youth and poor households** and employs specific measures to also reach these sub-sections within the village community.

## WHAT IS 'FARMER MANAGED NATURAL REGENERATION'

FMNR is a generic term for a variety of 'farmer led regreening 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).



Ousmane Thiall and Village Chief Omar Williane with FMNR peanuts, Kaffrine region, Senegal

## WHY THIS IS A UNIQUE, ONE-OF-A-KIND PROGRAMME

- As FMNR is a long-term process, it needs **long-term commitment and financing**, and this is one of the few programmes to provide exactly that.
- The FMNR-method stems from communities in the Sahel itself and is not a top-down blueprint. This programme merely facilitates its diffusion to other communities that might benefit from it, making it very demand driven, tailor made and **community-based**.
- Each (national) consortium is composed of various organisations with the same overall goals, but with



Baobab fruit, Senegal

different perspectives and working in different contexts and realities. This keeps the programme **open to new insights** and changing realities.

- **The partners are considered equal** and have their part in drawing up the programme.
- The programme is linking local, national and international organisations and institutions, thus **forming a strong movement** that could really change and regreen the Sahel region.
- As the programme seeks collaboration with many stakeholders to enhance acceptance and support, the results will be **future proof**.

## ORGANISATION AND ACTIVITIES

In Niger, Burkina Faso and Senegal, national consortia have been formed, all consisting of five or six organisations including one coordinating organisation which is responsible for the national coordination, planning and reporting. Both ENDS is responsible for the overall coordination and reporting to the (Dutch) donor. The consortium will be employing the following activities:

### Awareness-raising

Because the adoption of the Regreening approach requires quite an investment in terms of time before one can see and enjoy the results, the national consortia organise awareness-raising meetings in the villages and meetings with village representatives and local stakeholders

### Institutional embedding of FMNR

Institutional embedding of FMNR is of crucial importance in light of long-term sustainability. This is why we set up Village Committees in communities which control, encourage and monitor FMNR, with members representing all social groups in the committee and of course including women.

### Capacity strengthening

One of the key activities of the local organisations within the consortia is capacity-strengthening, such as training the Village Committee members, training farmers on FMNR techniques and organising exchange visits between sites.

### Market development

Farmers (and other stakeholders) not only need support on the production side, but also on the market side. After all, market demand and a good price are the biggest drivers for farmers to grow a certain crop. Therefore, this support is integrated in the programme.

### Research

It's extremely important to show scientific evidence of success in advocacy towards policy makers and (inter)national institutions as well as in raising acceptance and support amongst farmers. This is why the consortium does research on various levels, such as collecting data at village level and at regional scale, and research to measure the programme's impact: soils, hydrology, biodiversity, socio-economic conditions, etcetera.

### Lobby and advocacy

At the **local level**, the consortium focuses on lobby and advocacy efforts to make FMNR become part of Community Development Plans, including financial resources to support communities with the implementation. At the **national level** we focus on advocacy towards the ministries of Agriculture and the Environment. We look at legislation for land tenure, forest management and communal land for cattle grazing.



FMNR tomatoes in Burkina Faso



FMNR-products, Senegal

We bring contradictory legislations to the surface and bring these to the attention of duty-bearers. At the **international level**, our advocacy targets intergovernmental institutions such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the Green Climate Fund, the Secretariat of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

### Communication to raise awareness and to support lobby and advocacy

To effectively engage farmers, pastoralists and other villagers on the one side, and relevant policy makers, institutions and the donor on the other side, the programme not only produces scientific evidence, but will also develop various communication plans for different target groups on the local, regional and international level. We will communicate to farmers, villagers and other stakeholders, to platforms and intergovernmental institutions in the programme region, to the (Dutch) donor and to international lobby and advocacy targets such as the Green Climate Fund and the UNCCD.

### Domino effect

This integrated approach on basis of three processes (implementation by farmers, solid legal framework and market access) targeting all key actors seeks to create the most optimal situation to roll out Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration on a large scale.

We are convinced that the only way to achieve sustainable regeneration of ecosystems is in combination with economic benefits for all stakeholders and putting communities at the centre of the programme. Through this programme, the programme partners aim to set a domino effect in motion where one community inspires the other in Regreening its natural environment.



Women in FMNR-practicing community in Kaffrine region, Senegal

### The project partners

