

STRATEGY 2022-27

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INTRODUCTION

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Our new strategy

There has never been a more relevant and crucial time in the history of Tree Aid to scale up our work. Land degradation, deforestation, poverty and malnutrition continue to grow across the drylands of Africa and the impacts of climate change are being experienced daily by the people we serve.

International recognition of the problems caused by ecosystem breakdown and climate change is growing. There is growing realisation - both in policy makers and the public - on the urgency of action required. High quality Nature Based Solutions are key.

Our new five-year strategy will look to leverage the depth of experience Tree Aid holds in this critical moment - recognising both the need for, and opportunities to, bring our work to the scale commensurate with the challenge.

This strategy is a step towards achieving our wider 20 year vision to reverse deforestation

and land degradation in the drylands of Africa and to catalyse change across the region to create resilient and thriving communities.

A look back on our last strategy

Tree Aid has seen a rapid change over the past strategy period (2017-2021) which has set the organisation on a path to achieving its vision in the coming 20 years. As an organisation we have significantly scaled up work across 5 country programmes and, in 2021, started to operate in a 6th country programme in Senegal. Over the strategy period we have:

- **Grown 10.7 million trees**
- **Supported over 1.3 million people** across 6 country programmes
- **Ensured that 137,000 hectares of land** have benefited from land restoration activities
- **Worked with 978 enterprises** with a membership totalling nearly 35,000

- **Grown incomes by on average of 104%** as a result of our work

Through substantial investment in M&E including dedicated resources and systems at Tree Aid, we now generate more robust evidence of our work and effectively measure and monitor progress towards our objectives. We now aim to leverage this expertise and evidence to influence and shape policy in our intervention countries and internationally.

Collaboration with household economic analysis experts and technological innovation using geospatial mapping of ecological data has kept Tree Aid at the forefront of data collection and analysis, allowing the organisation to demonstrate our impact to a wide range of stakeholders.

Furthermore, Tree Aid has showcased its on-the-ground knowledge, experience and quantifiable evidence to increase its involvement in international platforms and connect with other development actors. Using our unique position as one of the few NGOs

dedicated to delivering on the Great Green Wall, Tree Aid has taken a strong position in monitoring, advocating for and delivering work on the ground.

The organisation sits on both the Great Green Wall Steering Committee and the World Economic Forum Round table on the Great Green Wall. Furthermore, Tree Aid is now a recognised Actor for the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, and active member of the Climate Action Network and hold observer status with both the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD).

All of our work is underpinned by strong financial performance and systems. In the last 5 years we have secured approximately £40m in grant funding and over £6m in donations from the public. We have managed this growth by investing in our finance and compliance systems to ensure effective and efficient financial oversight of our work.

EXTERNAL CONTEXT

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Despite the success Tree Aid has had over the last 5 years, the context within the drylands of Africa remains grave. Increased frequency and intensity of climactic shocks, including flooding and drought, have shown that the communities we seek to serve are truly on the front line of the climate crisis. The majority of the region is facing a triple emergency of poverty, environmental degradation and climate change.

Unprecedented levels of insecurity and insurgency, leading to internal displacement, as well as political instability have further destabilised the region. Over 1m people have been displaced across Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Ethiopia in recent years as violence and insurrection continues to grow. In this context, Tree Aid has been required to work further south in each country to be able to operate effectively and safely. In Mali, Burkina Faso and Ethiopia there has been substantial political turmoil further holding back strategic development and external investment.

These challenges have been exacerbated further by COVID-19 and its impact on communities across the region. Beyond the disease itself, the communities have suffered from the restrictions established to contain the pandemic. The cost of basic necessities, including food, has increased. Commercial relations between villages or across borders have contracted or ended completely. It has increased household costs related to health, hygiene and sanitation, reducing funds for food, pushing households further into poverty. The slowdown in the international economy has had a significant knock on effect to development targets.

All of these issues combined have resulted

in a region moving backwards rather than forwards on key development and environmental targets. Hunger and poverty for the most vulnerable across the region is growing, with the West African drylands recently identified as one of the fastest growing hunger crisis globally¹.

Furthermore, despite Tree Aids progress in delivering restoration work across the region, deforestation and land degradation continue at a significant pace. Whilst international and national commitments restore forests and arable land are in place, concrete action on the ground has been limited and sporadic. A 2020 UNCCD report, supported by Tree Aid, estimated that 18% of the Great Green Wall targets had been achieved 12 years into a 23 year plan².

Another key indicator of progress, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), have largely stagnated across the region. The goals to improve sustainable use of land and forests (SDG 15), to eradicate poverty and hunger (SDGs 1 and 2), and to reduce gender inequity and broader inequalities (SDGs 5 and 10) are all reported to be facing major challenges across countries in which Tree Aid delivers its programmes.

Women play a crucial role in managing natural resources and building sustainable livelihoods which can lift households out of poverty. Women in the Sahel make up roughly 80%³ of all agricultural labour and play a vital role in household nutritional outcomes. Yet across the region, gender inequality remains unacceptably stark. Women's access to land, inputs, equipment, training, information or credit are all significantly less than that of men. The latest African Development Bank

Gender Equality Index states that women in the Sahel have an overall gender gap of 68.1% - significantly worse than the continental average of 51.6%.

However, despite the significant lack of progress in both human and environmental indicators across the region, there is cause for cautious optimism. Over recent years there has been a convergence of thought and effort towards tackling the climate crisis through Nature Based Solutions. Trees and ecosystem restoration are now, more than ever, recognised as a genuine part of the solution to both local and global climate issues.

Since the launch of our last strategy in 2017, there has been a growing interest and recognition of the importance of empowering local people and communities to restore their environment and local ecosystems. New grant financing is being made available for climate and Nature Based Solutions and there is a significant growth in carbon markets.

The launch of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration in 2021 has further helped

to focus international efforts. COP 26 in Glasgow provided a renewed commitment and increased funding towards combatting global deforestation and land degradation through the Glasgow Declaration on Forests and Land Use.

With support from the Green Climate Fund, World Economic Forum, African Development Bank and the French Development Agency and as a recognised Flagship Programme for the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the Great Green Wall has started to receive the donor and public attention needed to make its mission a reality.

This is a critical juncture for the causes Tree Aid has worked towards for over 35 years. The need has never been more profound or more urgent, yet the possibility to catalyse a seismic change across the drylands of Africa towards thriving ecosystems and thriving communities has never been so real.

¹ Hunger Virus Multiplies, Oxfam 2021

² UNCCD 2022

³ Alliance Sahel 2022

VISION VISION VISION

Now is the time to set our sights on transformative change for the drylands of Africa. By 2040 we will see:

- A reversal of deforestation and land degradation rates and net gains across the region.**
- An increased resilience of communities across the region through diversified incomes and greater skills in business and land management.**
- Land tenure systems in place which allow for and incentivize local control and local investment in land resources.**
- Decentralized forest governance policies adopted and implemented across all the region – putting the control of local resources into local hands.**
- Sustainable private sector investment into African natural resource bases for win-win solutions.**

In order to achieve this vision, our coming five-year strategy must establish the correct capability within the organisation. We have made significant progress in developing our evidence base, our advocacy and influencing, our communications, our fundraising and our financial oversight. However, we recognise the need for investment and further development to meet the challenges ahead.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

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Our strategic objectives must encompass the breadth and scale of the challenge at hand. Over this strategic period we will aim to deal with both the local and systemic challenges which our communities and landscapes face. The power and potential of grassroot action is at the centre of our approach. Direct action to empower families and their communities is a critical component to achieving lasting change. Equally, the broader local and global systems in which communities are situated must change to realise our vision.

Over the next 5 years we will focus our efforts on 3 levels of intervention which will be mutually reinforcing in order to achieve our vision and mission.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Land area (Ha) benefiting from restoration activities
- Trees grown(#)
- Empowered women through improved choice, voice and control results



Better national policy
Increased climate financing
Enhanced value chains
Raising voices of Sahel communities

Improved ecosystems
Improved access
Improved management
Increased gender equity
Increased collective enterprises

Increased incomes
Increased nutrition
Increased skills
Increased gender equality
Increased resilience

1. Empowered Families

Thriving, resilient and empowered smallholder families are central to achieving sustainable social and ecological change across the drylands of Africa. We will support households to develop skills and knowledge to enable them to lift themselves out of poverty. Only through empowering households can we ensure that change at the community level and beyond is possible.

We will support over 2.4m people to gain knowledge and skills so that they have the tools to grow and diversify their incomes, adapt farming to more sustainable and higher yield approaches, increase dietary diversity and improve nutrition, address gender inequities within households and become more resilient to future climate shocks.

We will:

- Ensure farmers are trained and are applying vital agroforestry and soil and water conservation techniques across their farms to restore degraded land and improve crop yields.
- Enhance access to nutritious and diverse food year round through the use of tree foods.

- Support women's access to employment opportunities and increase their household decision making power.
- Strengthen the skills of Village Tree Enterprise members so they grow and diversify their incomes.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Households no longer living in extreme poverty (below \$1.90) amongst project beneficiaries (#/%)
- Household dietary diversity (#)
- Household income (\$/year)

2. Empowered Communities

Our work has always focussed on community empowerment and we know collective action is vital to achieve our mission. Empowered communities have the capacity to work together on the challenges they face across their landscapes and achieve substantial local ecological restoration and poverty reduction.

In the coming 5 years, we will support 4,000 communities to work together to effectively manage their landscape. We will ensure they

have systems, skills and means to manage and restore their local landscapes as a whole. We will work with local authorities and traditional leadership to ensure fair and equal access for all members. We will support the development of cooperatives to ensure groups can maximise their potential to grow as businesses and access new markets.

During this strategic period we will:

- Restore 220,000 hectares of land
- Grow 12 million trees
- Put in place effective and representative landscape management committees and management plans across communities.
- Ensure that communities are applying their knowledge and skills to restore their landscapes
- Strengthen partnerships between communities, municipal government and traditional leadership structures
- Develop cooperatives and trade associations to increase their support to member VTEs, profitability and management capacity

Key Performance Indicators:

- Community members satisfied with the local governance of their forests (#/%)
- Tree species diversity.
- Tree Survival Rate
- VTEs supported (#)

3. Empowering and Enabling Systems

Tree Aid recognises that our work is part of a broader movement across the Sahel and that the scale of the challenges faced by this region are too great to tackle alone. In line with our Theory of Change, truly sustainable impacts require an enabling environment and systems which reinforce and empower communities to thrive. As an organisation we are committed to challenging and changing systems, to empower communities and families to restore their landscapes and lift themselves out of poverty. We will do this in collaboration with both those we serve and other stakeholders who strive for change.

The coming 5 years we will:

- Push for national level policies and action across our country programmes to enable communities to take ownership and responsibility for their local ecosystems.
- Partner with governments and other national stakeholders to develop restoration plans and stimulate non-timber forest product domestic markets.
- Collaborate internationally to further stimulate pro-poor and sustainable investment in key non-timber forest product value chains.
- Work with international trading associations such as the Global Shea Alliance to push the specific needs for pro-poor and pro-ecosystem investments.
- Raise the voice of those we represent at international forum and raise the profile of the issues faced by those living in the drylands of Africa.
- Demand increased international climate and development funding focussed on nature based solutions and adaptation within the region.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Number and relevance of international networks/coalitions Tree Aid is active in
- Number of evidence-based communications disseminated at relevant international forums
- Number of national advocacy strategies (including problem and context analysis, stakeholder mapping and policy manifesto/goals) developed in country
- Tree Aid is perceived as a credible and legitimate advisor by the identified decision makers to influence in-country



i. Programming and Country Office growth

To ensure our ability to deliver action at scale across our country programmes we will need to secure new and larger financing opportunities. We aim to grow all 6 country programmes in the coming 5 years, ensuring each has a secure and viable level of long term projects.

We will:

- Leverage evidence from our existing programmes to scale up work within countries and across the region – seeking out new opportunities within existing country programmes and in relevant new countries where viable.
- Invest in in-country capacity to enhance our programme design and business development.
- Diversify our income streams, including scaling up our carbon financing, and seeking out new donor partners.

ii. Building our Evidence

Research and evidence are vital to achieve our strategic goals. In order to deliver the most impactful programmes, we must continue to learn, adapt and develop our interventions in line with our Theory of Change. Our ability to demonstrate the effectiveness of our approach will be central to accessing additional grants at scale to expand our programming.

We will invest to gain a deeper evidence of programmatic impact and outcomes.

We will broaden our knowledge beyond the boundaries of our own programmes, conducting research across the region – including climate impacts, deforestation, land degradation and land tenure rights – to contextualise our work and strengthen our outcomes.

Through concerted efforts to report our findings and share our learning across policy and peer forums we will demonstrate the benefits of our approaches and the impact of investments.

We will:

- Invest in our people and our systems to ensure we are able to go deeper with our evidence and learning.
- Fully digitise our data systems and make use of data analytics to automate our analysis processes.
- Recruit dedicated monitoring and evaluation staff in each of our country programmes.
- Develop and integrate qualitative and quantitative research methods to further our understanding of the drivers of land degradation, poverty and gender inequality.
- Partner with research agencies and collaborate with open source platforms where we can both contribute to global datasets and benefit from aggregated data.

iii. Advocacy

Our projects provide critical, grounded

experience and knowledge of the challenges and solutions within the region. In order for Tree Aid to achieve its vision we must leverage this knowledge to influence governments, international bodies, the private sector and peer groups to address systemic challenges which hinder progress.

Tree Aid will raise its voice in each country bringing evidence and testimony from those we serve and in so doing seek to influence a broad range of stakeholders to create empowering systems for communities and families across the drylands.

We will:

- Invest in advocacy capacity in each of our country programmes
- Build our networks and partnerships nationally and internationally
- Develop strategies in each country to identify and pursue key policy changes at the national level
- Continue to be a voice for communities in the Sahel – bringing testimony and data to international fora.
- Grow international recognition of the specific needs and potential within the Sahel to build broader support for action and financing.

iv. Communication

To deliver our mission, it is essential for us to communicate the impact of our work and the issues we are seeking to address. Our communications must seek to raise the voices of those we serve in the drylands of Africa to both the broader public and policy makers. Furthermore, to build local engagement and ownership, communications within our countries of operation must develop and grow

We will:

- Ensure alignment of our communications work with our programme and advocacy messaging.
- Support country programmes to develop specific communications packages within their national media outlets.
- Continue to build on the investment in our digital platforms to broaden our reach.

- Invest in skills and communication assets to raise the profile of the organisation and its mission.
- Work with local film makers and photographers across the region to help us tell the stories of people living in the drylands of Africa.

v. Fundraising

Increased public support is essential for us to deliver on our strategic goals. We will build on the progress made over the last strategy period, to continue to increase our supporter base.

We will:

- Continue to grow our investment in digital fundraising and communication.
- Grow our brand recognition and reach and secure further support.
- Build on the success of our campaigning and work towards greater alignment with our key programme and advocacy aims.
- Build upon our corporate donor supporters, seeking out greater levels of long term support from a wide range of brands who are aligned with our mission.

vi. Financial oversight and controls

As Tree Aid grows we will continue to support that growth with transparency and excellence in our financial reporting, controls and systems. We will continue to provide strong control over resources and high quality donor and management information.

We will:

- Enhance existing systems of internal control
- Strengthen approaches to partner due diligence, management and support.
- Build on our existing risk and compliance functions.
- Invest in further developing our financial management information systems Build on our risk-focused internal audit programme, ensuring it is fully integrated with donor and external audits.

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Values Driven

Our values continue to drive us forward and what we achieve over the coming five years will be done so with these values as core to our approach.

- We stand together with and respect the people we work for and with.
- We recognise that we play one part in a large collective effort to facilitate sustainable development.
- We are bold, ambitious, determined and impatient for change.
- We are professional. We work effectively and efficiently, to a high standard and are experts in our field.
- We have integrity. We are honest, transparent and accountable.
- We are always learning. We review and adapt to maximise our impact.

Collaborators

As set out in our vision we cannot achieve our goals without joining forces with like-minded partners. We must collaborate with a broad range of stakeholders to increase the breadth and depth of our programmes.

We will:

- Continue to build our work with civil society organisations across our country programmes, developing their capacity to deliver.
- Form new, large scale programming consortiums, partnership and alliances with complimentary organisations.
- Collaborate with research agencies to strengthen learning for the sector.
- Strengthen our work with advocacy networks to raise the profile of the Drylands of Africa and Nature Based Solutions and increase financing for the region.
- Work in close collaboration with national government agencies to strengthen our work, improve local policies and practices to tackle poverty and protect the environment.

Grounded in our approaches

Tree Aid puts local knowledge at the heart of our approach. We believe it is critical that we combine the best of international research, evidence and understanding with the lived experience of those facing the challenges of deforestation, land degradation, poverty and food insecurity.

All of our programmes are designed from the ground up and in full consultation with communities, to understand their needs and goals. Our role is to empower those communities to restore their environments and lift themselves out of poverty.

Environmentally sustainable

As an organisation we are committed to combatting the climate crisis affecting those on the front line. As such, beyond our programmatic actions, we must look at what potential negative impact our operations might be having on the environment.

We commit to reviewing our environmental footprint in more detail and finding ways to reduce it.

We will mainstream this work throughout our decision making on procurement, logistics, travel, data management and communications.

Employer of choice

Our staff are a vital component to our work and Tree Aid will always strive to create a supportive and empowering culture. We are committed to ensuring the wellbeing of our staff and maintaining our collective vision and approach to the work we do.

We will recognise success of our teams and support progression for our staff. We will strive for a collegiate and stimulating working environment where every member of our organisation is valued for the unique role they bring to delivering for communities in the drylands of Africa.



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