

## **i. Title/Heading**

Blue Lifelines for a Secure Sahel (BLISS)

## **ii. Context and rationale.**

Governments, development and humanitarian agencies are facing the complex challenge of how to improve food security, reduce human insecurity and enable climate change adaptation across the Sahel. Fish, rice production and pastoralism make wetlands the most naturally productive zones of the Sahel. Investment is available for agricultural intensification and reducing land degradation in drylands. However wetlands are shrinking due to climate change coupled with poor land and water management and their role is being overlooked.

Wetlands-drylands are inter-twined; people and nature depend on both and constantly move in-between. Loss and degradation of wetlands is breaking apart the underlying social compact, creating conflict and out-migration. 2.3 million people have displaced around Lake Chad since 2013 and more than 1 million are under threat in the Inner Niger Delta in Mali<sup>1</sup>. The poorest and most vulnerable, including herders, fishermen and especially women and youth are most affected.

Improving water and land management in a joined up way in the Sahel is essential to reverse these trends; reviving wetlands is fundamental. Successful pilots exist with local communities increasingly calling for support to enhance local wetland productivity as a means to reduce conflicts.

## **iii. An overview of the contribution.**

BLISS will connect interventions for wetlands and drylands to reverse land degradation and build community resilience to climate change in the Sahel.

**Vision: Sahelian communities become more secure and resilient to climate change by restored inter-connected wetland and dryland ecosystems and economies.**

Goal by end 2030: 20 million hectares of Sahelian wetlands safeguarded and restored in at least 6 major systems improving adaptive capacity and safety of 10 million people across the Sahel

Objectives:

- Commitment by Sahelian nations to improve the condition of wetlands to enhance community resilience to climate adaptation
- Policy development and adjustment at Sahel, river basin and national levels, through relevant African Union fora and bottom-up policy processes.
- Access for local wetland communities to knowledge and innovative micro-credit finance,.
- Early-warning systems embedded to enable optimal livelihood choices to be made .

## **iv. How the contribution leverages living natural systems as a solution to avert climate change?**

The contribution will not avert climate change but will support adaptation of society and especially rural communities.

---

<sup>1</sup> Wetlands International. (2017). *Water Shocks: Wetlands and Human Migration in the Sahel*. Wetlands International, The Netherlands.

**v. How might the contribution support both climate, mitigation and adaptation as well as other important co-benefits and social, economic and environmental outcomes in coming years:**

By reviving wetlands as climate buffers and diversifying livelihood opportunities, adaptation to climate change and reduced community natural resource conflicts will be achieved. A systems approach linking local to catchment scale natural resource use, and drylands to wetlands will be adopted. This will contribute to social stability and contribute to wider efforts to maintain peace. Threatened biodiversity will be safeguarded and rehabilitated. In particular it will contribute to SDGs 1, 2, 6, 12, 13 and 16.

**vi. Which countries and organisations are involved in the contribution?**

BLISS builds on existing successful CSO-government cooperation in multi-partner programmes in Mali, Guinea, Ethiopia, Uganda, South Sudan<sup>2</sup>. GGWC is collaborating to encourage the African Union to adopt a Resolution on wetlands. African Ramsar Convention parties<sup>3</sup> have called for recognition of the relationship between wetlands, peace and security. There is interest from members of the Global Resilience Partnership, UNCCD SSS, African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative 100 initiative to collaborate.

**vii. How have stakeholders (for example indigenous peoples, local communities, and youth) been consulted in developing the contribution?**

The contribution is based on the lessons learned and best practices of more than 20 years of work by Wetlands international and partners in the region together with different actors in the humanitarian, water, development and agriculture sectors. In all field interventions the work has been co-designed and implemented jointly with communities and government taking into account gender, ethnicity and age differences.

**viii. Where the contribution can be put into action?**

Lake Chad, the Inner Niger Delta and, Sourou (Mali), Senegal Delta (Senegal), Gambella (Ethiopia), Sudd (S Sudan), Mbaere Bodingue, and Rivière Sangha (CAR), Niger River (Niger).

**ix. How the contribution will be delivered? How will different stakeholders be engaged in its implementation? What are the potential transformational impacts?**

---

<sup>2</sup> Partners for Resilience (Mali, Ethiopia, Uganda, South Sudan); The Netherlands Red Cross, Care, Cordaid, Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, Wetlands International, in cooperation with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign affairs

Water, Peace and Security (Mali); IHE Delft, World Resources Institute, The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, International Alert, Deltares, Wetlands International, in collaboration with The Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs

BAMGIRE (Mali, Guinea); Potsdam Institute, Wolfs company, Altenburg & Wymenga, IWMI, Ottawa University "Sustainable Water Management for Food Security and Nutrition in Agriculture and Food Systems" (Mali, Ethiopia); Caritas Switzerland, IWMI, hydrosolutions ltd.

<sup>3</sup> Mali, Senegal and the Central African Republic

It will be shaped and implemented by a consortium of international, national and local partners, led by Wetlands International. An African-based coordination unit will be established for mobilising the consortium including Wetlands International's offices plus partner country offices whose extensive network of local CSO's, will engage directly with local stakeholders. Project design will be informed by key knowledge organisations in the region and communities. Implementation will be underpinned by policy regulations via local government engagement.

**x. Is this initiative contributing to other Climate Action Summit workstream (industry transition; energy transition; climate finance and carbon pricing; infrastructure, cities and local action; resilience and adaptation; youth and citizen mobilization; social and political drivers; mitigation strategy)?**

BLISS will co-contribute to the goals of other workstreams including resilience and adaptation; youth and citizen mobilization; social and political drivers.

**xi. Examples of experiences to date: how does this contribution build upon this experience? How does the contribution link with different ongoing initiatives?**

BLISS builds on more than 20 years of work in the region covering knowledge development at system scale, policy setting and influencing and local scale adaptation and development work with communities<sup>4</sup>. Working with our partners the contribution will use the collective track record to underpin development of community level nature base solutions.

**xii. Mechanisms for funding (with specific emphasis on potential for partnerships).**

BLISS will seek to influence government, bilateral and multilateral investment financing from bodies such as the EU and development banks and regional initiatives such as GGW and AFR100 to help de-risk investments and enable nature-based solutions. Further potential to upscale BLISS exists via the Global Resilience Partnership and Green Climate Fund.

**xiii. Means of stewardship, metrics for monitoring.**

A consortium of partners will be established to drive the design process and establish milestones for implementation. Wetlands International will work with government and CSO partners, the African Union, Ramsar Convention, UNCCD, GCA and GRP to establish commitments and priorities for action. We will use "outcome harvesting" approach for monitoring, evaluation and learning.

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.wetlands.org/publications/water-shocks-wetlands-human-migration-sahel/>;  
<https://www.wetlands.org/publications/downstream-voices/>;  
<https://www.wetlands.org/casestudy/ensuring-food-and-water-security-in-mali/>;  
<https://www.wetlands.org/casestudy/building-ecosystem-resilience-to-escape-a-humanitarian-crisis-in-ethiopia/>;  
<https://www.wetlands.org/casestudy/restoring-the-abundance-of-senegals-ndiael-special-reserve-for-people-and-nature/>

**xiv. Communication strategy.**

- Reach out and engage with key African governments, donors, conventions and policy platforms to raise awareness and promote political commitment and financial support.
- Inspire and stimulate local communities to act using different media, including social media, videos, radio, tv and theatre to create a movement across the Sahel to transfer ideas and experiences.
- Stories from the region will be used for publication on the internet and to feed a network of communicators willing to spread the word.

**xv. Contact details of proponents (indicating the degree of commitment among the countries and organizations that are named).**

Lead Proponents:

- Jane Madgwick, CEO Wetlands International
- Karounga Keita, Regional Director Wetlands International Sahel

All partners in existing initiatives (see vi.)

Ramsar Convention Focal Points Mali, Senegal and Central African Republic

Elvis Paul Tangem, GGW Commission - supporting high level policy dialogue.

Kitty van der Heijden, Europe and Africa Director WRI and Vice-President. Status – interest to collaborate.