

REGIONAL ISSUES - AFRICA

G L O B A L E N V I R O N M E N T O U T L O O K

The fourth *Global Environment Outlook – environment for development (GEO-4)* assessment report is published in 2007, exactly two decades since the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) published its seminal report – *Our Common Future* – which placed sustainable development on the agenda of governments and other stakeholders. *GEO-4* is the most comprehensive UN report on the environment prepared by about 390 experts and reviewed by more than 1 000 others across the world.

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Since 1987, several major regional developments including political reforms, institution-building and the development of new policies have resulted in significant changes in the way environmental issues are managed in Africa to promote sustainable development. The Environment Action Plan (EAP) under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) framework is Africa's most recent regional environmental policy.

Land resources: endowments and opportunities

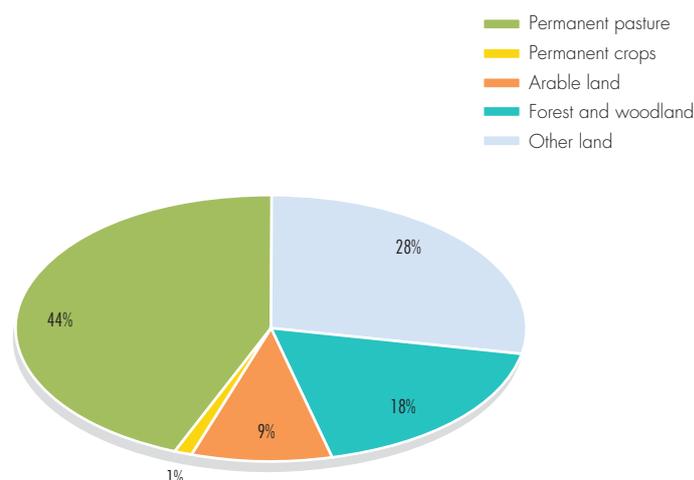
Africa's 53 countries are comprised of a variety of ecosystems, including forests and woodlands, drylands, grasslands, wetlands, arable lands, coastal zones, freshwater, mountain and urban areas. The 8.7 million km² of Africa's land considered suitable for agricultural production can potentially support the majority of the region's people.

Land is an environmental, social and economic asset that is critical to the realization of opportunities for the people of Africa. The main share of Africa's land uses include pasture (44 per cent), forest and woodlands (18 per cent) and cropland (10 per cent). Agriculture is the main use of land in Africa, and the biggest employer.

Africa's people also rely on fisheries for their food needs. Nearly 10 million people depend on fishing, fish farming, and fish processing and trade. The region produces 7.3 million tonnes of fish per year, 90 per cent of which is caught by small-scale fishers. In 2005, Africa's fish exports were worth US\$2.7 billion.

The region is endowed with different minerals, including 70 per cent of the world's diamonds, 55 per cent of its gold and at least 25 per cent of chromites.

Major land-use categories in Africa, 2002



Source: GEO Data Portal, compiled from FAOSTAT 2004

Land pressures

There have been major droughts occurring in the past two decades and notably in the years 1990-92 and 2004-2005. Due to a growing population, Africa faces declining per capita access to arable land even as the region struggles to increase food production per unit area. Per capita agricultural production has declined by 0.4 per cent between 2000 and 2004. Land degradation exacerbates poor food production, increasing food insecurity.

Africa has the highest deforestation rate of the world's regions. The region loses an estimated 40 000 km², or 0.62 per cent of its forests annually, compared to the global average deforestation rate of 0.18 per cent. This, coupled with poor land tenure regimes, precipitate ineffective land-use planning and management. Overexploitation of the resource contributes to increased land degradation, salinization, pollution, soil erosion and conversion of fragile lands.



Christian Lambrechts

Soil erosion is now widespread in Africa, affecting food production and food security.

With 3.3 per cent annual growth in urban population between 2000 and 2005, Africa has the world's highest rate of urbanization. By 2005 an estimated 347 million people (38 per cent of Africans) were living in urban settlements.

Land degradation trends

By 1990, land degradation affected an estimated 5 million km² of the continent. In 1993, 65 per cent of agricultural land was degraded, including 3.2 million km² (25 per cent) of Africa's susceptible drylands (arid, semi-arid and dry sub-humid areas).

Soil erosion is now widespread in Africa which has led to reduced productivity. Many African farmers are forced to continuously use the same land because of population pressure, inequitable land ownership and poor land-use planning.

While irrigation could provide some of the impetus towards a Green Revolution in Africa, inefficient application could lead to land degradation. About 647 000 km², or 2.7 per cent of Africa's total land area is affected by salinization, representing over 26 per cent of the world's salinized land area.

Africa's drylands are unevenly distributed across the region, and some are even found in the usually wet tropical zones of Central and Eastern Africa. Across Africa, drylands occupy 43 per cent of the region.

*Sources and credits for the information presented here are available and fully referenced in the **Fourth Global Environment Outlook - environment for development** report.*

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