Communities Regreen the Sahel

Scaling up community-led restoration

The Sahel: a region under pressure

In the Sahel's drylands, land degradation threatens the livelihoods of millions. Addressing it requires integrated solutions that restore the environment, rebuild trust and promote sustainable livelihoods.

Turning the tide

Fortunately, thousands of communities are reversing this trend. With support from the 'Communities Regreen the Sahel' (CRS) partners, they restore ecosystems through Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) and agroecology. Since 2010, CRS has used community-led FMNR to strengthen food security, livelihoods and biodiversity in Niger, expanding to Burkina Faso and Senegal in 2018. It now unites 17 organisations, from universities to NGOs and community-based organisations, with Dutch technical and financial support.

Building resilient food systems

Degraded land and erratic weather leave many subsistence farmers without enough to eat. By restoring soil fertility and water retention, FMNR helps them grow more abundant, diverse food. Community food banks, developed with local healthcare workers and authorities, let farmers exchange harvest for stored grain, keeping food affordable in lean seasons. The goal: lift at least 125,000 people out of undernourishment by 2027 through food from regenerated land.

Woman pruning FMNR trees, Burkina Faso

Non-Timber Forest Products from regenerated land such as fruits, nuts, shea butter, honey and soumbala also helps improve farmer livelihoods. CRS helps farmer organisations build their businesses, access finance and reach buyers, and works with local authorities on market infrastructure, policy, regulation and finance. Women, who lead harvesting and processing, receive technical training, shared facilities and revolving funds for equipment. The goal: double the incomes of at least 25,000 smallholder farmers by 2027.

Social inclusion and peaceful communities

Land degradation and climate change hits women, youth, pastoralists and displaced people hardest, and as land and water grow scarcer and armed groups deepen vulnerabilities, tensions between groups can escalate into conflict. Because of this it is paramount to include all community members in land decisions and ensure benefits are shared equally.

Results achieved (2018-2025)

- *151,000+ ha degraded land restored (FMNR + agroecology)*
- *100,000+ farmers trained (Niger, Burkina Faso & Senegal)*
- *Tree density more than doubled: 30 → 70–80 trees/ha*
- *850+ village committees for land management & conflict resolution*
- *Harvests increased: cereals 300 → 500 kg/ha; cowpea 400 → 1,000 kg/ha*
- *Niger: presidential decree secured farmers' tree rights*
- *10 native tree species returned*
- *85% of programme funding goes directly to local action*

COMMUNITIES REGREEN THE SAHEL

What is FMNR?

Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) is an Indigenous restoration technique, reintroduced in the 1980s by farmers in Niger. Rather than planting new trees, farmers identify and protect the 'underground forests' of roots, stumps and seeds already dormant beneath degraded land, allowing native, drought-resistant trees to regenerate naturally.

This natural regeneration restores soil fertility, improves water retention, increases tree density, and boosts agricultural yields - all while remaining low-cost, locally-led and more sustainable than top-down or conventional tree-planting programmes. The approach promotes inclusive and peaceful governance of land and resources. As communities restore their land, they also strengthen the trust and cooperation needed to manage natural resources collectively.

With CRS support, more than 850 village committees bring these groups together to agree how land is managed and mediate disputes peacefully. We provide dedicated support to women to access markets and secure land rights and youth to engage in FMNR through small grants, exchange visits and school programmes. Because leadership and knowledge remain local, CRS can continue where insecurity halts other externally-led projects.

Advocating for sustainable land governance

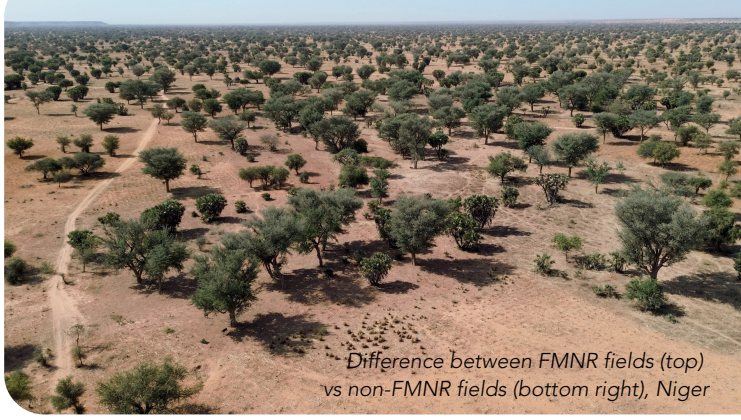
Regreening remains fragile without secure land rights and an enabling policy environment. We help communities strengthen land tenure, and bring evidence of FMNR's value to decision-makers and funders at all levels, advocating for policy recognition and increased local investment. This has contributed to formal recognition of FMNR in Niger, including a presidential decree on tree tenure, and to advocacy gains at the UNFCCC and UNCCD COPs.

Climate resilience

One of the hottest regions on earth, the Sahel is highly exposed to droughts, floods and strong winds. FMNR enables both adaptation and mitigation.

Our network

Both ENDS – Connecting people for change; enda pronat; SPONG; enda énergie; tiipaalga; INERA; himma; APIL



Difference between FMNR fields (top) vs non-FMNR fields (bottom right), Niger

Regenerated trees cool and protect soils, improve water retention and reduce erosion, while diverse trees and crops spread risk during extreme weather. Restoring degraded land also stores carbon rather than releasing it, making FMNR a locally led, low-cost climate strategy.

Research for continued improvement

To strengthen evidence on FMNR and share knowledge with communities, policymakers and donors, we work with research institutes in all three countries. They conduct participatory action research at learning sites, addressing community-specific questions and improving the approach.

A grassroots regreening movement

Like the landscape it restores, FMNR's impact spreads from the ground up. Farmers are its best advocates: a neighbour's thriving trees, healthier soils and better harvests encourage others to adopt FMNR, while exchange visits, radio shows and caravans carry the message between villages. CRS connects organisations and research institutes locally, regionally and internationally to mobilise knowledge, funding and policies to broaden the movement.

However, FMNR requires long-term commitment and financing. We need your support to scale community-led restoration across the Sahel and drive an even broader regreening movement.

Join the movement & support us!

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