



FIGURE 1 Subregional breakdown used in this report

Central Africa: Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda, Saint Helena, Sao Tome and Principe

East Africa: British Indian Ocean Territory, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mayotte, Réunion, Seychelles, Somalia, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania

Northern Africa: Algeria, Egypt, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia

Southern Africa: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe

West Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo

NOTE: For consistency, this report uses the same subregional groups that were used in the *Forestry Outlook Study for Africa* (FAO, 2003).

EXTENT OF FOREST RESOURCES

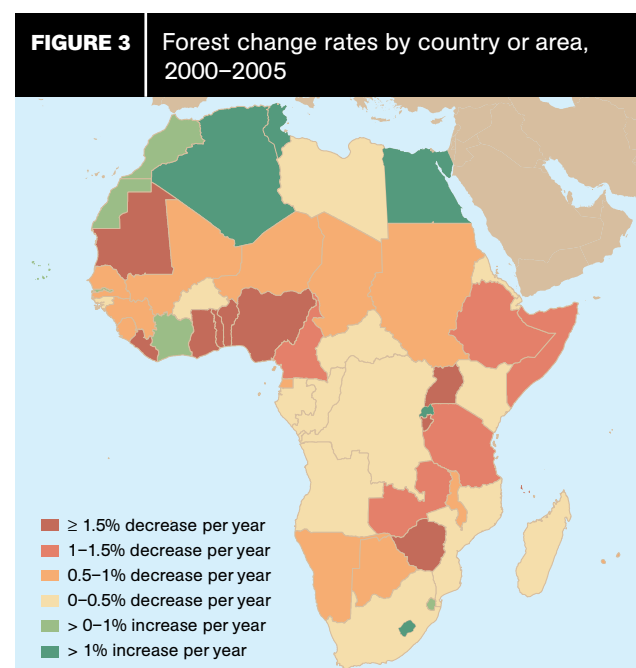
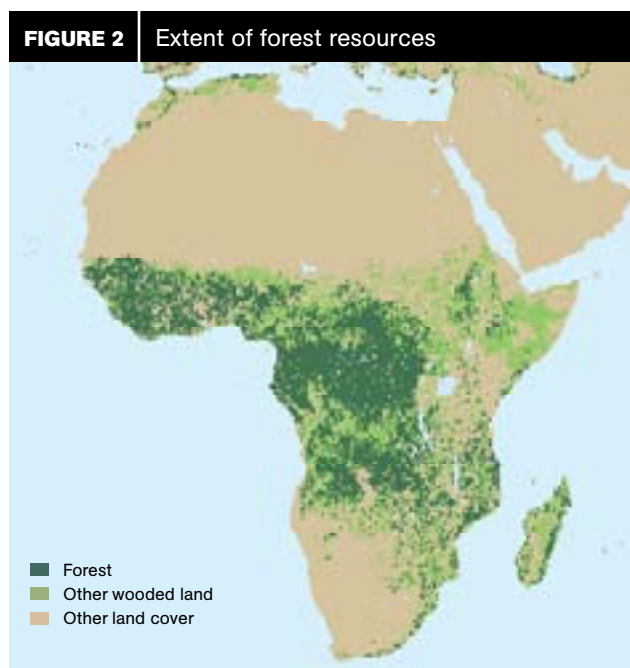
The estimated forest area for Africa in 2005 is 635 million hectares (Figure 2), accounting for about 16 percent of global forest area. Net annual forest loss is about 4 million hectares for the period 2000–2005 (Table 1). This amounts to almost 55 percent of the global reduction in forest area. However, the reported forest cover is distributed unevenly among the different subregions and countries.

A significant share of net forest loss is reported from those countries with the greatest extent of forests. For

example, Angola, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia together account for a majority of the forest loss in East and Southern Africa (Figure 3). Available information also indicates a high rate of forest loss in Zimbabwe, estimated at 1.7 percent per year, far above the average of 0.7 percent for all Southern Africa. In Northern Africa, the Sudan alone accounts for most of the forest cover and for 60 percent of the forest reduction. In West and Central Africa, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria together account for most of the loss.

TABLE 1
Extent and change of forest area

Subregion	Area (1 000 ha)			Annual change (1 000 ha)		Annual change rate (%)	
	1990	2000	2005	1990–2000	2000–2005	1990–2000	2000–2005
Central Africa	248 538	239 433	236 070	–910	–673	–0.37	–0.28
East Africa	88 974	80 965	77 109	–801	–771	–0.94	–0.97
Northern Africa	84 790	79 526	76 805	–526	–544	–0.64	–0.69
Southern Africa	188 402	176 884	171 116	–1 152	–1 154	–0.63	–0.66
West Africa	88 656	78 805	74 312	–985	–899	–1.17	–1.17
Total Africa	699 361	655 613	635 412	–4 375	–4 040	–0.64	–0.62
World	4 077 291	3 988 610	3 952 025	–8 868	–7 317	–0.22	–0.18



SOURCE: FAO, 2001a.

TABLE 2

Area of forest plantations

Subregion	Area (1 000 ha)			Annual change (1 000 ha)	
	1990	2000	2005	1990–2000	2000–2005
Central Africa	348	388	526	4	28
East Africa	1 246	1 233	1 230	-1	-1
Northern Africa	7 696	7 513	7 503	-18	-2
Southern Africa	1 867	2 060	2 150	19	18
West Africa	900	1 337	1 677	44	68
Total Africa	12 057	12 532	13 085	48	111
World	101 234	125 525	139 466	2 424	2 788

Africa also has more than 400 million hectares of “other wooded land”, with scattered trees but not enough to be defined as “forest”. Data on the extent and growing stock of other wooded land are weak, but the extent continues to decline.

Africa’s total area of forest plantations – a subset of planted forests defined as those consisting primarily of introduced species – is about 13.0 million hectares (Table 2). Approximately 2.4 million hectares (18 percent) of forest plantations are planted for protective purposes; the remainder are planted to produce wood, particularly industrial roundwood and fuelwood. Most forest plantations are in Northern Africa, which is dependent on plantations because of the scarcity of natural forests. Southern Africa has developed a globally competitive forest industry almost entirely based on planted forests.

Since 1990, forest cover in Africa has been declining at one of the highest rates in the world (together with Latin America and the Caribbean). However, the rate of loss has shown signs of declining slightly in the past five years. Unfortunately, there are only a few countries in which forest cover is increasing or marginally improving, and most of these are the “low forest cover” countries of Northern Africa in which substantial efforts have been made to establish planted forests. Improvement has been reported in Rwanda and Swaziland as well, also largely resulting from increased planting.

BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

There is evidence of an overall decline in the area of primary forests in the region, but some of the most important forested countries were not able to report on this parameter, especially in Central Africa. Thus, it is not possible to make a definitive statement regarding the magnitude of this trend.

Forty-three countries, accounting for some 70 percent of the forest area in Africa, provided information on area of forest designated for biodiversity conservation for the three reference years. In these countries, a total of about 69.5 million hectares of forests, accounting for about 16 percent of the forest area, are designated primarily for conservation (Table 3).

Although the area so designated declined in some countries, at the regional level there has been a substantial increase, especially during 2000–2005.

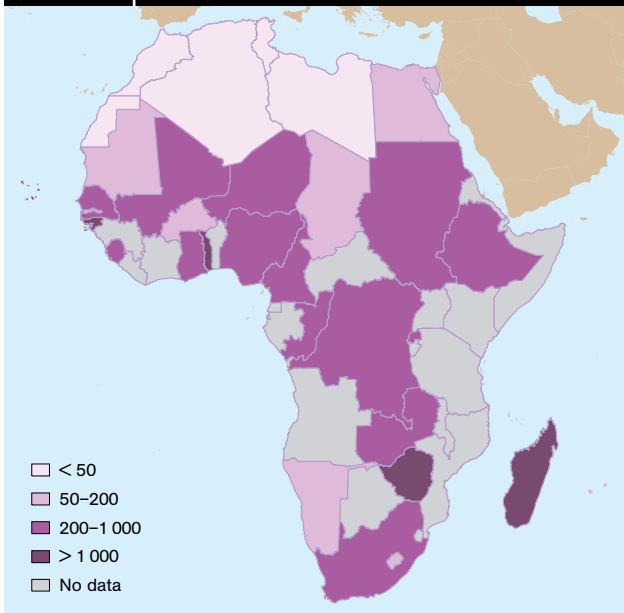
Forest composition, the number of native forest species and the existence (or absence) of threatened and endangered species are other indicators of biodiversity. However, with only 16 countries reporting on these variables, a clear indication of the state of biodiversity is not available. Forest composition and the preponderance of species differ widely within Africa. As would be expected, the tropical moist forests in the Congo Basin have high diversity, with native forest tree species varying from 12 to 5 000 in the reporting countries (Figure 4). The ten most common tree species represent only 22 percent of the species in a typical forest

TABLE 3

Area of forest designated primarily for conservation

Subregion	Area (1 000 ha)			Annual change (1 000 ha)	
	1990	2000	2005	1990–2000	2000–2005
Central Africa	26 497	26 375	30 388	-12	803
East Africa	2 934	2 882	2 818	-5	-13
Northern Africa	9 773	9 051	8 687	-72	-73
Southern Africa	12 360	12 360	12 360	0	0
West Africa	15 239	15 244	15 275	0	6
Total Africa	66 803	65 912	69 528	-89	723
World	298 424	361 092	394 283	6 267	6 638

NOTE: Fewer than 50 percent of the countries in Central Africa were able to provide data on this parameter for all three years.

FIGURE 4 Number of native tree species

unit. In a temperate or boreal forest, the most common ten species account for over 50 percent.

Country statistics for the number of threatened tree species are more reliable, owing to regular monitoring and reporting for the *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* (IUCN [World Conservation Union], 2000 and 2004). On average, each African country lists about 7 percent of its native tree species as critically endangered, endangered or vulnerable.

FOREST HEALTH AND VITALITY

In Africa, as in several other regions, it is difficult to analyse trends in forest health because of the scarcity of information. Only 14 countries of 58 provided information on trends in forest fires over two time periods, accounting for 19 percent of the total forests in Africa. However, the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission (JRC) carried out a remote sensing study of wildland fires in Africa (including, but not limited to, forest fires) (JRC, 2000). The study concluded that Africa accounted for 64 percent of the global area burned by wildland fires in 2000, when 230 million hectares were burned, accounting for 7.7 percent of the total land area of the continent. A follow-up study in 2004 revealed similar results.

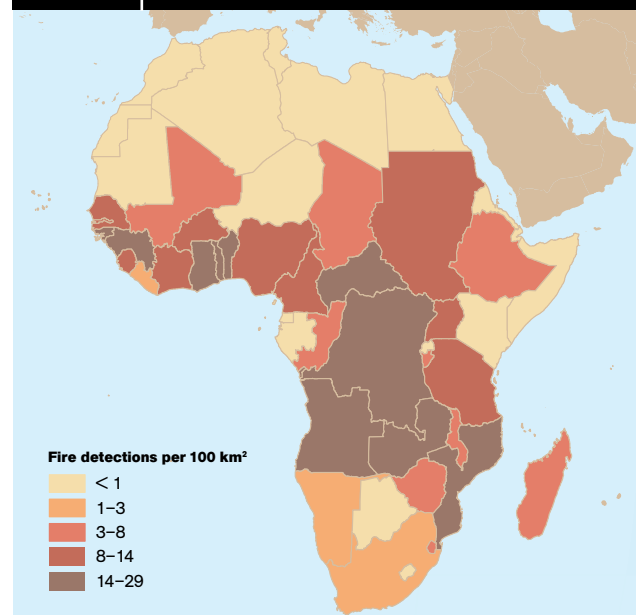
As reported to the 2005 FAO Regional Conference for Africa (FAO, 2006c), two areas of particularly high fire frequency stand out: one is northern Angola and the southern Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the other southern Sudan and the Central African Republic (Figure 5). These areas were once mostly tropical forest, but today the vegetation is a mosaic of grassland and remnant tropical forest patches, interspersed with the fields and settlements of both sedentary and shifting

cultivators. Most of the deforestation of this zone took place decades ago, and while fire is undoubtedly preventing forest regeneration, its prevalence is symptomatic of the past conversion of forest to grassland, rather than being the direct, current cause of forest loss.

The number of fires and the area burned vary considerably from year to year, often in synchrony with the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) and associated extreme weather phenomena. Rainfall, biomass production and ENSO are particularly strongly linked in Southern Africa. A comparison of the extent of burning there in 1992, when the region experienced a severe drought, and in 2000, following a season of above-average rainfall, showed much earlier and more extensive burning in 2000. Good rains produce more biomass, and therefore more fuel for fire during the dry season, unless the additional production is consumed by livestock or wildlife. This link between rainfall and biomass production means that regional, seasonal climate forecasts can be used to anticipate the likely vegetation biomass conditions in the coming season and to assess the level of fire risk.

Damage from wildfire is a significant threat to sustainable forest management in Africa. Long-term data are not sufficient to conclude whether the area affected by forest fires is increasing or declining. Moreover, it is difficult to generalize whether a decline in fire incidence is a positive development or not. In several ecosystems, fire is an integral part of the natural ecosystem processes.

As regards the incidence of pests and diseases, comparable data over a period of time were provided in

FIGURE 5 Extent of burning, 2004/2005

NOTE: Data derived from the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) satellite sensor at 1 km² resolution.

SOURCE: FIRMS (Fire Information for Resource Management System), University of Maryland, United States of America/United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

FRA 2005 by only five countries, and hence it was not possible to provide a regional overview of the situation and general trends. FAO has proposed a systematic process for improving data collection for FRA 2010 and has prepared forest pest profiles for Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Morocco, South Africa and the Sudan.

Despite the lack of data, there is no doubt that increasing problems with invasive insects, diseases and woody species have affected the productivity and vitality of African forests. The Forest Invasive Species Network for Africa was created to focus on these disturbances, with the mandate to coordinate collation and dissemination of information on forest invasive species in sub-Saharan Africa (www.fao.org/forestry/site/26951/en).

Accidental introductions of forest pests have affected industrial plantations of cypress and pine in East and Southern Africa for several decades. The cypress aphid, *Cinara cupressivora*, which affects Mexican cypress (*Cupressus lusitanica*) and pencil cedar (*Juniperus procera*), was first recorded in Malawi in 1986 and soon spread to neighbouring countries. It was estimated that the aphid had killed trees worth US\$44 million as of 1990 and was causing the loss of a further US\$14.6 million per year through reduction in annual growth increment (Murphy, 1996). Similarly, the European woodwasp (*Sirex noctilio*), accidentally introduced into South Africa, has infested pines and caused considerable impact on the industry. Special

efforts are being made to prevent its further spread in the midlands of South Africa and to neighbouring countries.

New insect pests introduced into Africa within the past five years include *Coniothyrium zuluense* in Ethiopia, *Thaumastocoris australicus* and *Coryphodema tristis* in South Africa, *Leptocybe invasa* in Kenya, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania and *Cinara pinivora* in Malawi.

PRODUCTIVE FUNCTIONS OF FOREST RESOURCES

The production of wood and non-wood forest products (NWFPs) is a very important function of African forests and woodlands and has great impact on socio-economic development. Some 30 percent of total forest area is designated primarily for production, compared with a global average of 34 percent.

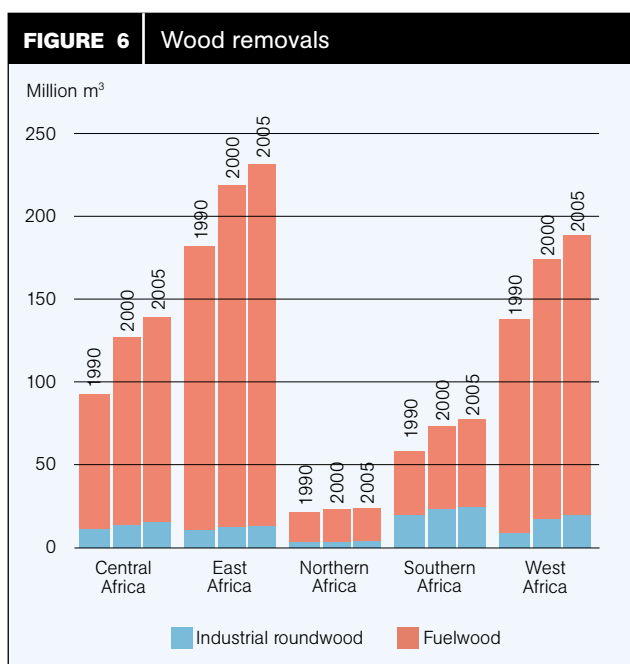
The extent of forests designated for production is declining in Africa (Table 4). However, it is not clear if this should be considered a positive or negative trend in terms of sustainable forest management. It may be a sign that more area is excluded from productive purposes in order to enhance the conservation of biodiversity and other functions of forests; but it may also be an indication that productive forests are being cleared to convert land to non-forest uses. This is an area needing improved data in the context of FRA 2010.

TABLE 4
Area of forest designated primarily for production

Subregion	Area (1 000 ha)			Annual change (1 000 ha)	
	1990	2000	2005	1990–2000	2000–2005
Central Africa	45 268	43 790	41 992	–148	–360
East Africa	30 678	27 646	26 119	–303	–305
Northern Africa	35 067	32 899	31 331	–217	–313
Southern Africa	9 527	11 031	12 083	150	210
West Africa	27 789	24 548	23 134	–324	–283
Total Africa	148 329	139 913	134 658	–842	–1 051
World	1 324 549	1 281 612	1 256 266	–4 294	–5 069

TABLE 5
Growing stock

Subregion	Growing stock					
	(million m ³)			(m ³ /ha)		
	1990	2000	2005	1990	2000	2005
Central Africa	47 795	46 247	45 790	192	193	194
East Africa	4 989	4 616	4 446	56	57	58
Northern Africa	1 436	1 409	1 390	17	18	18
Southern Africa	6 669	6 292	6 102	35	36	36
West Africa	7 871	7 085	6 753	89	90	91
Total Africa	69 373	66 171	64 957	99	101	102
World	445 252	439 000	434 219	109	110	110



Growing stock is an important indicator of forest productivity. Although aggregated comparisons (growing stock per subregion or region) may not provide a clear picture, some general inferences can be made based on a global comparison. Country data suggest a significant decline in total growing stock in almost all countries (Table 5), although a few countries have registered an increase resulting from an increase in the area of forest plantations.

Another key issue for the productive functions of forests – given the declining trend in growing stock in most countries – is whether the level of wood removals exceeds the annual allowable cut. Almost 90 percent of the wood removals in Africa are used for fuel, compared with less than 40 percent in the world at large (Figure 6). For Africa as a whole, wood removals in 2005 were about 1 percent of growing stock. However there is considerable variation among regions, largely resulting from disparities

in access to forest resources and the proportion of commercial species. For example, in West and Central Africa, the removal rate is about 0.06 percent of the estimated growing stock, while in Northern Africa it is over 7 percent.

In the absence of information on annual allowable harvests, it is difficult to conclude whether current removals are sustainable. The dominant use of wood in Africa is for fuel, and a large part of the demand is met from other wooded land and trees outside forests. Since market demand and forest access are key determinants of the intensity of wood removal, areas that are easily accessible are more intensively logged than remote ones.

PROTECTIVE FUNCTIONS OF FOREST RESOURCES

For the 43 countries reporting, the extent of forest designated primarily for protection is about 4.5 percent of forest area and declined from 21.4 million hectares in 1990 to 20.6 million hectares in 2005, in line with the overall reduction in forest cover (Table 6).

However, not all countries use this designation, and some protective functions may be included under “multiple purpose” (Figure 7).

In proportion to the total area of forests, the reported extent of forests designated primarily for protection is low in Central Africa, but this is at least partly because of the relatively low level of reporting.

A number of countries have stepped up afforestation efforts with the primary objective of environmental protection. This includes afforestation of degraded areas for soil conservation, establishment of windbreaks and shelterbelts to protect agriculture areas, stabilization of sand dunes and urban and peri-urban planting to improve amenity values. In the 46 countries reporting on this activity, there was an increase in the extent of protective forest plantations of nearly 400 000 hectares (ha)

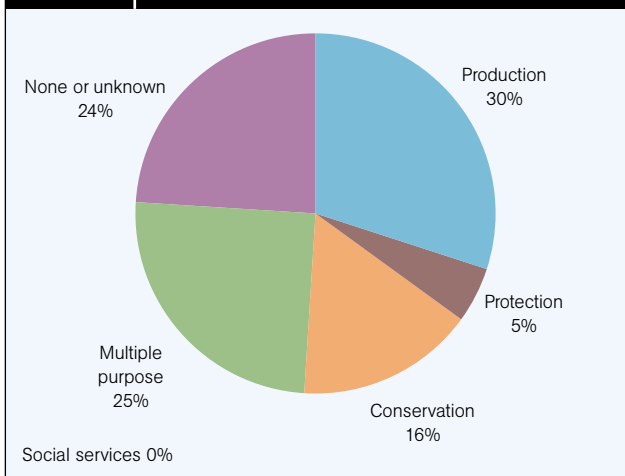
TABLE 6

Area of forest designated primarily for protection

Subregion	Area (1 000 ha)			Annual change (1 000 ha)	
	1990	2000	2005	1990–2000	2000–2005
Central Africa	368	746	651	38	–19
East Africa	3 748	3 633	3 574	–12	–12
Northern Africa	3 645	3 819	3 861	17	8
Southern Africa	2 692	2 480	2 279	–21	–40
West Africa	10 939	10 610	10 247	–33	–72
Total Africa	21 392	21 287	20 613	–10	–135
World	296 598	335 541	347 217	3 894	2 335

NOTE: Fewer than 50 percent of the countries in Central Africa were able to report on this parameter.

FIGURE 7 Designated primary functions of forests, 2005



during 1990–2005. Most of the increase (over 87 percent) occurred in the poorly forested subregion of Northern Africa.

The total area of forest designated for protective functions shows a slight decrease for Africa as a whole, with Northern Africa being the only subregion with a slight increase. However, the area of protective forest plantations is increasing in four subregions and in the region as a whole. Overall, it is not possible to conclude that protective functions are improving; but in contrast with some of the other thematic elements, the trends are not alarmingly negative.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FUNCTIONS

The value of wood removals (fuelwood and industrial roundwood) in Africa increased from US\$2.1 billion in 1990

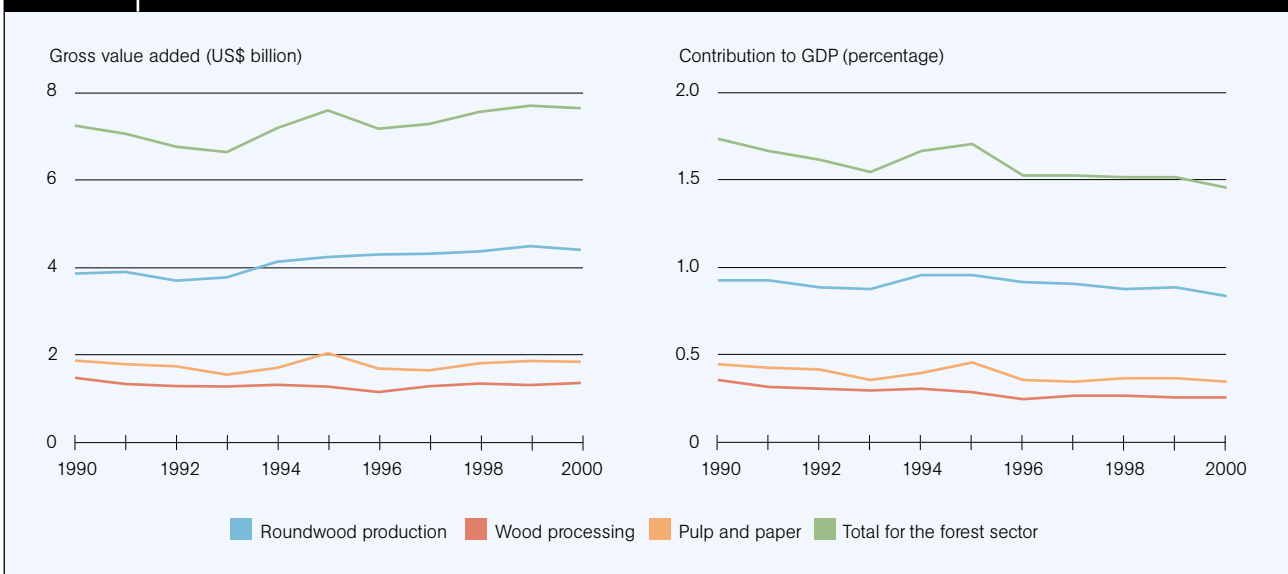
to about US\$3.9 billion in 2005. However, in spite of the relatively rapid growth in value, in 2005 its share in the global value of wood removals was only about 6.5 percent, while Africa accounted for about 16 percent of the world's forests.

Africa's share in the global value of industrial roundwood removals accounts for only about 4.7 percent, whereas its share in the value of fuelwood removal is about 22 percent. In fact, fuelwood value represented almost 35 percent of the total value of wood removals in 2005, although this proportion has been declining since 1990. No other region has recorded such a high share for the value of fuelwood removals in the total value of all wood removed.

The overall contribution of the forest sector to gross domestic product (GDP) registered a marginal increase from about US\$7.3 billion in 1990 to about US\$7.7 billion in 2000 (Figure 8). However, the forest sector share of total GDP has been declining over time, from about 1.7 percent in 1990 to about 1.5 percent in 2000. This decline is largely a result of the faster growth of other sectors, increasing GDP, while forestry's value added has not increased significantly. Within the forest sector, value added in the wood-processing and pulp-and-paper subsectors has remained more or less the same, and roundwood production (which includes industrial roundwood and fuelwood) accounts for almost 57 percent of value added.

This is in contrast to the global situation, where wood processing and pulp and paper together account for almost 78 percent of the value added, while the share of roundwood production is only about 22 percent. Africa's share of the forest-sector value added is about 2.2 percent of the global total. Its shares of value added in the wood-industries and pulp-and-paper subsectors are about 1.3 and

FIGURE 8 Trends in value added in the forest sector, 1990–2000



1.1 percent, respectively, while roundwood production is about 5.7 percent of the global value.

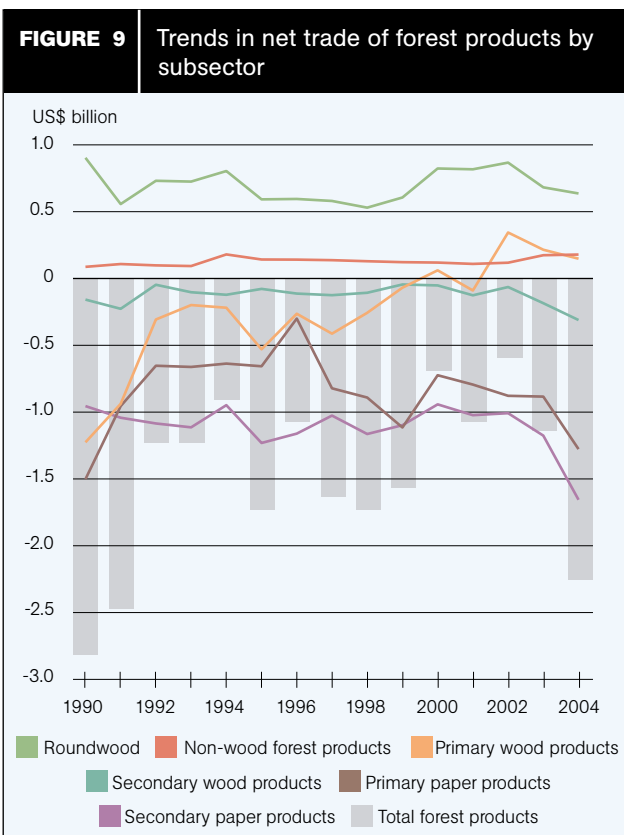
There are many countries in which the development of competitive wood-processing and pulp-and-paper subsectors has led to a high share in value added from the forest sector, although the value added generated in wood production is extremely low. This offers an important lesson – possession of a large tract of forests and increased wood production are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for the existence of a vibrant forest industry. Increasingly, natural advantage (for example, the existence of vast tracts of forests) is being replaced by competitive advantage (Figures 9 and 10).

Employment in the formal forest sector in Africa increased from about 520 000 persons in 1990 to about 550 000 in 2000 (Figure 11). This increase is largely attributable to growth in employment in wood processing, which on average accounted for 60 percent of employment. However, following a significant increase from 1992 to 1995, there was an apparent decline in the late 1990s.

While there has been some growth in employment in the formal forest sector, the share of forestry in total employment has declined marginally from about 0.20 percent in 1990 to 0.16 percent in 2000.

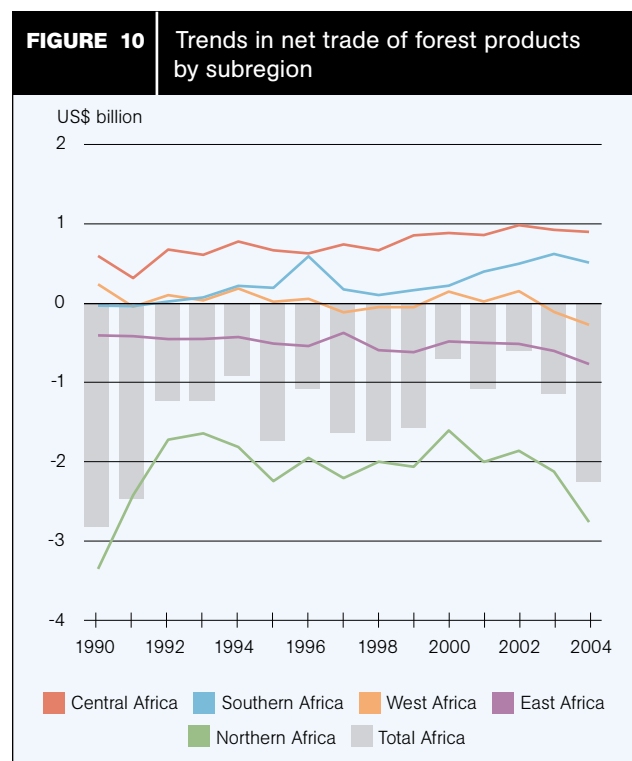
A problem in assessing the socio-economic significance of the forest sector in Africa is the scarcity of data on production and employment in the informal sector. Microlevel studies suggest that the informal sector is predominant, but national statistics on income and employment emphasize the formal sector. Significant shares of wood production (particularly fuelwood) and processing (for example, pit-sawing, charcoal production, collection and trade of NWFPs) take place in the informal sector, and thus no national statistics are available. In some countries in the region, in particular in West and Central Africa, bushmeat is the most important single source of protein in the diet; yet this important NWFP is not usually reflected in official statistics.

The importance of the informal sector also raises some significant issues for progress towards sustainable forest management. Since those who operate in the informal sector often have no rights over the land and forests, most collection of wood and other products is “illegal” in the existing legal framework of most countries. In the context of ill-defined rights, there is little incentive to manage resources sustainably. Further, most of those dependent on the informal sector are poor, without the necessary resources to practise such



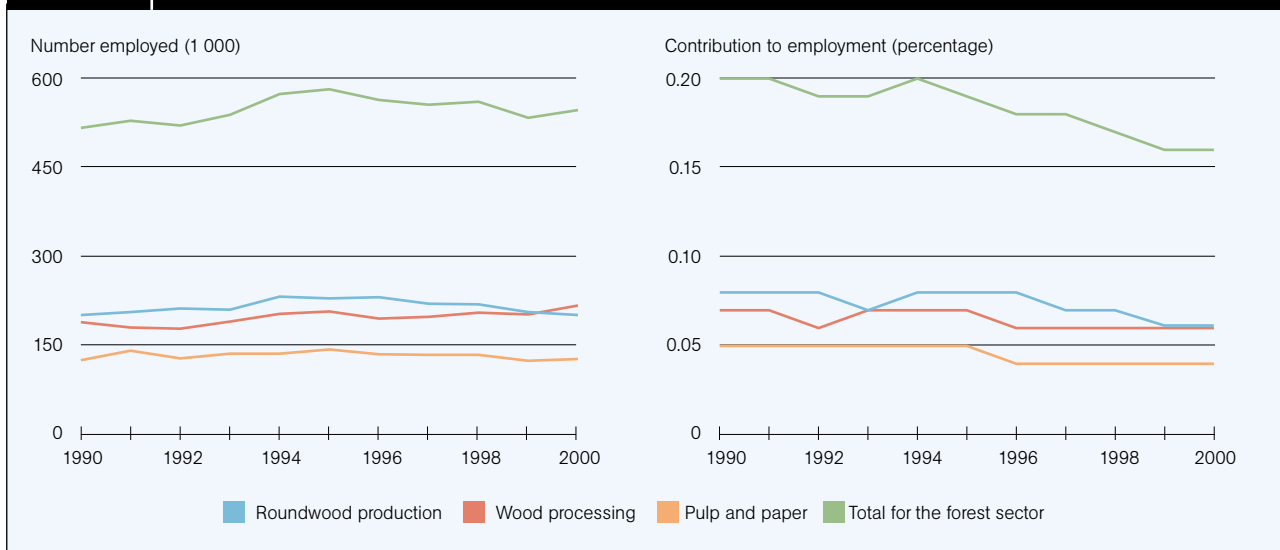
NOTES: A positive value indicates net export. A negative value indicates net import. Primary wood products include roundwood, sawnwood, wood-based panels and wood chips. Secondary wood products include wooden furniture, builders' joinery and carpentry. Primary paper products include pulp, paper and paperboard. Secondary paper products include packaging cartons, boxes and printed articles, including books and newspapers.

SOURCES: FAO, 2006b; United Nations, 2006.



NOTE: A positive value indicates net export. A negative value indicates net import.

FIGURE 11 Employment in the formal forest sector



management. This would suggest that improvements in the functioning of the informal sector are needed in order to make progress towards sustainable forest management.

LEGAL, POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

During the past decade, more than half the countries in Africa have developed or have been developing a new forest policy. The general trend is towards more sustainable, decentralized forest management, including enhanced access and management rights for local people and communities and the strengthening of private-sector investment. Several countries have made poverty alleviation a focus of their forest policy. In a few cases, forestry is considered in the national poverty reduction strategy. About two-thirds of the countries also have an active national forest programme in various stages of implementation, and 21 have established partnerships with the National Forest Programme Facility.

The implementation of new policies has been affected by obstacles: inadequate political support to the forest sector; weak capacity to implement processes that are participatory and involve cross-sectoral issues; and limited ability to mobilize external and internal financial resources to support key strategic actions.

Significant reforms of forest laws have taken place in many African countries. Since 1992, more than half the countries have developed new forestry laws or codes. While these vary in terms of their approaches and the depth to which they address particular issues, in general they evidence a broad trend towards:

- strengthening forest management planning;
- promoting sustainable forest management;

- strengthening the potential for community and private-sector forest management, including decentralization of responsibilities with greater local involvement; and
- recognition of environmental and biodiversity concerns, including forest protection.

Despite progress in improving forestry legislation, implementation and law enforcement remain weak in most countries. New legal provisions have been enacted in countries with political instability and weak political will, fragile civil society organizations, lack of administrative capacity and unfavourable local and national economies.

While new forest laws in some countries include provisions to transfer utilization and management rights to private individuals or communities, public administrations still play a dominant role in virtually every country in Africa. In many countries, national forestry agencies lack the means and capacity to fulfil the duties assigned by law.

At least one-third of the countries in Africa have undergone structural reforms of their forestry administrations in the past decade. In some countries, forestry departments were transferred to newly created environment ministries. There have been institutional reforms that included decentralization of management authority for forest resources and/or devolution of management rights to local people and the private sector. Implementation remains weak in many countries, and high rates of mortality from HIV/AIDS and other diseases have adversely affected institutions.

A number of countries have restructured their national agricultural research systems, including forest research. The prevailing trend is regionalization of agricultural research within countries, with regional programmes undertaken by multidisciplinary research teams. While justified and positive in many aspects in principle, this restructuring may, in fact, weaken national capacity in

forest research by spreading limited national expertise too thinly. In some countries, coordination of such research at national and regional levels is not satisfactory. Government and donor funding of forest research has been declining over the past decade.

Forestry educational institutions in Africa vary widely in terms of funding support, number of graduates and quality of curricula. According to a survey in sub-Saharan countries (FAO, 2005a), forestry educational institutions from nine countries indicated that funding was intermittent, declining and came largely from national resources. Graduation at the forestry certificate level has dropped drastically, mainly because of low enrolment and the closure of certificate programmes. In general, forestry education needs are not properly identified, and plans are poorly articulated. Forestry authorities, the private sector and educational institutions need to engage in multipartner dialogue to improve forestry education planning. Several networks for forestry education have emerged, such as the African Network on Agroforestry Education (ANAFE) and a network of forestry and environmental education institutes in the Central African subregion, Réseau des institutions de formation forestière et environnementale d'Afrique centrale (RIFEAC).

A particularly positive development is the growth of regional cooperation at the policy level to address forest issues – through initiatives such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Conference of Ministers in Charge of Forests in Central Africa (COMIFAC) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Leaders in many African countries have demonstrated political commitment to support sustainable forest management through forestry laws, policies and national forest programmes. Weak capacity and inadequate resources continue to hamper efforts to implement these reforms effectively in many countries. Nonetheless, in this thematic element it can be concluded that significant progress is being made to establish a framework for sustainable forest management on which the other thematic elements can build.

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

Progress towards sustainable forest management in Africa is slow and uneven. The legal and policy environment is improving in many countries, as evidenced by political commitment at the highest levels, by the development of national forest programmes throughout the region, and by progressive new forestry legislation in many countries. Regional partnerships such as NEPAD and COMIFAC provide a solid framework for action. However, the

investment in forestry remains far below what is required, and the capacity to enforce laws and to implement programmes effectively remains weak in most countries. Some key concerns are summarized:

- Although the rate of forest cover loss is slowing slightly, on the whole the rate remains high. The extent of other wooded land is also declining.
- Afforestation and reforestation efforts fall short of compensating for the loss of natural forests. Most of these efforts are in countries with low forest cover (especially in Northern Africa).
- The area of primary forests in Africa is declining, but there has been some increase in the extent of area designated primarily for the conservation of biological diversity.
- The lack of reliable and consistent data over a sufficiently long period prevents any meaningful conclusion on the state of forest health and vitality.
- The total area designated primarily for protection has declined over the years, even though the percentage of protected forest has increased in some countries. There has been an increase in the extent of protective forest plantations, although much of this, again, is in Northern Africa, and consists primarily of countries with low forest cover.
- The value of wood removals has increased, but fuelwood still accounts for a larger share than in other regions. Official reports do not reflect actual removals, in view of the predominance of the informal sector. It is not likely that sustainable forest management will be achieved without taking action to address many of the issues contributing to a strong informal sector, including poverty and land tenure.
- Because the informal sector is absent from national economic statistics, the importance of forestry in the region is strongly understated in many official studies. In particular, the forest sector should be a key component of national efforts to reduce poverty.
- Perhaps the most positive trend is that most African countries have made legal, policy and institutional changes. However, the ability of institutions to implement sustainable forest management is limited, owing largely to the overall unfavourable social and economic situation.
- Information and communication on forest-sector issues remain weak and will require new approaches at the national level to open communication, reliable monitoring systems and sharing of information and experiences.

Overall, progress towards sustainable forest management in Africa is uneven. In comparison with most other regions, Africa lags behind. The challenge is to build on the positive trends and to take effective action to halt the most serious negative ones.