



Evolution of the landscapes of West Africa from 1975 to 2013 : Decline or Renaissance

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People and extreme variability of weather have made huge differences to the landscapes of West Africa. Satellite data compiled over the past 30 years show clearly the land degradation and deforestation that have impacted the livelihoods and food security of millions.

The data have been assembled for the first time in a new publication, "Landscapes of West Africa : A window on a Changing World". This hard cover Atlas has been printed in English and French. It is also available at the following website : <https://eros.usgs.gov/westafrica>.

The Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) teamed up with the United States Geological Survey (USGS) with funding from USAID to create this Atlas.

"This book will be a valuable tool for technical experts and policy makers to help find ways to stabilize or even restore landscapes while improving food security and livelihoods in the Sahel", says Dr. Djimé Adoum, Ph.D, the Executive Secretary of CILSS.

The Atlas shows that in 1975 natural habitats of the Sahelian and Sudanian Regions such as steppe, sahelian short grass savanna, and sudanian savanna were the dominant land cover classes across West Africa. Between 1975 and 2013, they have been transformed mainly from high population growth and a growing need for more food. Agricultural expansion is the most dramatic change in the landscape of West Africa. Between 1975 and 2013, the area covered by crops doubled in West Africa. The conversion of natural landscapes of West Africa to agriculture has greatly reduced natural biodiversity, and has exposed the soil to wind and water erosion.

However, the news is not all catastrophic. Across West Africa, the Atlas shows examples of positive land modification, such as the regeneration of woody cover, the increase of biodiversity on cropland, or the use of soil and water conservation practices to improve cropland productivity.

This Atlas helps to build a clearer picture of past and current land use and land cover, and can guide the making of informed choices that will support the livelihoods and well-being of current and future generations of West Africans.

For more information, please contact :

Abdoulkarim DANKOULOU Chief of Communication, Information and Documentation. Executive Secretary. CILSS Tel : 00226 25499600 Email : dankoulou.abdoulkarim@cilss.int	Papa Oumar DIEYE Communication officer AGRHYMET Regional Centre Tel 0022720315316 Email : p.dieye@agrhymet.ne	Yao KUWORNU Press Office: +233 (030) 274- 1203 Cell phone: +233 (024) 350- 0540 Email : akuwornu@usaid.gov
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CILSS is an intergovernmental organization composed of 13 countries, namely Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Togo. In organizational terms, CILSS is composed of three (3) centres of operations: the Executive Secretariat, based in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso; The AGRHYMET Regional Centre based in Niamey, Niger; The Sahel Institute, based in Bamako, Mali. Its mandate is to seek to assure food security and to combat the effects of drought and desertification for a new ecological balance in the Sahel. For more information, please visit the web site : www.cilss.int

The USAID/West Africa regional mission's goal is to promote social and economic well-being advanced by West Africans. Spanning 21 countries, USAID/West Africa designs and supports programs with West African partners to strengthen systems of non-violent conflict management, further economic growth, and expand quality health services. The American people, through USAID, provide economic and humanitarian assistance in more than 100 countries worldwide. For more information, please visit the web site: <http://www.usaid.gov/west-africa-regional>

USGS has evolved over the ensuing 125 years, matching its talent and knowledge to the progress of science and technology. USGS is the sole science agency for the Department of the Interior of USA. It is sought out by thousands of partners and customers for its natural science expertise and its vast earth and biological data holdings. As the Nation's largest water, earth, and biological science and civilian mapping agency, USGS collects, monitors, analyzes, and provides science about natural resource conditions, issues, and problems. For more information, please visit the web site : www.usgs.gov