



## **Great Green Wall in the Sahel, massive deforestation in coastal West Africa**

Jacques Berthelot (jacques.berthelot4@wanadoo.fr), SOL, 8 September 2021

The World Congress of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) opened in Marseille on 3 September 2021<sup>1</sup> and will end on 11 September. In the presence of many international personalities and heads of State, including President Emmanuel Macron and the former President of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, and the Commissioner of the WAEMU (West Africa's Economic and Monetary Union) in charge of agriculture, water resources and the environment, Kako Nubukpo, who welcomed the commitment of Mahamadou Issoufou to the Great Green Wall<sup>2</sup>.

If all States, international institutions and all human beings must mobilise strongly to face this major challenge for the survival of future generations, it is useful to underline the limits of West Africa's fight for its environment, with the contradiction between, on the one hand, the Great Green Wall (GGW) project in the Sahel and, on the other hand, the acceleration of deforestation in the Sahel and even more so in the coastal zone.

Let us also underline the ambiguity of President Macron having put in place of honour the former President Mohamadou Issoufou, also a former president of the AfCFTA (African Continental Free Trade Area), supported politically and financially by the EU, including France, while its formal implementation since January 2021 is fictitious since neither the customs duties (to be reduced by 90% in intra-African trade) nor the rules of origin have been adopted. France also maintains close relations with President Issoufou to ensure that Orano continues to exploit uranium at the Imouraren site<sup>3</sup>.

### **I - The limits of the Great Green Wall**

In an article dated 10 September 2020, Laurence Caramel of the newspaper Le Monde wrote that "*Fifteen years after its launch, the Great Green Wall project remains a mirage... In Mali, Nigeria, Mauritania and Djibouti, this flagship initiative of the continent, in which the eleven countries of the Sahelian strip are involved, is limited to meagre plots of several thousand hectares of reforestation... The first evaluation report, commissioned by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and unveiled on Monday 7 September, acknowledges this modest record: Only 4 million hectares have been developed out of the 100 million targeted by 2030... The independent researcher Ronan Mugélé, at the end of his thesis entitled "The Great Green Wall, geography of an environmental utopia in the Sahel" (2018), is much more sceptical: "Its impact on pastoralism, and the tensions that it can fuel by subtracting areas of pasture in a context of increasing scarcity of resources, is strongly questioned by the researchers who are currently in the field"*"<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Opening ceremony of the IHCN in Marseille, with Benoit Payan, Mayor of Marseille:

<https://www.facebook.com/marseilleville/videos/380556130264299>; voir aussi la vidéo de présentation des activités : [https://www.bfmtv.com/marseille/videos/marseille-le-congres-mondial-de-la-nature-de-l-uicn-s-est-ouvert-au-public-samedi\\_VN-202109050074.html](https://www.bfmtv.com/marseille/videos/marseille-le-congres-mondial-de-la-nature-de-l-uicn-s-est-ouvert-au-public-samedi_VN-202109050074.html)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/kakonubukpofanpage/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.orano.group/en>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/kakonubukpofanpage/>

Anxious to implement the "European Green New Deal" in France, President Macron took part in a debate on the Great Green Wall at the One Planet Summit on 11 January 2021<sup>5</sup>, and AgraPresse of 18 January 2021 reports that *"the President of the Republic indicated his intention to seek sustainable protein supplies on the African continent, as a complement to a future European protein plan": "I hope that we can look at all the proteins that we can produce on the African continent, to enable it to deploy its agricultural model more quickly"*, with the laudable intention of no longer importing soya from South America to protect the environment there<sup>6</sup>. The problem is that the whole of Africa produced only 3.1 million tonnes of soya (98.6% of which was in sub-Saharan Africa) and had a trade deficit of 8.9 million tonnes (after converting 3.3 million tonnes of oilcake into seed, in addition to the 4.8 million tonnes of seed), essentially also from South America, even though 94.6% of the deficit came from North Africa. It does not matter that African production is already very insufficient to meet human and animal consumption, the neo-colonial reflex persists!

As for Niger, *"Some 200,000 tonnes of wood are consumed every year, the equivalent of 100,000 hectares of forest destroyed... Because more than 90% of households use only charcoal for heating during the short Nigerien winter, for lighting and for cooking all year round... Since 1990, the forested areas of the South have lost a third of their surface area, to represent only 1% of the country... Since 1990, forest areas in the South have lost a third of their surface area, and now represent only 1% of the country"*<sup>7</sup>, which has prompted the government to subsidise gas stoves. In reality, a better solution for consumers and the environment would be to use rice husk stoves<sup>8</sup>.

## **II – Accelerated deforestation in coastal West Africa**

According to the National Forestry and Wildlife Inventory (IFFN) *"90% of the Ivorian forest surface has disappeared over the last 60 years, making Ivory Coast one of the countries in Africa with the highest annual deforestation rate... Faced with poaching and progressive destruction, large mammals have almost disappeared, due to the increasingly frequent conflicts between man and wildlife. In addition, 34 species have joined the Red List"*<sup>9</sup>. And it is accelerating, according to a Mighty Earth press release of 28 February 2021: *"47,000 hectares of deforestation - more than four times the size of the city of Paris - has occurred in the cocoa-producing regions of Ivory Coast over the past year. This is despite the commitment of the government and the cocoa industry to achieve zero deforestation and to set up a joint monitoring mechanism under the Cocoa and Forests Initiative"*<sup>10</sup>.

Ivory Coast is not an isolated case, nor is cocoa the only cause of deforestation in coastal West Africa, since *"Ninety percent of the Upper Guinea Forest and many of the ecosystem services and functions it provides, such as watersheds that provide sustainable water supplies, have*

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<sup>5</sup> Listen to the Great Green Wall Investment Forum speech by Frank Riester, French Minister for Foreign Trade: <https://www.unccd.int/actions/great-green-wall-initiative/great-green-wall-accelerator>

<sup>6</sup> Extract from Marie-Paule Murail's chapter on *"Le contexte écologique du continent africain"* in *"Résistances africaines à la domination néocoloniale"*, coordonné par Martine Boudet, Editions Le Croquant, mars 2021.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.goodplanet.info/2015/07/27/pour-contrer-lavancee-du-desert-et-la-deforestation-le-niger-promeut-son-gaz/?cn-reloaded=1>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cysBb4Hq0Y4>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.commodafrica.com/01-07-2021-la-deforestation-en-cote-divoire-est-la-plus-forte-dafrique-avec-90-de-la-foret-disparue>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.mightyearth.org/2021/02/18/communiquede-presse-mighty-earth-sur-la-nouvelle-carte-de-responsabilite-du-cacao-3-0/>

already been lost to human activities such as mining, timber harvesting, agriculture and conversion of the forest to oil palm and other plantations at various scales"<sup>11</sup>.

As for Nigeria, it has lost 96% of its forests and loses about 400,000 hectares of its land every year to deforestation<sup>12</sup>. The political scandal is that "51% of the charcoal imported by Belgium comes from Nigeria, the country with the highest annual deforestation rate in the world, and the largest exporter of tropical charcoal to the European Union"<sup>13</sup>. France is not to be outdone: "Every year, the French consume around 130,000 tonnes of charcoal. A study conducted by the non-governmental organisation (NGO) "The Forest Trust" (TFT) in 2016 estimates the share of imported charcoal at nearly 60%. The main supplier countries are Nigeria, the Netherlands and Belgium, with the latter two countries often bagging imported charcoal from Africa. According to the study, a third of the charcoal bags sold in France do not indicate the origin of the wood or the country, but TFT found that 15% of the bags with no origin indicated were made from tropical charcoal"<sup>14</sup>.

The following table shows that fuelwood production in WA has grown on average half as fast as the population from 1961 to 2020, except in Ghana, Liberia and Niger, due to declining wood resources and the use of other energy sources.

Increase in fuelwood production in West Africa from 1961 to 2020, in 1000 m<sup>3</sup>

	1000 inh	WA	Ghana	Liberia	Niger	Burkina	Mali	Senegal	Nigeria	Ivory Coast
1961	86733	88027	6286	1560	2161	6034	2537	2908	36237	6247
1970	106080	95250	7750	1547	2840	6818	2784	3419	38927	6733
1980	137799	105289	9647	2400	3847	7810	3086	4095	42150	7317
1990	180535	126674	12870	3453	5674	9242	3942	4687	50917	7577
2000	234749	156999	26725	4725	7805	7402	4731	5114	59349	8529
2010	307040	183931	37791	7008	9876	12785	5326	5427	63215	8947
2011	315538	186494	38985	7254	10092	12963	5385	5453	63600	8989
2012	324251	189128	40203	7508	10313	13145	5445	5478	63999	9035
2013	333182	191834	41448	7771	10539	13331	5505	5504	64414	9084
2014	342336	194612	42720	8044	10772	13520	5568	5530	64843	9137
2015	351718	197465	44018	8326	11010	13714	5631	5557	65288	9193
2016	361327	199840	45203	8597	11219	13870	5681	5570	65583	9201
2017	371160	202274	46410	8877	11433	14030	5731	5584	65891	9212
2018	381202	204770	47639	9166	11651	14193	5783	5598	66210	9225
2019	391440	206041	47639	9465	11875	14359	5835	5612	66541	9241
2020	401861	206042	47639	9465	11875	14359	5835	5612	66541	9241
2020/1961	463%	234%	758%	607%	550%	238%	230%	193%	184%	148%

Source : FAOSTAT

Attempts to label cocoa as "sustainable" in Ivory Coast and Ghana are encountering huge implementation problems. Under pressure from cocoa multinationals to try to save the industry, CIRAD is not addressing the key issue of the need to reduce cocoa production, not only to save the environment but also to stop the near-servitude of young Sahelian children who form a large part of the plantation workforce<sup>15</sup>.

We should also remember that, without the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), processed cocoa exports from the three non-LDCs of West Africa (Ivory Coast, Ghana and

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.wabicc.org/fr/zone-de-fonction/reduire-la-degradation-la-deforestation-la-foret-et-la-perte-de-biodiversite-dans-les-mangroves-et-les-forets-des-hautes-terres/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.cnews.fr/monde/2019-01-18/le-nigeria-perdu-96-de-ses-forets-805846>

<sup>13</sup> <https://wwf.be/sites/default/files/articles/files/RAPPORT-POLICY/FORESTS/BE/WWF-rapport-charbon-de-bois-FR.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/questions/detail/15/QE/18829>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/05/12/en-cote-d-ivoire-la-difficile-lutte-contre-le-travail-des-enfants-dans-le-cacao\\_6079965\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/05/12/en-cote-d-ivoire-la-difficile-lutte-contre-le-travail-des-enfants-dans-le-cacao_6079965_3212.html)

Nigeria) to the EU would be subject to Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) tariffs of 6, 1% for cocoa paste, 4.2% for cocoa butter and 2.8% for cocoa powder, while the Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with 9 Latin American countries also allow them to export all these products to the EU duty free. And the scandal is that the EU does not require them to respect international conventions on human rights, social rights, the environment and good governance, which it requires of ACP countries in order to grant them GSP+ status. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International reports on the violation of these rights are damning, particularly in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador.

Since the division of the current States of WA is a colonial legacy, as historically WA has had empires covering most of its territory, there is an urgent need to go back to the roots to ensure its political, commercial, food and monetary sovereignty in the long term by disconnecting itself from global value chains rather than seeking a short-term trade surplus which is a source of structural debt. The creation of the United States of Western Africa would establish political, commercial, food and monetary solidarity between coastal and Sahelian countries, by drastically reducing the area under cocoa in favour of cereals, oilseeds, fodder legumes, roots and tubers, part of which would provide Sahelian livestock with fodder resources allowing a strong expansion of animal production, particularly dairy production, part of which would in turn be returned to coastal countries<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> *No monetary sovereignty of West Africa through the éco without prior popular sovereignty and political solidarity*, SOL, 5 September 2021 (<https://www.sol-asso.fr/analyses-politiques-agricoles-jacques-berthelot-2021/>)