



Initiatives pour l'Avenir des Grands Fleuves (IAGF)

Initiatives for the Future of Great Rivers (IFGR)

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One region in urgent need of action and clear commitments is found in West Africa, far up in the highlands of Guinea, in the Fouta Djallon. These forested highlands, often called “the water tower of West Africa” are the birthplace of 8 of the region’s largest rivers, i.e. the Senegal River, the Niger River, the Gambia River, the Konkouré River, the Corubal River, the Little Scarcies River (Kaba), and Great Scarcies River (Kolenté).

But the Fouta Djallon is dying and its sources which water a region home to 300 million people, are drying up. The combined effects of climate change and the actions of local populations and livestock have put severe pressure on this vibrant but fragile ecosystem. As deforestation, desertification, and erosion of soil increase, the future stability and development of a whole region finds itself threatened.

The consequences of a disappearance of the Fouta Djallon Highlands and of their sources would be nothing short of cataclysmic. The very survival of West Africa’s rivers depends on successfully safeguarding the Fouta Djallon.

Sustaining the existence and flow of West Africa’s rivers therefore requires preserving the region’s beating heart, the Fouta Djallon, a mountainous region of plateaus at altitudes ranging between 500 and 1500m (from 1600 to a little less than 5000 ft), with a central area of 60,000 km² and

with foothills spreading to Guinea's neighbouring countries, i.e. Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Senegal, and Sierra Leone, over an area of more than 300,000 km².

The Fouta Djallon and its rich ecosystems are slowly dying out amidst general indifference of the international community. It is not only water that is missing to safeguard the Fouta Djallon and its sources, but concrete solutions.

Though initiatives and solutions are slowly being developed on the ground and political will is rising across the region to tackle this global issue, there is a need to synergize these efforts at all levels, across sectors and borders. To reverse existing trends and ensure the future of the Fouta Djallon, IFGR, The Bridge Tank, and OMVS, propose a 4-point action plan :

- (1) supporting and mobilizing local populations in establishing what existing tools and traditional methods can be mobilized for the preservation of these ecosystems and what needs to be changed; thereby establishing a catalogue and an academy of durable best practices, combining both traditional and modern agricultural and ecosystem preservation methods (resilient agroforestry), to raise awareness and train local populations
- (2) this community action provides the early diagnosis and basis on which to then develop and foster scientific research and data collection, supported by technological innovation driven by local entrepreneurs, startups, and local environmental engineering to increase knowledge and data of the Fouta Djallon's resources and ecosystems and develop nature based solutions;
- (3) moving up the ladder, political decision makers and multilateral organizations across the region, supported by the international community, must provide the enabling environments to tackle this global issue and ensure social and environmental sustainability. We call for the creation of an assembly of West African states, RBOs, and multilateral organizations, backed by the international community, for the Fouta Djallon to develop a regional cooperation framework around this common resource and ensure social, societal, and environmental sustainability in the highlands and across the region;
- (4) the data, institutional and democratic legitimacy generated by the first three levers will provide the transparency framework required to mobilize greater financial resources, particularly through green and blue finance initiatives in support of the development of the Fouta Djallon and the protection of its biodiversity.

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