



**Talking points by Her Excellency Ms. Rhoda Peace Tumusiime
Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture**

**African Union Commission
on the occasion of the**

**Side event on the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative
(GGWSSI)**

Warsaw, Poland, 20th November 2013



- **Secretary General of Global Environment Mechanism**
- **Co-chair of the Joint Expert Group of AU-EU Strategic Partnership**
- **Your Excellencies, Honourable Ministers,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Last year in Doha during COP.18/UNFCCC, AUC and its partners, particularly the European Union, FAO, the World Bank and the UNCCD institutions, organized a side event on their common achievements in joining their efforts to implement the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative.

This year, we want again to take advantage of the 19th Session of the COP/UNFCCC to strengthen the need for a wider collaborative partnership or alliance to accelerating the implementation of the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative.

In Africa, and particularly in the Sahel and Sahara region, fertile land is a vital source of life to millions. Not only is this precious natural asset the basis for food security and agricultural production, it also generates employment and mitigates social crises for the region's most poverty stricken and vulnerable people.

Whilst it is estimated that in Africa, 83 per cent of rural people are dependent on livelihoods from land, 40 per cent of Africa's land resources are currently degraded or affected by desertification. Poverty, hunger, unemployment, forced migration and conflict are just some of the many threats it poses.

Nurturing Africa's land is, therefore, an imperative for all humanity. Bold action and investments in sustainable land management (SLM), including integrating SLM in the UNFCCC agenda, are crucial to boost food production, help people adapt to

climate change and mitigate its effects, support biodiversity, enhance businesses based on land resources and foster the contribution of Land to a green economy.

You would recall that this conviction was at the basis in 2007 of the launching of the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative (GGWSSI), as a continental programme to reverse land degradation and desertification in the Sahel and Sahara region in Africa, boost food security and support local communities to adapt to climate change.

- **Ladies and Gentlemen**

The perception that the GGWSSI is a simple tree planting initiative needs to be corrected, because for Africa, the Great Green Wall is more than that. It is a mosaic of sustainable interventions that aims to respond directly to community needs and promises to transform local livelihoods.

The field work already undertaken by some African Union Member States, shows that the Great Green Wall is proving to be a real game-changer for Africa, with the potential to strengthen local resilience to climate change, preserve rural heritage and improve the living conditions of local populations. We are encouraged by the commitment demonstrated by Member States towards implementing the GGWSSI initiative, and it is our hope that, once on its cruising altitude, this initiative contributes to global security in the Sahel and the Sahara region.

- **Distinguished Guesses, Ladies and Gentlemen**

Since 2009, the AUC is receiving from its partners, especially the EU and FAO, full support in implementing this initiative. The reason for that is because the GGWSSI

is based on a strong spirit of solidarity, where we uphold mutual trust and shared responsibilities. This approach is helping promoting and facilitating a South-South exchange of best local practices in order to step-up efforts in environmental management and sustainable development. Indeed, local communities are at the heart of the partnership and their participation and ownership of the process are central to the planning, implementation and management of projects. Furthermore, the African Union Commission considers that integrating the initiative into existing national, regional and local programmes for rural development, including the CAADP process, is vital to ensure SLM becomes a priority action for the entire Continent.

I, therefore, appeal to all leaders and stakeholders in Africa, and all our development partners to step up investments in this initiative.

Let me thank EU, FAO, UNCCD Institutions and the World Bank for their continuous support to AUC in fulfilling its mandate of coordination and facilitation of the implementation of the GGWSSI. We look forward to its full implementation for the desired results and impacts.

I thank you for your kind attention.

