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**THE GREAT GREEN
WALL (GGW) INITIATIVE IN
AFRICA: A PATH BREAKING
LIVING INFRASTRUCTURE
IN THE PLANET,
WITH
GROWING POLITICAL
CHALLENGES.**

Rainer Masera

The Great Green Wall (GGW) Initiative in Africa: a path breaking living infrastructure in the Planet, with growing political challenges*

(La Grande Muraglia Verde (GMW) in Africa: un'infrastruttura pionieristica per il Pianeta, tra crescenti sfide politiche)

Rainer Masera**

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ABSTRACT [En]:

The Great Green Wall is an important reforestation and cooperation project stretching from Senegal to Ethiopia, designed to restore ecosystems and strengthen resilience across the Sahel. This territory is, however, contaminated by landmines and explosive remnants of war, which compromise the effective sustainability of the Great Green Wall.

The analysis is set within the Africa–EU partnership and identifies the new global challenges concerning the present and future role of Africa and international cooperation.

Keywords: Great Green Wall, geopolitic, Africa- EU cooperation.

ABSTRACT [It]:

La Grande Muraglia Verde è un importante progetto di riforestazione e cooperazione che si estende dal Senegal all'Etiopia ed è stato ideato per ripristinare gli ecosistemi e rafforzare la resilienza dell'area del Sahel. Tale territorio è, però, contaminato da mine e residuati bellici e ciò compromette l'effettiva sostenibilità della GMV.

L'analisi si inserisce nell'ambito del partenariato Africa–UE ed individua le nuove sfide globali che riguardano il ruolo attuale e futuro dell'Africa e della cooperazione internazionale.

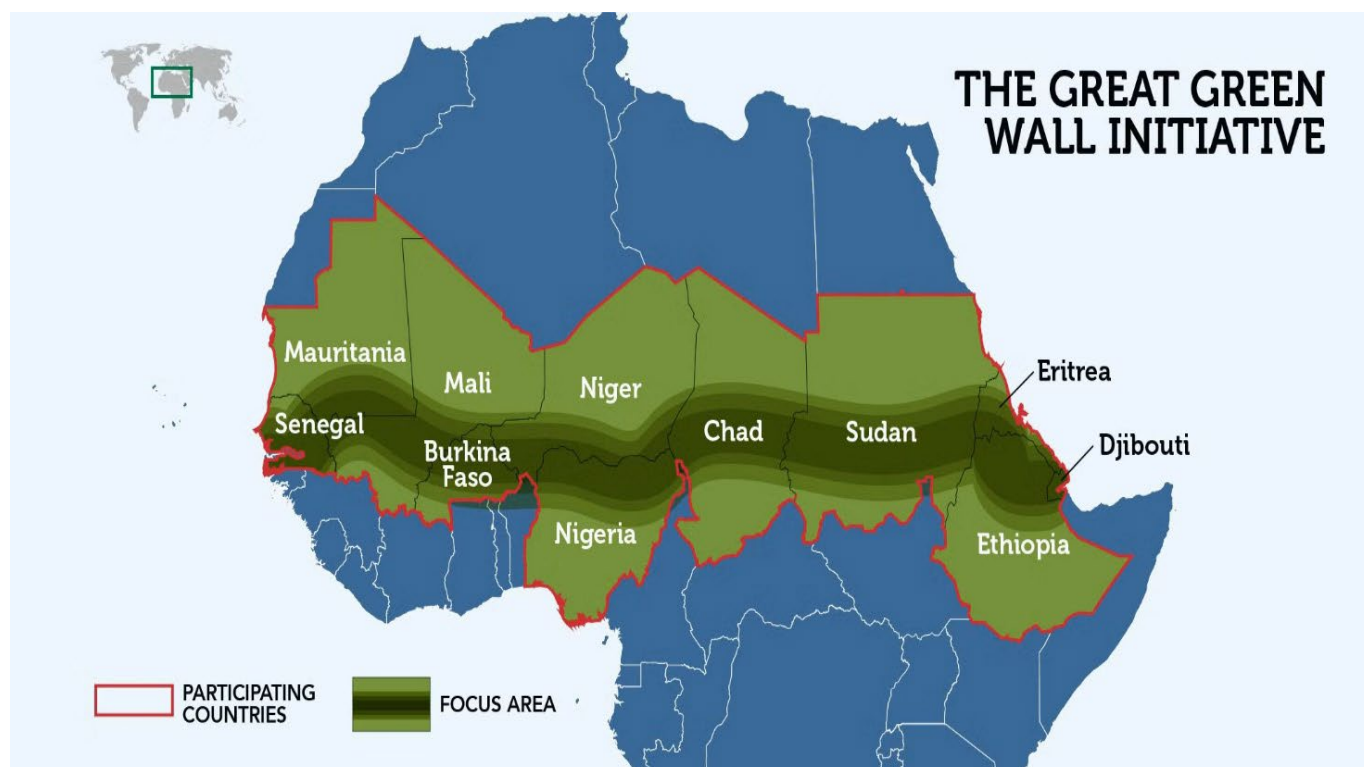
Parole chiave: Grande Muraglia Verde, geopolitica, cooperazione Africa-EU.

SOMMARIO: 1. The Great Green Wall in Africa – 2. Africa’s role – 3.The second, little-known, daunting Wall in Africa – 4. Key transformations in Africa - 5. Some tentative concluding remarks

1. THE GREAT GREEN WALL IN AFRICA

The GGW was launched in 2007 to restore/create a diversity of ecosystems in Africa. It represents a very important official project for reforestation and cooperation, which runs from Senegal to Ethiopia and covers some 8,000 km (Chart 1).

Chart 1 - The Great Green Wall



Source: GEF, 2025

It extends economically and financially to Algeria and Morocco and to Southern Europe; only 14 km separate the two continents (Chart 2).

*Il contributo è stato approvato dai revisori.

** I wish to express my thanks to two anonymous referees for their very helpful comments.

Chart 2 - The shortest distance between Europe and Africa: 14 km



Source: Caplio

The lessons of geography and history are often forgotten or downplayed: Carthago, the Roman Empire, Granada and the Alhambra, the Arab domination during the Nasrid Emirate ... are all reminders of the proximity of the two continents.

More recently, Spain's North African exclaves of Ceuta and Melilla and the strait of Gibraltar, which is an overseas territory of Great Britain, come to mind.

2. AFRICA'S ROLE

Africa's role in international affairs has become crucial in the new global (dis)order¹. Large young population, vast natural resources (energy, raw materials), critical geographical position have made the continent a focal point for world powers (US, China, EU, Russia, India) for key adjoining countries (Iran, Turkey, Israel) and also for important African countries.

The Kingdom of Morocco has taken an initiative to bring together landlocked Sahel countries and provide strategic access to the Atlantic Ocean through major investments in infrastructures, in cooperation with other states. This might however conflict with Algeria's initiatives in the region².

The unsettled state of affairs is underlined notably by the Trump Administration declaration that the US would undertake in 2025/26 massive bombing of ISIS terrorists in Nigeria³ and by Israel's recognition of Somaliland as an independent sovereign state in December 2025 (BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/>). Somaliland's territory is claimed, but not controlled, by Somalia, which does not recognise Israel as an independent state.

3. THE SECOND, LITTLE-KNOWN, DAUNTING WALL IN AFRICA

Across the African continent there is an even longer – some 10,000 km – «wall» consisting essentially of physical landmine contamination, spanning from Morocco (and the Mediterranean bordering Africa⁴) and Mauritania to the Sahel region and to Ethiopia (Chart 3).

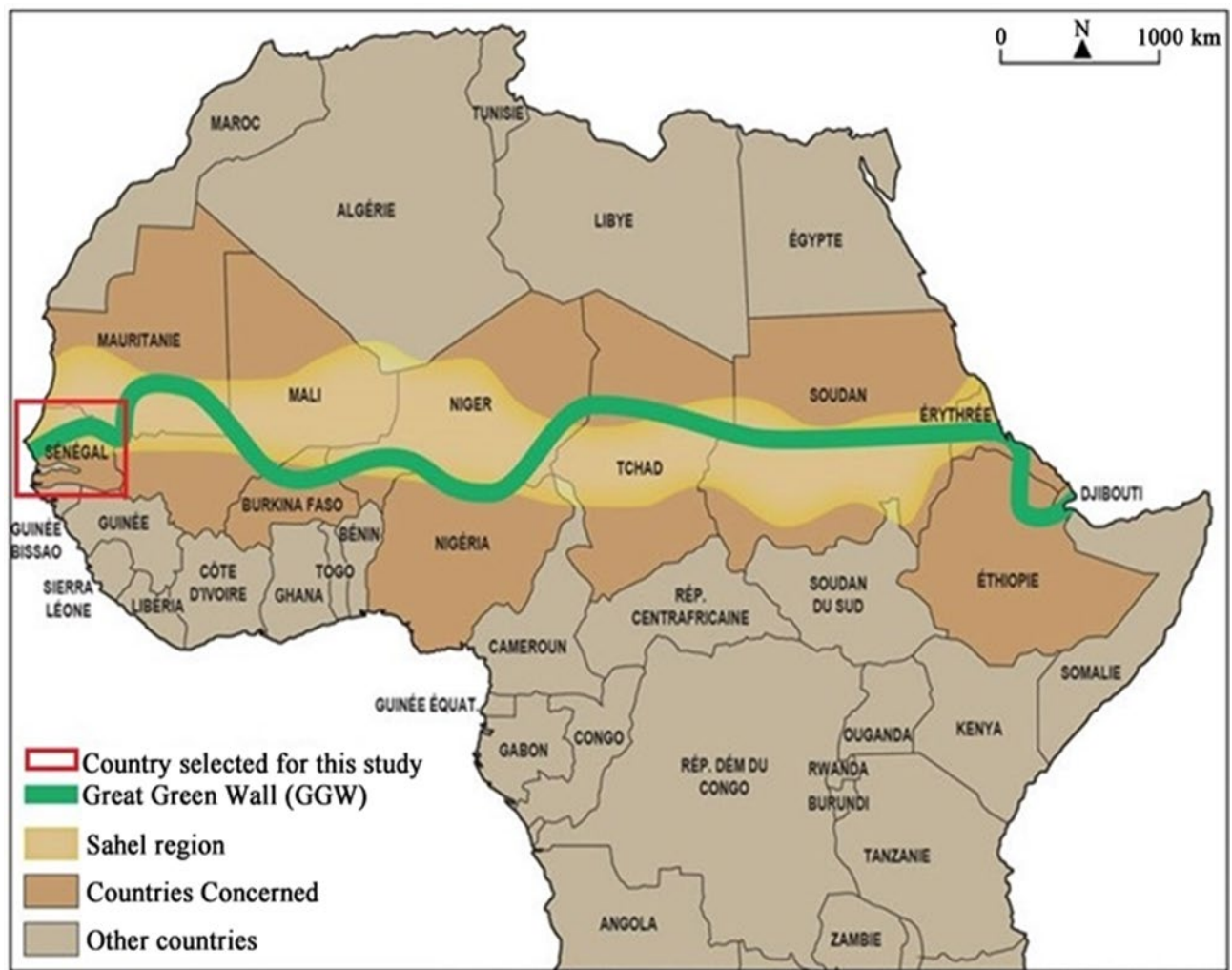
¹ The complex new links are explored, with ample references, in R. MASERA, *Global Megatrends*, Fondazione Cesifin, Firenze, 2024.

² See, for instance, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Morocco's Atlantic Initiative*, <https://carnegieendowment.org>.

³ A clear sign of the unraveling of the *pax americana*, as had happened to the *pax romana* and the *pax britannica*.

⁴ Landmines and explosive ordnance are a significant growing threat, notably in the Central Africa Republic, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Chart 3 - The GGW and the Sahel region



Source: Scirp.org

It comprises: antipersonal landmines (APL), explosive remnants of war (ERW), improvised explosive devices (IED), explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA). Paradoxically the two walls are partially overlapping.

The United Nations and organizations such as the Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor⁵ document the contamination: the landmine wall is destructured and indeed slowly “moving” (i.e. shifting location). This makes for a highly insidious and dangerous situation which entails very heavy tolls of human lives and wounded persons, notably children.⁶ The Vatican is also at the forefront for the implementation of an international treaty banning anti-personnel mines, for the active support of courageous witnesses of justice and peace and for a world day of peace in 2026.

⁵ See Ideas Indaba, 2025.

⁶ See M. FAVRETTI, 2025.

An ongoing drama is around us, little known and publicised for complex geopolitical reasons - which would deserve close attention - to safeguard the GGW and the very Pan African Union (PAU).

Italy and the Meloni Government are actively fostering a peaceful solution – consistently with the EU «Global Gateway» approach which was discussed and endorsed by the G20 in Johannesburg, South Africa, in November 2025 (<https://www.b20southafrica.org/about-g20>)⁷.

4. KEY TRANSFORMATIONS IN AFRICA

As explained notably by United Nations and by the International Monetary Fund (IMF, F&D Magazine, December 2025, <https://www.imf.org/en/home>), the demographic transformation which is taking place in Africa represents a game changer destined to affect globally scholarship and policy in law and finance.

Africa's population is estimated at around 140 million in the year 1900, 10% of the world then. It is now 1.4 billion, by 2050 it is projected to reach 2.5 billion. The African continent would represent one quarter of the world's population. At the end of the century the share would climb to 40% with a broadly corresponding rise in its geopolitical importance.

The GGW project is a pillar stone of these anticipated events. It seeks to re-green Africa from Senegal to Somalia and to multiply available resources. It requires peace and collaboration, as originally envisaged. Landmine contamination and heated political divisions are threatening the project, which would represent the largest living structure on the planet, stretching 8.000 km., a world feat and wonder to rival the Great Wall of China.

⁷The crucial rôle of the EU has been clearly identified by D. ROSSANO, *Solidarietà e stabilità economica nella ridefinizione del patto di stabilità e crescita*, in *Riv. trim. di Diritto dell' Economia*, Supplemento n.1, 2023, 133 et seq., at p. 140. The perspective taken by Rossano is represented by the ongoing war waged by Russia on Ukraine, which upset macroeconomic and political balances. See also D. ROSSANO (a cura di), *La supervisione finanziaria dopo due crisi*, Wolters Kluwer, Milano, 2023.

5. SOME TENTATIVE CONCLUDING REMARKS

It was clearly indicated that Africa is emerging as a leading area of the world. Its crucial rôle entails great responsibilities: it should summon up the political, societal and ethical resources to overcome the fractures, to share prosperity in a peaceful, collaborative framework.

The GGW must make the wall of landmine contamination recede and disappear. The spirit and the charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), founded in 1963, should be fully carried over to the African Union (AU) enacted in 2002, with its goal of profound integration for the African continent, in cooperation with international partners.

The Africa–EU partnership was established 25 years ago at the first Africa–EU Summit held in Cairo. The EU has recently restated the importance of the partnership, and underlined the crucial role of the collaboration between the European Parliament and the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) (EC, <https://commission.europa.eu>). The Africa EU-Civil Society-Forum represents an integral part of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES).

The clear focus of this note should not be blurred, but the temptation to open new vistas on Africa by adopting a holistic approach is strong. I will try to meet the challenge by relying on concurrent, complementary research and analysis of many authors and my own⁸.

It is an important occasion to examine previously unseen opportunities and perspectives, and to identify new challenges with a global dimension, but also a clear focus on the current and future rôle of Africa and of international cooperation.

Elon Musk (born in South Africa in 1971) is a visionary tech, automotive, space and work expert. He is perhaps best known for being the world's richest person, at the same time he has given fundamental contributions to AI and robotics. He has argued that robotics is destined to replace all human jobs, even so working will no longer be necessary.

The key to this apparent paradox lies in the fact that multiplying humanoid robots will unleash productive capacity, while demographic transition and population prospects point to a gradual slow down (UN World Population Prospect 2025). Thus, even if humans will not be required for most tasks, and will not earn income and salaries, robotics will create such abundance that working becomes optional.

⁸ For a critical assessment of these topics and a survey of literature see R. MASERA, *At the crossroads for the world*, LEYR, forthcoming.

The issues are complex and intertwined, but cannot be easily escaped. The world is entering a knowledge paradigm. Technological advancement, digital innovation, interweaving of human and physical capital (the new productive systems) can transform societies capturing the benefits of creating innovation. Yet, also unprecedented risks loom in robotics, with scenarios of tipping points and destabilising cascades ushering into radical uncertainty.

The road takes us back to Africa and to its central role for possible solutions in the new set ups. Bill Gates, who has also argued that humans won't be needed for compulsory jobs, has publicly pledged in mid-2025 to direct the majority of his \$200 billion personal wealth over the next twenty years towards philanthropic commitments in Africa, through the Gates Foundation, with the view of empowering African governments to cope with major challenges in the continent (Bill Gates to Direct Majority of \$200 billion Pledge Toward Africa's Future, <https://www.gatesfoundation.org/>).

Evidently, international aid is of fundamental importance, but cannot help cure political mistakes, bad governance and bureaucratic excess, domestically and abroad.