



Diversity II – Preliminary Dryland Products

Booklet for Test Site 13 Western Sahel



Team

European Space Agency

Project requirement definition; user interface; EO data provision; project control



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Prime contractor; project management; algorithms for preprocessing including atmospheric correction over land and lakes; software and production



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Drylands requirements analysis; algorithms for drylands; software and production



Brockmann Geomatics AB, Sweden

Biodiversity and user interface; algorithms for in-water retrieval and lake indicators; website, web GIS, communication and outreach



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Introduction

With the Diversity II project (<http://www.diversity2.info/>) ESA aims at contributing with EO based methods to the strategic goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), especially the supportive goal E: Enhance implementation through participatory planning, knowledge management and capacity building. Besides the CBD and other interested parties, also the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is a major relevant and interested stakeholder and participating in the User Requirement compilations. The specific aim of this project is to set up an EO-based monitoring scheme for assessment of status, changes and trends of biodiversity and ecosystem NPP (Net Primary Production) in global drylands using moderate resolution EO data. The project is based on Envisat MERIS data and comprises a period of analysis from 2002-2012. Figure 1 gives an overview of the dry land sites which have been selected in the Diversity II project.

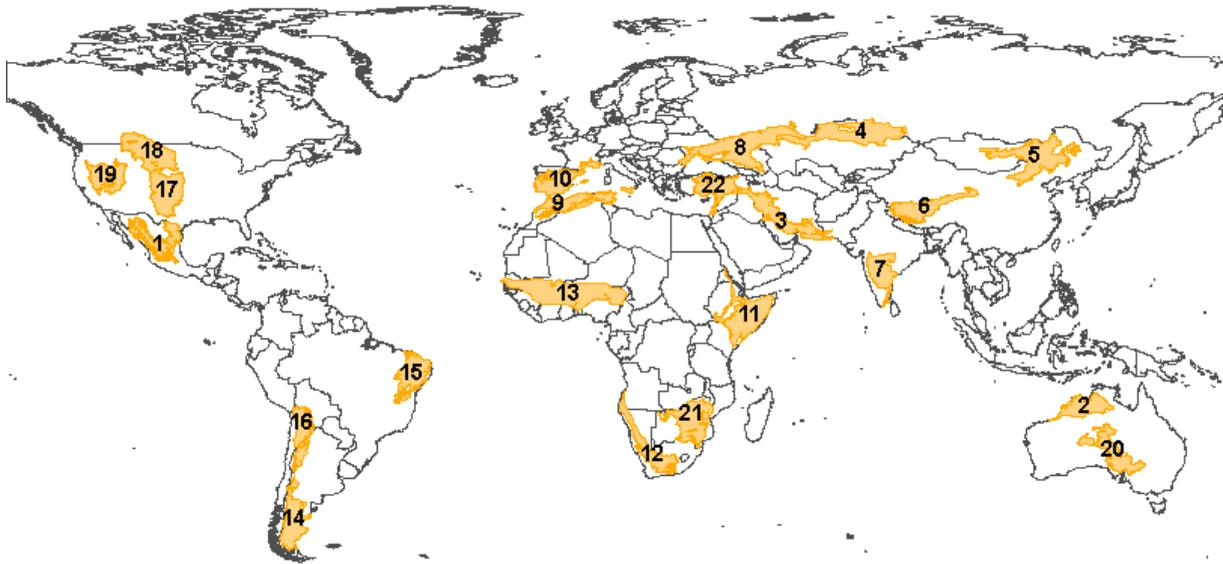


Figure 1: Distribution of global Diversity II dry land sites

Scope of the Preliminary Booklet

This booklet presents NPP proxy and Rain Use Efficiency (RUE) status, change and trend maps for study site 10, Southern Europe along with some basic background information. The booklet is in a preliminary stage and may be changed upon user request to include further or different results of the analyses. The booklets can be downloaded on <http://www.diversity2.info/testsites/ppd/>.

However, the focus of the booklet is on the most significant and important results of the studies, while complete documentations of methods, techniques and all results will be subject of the project reports. The presented maps can be downloaded via FTP (see page 10 for FTP access).

Up to now, only so-called “Level one” products are shown, i.e. descriptive maps of status and trends of NPP proxies and RUE. They will be supplemented with level-two products, which are currently under development and aim to present the results in more abstract and synthesised ways.

The booklet serves not only to present methods and results in a compact way to users, but also to elicit user feedback. At the end of the booklet (page 31), a short questionnaire is included, aiming at structuring the feedback along some general lines. However, for convenience we recommend to use the on-line questionnaire on <http://www.diversity2.info/testsites/ppd/uq/>.

Overview of Test Site

The map in Figure 2 presents an overview of the study site 13 in the Western part of Africa. The map on the left-hand side shows the GlobCover v. 2.3 2009 data, which were derived (<http://due.esrin.esa.int/globcover/>) based on ENVISAT MERIS FR (300m) reflectance data. The GlobCover map shows a pronounced gradient of vegetation cover type stretching from north to south. The northern parts of site 13 are characterized by closed to open grassland and mosaic cropland vegetation

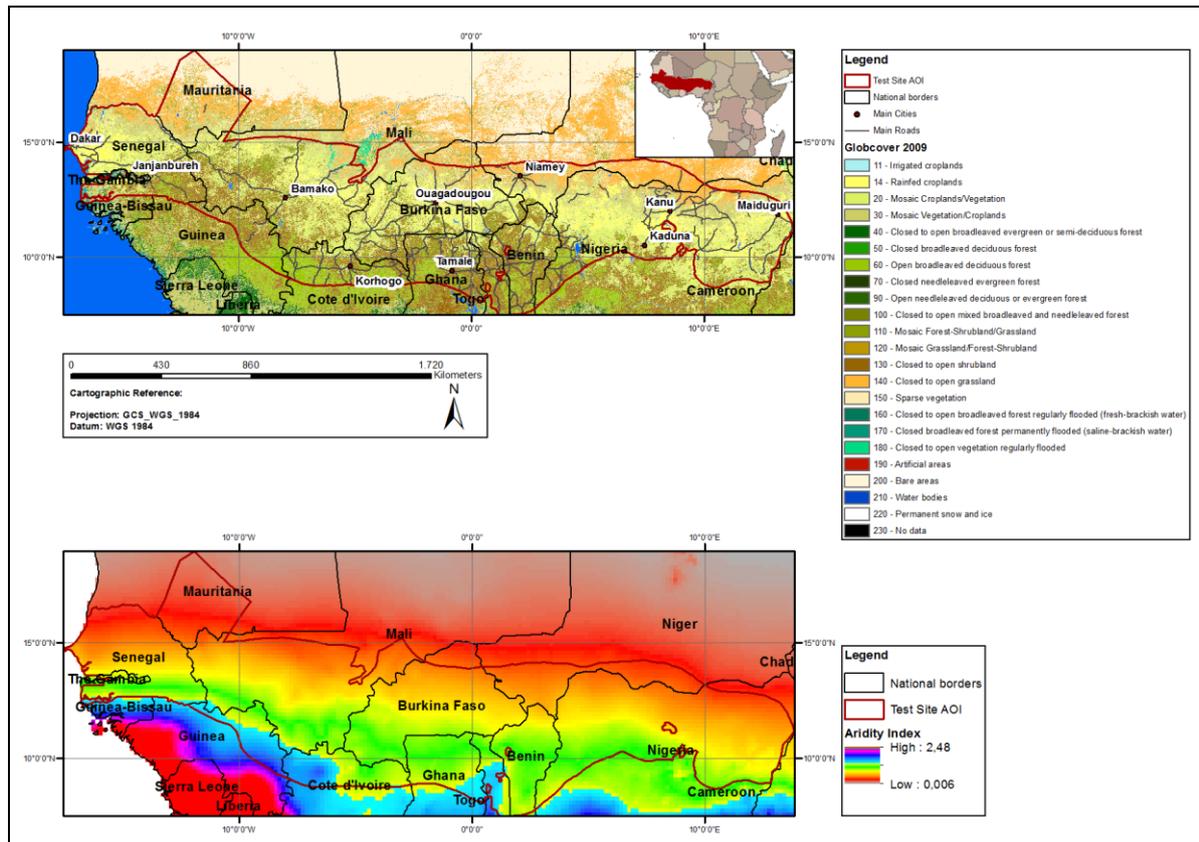


Figure 2: Overview of test site 13, West Sudanian Savanna, showing land cover from the GlobCover 2009 data set on the left-hand side and an aridity index map on the right-hand side derived from the CGIAR-CSI global aridity data base

Towards the south a shift in vegetation cover can be observed towards closed to open shrubland and open broadleaved deciduous forest. This pattern is generally following the aridity index derived from the CGIAR-CSI global aridity data base (Zomer et. al, 2007, Zomer et. al, 2008) which is depicted below the GlobCover map in Figure 2. The CGIAR-CSI global aridity index is computed as ratio of mean annual precipitation and mean annual potential evapotranspiration. Note that declining values indicate increasing aridity. Test site 13 comprises aridity values between 0,006 – 1.5 with the majority ranging between 0,02 and 0,5 (following the CGIAR-CSI classification scheme this corresponds to arid-hyperarid conditions).

Figure 3 shows two climographs of northern Senegal and south-western Niger, respectively. Both climographs exhibit a similar seasonal behavior with a summer precipitation peak. However, the precipitation pattern further in the West at the Senegal field station is characterized by a shorter time window and overall less annual rainfall.

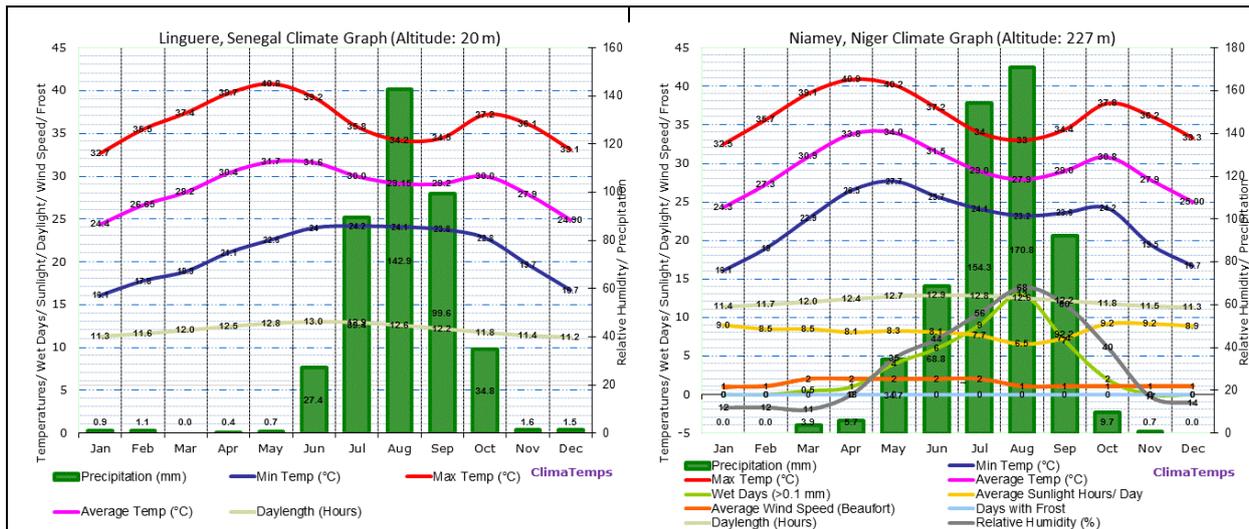


Figure 3: Climographs of Linguere (North Senegal) and Niamey (South West Niger), sources: <http://www.linguere.climatemps.com/graph.php>, <http://www.niamey.climatemps.com/graph.php>

Vegetation and Biophysical Time Series

The seasonal behaviour of the vegetation greenness and important water related parameters are shown in Figure 5. Figure 4 presents the locations of the time series data in all diagrams derived for test site 13, of which time series for location 18 and 19 are presented in Figure 5.

As NPP proxy the NOAA AVHRR GIMMS NDVI (http://gcmd.nasa.gov/records/GCMD_GLCF_GIMMS.html) were used, along with the corresponding rainfall (http://disc.sci.gsfc.nasa.gov/precipitation/documentation/TRMM_README/TRMM_3B42_readme.shtml), CCI soil moisture (<http://www.esa-soilmoisture-cci.org/>) and MODIS evapotranspiration (http://modis.gsfc.nasa.gov/data/dataproduct/dataproducts.php?MOD_NUMBER=16) time series data. All these global data sets are available on the internet free of charge.

The two diagrams shown give an impression of both the spatial and the temporal variability of rainfall and subsequently of soil moisture and vegetation. MODIS evapotranspiration follows this temporal pattern especially at location 19 that receives more rainfall than location 18 further east.

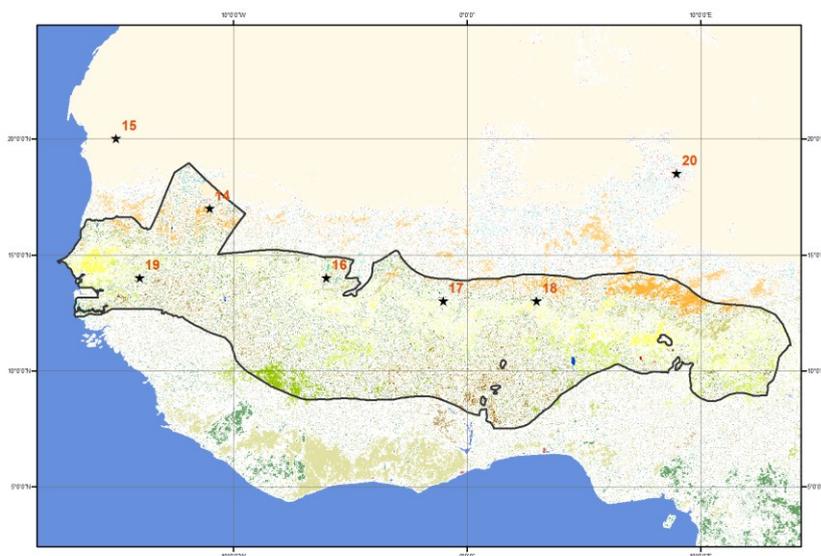


Figure 4: Locations of derived time series diagrams

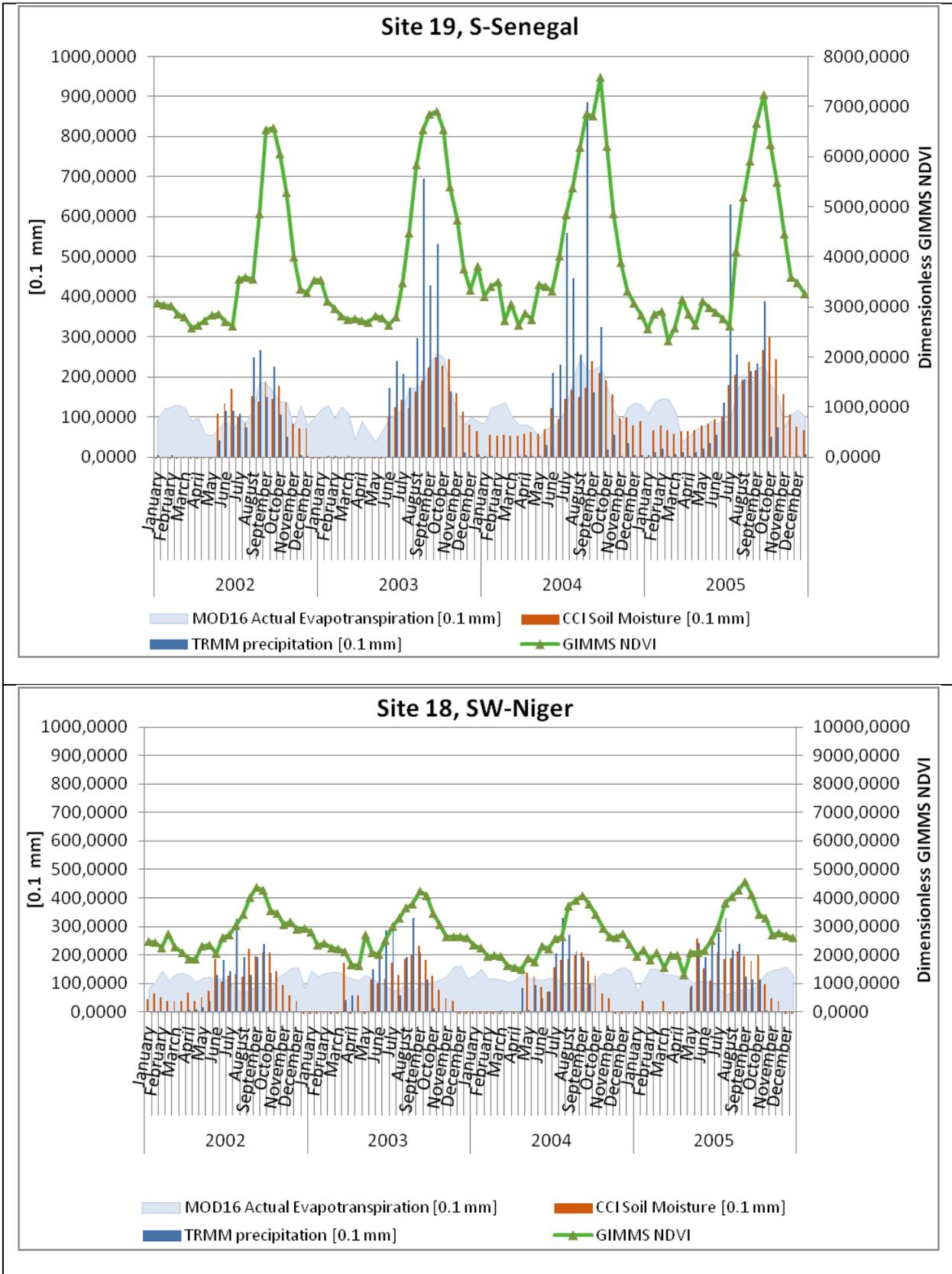


Figure 5: Time series diagrams for locations 19 and 18 in Figure 4

Underlying Data of the Generated Indicators

Based on ENVISAT MERIS FR (Full Resolution) data with a ground resolution of 300m, all NPP proxies presented here and the indicators derived therefrom originate from the fraction of absorbed photosynthetically active radiation (fAPAR) computed according to Gobron et al. 1999. The fAPAR values are compiled on a bi-weekly basis, resulting in time series data with 24 values per calendar year. In addition, TRMM 3b42 rainfall data were used to relate the productivity data to precipitation.

Generation of NPP-Proxies

In a first step, phenological descriptors and periods are derived individually for each year, as shown in Figure 6. The diagram in Figure 6 shows the temporal course of the NPP proxy data (here NOAA GIMMS NDVI) during a 3-years periods and the subdivision into different seasonal periods. The vegetation year includes the full yearly vegetation cycle starting at the end of the preceding dry season and ending at the end of the following dry season – or in case of several green seasons during a year – at or before the begin of the (statistically) dominant green season. The vegetation year length of a given year varies with possible shifts of the green season start time.

The **vegetation year** can be subdivided into different periods, limited by defined starting and ending points in time. The **growing season** includes ascending (green segment of the curve) and descending parts (brown part) and starts once a selected greenness threshold is surpassed on the way from the start of the vegetation year to the green peak. The brown part of the curve demarcates the **senescence period**, which ends again once a defined lower fAPAR threshold is passed. The thresholds depend on the ranges between the fAPAR minima before and after the green peak, respectively, and the peak fAPAR value. Here, 10 percent of these ranges added to the respective minima define the thresholds. The ochre part of the vegetation curve constitutes the **“dry season”**.

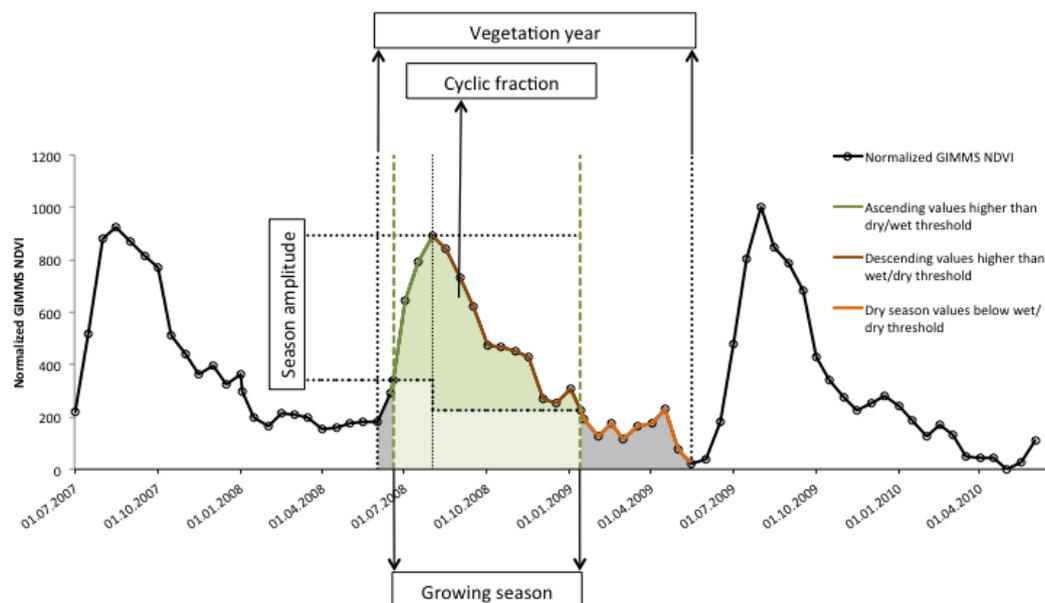


Figure 6: Scheme of the extracted phenological descriptors and periods . Note: the actual NPP proxies are derived based on MERIS fAPAR

For the above described phenological periods, the MERIS fAPAR values have been temporally integrated to either sum or average values, or in case of the season amplitude (figure 4), the

difference between the fAPAR at the start of the growing season and the peak fAPAR is taken. The results are called “**NPP proxies**”, and constitute yearly (one value per vegetation year) values. The indicator maps presented in this preliminary version of the booklet are based on the following NPP proxies:

- **Average vegetation year fAPAR:** Mean value of all fAPAR values within one full vegetation cycle, constituting a proxy for the annual NPP.
- **Cyclic fraction fAPAR:** The cyclic fraction of the vegetation comprises summed fAPAR values of the green peak(s) during a vegetation year, subtracting the non-cyclic base levels. The cyclic fraction fAPAR can be interpreted as the amount of NPP that is directly related to the annual cycle of the climatic vegetation growth factors, especially rainfall.
- **Average dry season fAPAR:** For the dry season the low fAPAR values after the green peak are taken, defined by a 10% amplitude threshold. The dry season greenness values reflect the portion of plants that remain green after senescence of the annual vegetation or grow new green leaves during the dry period. High dry season levels indicate the presence of shrubs, bushes and trees.

From Proxies to Indicators

By analyzing the annual NPP proxies and rainfall through time, a set of indicators for vegetation/ecosystem condition and change is derived. The indicators shown so far can be divided into status and trend type. Given the MERIS data period from June 2002 to March 2012 and the globally varying vegetation cycles, NPP proxy and Rain Use Efficiency indicators for a total of eight vegetation years could be extracted, starting in 2003/(2002) and ending in 2011/(2012).

Hence, the status and trend indicators cover worldwide eight vegetation years. Status indicators for this period include 8-year averages and the coefficients of variation. In addition, the 8-year period was subdivided into two epochs covering four vegetation years each. The corresponding epochal status maps and epochal difference maps are not shown in this booklet.

For the trend indicators, absolute and relative trends are shown. They were derived with the non parametric Theil Sen trend slope estimator (Theil 1950, Sen 1968) and limited with the Mann Kendall significance test (Kendall 1962) to trends with a probability greater than 0.95.

All indicator maps show distinct ranges of the original continuous values, using the same class intervals and colour scheme worldwide.

Maps of Indicators

The following section contains maps for the entire test site and surrounding regions for each indicator product. The first two maps of each item depict status and variability maps while the third and fourth map show absolute and relative trends maps, respectively. An exception is the rainfall maps, where instead of the relative trend the difference between the two epochs (2002 – 2006 and 2007 – 2011, respectively) is shown. The maps are described with short product specifications.

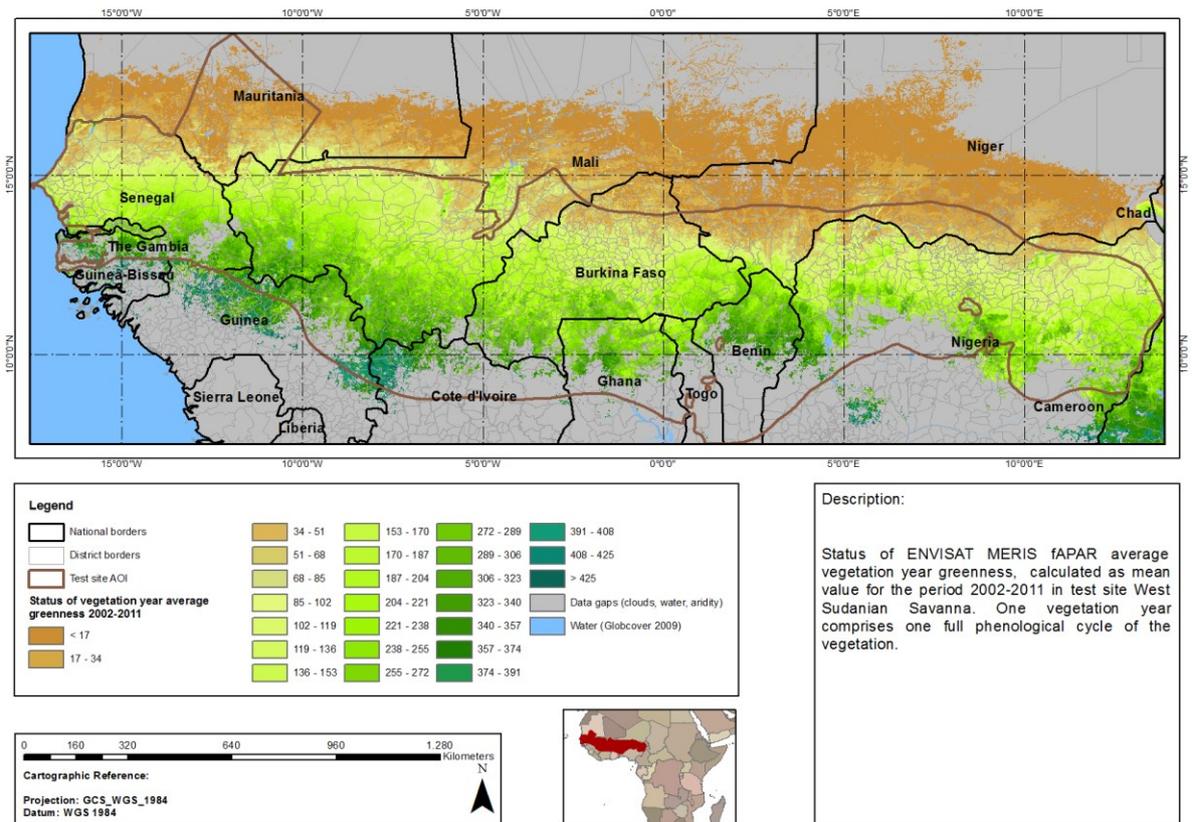
They can be downloaded from:

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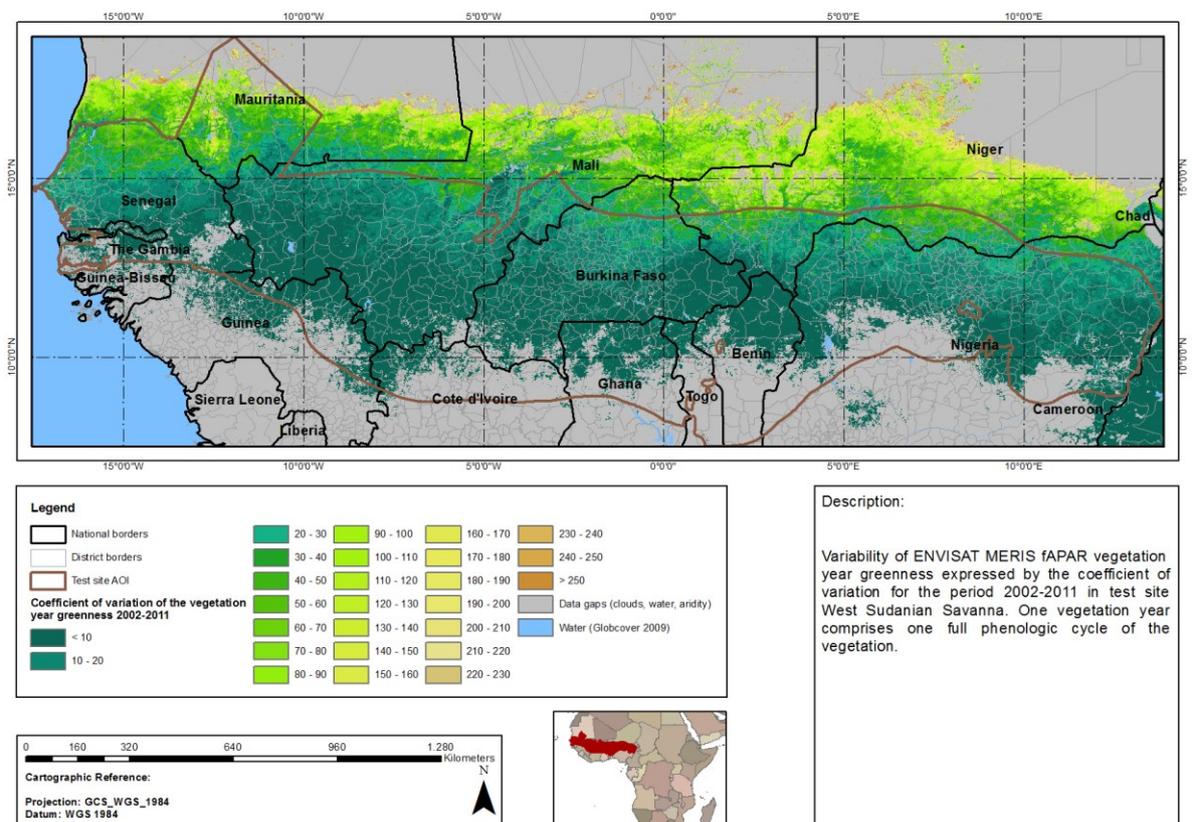
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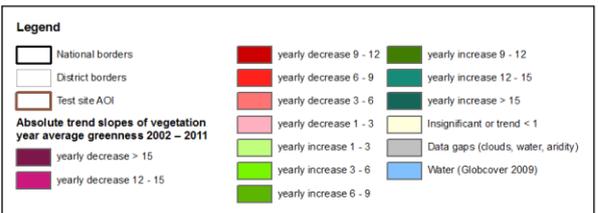
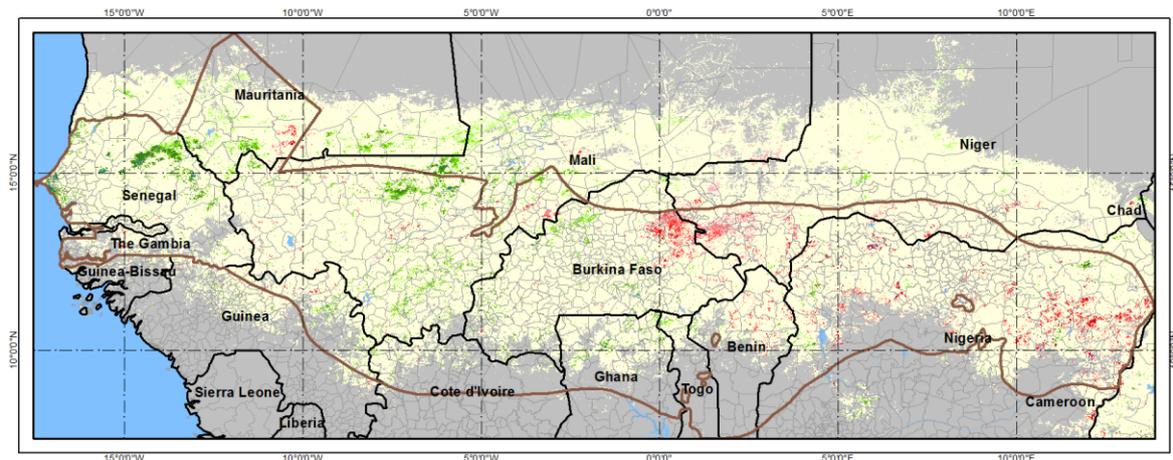
Average Vegetation Year Greenness



Vegetation Year Variability



Vegetation Year Greenness Trend (abs.)



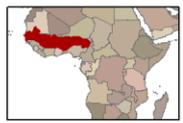
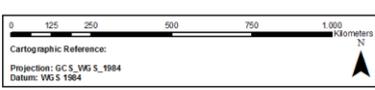
Description:

Slopes of absolute trends of ENVISAT MERIS fAPAR vegetation year averages in test site West Sudanian Savanna throughout the period 2002-2011. One vegetation year comprises one full phenological cycle of the vegetation and hence constitutes a proxy for the overall annual NPP. The vegetation year is defined to start at the onset of vegetation greening following first rainfalls and last until the end of the dry season. The actual start of each vegetation year is individually determined for each year.

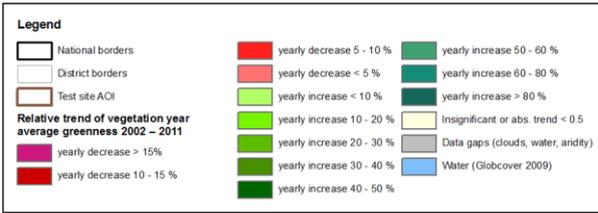
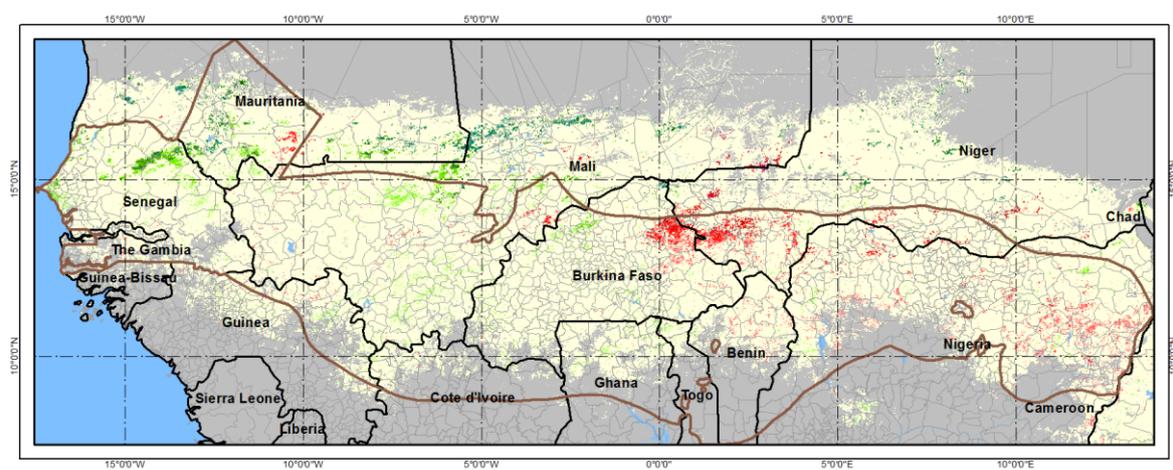
Trends are calculated using the median trend estimator after Theil (1950) and Sen (1968). Only significant trends ($p < 0.05$) are depicted based on the trend test on significance according to Mann (1945) and Kendall (1975).

Trend values indicate average change per year. Original fAPAR values reach from 0 to 1 and have been stretched from 0 to 1000.

Data gaps in the time series resulting from cloud cover, a too pronounced aridity or water bodies have been masked out.



Vegetation Year Greenness Trend (rel.)

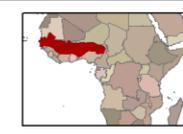
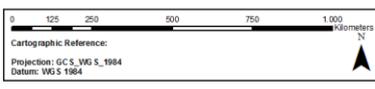


Description:

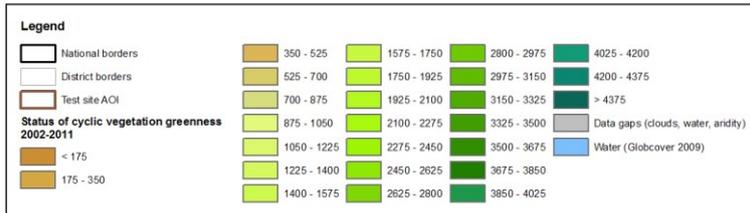
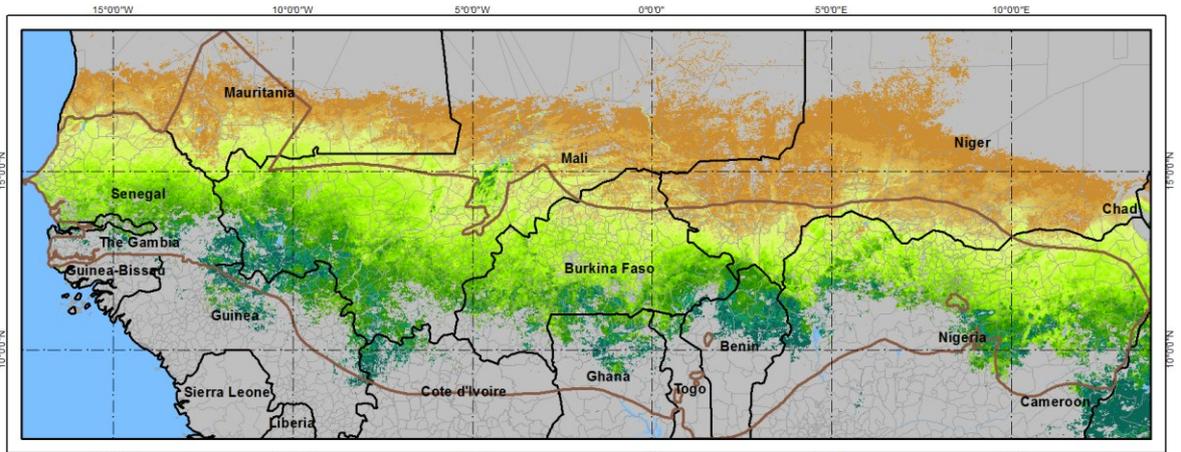
Relative yearly changes of ENVISAT MERIS fAPAR vegetation year averages in test site West Sudanian Savanna throughout the period 2002-2011. One vegetation year comprises one full phenological cycle of the vegetation and hence constitutes a proxy for the overall annual NPP. The vegetation year is defined to start at the onset of vegetation greening following first rainfalls and last until the end of the dry season. The actual start of each vegetation year is individually determined for each year.

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Data gaps in the time series resulting from cloud cover, a too pronounced aridity or water bodies have been masked out from the analysis.

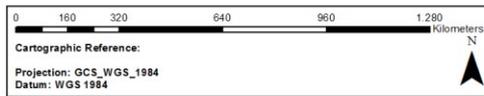


Cyclic Vegetation Greenness

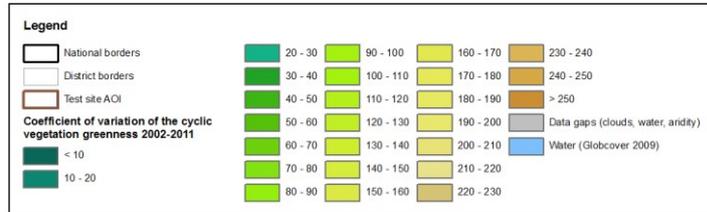
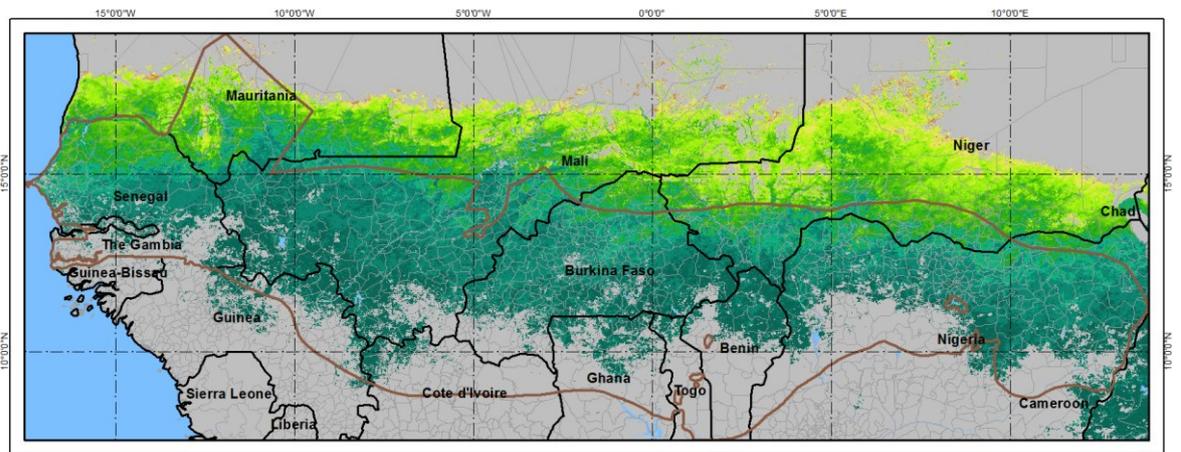


Description:

Status of ENVISAT MERIS fAPAR cyclic vegetation greenness calculated as mean value for the period 2002-2011 in test site West Sudanian Savanna. The cyclic fraction of the vegetation comprises summed fAPAR values of the green peak(s) during a vegetation year, subtracting the non-cyclic base levels.

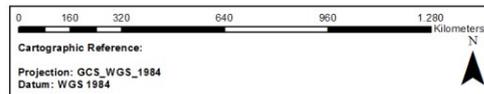


Cyclic Vegetation Variability

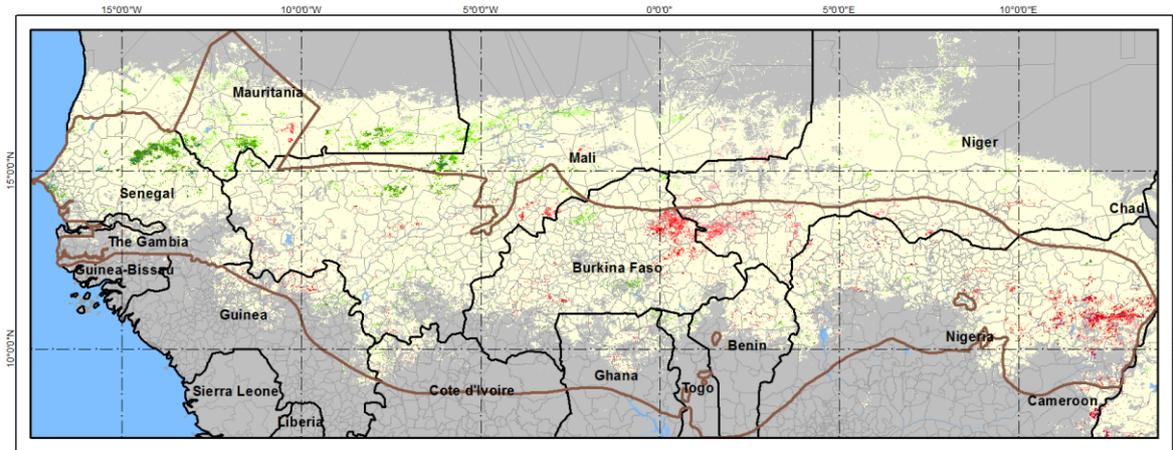


Description:

Variability of ENVISAT MERIS fAPAR cyclic vegetation greenness expressed by the coefficient of variation for the period 2002-2011 in test site West Sudanian Savanna. The cyclic fraction of the vegetation comprises summed fAPAR values of the green peak(s) during a vegetation year, subtracting the non-cyclic base levels.



Cyclic Vegetation Greenness Trend (abs.)



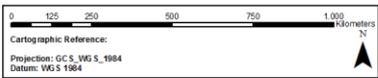
Description:

Slopes of absolute trends of ENVISAT MERIS fAPAR "cyclic fraction" values in test site West Sudanian Savanna throughout the period 2002-2011. The cyclic fraction of the vegetation comprises summed fAPAR values of the green peak(s) during a vegetation year, subtracting the non-cyclic base levels. The cyclic fraction fAPAR can be interpreted as the amount of NPP being directly related to the annual cycle of the climatic vegetation growth factors, especially rainfall.

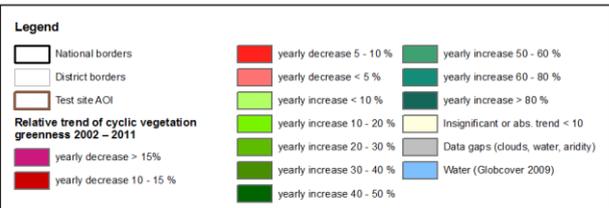
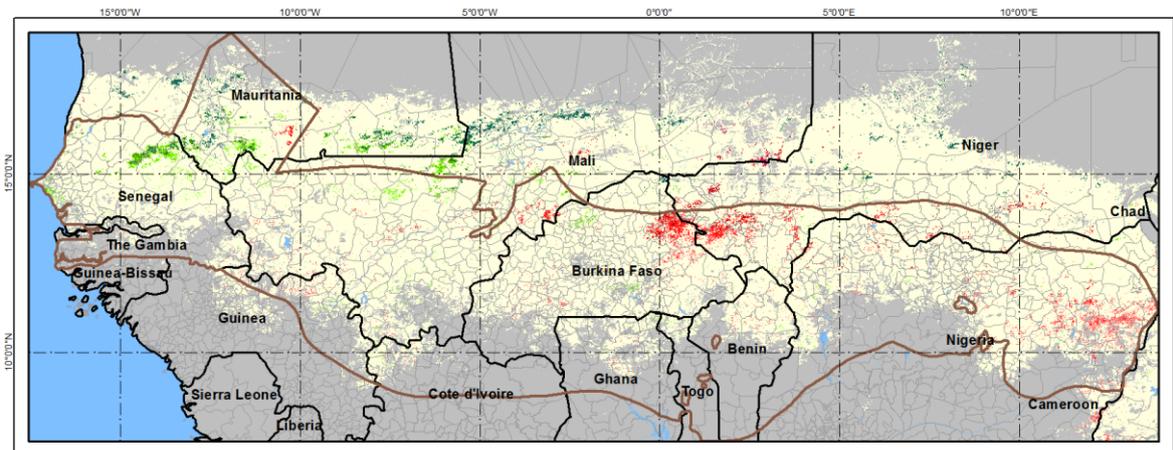
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Trend values indicate average change per year. Original fAPAR values reach from 0 to 1 and have been stretched from 0 to 1000.

Data gaps in the time series resulting from cloud cover, a too pronounced aridity or water bodies have been masked out from the analysis.



Cyclic Vegetation Greenness Trend (rel.)

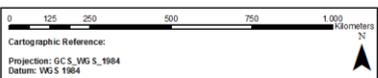


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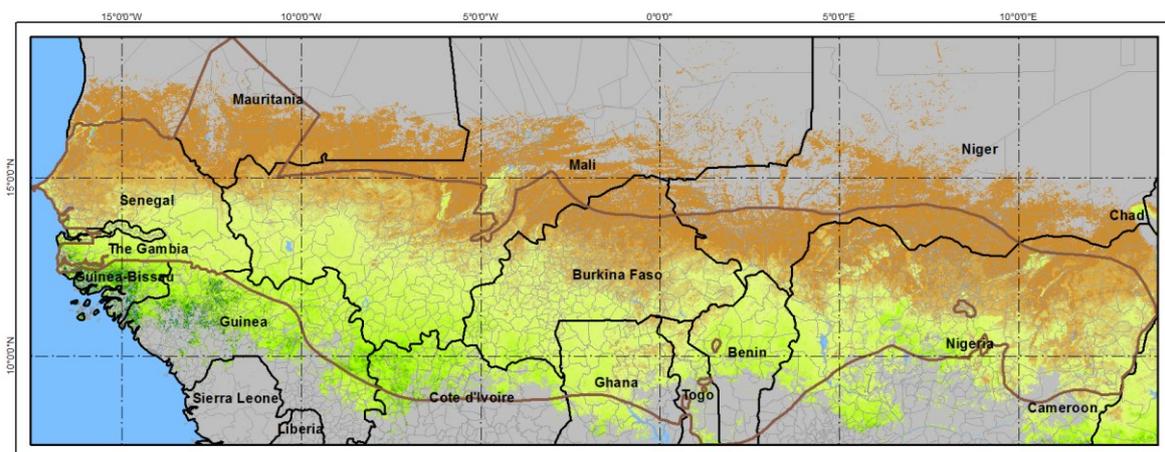
Relative yearly changes of ENVISAT MERIS fAPAR "cyclic fraction" values in test site West Sudanian Savanna throughout the period 2002-2011. The cyclic fraction of the vegetation comprises summed fAPAR values of the green peak(s) during a vegetation year, subtracting the non-cyclic base levels. The cyclic fraction fAPAR can be interpreted as the amount of NPP being directly related to the annual cycle of the climatic vegetation growth factors, especially rainfall.

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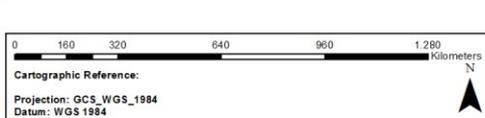


Dry Season Greenness

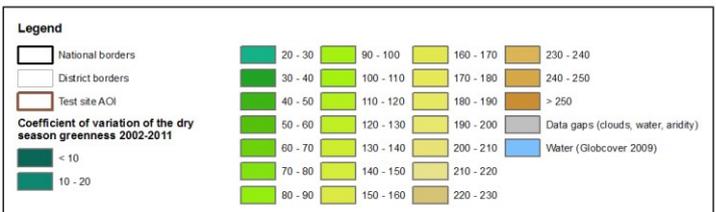
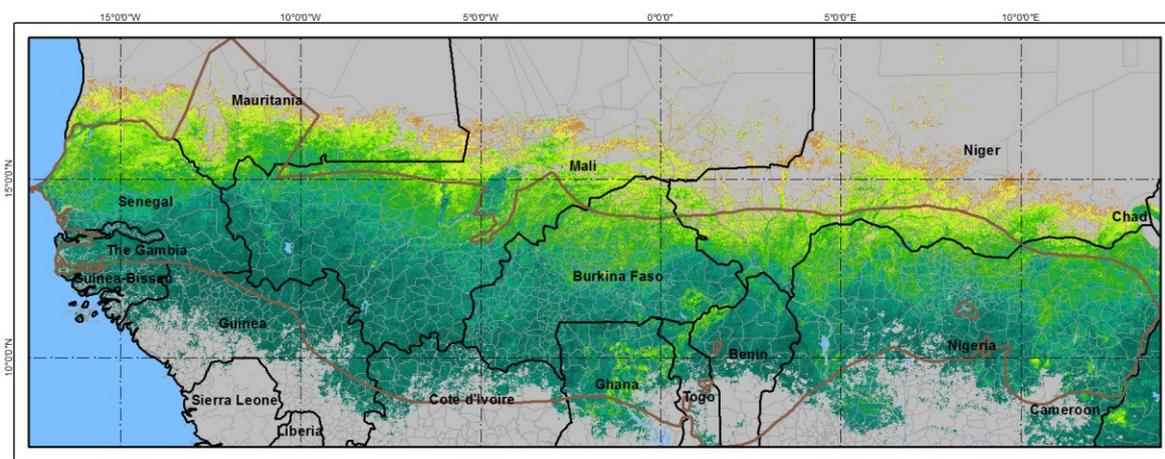


Description:

Status of ENVISAT MERIS fAPAR dry season greenness calculated as mean value for the period 2002-2011 in test site West Sudanian Savanna. The dry season greenness values reflect the portion of plants that remain green after senescence of the annual vegetation or grow new green leaves during the dry period.

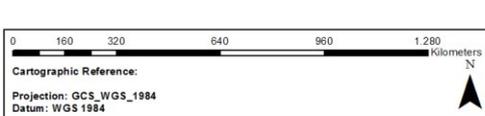


Dry Season Variability

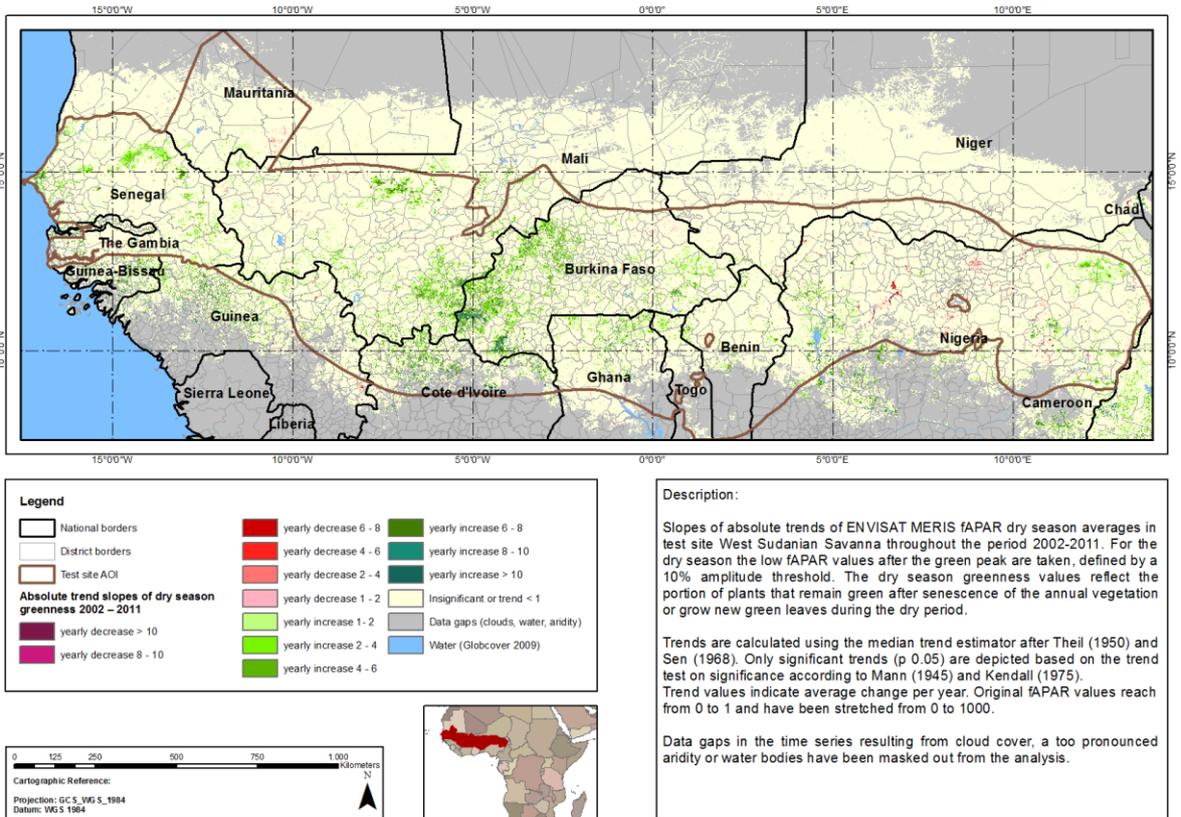


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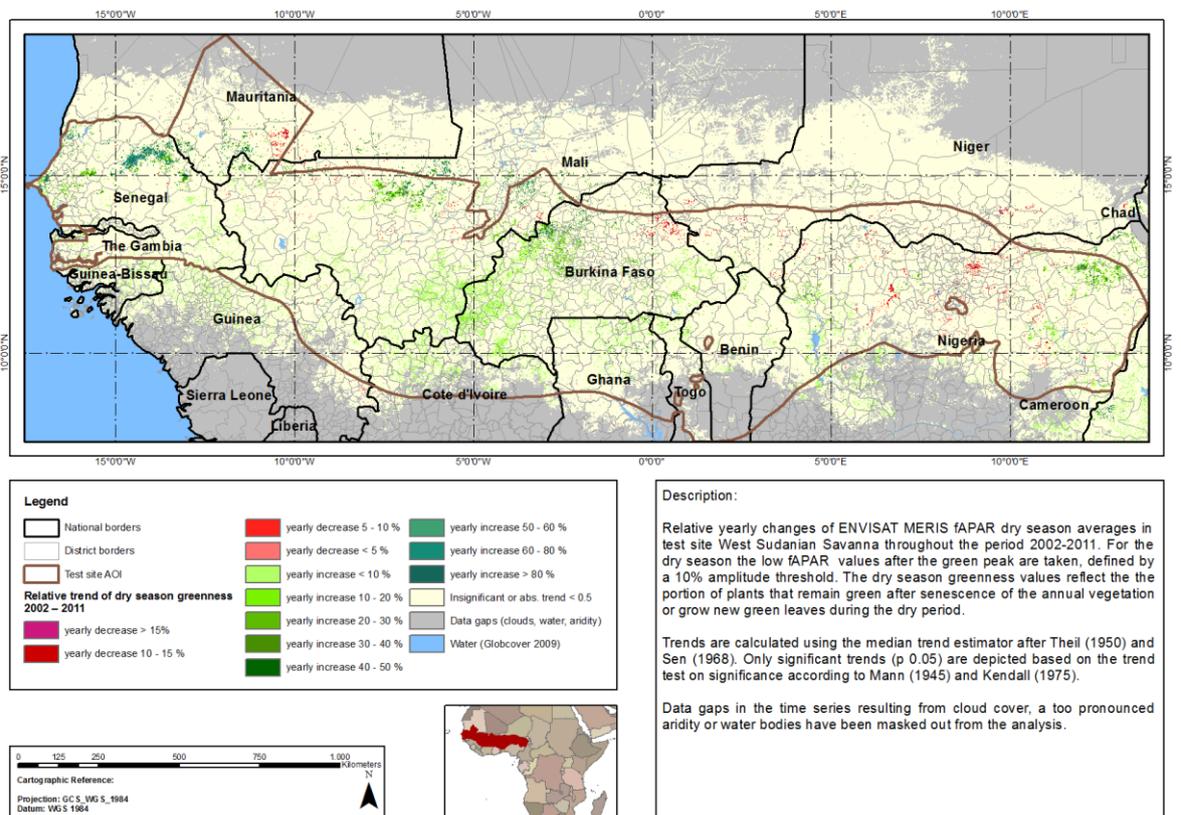
Variability of ENVISAT MERIS fAPAR dry season greenness expressed by the coefficient of variation for the period 2002-2011 in test site West Sudanian Savanna. The dry season greenness values reflect the portion of plants that remain green after senescence of the annual vegetation or grow new green leaves during the dry period.



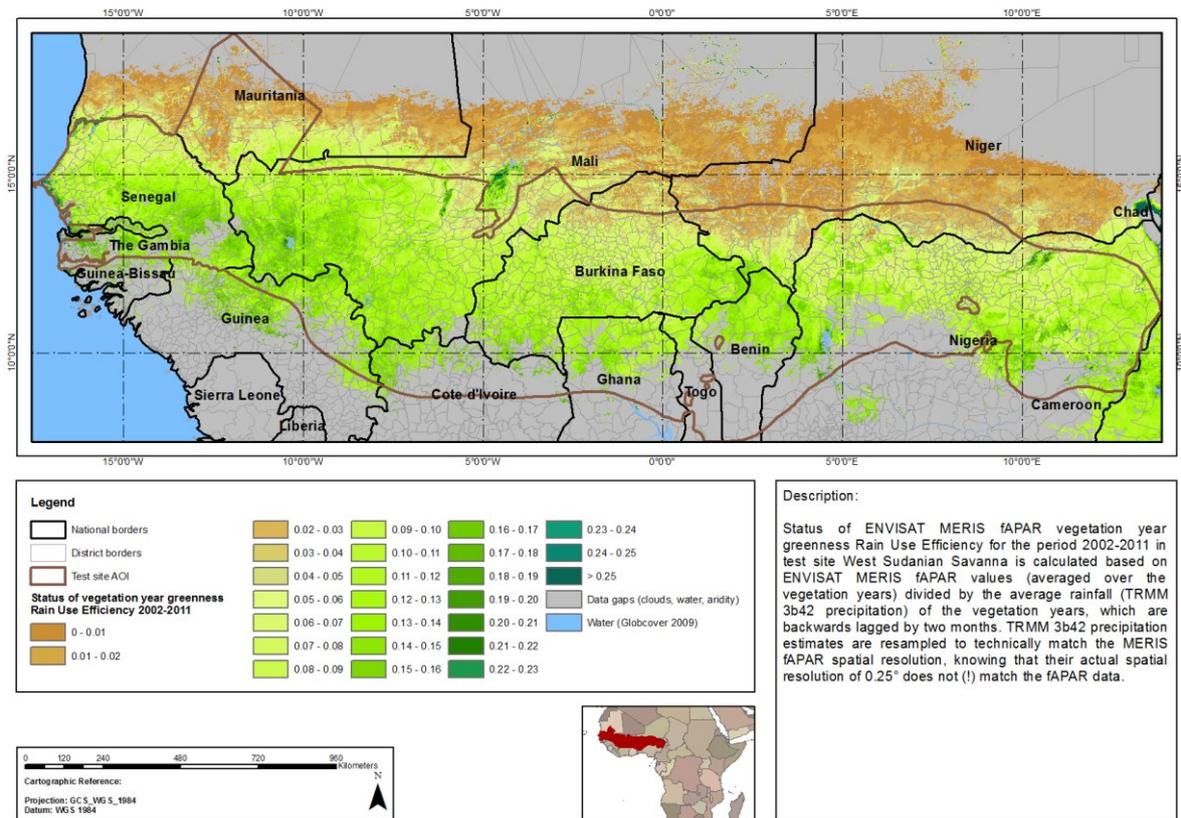
Dry Season Greenness Trend (abs.)



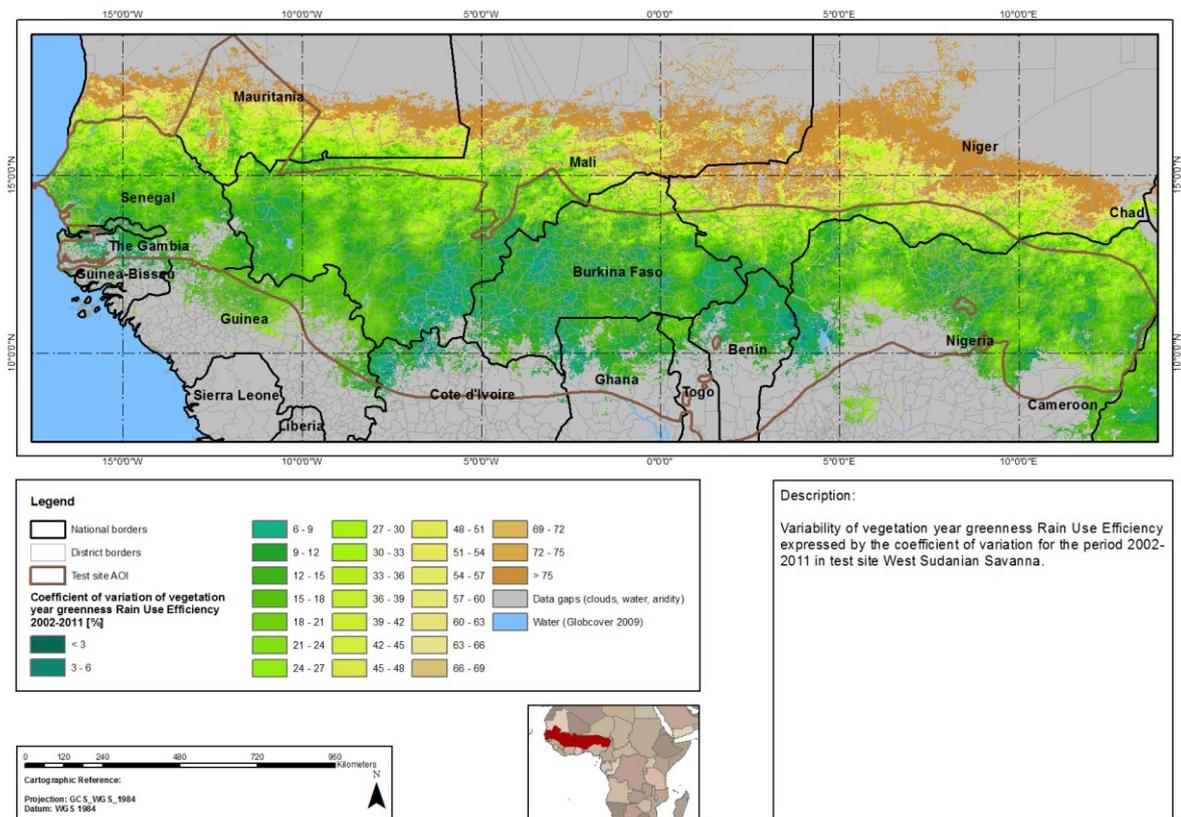
Dry Season Greenness Trend (rel.)



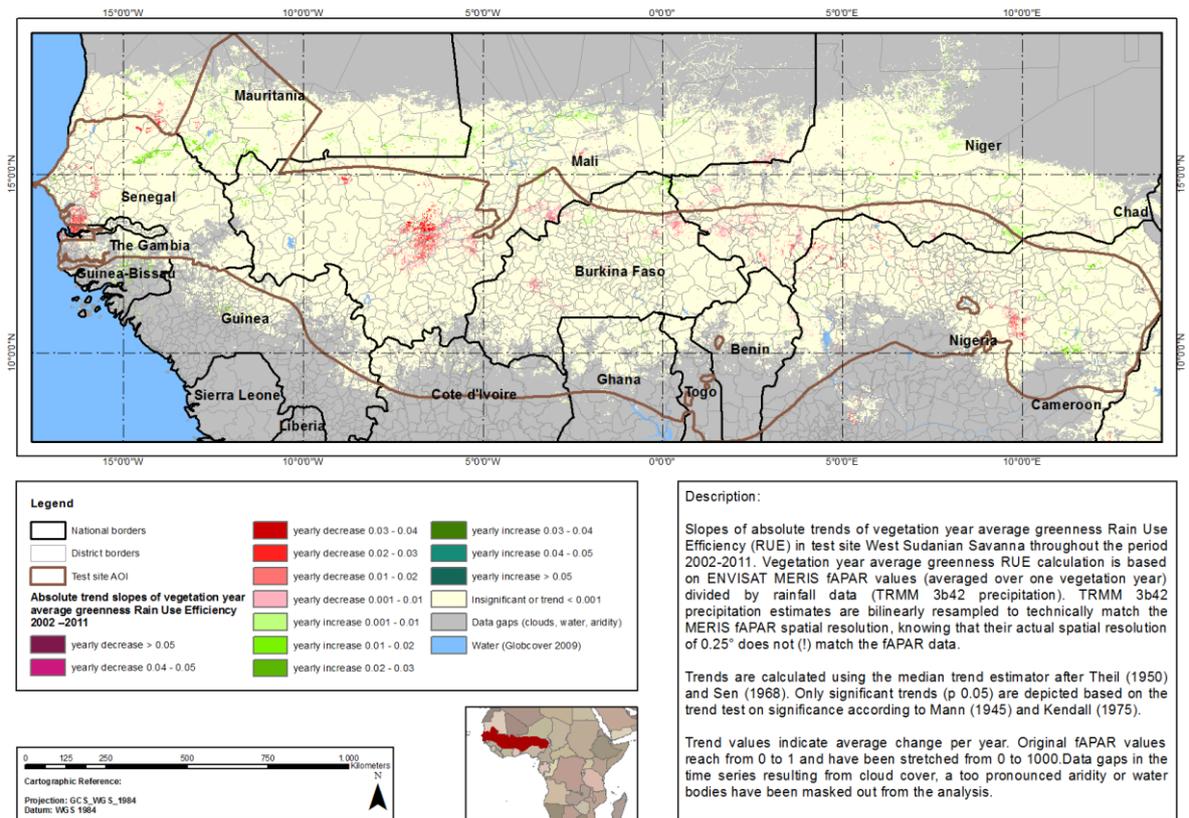
Average Vegetation Year Rain Use Efficiency Status



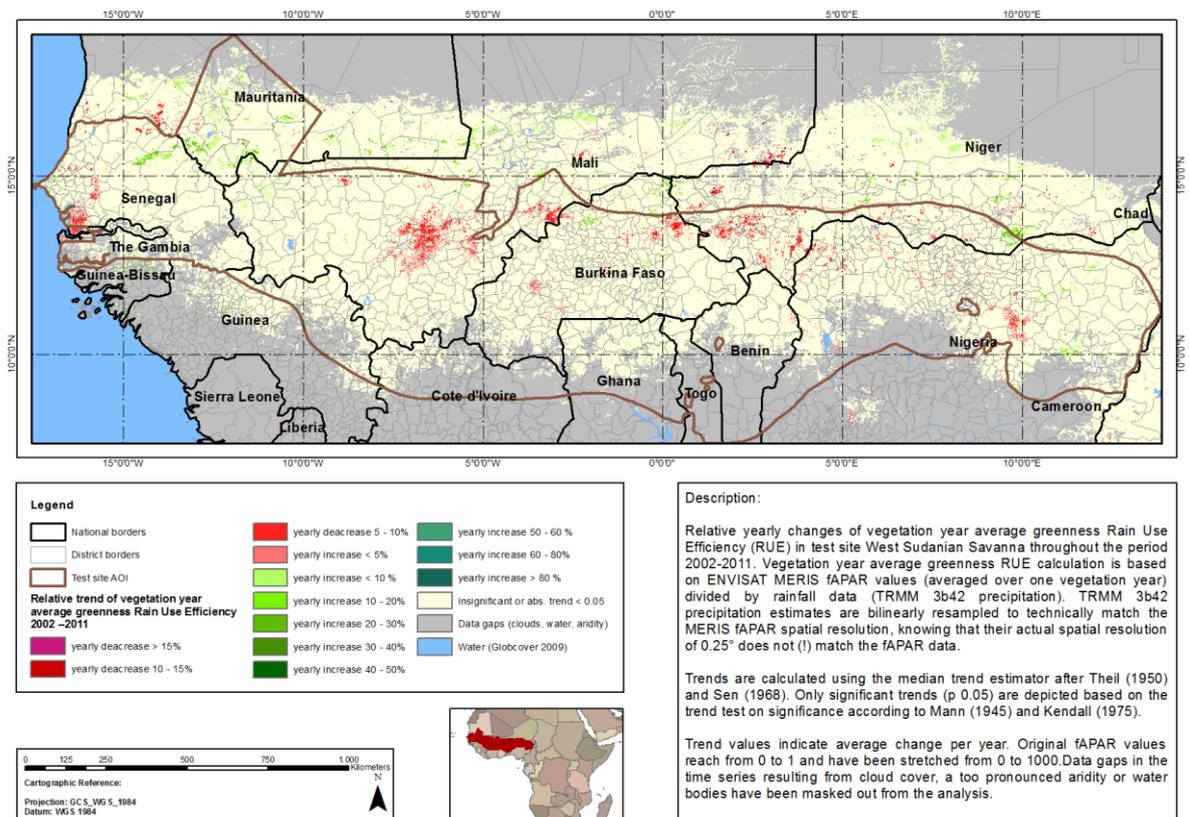
Vegetation Year Rain Use Efficiency Variability



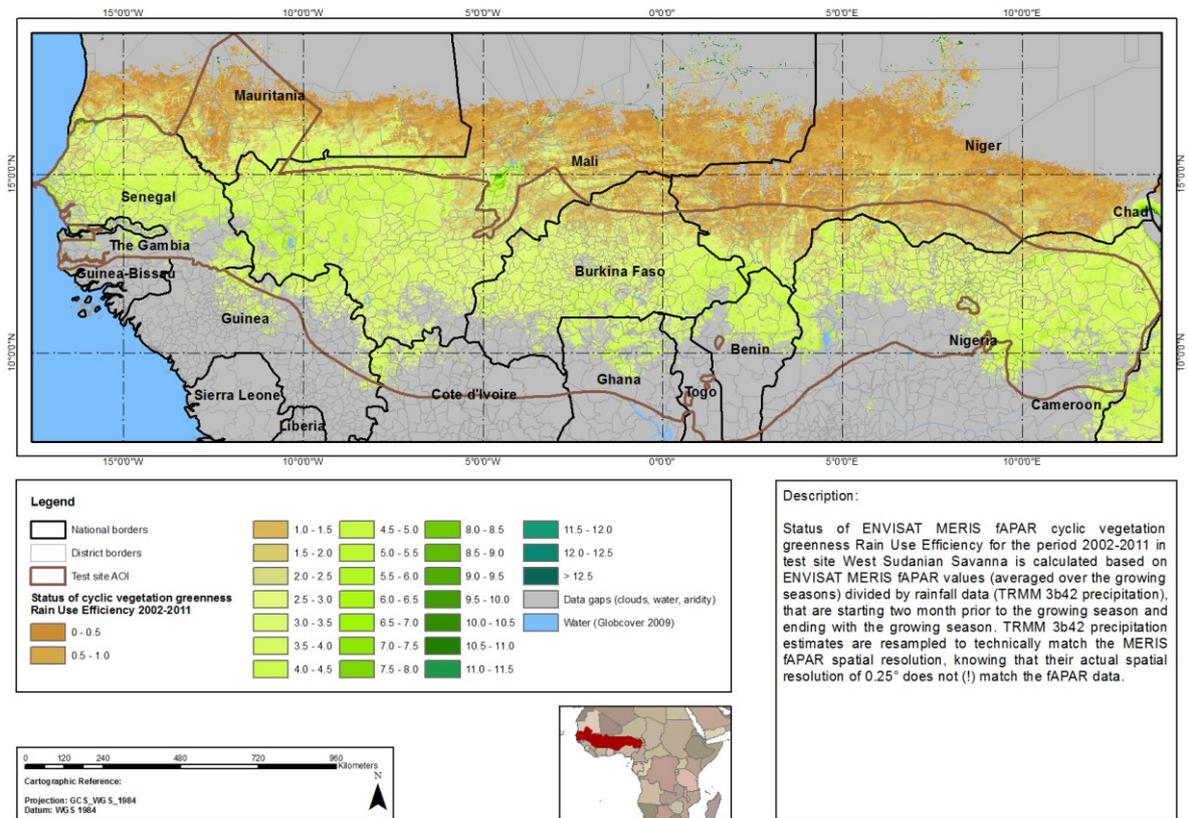
Vegetation Year Rain Use Efficiency Trend (abs.)



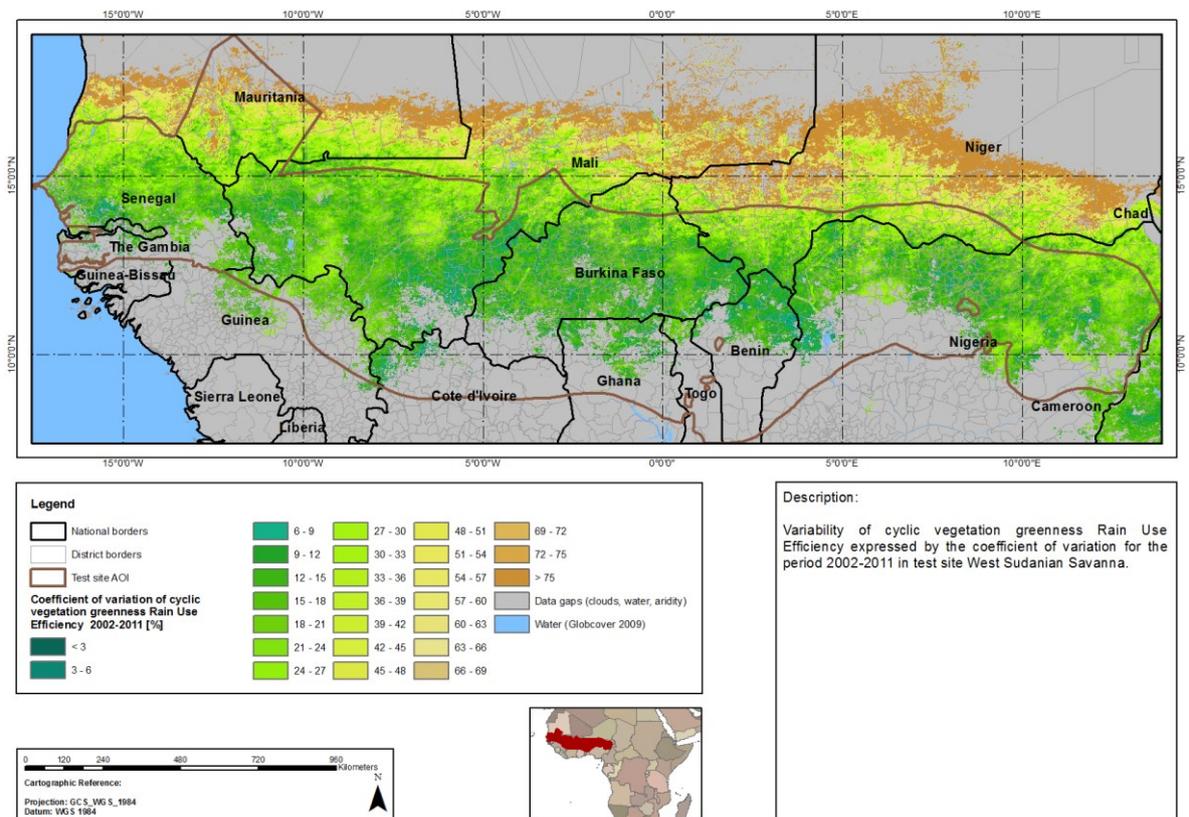
Vegetation Year Rain Use Efficiency Trend (rel.)



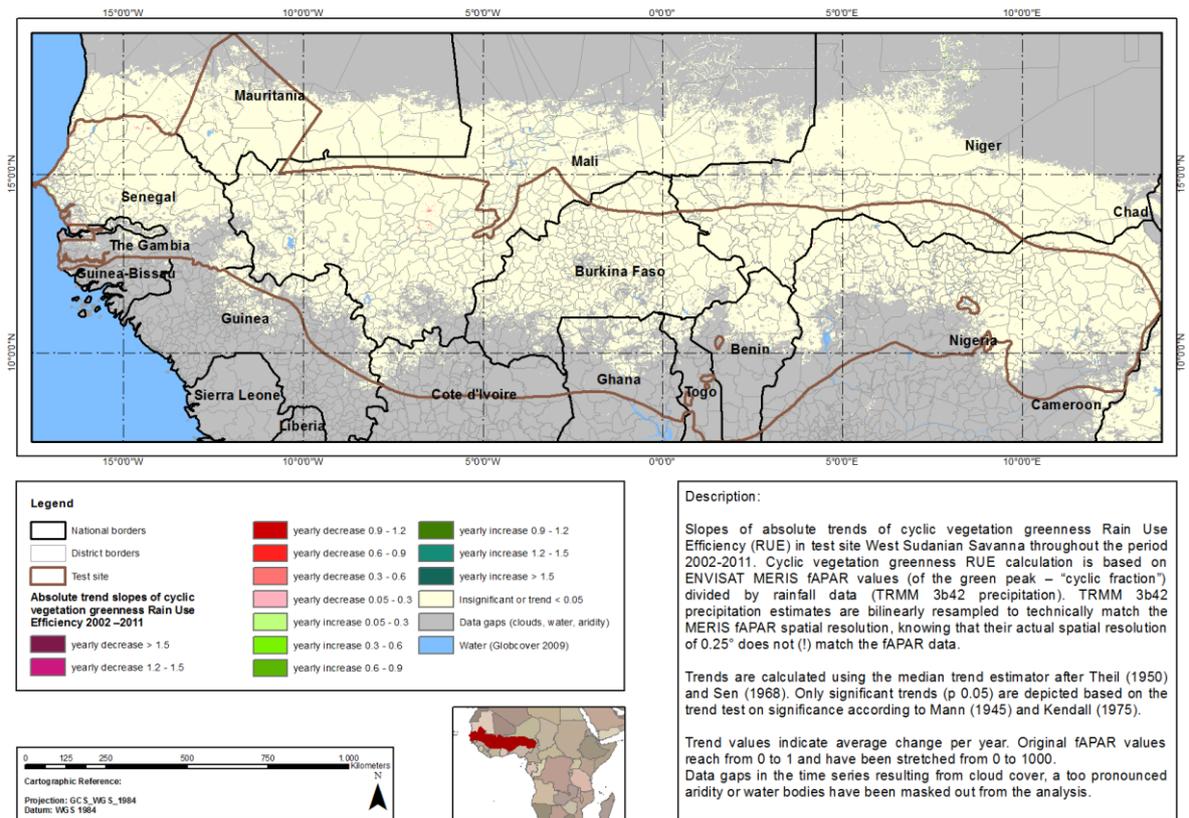
Cyclic Vegetation Rain Use Efficiency Status



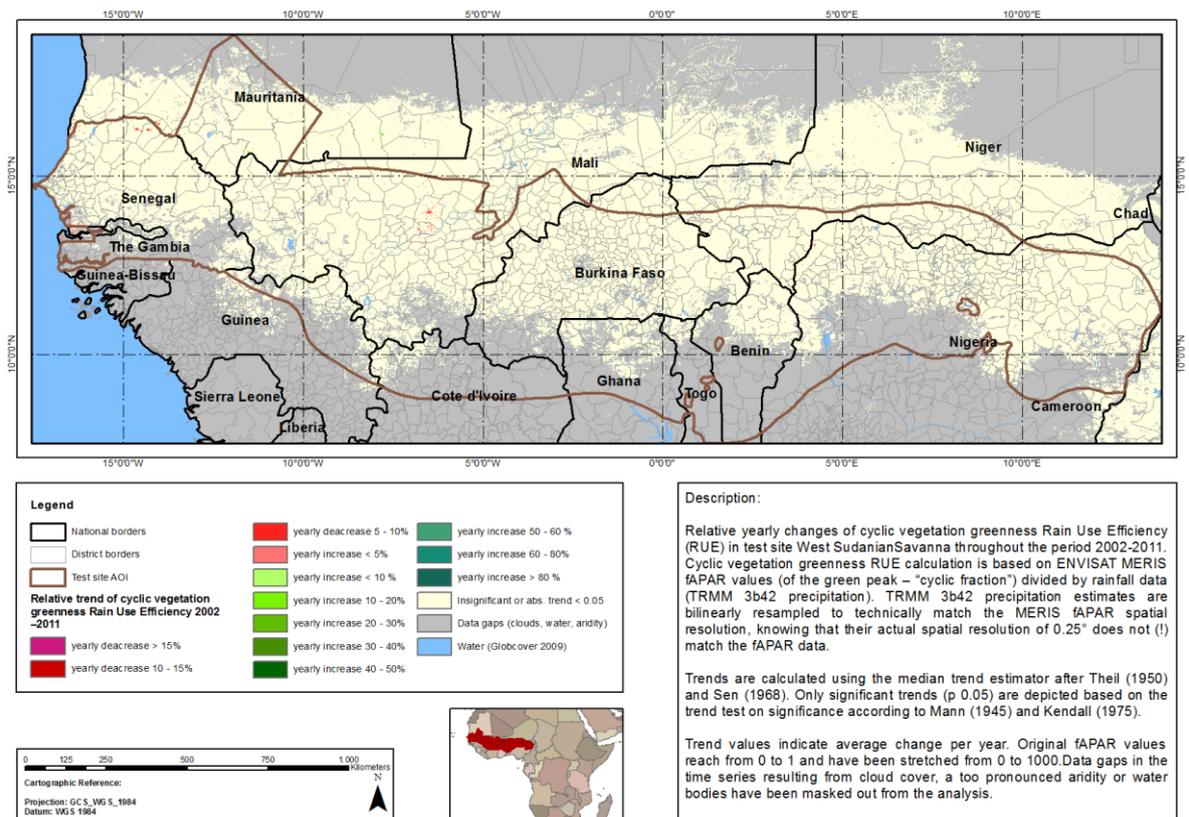
Cyclic Vegetation Rain Use Efficiency Variability



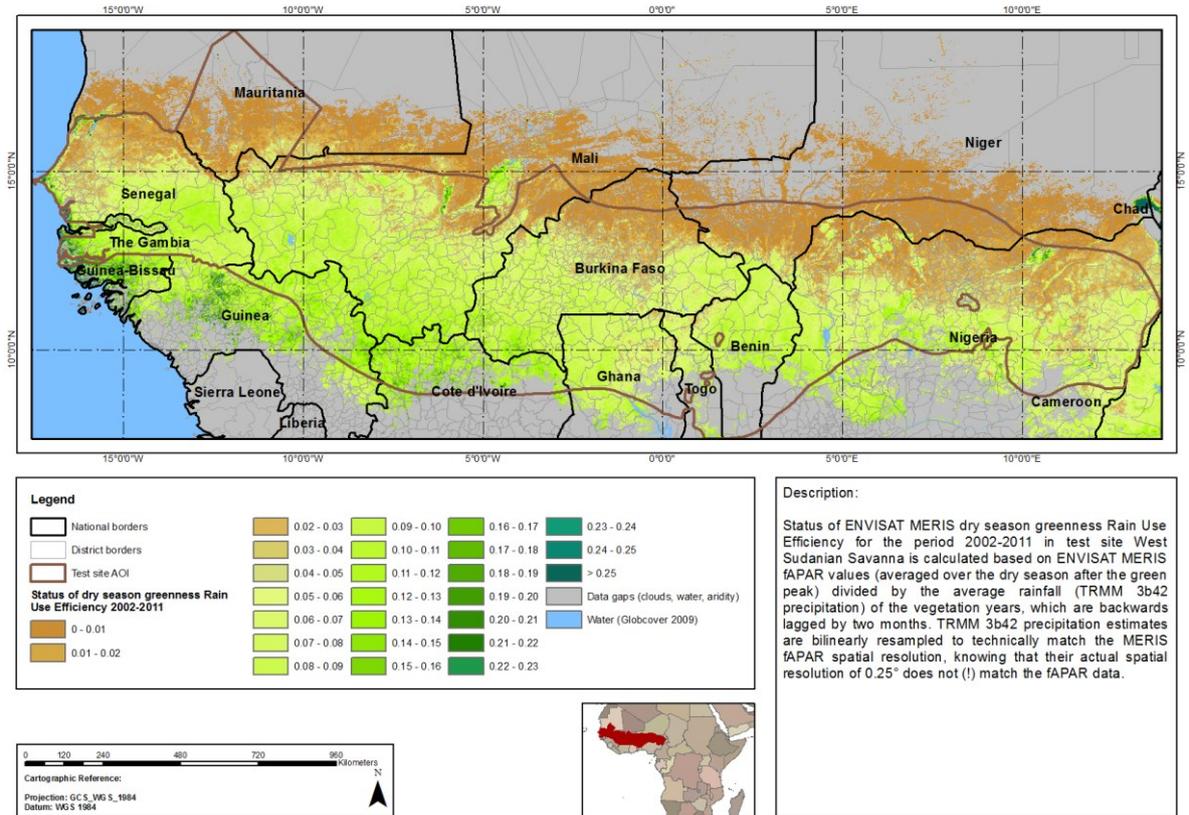
Cyclic Vegetation Rain Use Efficiency Trend (abs.)



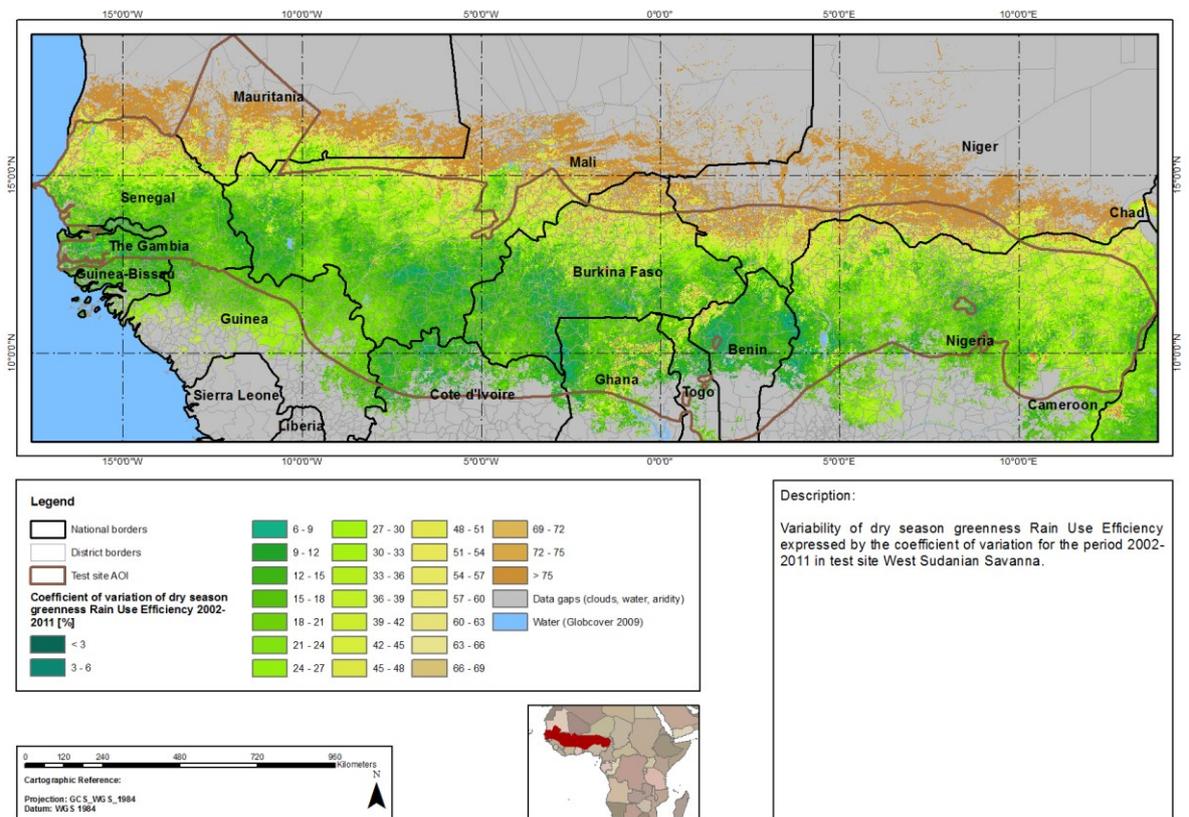
Cyclic Vegetation Rain Use Efficiency Trend (rel.)



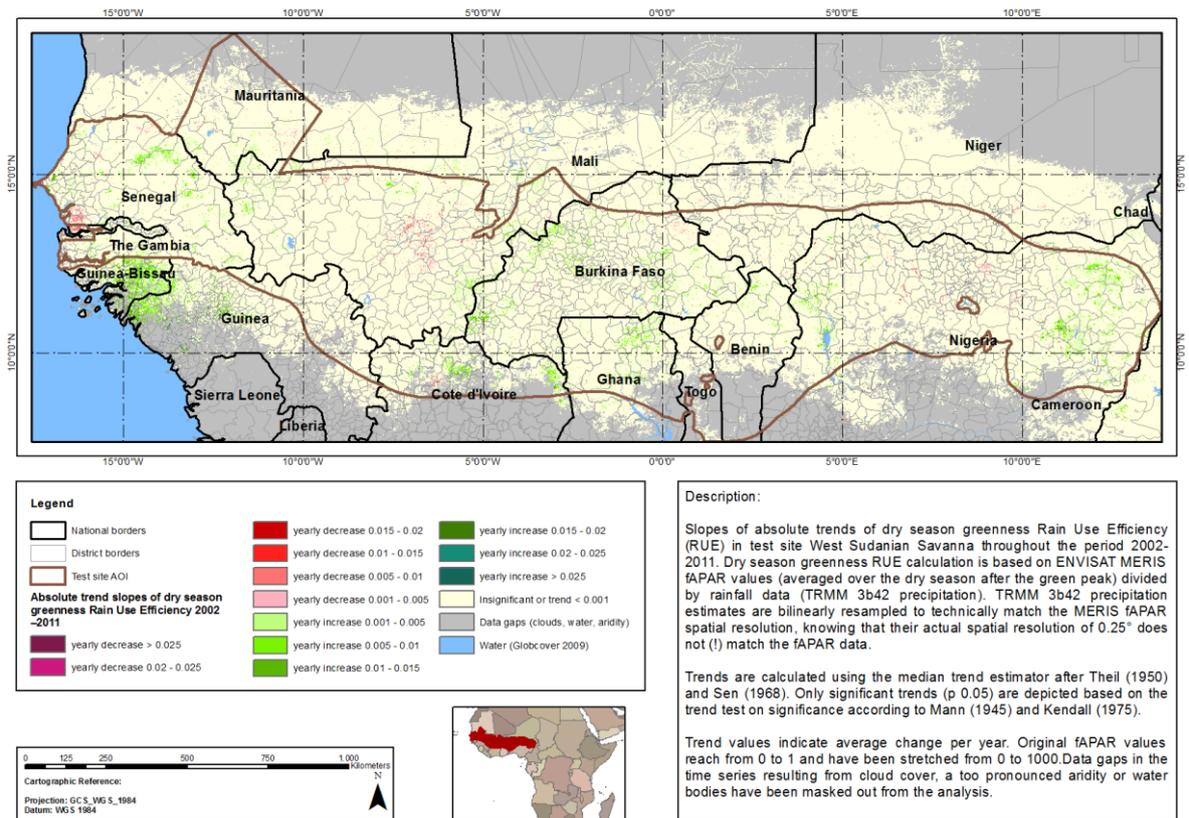
Dry Season Rain Use Efficiency Status



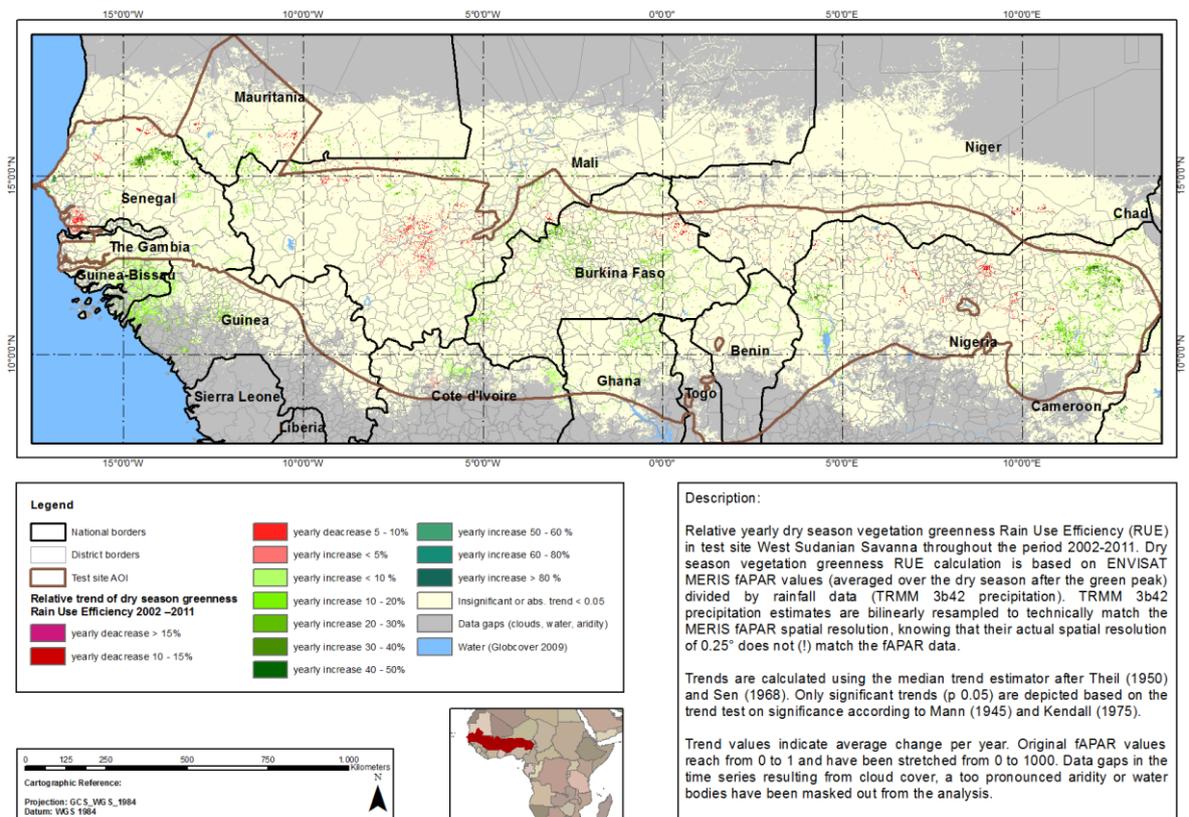
Dry Season Rain Use Efficiency Variability



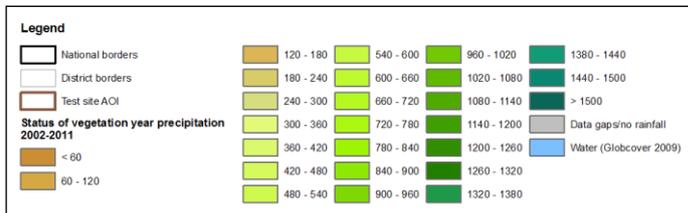
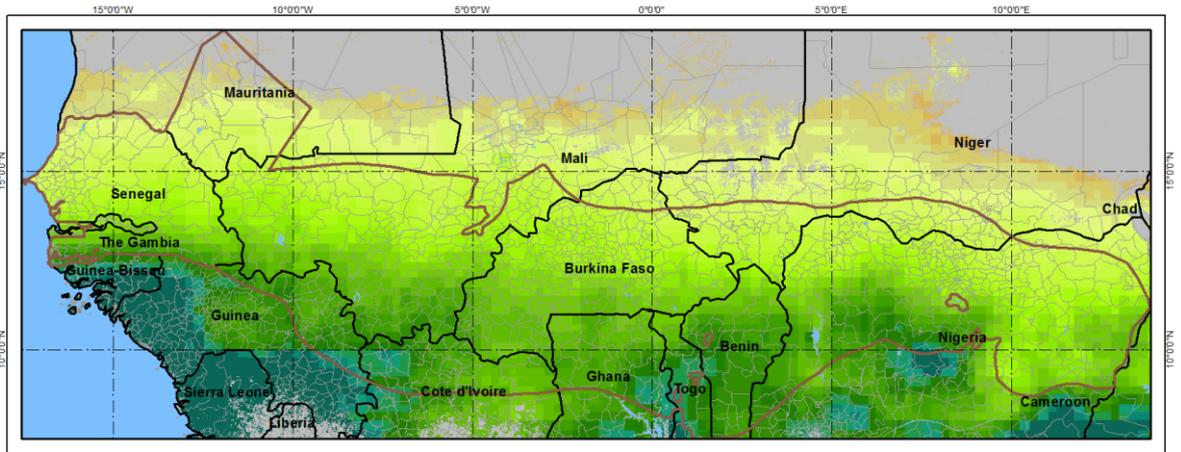
Dry Season Rain Use Efficiency Trend (abs.)



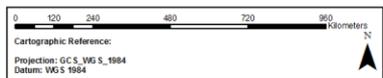
Dry Season Rain Use Efficiency Trend (rel.)



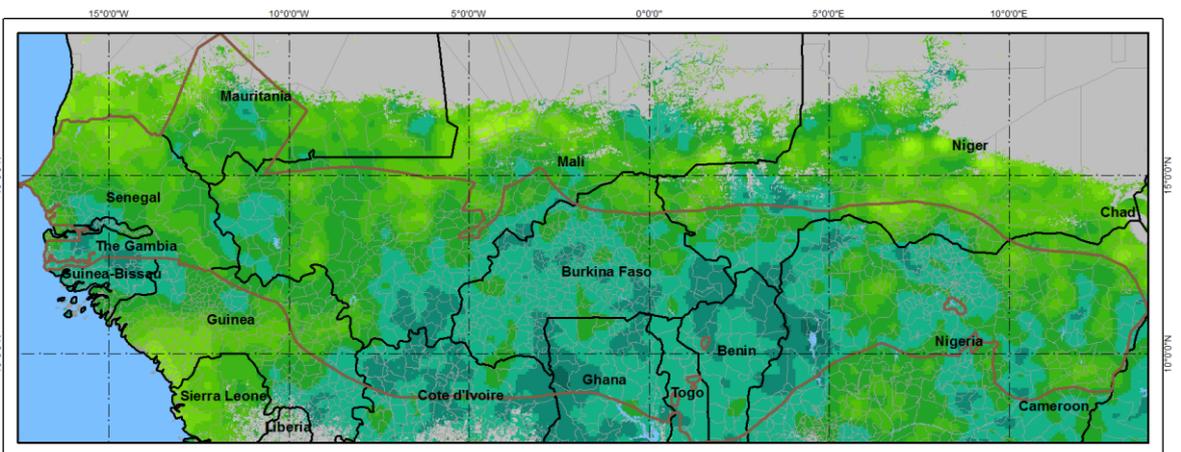
Vegetation Year Precipitation Status



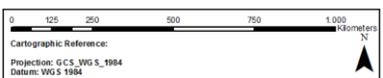
Description:
 Status of TRMM 3b42 precipitation estimates summed over vegetation years calculated as mean value for the period 2002-2011 in test site West Sudanian Savanna. Yearly aggregation periods are derived from the corresponding vegetation year with a temporal backward shift of two months. Thus, each precipitation vegetation year starts and ends two months earlier than the corresponding vegetation year.



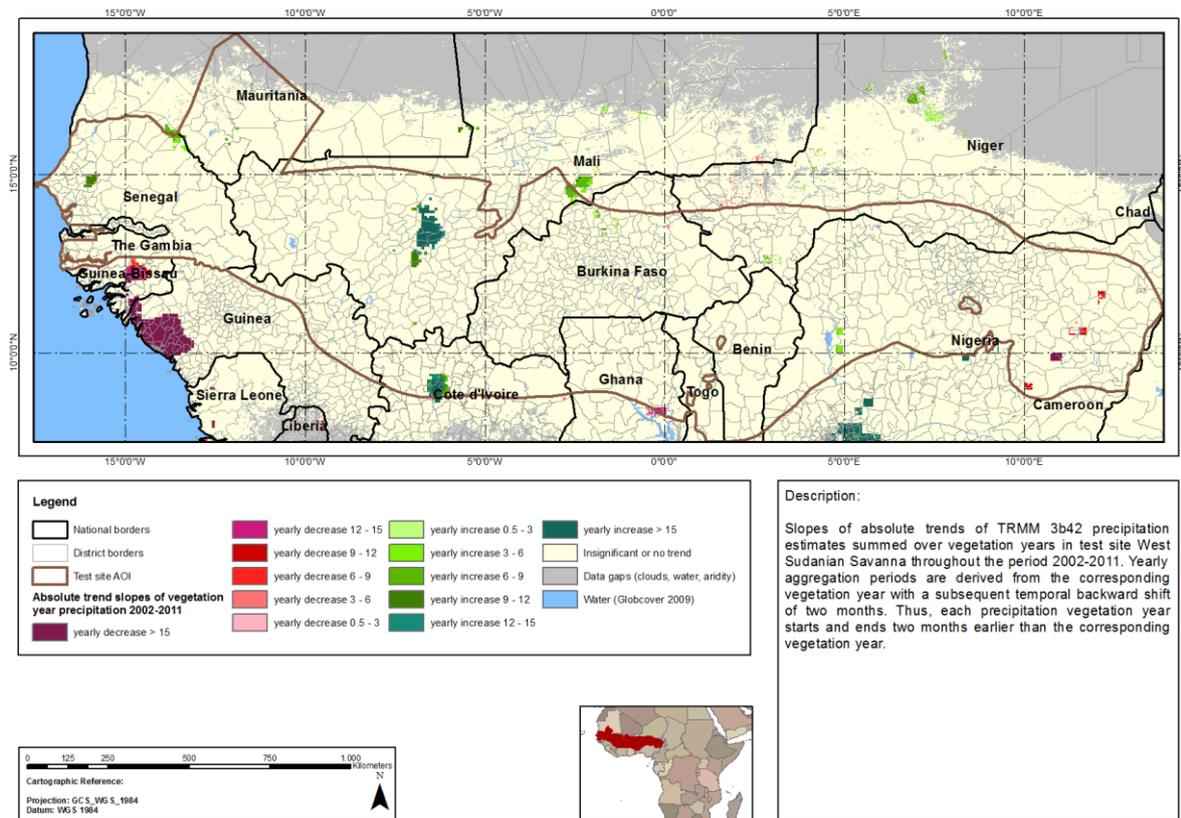
Vegetation Year Precipitation Variability



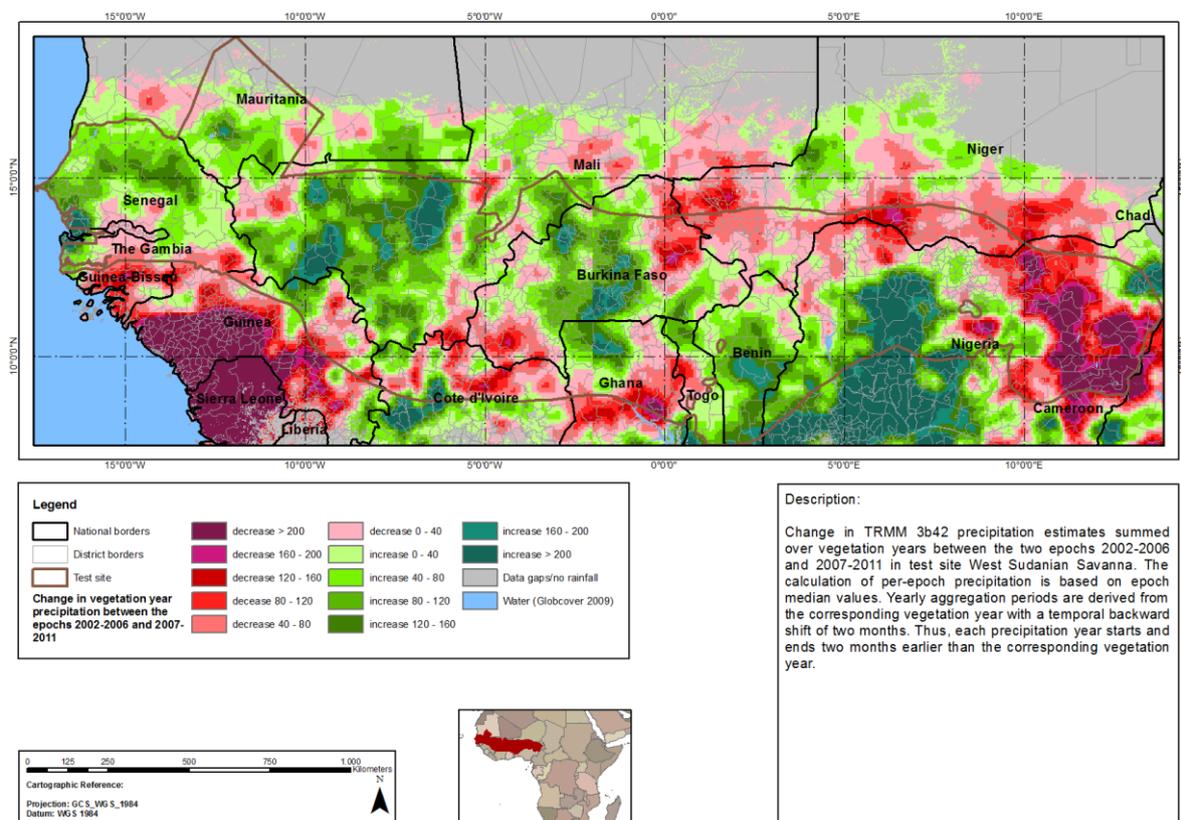
Description:
 Variability of TRMM 3b42 precipitation estimates summed over vegetation years expressed by the coefficient of variation for the period 2002-2011 in test site West Sudanian Savanna. Yearly aggregation periods are derived from the corresponding vegetation year with a temporal backward shift of two months. Thus, each precipitation vegetation year starts and ends two months earlier than the corresponding vegetation year.



Vegetation Year Precipitation Trend (abs.)



Vegetation Year Precipitation Change



Generic Interpretation of the Maps with regard to Degradation and Potential Loss of Biodiversity

The maps that are so far shown in the booklet include phenologically differentiated NPP proxy (Net Primary Production) and RUE (Rain Use Efficiency) status and trend maps, as well as rainfall status, trend – and change maps.

Overall the status maps describe the amount and variability (coefficient of variation) of greenness (NPP proxy) in the differentiated phenological seasons, as well greenness in relation to the amount of rainfall (RUE).

While vegetation productivity obvious follows the rainfall gradients at the large scale (not considering temperature and radiation differences), the smaller scale differentiations exhibit the presence of further influences on vegetation growth at more local scales. These local and regional factors are especially land use, soil properties and topography and include also the protection status of areas. For instance many linear features with (mostly) higher NPP proxy and RUE values than their surroundings can be related to river valleys (often with only seasonal or ephemeral surface water).

Consequently, the spatial distribution of RUE varies not only with rainfall, but depends on the constellation of all these factors at various scales. Hence RUE status (average condition) values, even if stratified according to aridity, cannot directly be interpreted in terms of existing soil degradation or exposure to degradation or richness/poverty of biodiversity without knowledge about growth factors other than rainfall, and about bio-geographical properties.

Biomes with rich floristic biodiversity can be expected to exhibit higher NPP response to rainfall throughout the year as diverse plant communities may be characterised by a high phenological variability with optimised water exploitation. However, it is not known whether, where and to which degree this theory translates into measurable spatial differences of RUE. Here an assessment of the results by local experts and the usage of reference maps and information will help interpret the results. An example with an extended area of extraordinary high average RUE conditions is the Succulent Karoo biome in South Africa (*"The Succulent Karoo is notable for the world's richest flora of succulent plants, and harbours about one-third of the world's approximately 10,000 succulent species"* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Succulent_Karoo).

The differentiation of the NPP and RUE indicators into phenological periods helps diagnose the seasonal behaviour of the vegetation and thus provides clues about the presence and dominance of evergreen perennial vegetation versus annual vegetation (e.g. annual grasses, crops). Accordingly, changes and trends of the phenological vegetation behaviour can be used as indicators for developments such as land use change and land cover change. For instance the worldwide observed phenomenon of bush encroachment (woody encroachment, woody thickening) in drylands (Ratajczak et al. 2011) will lead to a shift of vegetation phenology, where especially an increase of dry season greenness, possibly, but not necessarily combined with a decrease of the cyclic greenness can be expected.

Bush encroachment in drylands is often perceived as negative development, where the bushes lead to range land degradation by reducing grass cover and impeding the access of cattle to the remaining grass. Also impoverishment of biodiversity was frequently found as an effect of bush encroachment (Ratajczak et al. 2011). The greening trends especially in the dry season are indeed a widespread phenomenon in the derived NPP proxy maps (p.16), possibly pointing to continued bush encroachment or enhanced growth and greening of existing bushes, partly related to rainfall increases. Dry season greening may also be caused by the plantation of (especially evergreen) woody plants and forests. In case of greening trends related to commercial forest plantations, the trends can also be interpreted as a biodiversity loss.

The “classical” degradation measure is exhibited by decreasing RUE trends, i.e. the decrease of NPP proxies in relation to rainfall, theoretically indicating the decreasing ability of the vegetation to exploit available water. In the test sites so far studied, RUE decreases are rarely observed for the cyclic vegetation of the growing season (p.20). This means, the cyclic vegetation response to rainfall is not widespread diminished and degradation of soils leading to reduced usability of rainfall for vegetation growth seems to be hardly found in the test sites so far. Where it is found it seems to co-occur with regional rainfall increases, and may be interpreted as lacking ability of the vegetation to respond to apparently improved hydrologic growing conditions. Extended areas in South and East Portugal are an example for wide spread RUE decreases of the cyclic vegetation related to rainfall increase (p.24) without cyclic vegetation decrease (p.14). However, increased rainfall quantities may also come with higher rainfall intensities and may have also negative effects (increased runoff, more erosive power), and can be assumed to be not generally positively correlated with vegetation productivity.

RUE decreases are more frequently found when looking at the vegetation of the entire vegetation year (p.18), and are also often related to rainfall increases, and not to greenness decreases. RUE decreases are not only indicating potential degradation developments (progressing degradation triggered e.g. by land over-utilisation), but may be as well related to land cover/use changes, such as the conversion of rangeland into cropland, deforestation (less important in dry lands), etc. Especially processes such as urbanisation or mining will lead to extreme NPP proxy and RUE decreases. Decreases of only the dry season RUE (p.22) may in particular be related to conversion of rangeland into rainfed cropland, assuming a lower primary productivity of the cropland during the dry season. Also the clearing of shrubs, bushland and savannah vegetation may lead especially to dry season RUE decreases.

To summarize the observable NPP proxy and RUE trends cannot be directly interpreted as degradation or biomass losses, or, in case of positive trends, as land improvements. There are always multiple possible underlying causes and developments, hence in situ knowledge and information is indispensable for the interpretation of these developments, as well as for the average conditions expressed in the status maps. Especially the frequently found greening trends in the dry season, at first glance positive trends, may even be primarily related to adverse processes such as bush encroachment. However, caution is also necessary in this respect, as likewise range land improvement and tree planting activities may lead to diverse positive trends.

Finally it must be stated that the observation period is rather short, with several consequences for this study. The variability of rainfalls and subsequently vegetation greenness from year to year is so significant in drylands that it certainly hides trends, which in such a short period may be rare and not very pronounced. Trends must pass a high statistical significance threshold to be recognised as significant trends. There may be more relevant changes going on than the trend maps with only the highly significant trends can show, especially as many change events cannot be expected to exhibit gradual indicator developments. Also the rainfall trend maps (p. 24) show hardly any significant trends, while the rainfall change map between the two epochs shows large positive and negative change regions with partly big epochal rainfall differences.

On the other hand, the epochal change maps (differences between the means or median values of epochs, part of the overall products) are strongly influenced by variability and do certainly not only reflect “true” changes in the sense of concrete changes (e.g. land use change) or persisting developments (trends). Therefore these maps (that - except for rainfall - are not shown in the booklet) must be used with care.

Outlook

The phenologically differentiated analysis of NPP proxies and RUE so far performed will allow for a combination of the single results into integrated second order products. Their intention is to provide more evaluative assessments of the possible recent developments than the individual indicators. For instance, the occurrence of dry season greening in the absence of positive cyclic vegetation trends or in combination with negative cyclic vegetation trends may be derived as a an indicator for bush encroachment, either in the past and/or ongoing, where theoretically also the trend of the ratio of dry season to vegetation year greenness may support the diagnosis of increases of woody vegetation at the expense of grasses. The generation and/or interpretation of second order products may also be supported by means of land cover data.

Further on, CCI soil moisture (<http://www.esa-soilmoisture-cci.org/>) data, where available without greater data gaps, will be used as an additional and alternative measure for available water, and “Soil Moisture Use Efficiency” (SMUE) products analogue to RUE products will be derived thereof. Theoretically, soil moisture is the better suited water parameter for this purpose, as it almost directly constitutes the available water for plants, whereas rainfall only partly penetrates into the soil. The comparison of the SMUE with the RUE products will be of high interest.

Selected second order indicators will be added to these booklets, while the first order indicator maps may be reduced to keep the booklets focused on the most significant results. The results will be interpreted in terms of so-called “Biodiversity Stories”, which will verbally highlight the most prominent and significant developments found in the data.

Description of Biodiversity of Test Site 13 West Sudanian Savanna

The West Sudanian savannah is located in West Africa, constituting a stretch of hot, dry and wooded savannah that is delimited by the Atlantic Ocean to the West, the Sahel to the North, the Guinean forest-savannah mosaic to the South and the eastern border of Nigeria to the East (Chidumayo et al. 2011; WWFg 2013). It covers parts of the states of Senegal, Gambia, Mauritania, Mali, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina-Faso, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Niger and Nigeria. The region is subjected to a tropical and strongly seasonal climate, where mean monthly maximum and minimum temperatures are around 32°C and 20°C, respectively (Bie 1991; WWFg 2013). Annual rainfalls are limited to one season that starts by May-June and ends September-October, with values of precipitation varying between 600 mm in the northern parts of the savannah and 1200 mm in the south (Bie 1991). The most important limiting factor to ecosystem functioning is the length and severity of the dry season that can last two to eight months, with temperatures being high year-round and rainfalls being more variable and irregular, especially in the northern borders of the Sahelian region (Bie 1991). Climatic variations across different years are also common, which are responsible for very prolonged and harsh droughts, especially since the 1960-70’s (Bie 1991; Chidumayo et al. 2011). In terms of landscape, the region is mainly flat with no significant topographic features (elevation usually does not surpass 700 m). Overlying the region are mainly Precambrian and Cambrian rocks, in the form of granitic shields and sandstone (Bie 1991).

The West Sudanian savannah’s vegetation is mainly characterised by woodland savannah species, a mix of woody trees and tall grasses. Trees rarely exceed 10 m in height, in the north of the savannah mainly belonging to the genus *Combretum* spp. and *Acacia* sp., and as we go south *Tamarindus indica*, *Prosopis africana* and *Commiphora africana* begin to dominate the landscape. Further south in wetter areas, we can find *Terminalia* spp., *Isberlinia doka* and *Azalia africana* (Bie 1991; WWFg 2013). The herbaceous layer is constituted predominantly by *Hyparrhenia* spp. (elephant grass that can reach up to 4 m in height), but also by *Andropogon* spp., *Ctenium* spp. and *Loudetia* spp. (Bie 1991; WWFg 2013).

The savannah has also a considerably rich fauna, but endemism is low as the majority of species have pan-African distributions. Endemic species include two small mammals (*Crocodylus cinderella* and *Lemniscomys limulus*), eight reptiles and three amphibians (WWFg 2013). Mammals are especially well represented and the region includes populations of threatened large-sized species like the giant eland (*Taurotragus derbianus*), African wild dog (*Lycaon pictus*), cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*), lion (*Panthera leo*), elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), western giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis peralta*) and West African savannah buffalo (*Syncerus caffer brachyceros*), most of them restricted to protected areas (Bouche et al. 2011; Riggio et al. 2013; WWFg 2013). Invertebrates must also be very diverse in the region but remain to quantify. Odonate (dragonflies and damselflies) diversity is lower in the savannah as compared to forest but still hold endemic species like *Zygonychidium gracile* (Dijkstra & Vick 2004). Termites of the genus *Macrotermes* also provide relevant services to the ecosystem, as their abandoned mounds are colonized by many plant species and act as source of landscape heterogeneity (Kirchmair et al. 2012).

Threats to biodiversity in the West Sudanian savannahs are intimately related with poverty, which drive governments and local people to make short-term decisions that often hamper long-term conservation measures (Paré et al. 2009). The region has been exhibiting a high and rapid population and urbanization growth (3.1 and 7% per year, respectively), yet still, more than half of the population is dependent on agriculture and herding (Chidumayo et al. 2011). The demand and transformation of land for agricultural practices have reduced, degraded and fragmented natural habitat (WWFg 2013). One particular type of culture, cotton, has been expanding tremendously and since it requires large doses of pesticides, it has very harmful effects over the environment (Baudron et al. 2009). Grazing animals, cutting trees for fuelwood and charcoal, setting of uncontrolled fires (natural fires are an essential part of the savannah ecosystem), and illegal hunting of wildlife species (black rhinoceros were extirpated of Nigeria just few decades ago) have also contributed significantly for the loss of biodiversity (Nicolas et al. 2010; Chidumayo et al. 2011; WWFg 2013).

Nowadays the main patches of natural habitat are located in protected areas around all the countries in the region, and represent about 6.7% of the total area (WWFg 2013). Protected areas include forest reserves like the “Projet d’Aménagement des Massifs Forestiers d’Agoua, des Monts Kouffé et de Wari-Marou” in Benin (Nicolas et al. 2010), and many national parks such as Boucle du Baoulé in Mali, the River Gambia in Gambia, Niokolo-Koba in Senegal, Kainji Lake in Nigeria, Mole in Ghana, and Comoe in Côte d’Ivoire (WWFg 2013). Another relevant protected area is the W national park that includes areas of three states, Burkina-Faso, Benin and Niger (Baudron et al. 2009). Moreover, the region encompasses various Ramsar sites (Ramsar 2013) and IBAs (BirdLife International 2013).

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User Questionnaire

You can find an on-line version of this questionnaire here:

<http://www.diversity2.info/testsites/ppd/ug/>

1. How do you judge the overall relevance and quality of the presented products?

2. Please comment shortly on the presentation of the methods and results

3. What further products (level one) would be interesting to you to have?

4. Do you have any suggestions concerning possible “second level” products, which are supposed to show the results in a more abstract and/or synthesised way?