Regreening Africa

OUTCOME STORY FOR NIGER

Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) Decree

Summary of the change

Niger has considerable experience with Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR[i]) (Reij and Garrity, 2016, Tougiani et al., 2023) and the successful restoration it has brought to landscapes in different regions, including Zinder and Maradi, where at least five million hectares have been restored (Reij et al., 2009). Despite this success, the country did not have any legislation or policies in place that defined how farmers would use the regenerated resources (ICRAF, 2020). Through discussions and consultation in workshops and meetings, a presidential decree was developed, defining how farmers could benefit from FMNR to the fullest. The Presidential Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR[ii]) Decree of 30th July 2020 gave greater use rights to land managers over regenerated areas under FMNR in Niger. With the decree in place, the Republic of Niger became one of the first countries globally to adopt a presidential decree supporting FMNR. The decree was made possible through the efforts of many stakeholders, including the Regreening Africa programme, which has supported land restoration activities in the country.

Within Niger, Regreening Africa[iii] is implemented by World Vision and Care with support from ICRAF. The World Vision Regreening Africa programme manager for Niger notes that, **"the decree on FMNR has given rise to a renewal of confidence, producers in the rural areas who have adopted this practice are finally reassured that their efforts to maintain trees in the fields are recognised and rewarded by the law and the nation."**

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[i] Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) involves the selective pruning and management of naturally regenerating trees and shrubs from stumps, roots, and seeds in the soil to restore land at low cost. Land managers can select the trees and shrubs they wish to remain on their land during field preparation and prune the shoots and protect them to allow them to grow.

[ii] Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR) is used interchangeably with FMNR in the Sahel. In some countries it refers to regeneration and management in communal or areas not used for farming.

[iii] Regreening Africa is an ambitious five and a half year (2017-2023) programme supported by the European Union. Implemented by World Agroforestry (ICRAF) and a consortium of organisations including World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, Oxfam, Care and Sahel Eco, the programme aims to reverse land degradation among 500,000 households across 1 million hectares in eight Sub-Saharan African countries. By integrating trees into croplands, communal lands, and pastoral areas, Regreening Africa seeks to improve smallholder livelihoods, food security and resilience to climate change. The programme leverages science and research to measure impact, enhance social inclusion and livelihood efforts, and creates a sustainable enabling policy environment for land restoration at national and sub-national levels.

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Context

In Niger, forests and agricultural lands are degraded due to unsustainable farming and management methods (Chomba et al., 2020, FAO, 2020). This calls for restoration activities using proven practices such as FMNR, supported by an enabling economic and policy environment. Indeed, the policy environment around landscape restoration can be an impediment to restoration efforts (Chazdon et al., 2020) if not well understood and defined.

The Government of Niger prioritises landscape restoration due to the positive benefits experienced by farmers practising it in different regions of the country. The government has committed to several restoration targets, such as those of the African Forest Landscape Restoration (AFR100) Initiative, aiming to restore 3.2 million hectares of degraded land, as well as the Great Green Wall, among others.

Tree tenure is a complex and often poorly understood arena. It depends on several informal and formal agreements that are subject to different interpretations by various entities (Bettles et al., 2021). Additionally, prior to the decree, Niger did not have any laws that supported and gave farmers the freedom to use the resources they had regenerated on their own land. Instead, farmers were subjected to a long and costly process of obtaining a permit with the forester to dispose of their trees (Toudou et al., 2021). Furthermore, Niger's Forest Code 2004 mentions ANR but does not define in detail the management terms and benefit sharing of the restored ecosystems (ICRAF, 2020). These unfavourable economic and policy environments created challenges for the development and management of naturally regenerated resources (Chazdon et al., 2020), resulting in suppressed tree regeneration efforts rather than their promotion for adoption (ICRAF, 2020). The ANR decree aims to solve such challenges.

Description of the outcome process

The Decree of July 2020, announced by the Government of Niger, regulates the practice of ANR and was the main outcome of the engagement process. The ANR Decree grants greater user rights to land managers and aims to address and streamline land and tree tenure systems. The decree is a crucial step as it encourages farmers, who are the main managers of restored landscapes, to integrate trees in their farmlands and pasturelands, as they will benefit from the associated improvements and products. The decree is timely and gives farmers and pastoralists the right to decide how to use the trees they have regenerated and maintained on their lands. Farmers can decide how many shoots to retain, how many plants to prune, and what to harvest. However, they are not allowed to clear protected tree species.

The journey towards the decree started with a workshop on restoration in 2009, which resulted in recommendations on restoration techniques and practices that could work. During the restoration week in 2011, further discussions on what was working and what was not took place. It became evident that FMNR was one of the more effective restoration practices. The idea for a specific decree on ANR was born out of an annual workshop organised by the Ministry of Environment with the support of several international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), research organisations, and Niger state programs. This annual workshop enabled an exchange of views on the major achievements of the different actors in terms of land restoration, the successes to be highlighted, and above all, the challenges encountered. The main motivation was to meet the objective of restoring 3.2 million hectares of land by 2030, Niger's commitment under the AFR100.

A national workshop held in 2019 brought together different government ministries, including the Office of the President, various NGOs, research organisations including World Agroforestry (ICRAF) and International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), World Bank, World Vision, and universities, among others. From the workshop, a working group was formed to draft the decree, which was submitted to the Ministry of Environment, who presented it to parliament, where it was adopted and signed. The process took approximately one year. The decree was then announced by the President.

Significance of the outcome

The decree determines the management modalities of agroforestry parklands, particularly woody resources using FMNR. It redefines the management of trees that have been regenerated by farmers on their lands. Farmers and pastoralists now have exclusive rights to the trees and all the resources that come with them if they maintain them in their croplands. The only resources that farmers do not have full access to are protected species. Farmers benefit from a robust legal framework that substantially reduces the fear of someone else or a different agency enjoying the fruits of their labour when the planted or regenerated trees reach maturity. A farm manager is free to use the tree resources in any manner they see fit, as long as it benefits their activities and goals, although it is beneficial to their activities and goals if they do not uproot the trees. Furthermore, with the support offered by the Water and Forestry Services, farm owners are now setting up lawfully recognised committees at the village level to monitor and protect regenerated trees. It is also the mandate of the committee to address unfairness in the use of planted and regenerated resources.

The importance of the application of this decree is found at the local level, where adopting producers realise benefits from practising FMNR. In the regions where FMNR has been adopted and practised in Niger, degradation has been reduced, and land is being restored with fewer conflicts over resources. Resilience to disasters has increased due to extensive tree coverage. Livelihoods have improved as diversified products result in diversified incomes. Trees are a source of food, nuts, fruits, medicine, timber, and wood, among other saleable products (Francis et al., 2015).

Before the decree, community members had to travel to government offices to obtain permits and faced corruption and other challenges. As a result of the decree, producers can now freely use the resources from their regenerated trees.

According to the World Vision Regreening Africa program manager for Niger, the scaling up and adoption of this practice will be boosted, and the positive changes will be seen very quickly in the landscapes. Furthermore, the decree gives ownership to farmers and thus speeds up adoption. Adoption will, in turn, reduce poverty due to increased production resulting from the improved interactions between regenerated trees and crops in the field. Farmers can use the pruned leaves as fodder and improve their livestock production. These trees are also a source of firewood and building materials.

Contribution of Regreening Africa to the outcome

The Regreening Africa programme in Niger contributed to the technical development of the decree and provided financial support for organising workshops and field visits. These initiatives allowed farmers and policymakers to witness the potential of restoration activities. Regreening Africa also assisted in translating the decree into local languages and disseminating it through radio broadcasts, enabling communities to understand its content. Although the positive impact of the decree in Niger is evident, it is currently too early to quantify the number of farmers and communities that have adopted it.

There have been no significant negative impacts resulting from the implementation of the ANR decree thus far. The decree enables individuals without land ownership to access the resources generated by trees in the fields of others. Prior agreements are made to ensure this access when the landowner and tenant reach an agreement.

Next steps

- **Continued communication with farmers:** Utilise community radio to emphasise the importance of the decree and promote key messages and debates. Discuss key articles of the decree during village assemblies to ensure widespread understanding.
- **Sensitisation activities and encouragement of adoption:** World Vision Niger intends to continue sensitisation activities and encourage the adoption of best practices. Promote large-scale adoption to benefit more producers and restore landscapes.
- **Call for stakeholder support:** Seek support from all stakeholders to ensure the adoption and implementation of the decree at all levels.
- **Capacity building and training:** Encourage capacity building and training programs to attract more producers and enhance their understanding and skills in restoration practices.
- **Strengthen communication and competitions:** The government plans to strengthen communication on the decree and the adoption of Farmer-Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) at the local level. Organise regional and national competitions to encourage and recognise the best adopters.
- **Inclusion of farmers in the implementation process:** Ensure farmers are included in decision-making processes and strengthen communication between national management agencies and producers at the ground level.
- **Impact assessment:** Assess the impact of the decree to identify its benefits and any unintended consequences resulting from its implementation. Use the assessment findings to refine and improve the decree as necessary.

Suggested citation

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