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THE GREAT GREEN WALL



Measuring the Sturdy Livelihood Initiative and Developing a Regional Proactive Disclosure Template

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Editor's Note

Transparency and accountability remain the pillars of good governance and sustainable development. As we navigate the challenges of environmental conservation, legal reform, and electoral integrity, it is crucial to emphasize proactive disclosure as a tool for fostering public trust and institutional credibility. This edition highlights key frameworks shaping governance in Africa, from the Electoral Act 2022 to the Great Green Wall Initiative, showcasing how legal and policy advancements can drive positive change.

At FOI Counsel, our mission remains steadfast—ensuring access to information, promoting legal awareness, and advocating for policies that protect fundamental rights. We hope this publication sparks meaningful conversations and encourages stakeholders to champion transparency and accountability in their respective fields.

President Aigbokhan
Editor-in-Chief

The Great Green Wall: Measuring the Sturdy Livelihood Initiative and Developing A Reflexive Proactive Disclosure Template



Desertification affects over 50 million livelihoods that stretch across 30% of Nigeria total land area. The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) plays a central role in coordinating global efforts for the initiative. The initiative focuses on combating desertification and restoring ecosystems, which are critical for addressing climate change and preserving biodiversity.

The Sahel region faces numerous socioeconomic and environmental challenges, including severe land degradation, desertification, and the effects of climate change. It also grapples with chronic poverty, limited economic opportunities, and conflicts over access to scarce natural resources. The Great Green Wall initiative was launched by the African Union in the year 2007 as a bold environmental and development program initiated to address the challenges in the Sahel. It is an epic international effort to grow a vast belt of trees, vegetation, and fertile land across the dry lands of Africa. The initiative is not really to build a figurative Green Wall but to build a framework for sustainable land management and restoration project.

The Initiative encompasses 11 African countries directly affected by desertification and climate change in the Sahel.-Sahara region. These countries are part of the pan-African

Agency of the Great Green Wall. The pan-African Agency of the Great Green Wall is the coordinating body overseeing the implementation of the initiative. It was established in 2010 by participating African countries under the auspices of African Union. The agency has its headquarters in Nouakchott, Mauritania and works closely with international partners, donors and African government to combat desertification, restore degraded lands, and address climate change in Sahel-Saharan region. The countries that are signatories to Great Green Wall Convention are Burkina Faso, Chad, Djibouti, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Mali, Senegal and Sudan.

In 2015, Nigeria set up the National Agency for the Great Green Wall and it coordinates the national effort to address issues of land degradation, desertification, ensure ecosystem management and restoration, protect the country's natural capital and ultimately ensure that the country's ecosystem is prepared to withstand the travails of climate change and provide jobs. This ambitious project aims to restore 100 million hectares of currently degraded land, sequester 250 million tons of carbon, and create 10 million green jobs by 2030. Until now, the Great Green Wall (GGW) initiative has primarily focused on countries in the Sahel and Sahara regions to the north. Although Ghana and Kenya were not initially part of the initiative, they were co-opted because half of Ghana lies within the Sahelian zone and vulnerable to land degradation, deforestation, and the impacts of climate change. Kenya is especially vulnerable to desertification and drought.

Their inclusion in the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI) expands the program's reach to tackle these interconnected issues in West Africa. The Great Green Wall initiative is backed by funding and support from numerous international organizations, governments, and private entities. Notable examples include the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), throughout its history, the GEF has been a strategic partner of the GGWI countries and provided more than \$800 million in grants through diverse projects and programs. The World Bank and the African Development Bank, provide both financial and technical support, focusing on sustainable land management and economic development.

The commitment of various donors varies and cut across countries and institutions. The AfDB committed \$6.5 billion USD, the World Bank committed \$5.6 billion USD, European Union pledged \$2.5 billion USD, France pledged \$16.8 billion USD, the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) provided \$1.9 billion in funding and Green Climate Fund committed \$1.4 billion USD to combat desertification, support restoration and sustainable land management activities. Germany also contributes funds through the International

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Climate Initiative, United States provided financial and technical support through USAID and United Kingdom supported ecosystem restoration component of the initiative.

15% of the Nigeria ecological fund is committed to Great Green Wall initiative in Nigeria. The scope of the initiative includes afforestation, preserve biodiversity, regenerate agricultural systems, reforestation, and agroforestry, aiming to improve soil fertility, reduce erosion, and boost agricultural productivity. One of the key deliveries of the Initiative in Nigeria is the establishment of a 1,359 km contiguous shelterbelt from Kebbi State in the Northwest to Borno State in the Northeast serving as windbreak. The purpose of the initiative is to strengthening community resilience to climate-related disasters; restore ecosystems in degraded regions, support food security, and empowering communities to manage water resources more efficiently. It also includes increasing vegetation cover and reducing carbon emissions.

This groundbreaking initiative owes much of its success to the collaboration of a wide range of stakeholders. International organizations, development banks, governments, private enterprises, and philanthropic foundations have played vital roles in advancing the initiative's objectives. Their unified focus on the sustainability and alignment with the initiative's goals has reechoed workable global partnership. In a world facing growing environmental and socio-economic pressures, the initiative stands as a beacon of hope and a model for global cooperation. Its achievements underscore the potential of collective action to build a sustainable future.

Definition of Reflexive Proactive Disclosure

There is need for better governance frameworks, financial accountability and robust monitoring systems to ensure transparency and prevent misuse of resources. There is also a need for stronger oversight mechanisms to ensure the effective use of the project's funds and the achievements of its ambitious goals. Across Africa, governments and regional bodies have recognized the need for proactive disclosure as a tool for strengthening democratic governance, fighting corruption, and promoting human rights. Proactive disclosure refers to the practice of making information available before it is formally requested. Central to this approach is the principle that governments and public institutions should release important public information proactively, without waiting for citizens to make requests. The concept of reflexive proactive disclosure is a crucial step toward improving environmental governance, transparency and accountability within public institutions. Reflexive proactive disclosure describes a dynamic, self-regulating nature of proactive disclosure where disclosure updates are constantly influenced by feedback loops. The disclosure template is adjusted in response to criticism, crisis, periodic requests, new information and societal changes.

The principle is instrumental in achieving greater transparency and openness in government. Unlike reactive disclosure, which occurs in response to individual requests under access to information laws, proactive disclosure involves the release of data, documents, and reports that are of broad public interest, regardless of whether anyone has explicitly asked for them especially in areas like government spending, procurement, and public contracts, plays a crucial role in this by subjecting public



These countries are expected to implement measures that ensure the publication of data related to public spending, electoral processes, and public sector performance, thereby supporting proactive disclosure.

To measure the initiative in Africa, we need to know the tons of carbon that has been sequestered under the initiative, the numbers of hectares of degraded lands that have been restored, the numbers of jobs that have been created on food and energy security as well as maintenance of biodiversity. Also we need to know the numbers of trees that have been planted and community nurseries created and still surviving under the initiative. Also, the numbers of communities that have gotten solar systems installation from the initiative and the sustainable rural development practices and practical local community model developed to drive sustainability post initiative era.

Many countries have passed laws to promote transparency; enforcement remains a significant obstacle, with limited mechanisms to hold public officials accountable for failing to disclose information. The national legislations on access to information are designed to meet national need for disclosure but the provisions are richer in context. However, despite progress in promoting transparency across Africa, significant challenges persist. In many African countries, there is still resistance to fully implementing proactive disclosure, largely due to concerns about revealing sensitive government information.



Conclusion

Reflective proactive disclosure is a practice that can greatly enhance Africa's development by promoting transparency and fostering a culture of trust. This, in turn, empowers citizens to engage more actively in good governance processes, positioning them to participate in discussions and advocate for their needs. Having a regional framework for proactive disclosure in Africa is essential to establish a cohesive and consistent approach to transparency across the continent. Such frameworks can help African countries align their efforts, overcoming challenges arising from diverse legal, political, and cultural contexts. The need for this regional framework is clear, driven by the collective pursuit of transparency, accountability, and a prosperous, stable Africa.

With stronger regional coordination, Africa can realize its full potential, ensuring that the benefits of governance and development are accessible to all while promoting sustainable peace, democracy, and progress for future generations.

Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing Reflexive Proactive Disclosure in Africa



While the concept of reflexive proactive disclosure presents a promising pathway for transparency and accountability, its implementation in Africa faces several challenges. Many governments across the continent struggle with bureaucratic inefficiencies, political resistance, and technological limitations that hinder the full realization of proactive disclosure policies.

Legal and Institutional Barriers

Despite the existence of various treaties and protocols advocating for proactive disclosure, enforcement mechanisms remain weak in several African countries. Some governments still operate in a culture of secrecy, limiting public access to vital information. While access to information laws exist in many nations, they are often poorly implemented due to lack of political will.

Limited Digital Infrastructure

Effective proactive disclosure relies on robust digital platforms where citizens can easily access government data. However, many African countries still face

challenges related to internet penetration, cybersecurity concerns, and outdated data management systems, making it difficult to establish seamless disclosure frameworks.

Data Management and Accessibility

Even when governments release data proactively, issues such as poor organization, lack of user-friendly formats, and inadequate categorization make it difficult for the public to interpret and utilize the information. There is a growing need for standardized templates and open-data policies to enhance accessibility.

Political Resistance and Fear of Scrutiny

Some government officials and institutions resist proactive disclosure due to fears of political backlash, exposure of corruption, or increased public scrutiny. This hesitancy undermines the core objective of transparency and accountability.

Public Awareness and Engagement

Many citizens are unaware of their right to access public information, limiting their ability to demand transparency. There is a need for more civic education initiatives to empower citizens and encourage active participation in governance.

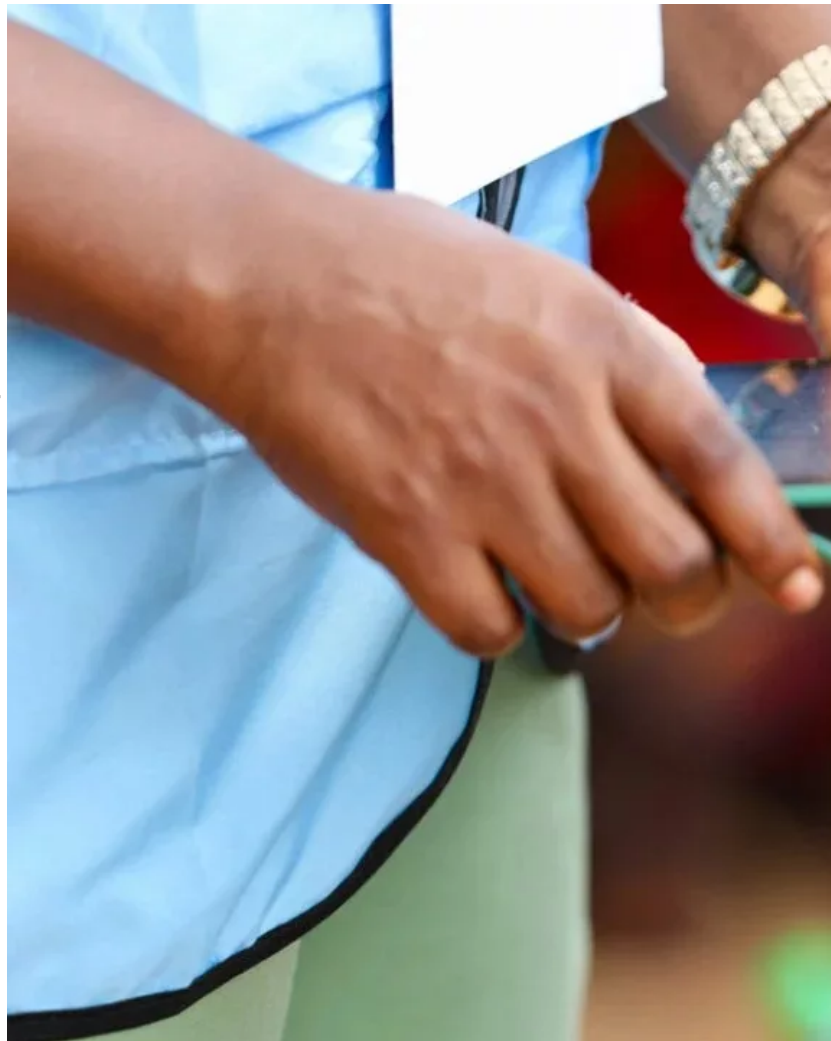


Did You Know That ??

The Electoral Act 2022 (Ss. 73(2), 137, and Paragraph 46(4)) allows INEC documents to serve as sufficient evidence of non-compliance without requiring oral testimony from the maker or signatory.

The Electoral Act 2022 introduced significant reforms aimed at enhancing the credibility of Nigeria's electoral process. One of the critical provisions (Sections 73(2) and 137, along with Paragraph 46(4) of the First Schedule) addresses the evidentiary requirements in election petitions. This provision has eliminated the necessity for oral evidence where originals or certified true copies of relevant INEC documents clearly disclose non-compliance with electoral procedures.

Previously, courts often dismissed documentary evidence as insufficient without oral testimony from the maker or signatory of the document, leading to instances where electoral malpractice went unchallenged due to procedural technicalities. However, under the new legal framework, if INEC forms fail to include details such as: Quantity and serial numbers of result sheets, Ballot papers, and Other sensitive electoral materials provided by INEC, the election conducted in that polling unit shall be



deemed invalid. This shift ensures that elections cannot be presumed to be regular when there are manifest discrepancies in the official records.

The Supreme Court's recent decision in *BABA & ANOR v. INEC & ORS* (2024) 14 NWLR (Pt. 1957) SC 155 @ P. 202 – 207, paras. A – E reaffirmed this principle, making it clear that documentary evidence alone can establish electoral irregularities without requiring additional oral testimony. This precedent strengthens electoral accountability by preventing the misuse of procedural barriers that previously shielded electoral malpractices. These provisions mark a significant step toward transparency and fairness in Nigeria's elections, reinforcing the legal framework to uphold the sanctity of the electoral process and ensure that elections truly reflect the will of the people.



The **Electoral Act 2022**, signed into law on February 25, 2022, introduces key reforms to enhance Nigeria's electoral process. It mandates the **electronic transmission of results**, ensures the **financial independence of INEC**, and extends the **campaign period** to 150 days before elections. The Act also improves **inclusivity for persons with disabilities (PWDs)**, requires voters to reside in their voting constituencies, and enforces **early release of election funds** at least a year before the polls.

The Electoral Act 2022 introduces significant provisions that strengthen the evidentiary value of documents issued by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in election petitions. Specifically, Sections 73(2) and 137, along with Paragraph 46(4), establish that INEC documents can serve as sufficient proof

of non-compliance with electoral laws without needing the direct testimony of the individual who signed or prepared them. This provision eliminates the procedural hurdle of requiring INEC officials to testify in every case, thereby streamlining the adjudication of election disputes and reducing delays caused by witness availability.



Government accountability is crucial for the success of initiatives like the Great Green Wall. Here's how African governments can be held accountable to perform their responsibilities effectively:

- 1. Strengthening Institutions:** Independent oversight bodies should monitor government actions. Strengthening the judiciary to enforce accountability laws. Enhancing the role of anti-corruption agencies.
- 2. Transparency and Public:** Participation Governments should make budgets, contracts, and project plans publicly accessible. Citizens should be able to track spending on environmental projects like the Great Green Wall. Digital platforms can facilitate real-time updates on government initiatives.
- 3. Active Civil Society and Media:** Investigative journalism can expose corruption and inefficiencies. Civil society organizations should advocate for policy improvements. Social media can be leveraged to pressure governments.
- 4. Community Involvement in Decision-Making:** Local communities should be included in planning and implementation. Decentralization of governance allows regional authorities to take responsibility.
- 5. Legal Reforms and Enforcement:** Strengthen environmental laws and ensure strict penalties for non-compliance. Providing legal means for citizens to challenge government failures.

6. International and Regional Accountability Mechanisms: International bodies like the African Union and ECOWAS put pressure on Senegal to meet its Green Wall commitments. The World Bank and the UN also set conditions for continued funding, ensuring the country followed best practices.

Results & Lessons Learned

As a result of these accountability measures: Senegal successfully restored 800,000 hectares of degraded land under the Great Green Wall by 2023. Corruption cases related to the project dropped significantly. Other countries in the Sahel, such as Mali and Burkina Faso, began adopting similar transparency measures.





About Us

FOI Counsel is a law group established primarily to provide legal assistance to NGOs and the media seeking for information, under the Freedom of Information Act 2011. We are also, the first Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) litigation-specialized firm in Africa. As the demand for our services increased we billowed into four thematic areas of work and these are:

FOI Advocacy & Litigation



We focus on ensuring transparency and accountability in government processes. This includes challenging government agencies that have refused to disclose information and litigating on behalf of individuals and organizations seeking to obtain government-held information.



We protect the fundamental rights of individuals and groups who have been subjected to violations involving a wide range of issues such as discrimination, police brutality, and freedom of speech, among others, and seek to bring justice to those who have suffered harm through legal means.



We promote equitable access to land resources and support the sustainable growth of rural communities. This involves advising on land ownership and tenure, supporting land-based livelihoods, and advocating for policies and programs that support rural development and the rights of rural communities.



We empower change and justice through in-depth analysis of laws, precedents, and regulations, and effective advocacy strategies to shape policies and promote equitable outcomes in society.

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