



**The Sustainable Partnerships for African Research and Knowledge on Great Green Wall (SPARK\_GGW):** a side event co-organized by DesertNet International and The African Union Semi-Arid Food Grain Research and Development (SAFGRAD) at the 16th Conference of the Parties of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in Riyadh (9 December, 2024).

A roundtable session, moderated by Dr. **Jean Luc Chotte**, President of the French Scientific Committee on Desertification (CSFD), focused on enhancing scientific collaboration for the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI) convened stakeholders from across Africa and Europe. The primary objective was to explore the role of research, innovation, and international cooperation in advancing the GGWI's goals, with particular attention to capacity building, knowledge sharing, and scientific partnerships.

The roundtable focused on enhancing scientific collaboration to further the objectives of the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI). Panelists, including experts from various fields, shared their perspectives on how research, innovation, and partnerships could contribute to the success of this ambitious environmental project.

Opening remarks by Dr. **Ahmed El-Mekass** (director of AU-SAFGRAD) set the stage for a discussion on the critical role of scientific research in achieving GGWI goals. M. **Mamadou Koutou** (Research and Programme Officer, SAFGRAD) outlined the GGWI's strategy, emphasizing capacity building and the importance of data and scientific research in combating desertification and promoting sustainable development.

During the discussions, panelists delved into the challenges and opportunities for scientific innovation within GGWI. Dr. **Fanna Abdou Gado** (assistant professor of CAMES at Abdou Moumouni University, CAMES, Niamey, Niger) highlighted the importance of African research institutions, the importance to carry out research activities on the ground and the barriers they face in accessing funding and infrastructure. Dr. **Oumarou Malam Issa** (senior soil scientist at the French Institute for Research and Sustainable Development IRD) explored the integration of initiatives like RESET-GMV and SPARK, emphasizing their potential to bridge the gap between scientists, policymakers, and local communities. Colonel **Abdou Ibrahim** (Director of the Agence Nationale de la Grande Muraille Verte, Niger) stressed the role of networks like SPARK in achieving GGWI goals. Dr. **Soumare Arona** (Principal climate change and green growth officer at the African Development Bank Group) discussed the pivotal role of financial institutions, such as the African Development Bank, in supporting long-term research funding models, while Dr. **Sibongile Mavimbela** (Senior Programme Officer managing the Environment and Climate Change portfolio at the Southern African Development Community SADC) examined the role of regional cooperation, particularly through SADC, in strengthening scientific collaboration.

Practical steps for enhancing collaboration were also debated. Panelists proposed initiatives to overcome barriers to research mobility, improve infrastructure, and foster partnerships between African and European universities. **Quirico Migheli** (Director of NRD and DNI representative in the CSFD) advocated for knowledge exchange and infrastructure support, while Oumarou Malam Issa emphasized the need for



inclusive platforms that facilitate African scientists' participation in global research partnerships. The session concluded with a call for more coordinated efforts and a sustainable financial framework for the scientific community under the GGWI. The discussion reaffirmed the importance of collaboration, capacity building, and innovation to meet the challenge of land restoration in the Sahel and beyond.

