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Corresponding Author: Dr. T. F. Lebel, PhD

Corresponding Author's Institution: UMR 5564

First Author: T. F. Lebel, PhD

Order of Authors: T. F. Lebel, PhD; Bernard Cappelaere, PhD; Sylvie Galle, PhD; Niall Hanan, PhD; Laurent Kergoat, PhD; Samuel Levis, PhD; Baxter Vieux, PhD; Luc Descroix, PhD; Marielle Gosset, PhD; Eric Mougin, PhD; Christophe Peugeot, PhD; Luc Seguis, PhD



LTHE, BP 53, 38041 Grenoble cedex 9. Tél. : 04 76 82 52 85 ; Fax : 04 76 82 52 86 ; Mel : Thierry.Lebel@hmg.inpg.fr

Konstantine P. Georgakakos, Sc.D.
Editor-in-Chief, Journal of Hydrology
Hydrologic Research Center
12780 High Bluff Drive, Suite 250
San Diego, CA 92130, USA

Grenoble, 3rd December 2008

Dear Dr Georgakakos,

You will find herewith the manuscript of the overview paper for the AMMA-CATCH special issue, entitled “**AMMA-CATCH studies in the Sahelian region of West-Africa: an overview**”, by T. Lebel et al..

The main objectives of this paper are: (i) to present the rationale for maintaining a long term hydro-meteorological observing system in West Africa ; (ii) to review the state of the art regarding our knowledge on the land-atmosphere interactions in this region and the main scientific questions to address in order to improve our understanding of these interactions; (iii) to present the observational strategy of this long term observing system; and finally iv) the paper describes the scope and content of the special issue. As present, 18 papers are accepted for publication in the special issue, 6 are in final form, 12 others were accepted pending minor or moderate revision (written in green in the *scope and content* section and in the list of references); one is still undergoing revision of the re-submitted version (written in red in the *scope and content* section). Given the time needed for reviewing a paper and in order not to delay the final publication of the special issue, this overview paper is submitted now, since it is considered that the papers accepted pending minor or moderate revision, will indeed be included in the special issue.

We thank you very much for considering this manuscript for the special issue.

With best regards,

Thierry LEBEL

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**AMMA-CATCH studies in the Sahelian region of West-Africa:
an overview.**

Thierry Lebel¹, Bernard Cappelaere², Sylvie Galle¹, Niall Hanan³, Laurent Kergoat⁴, Samuel Levis⁵,
Baxter Vieux⁶, Luc Descroix¹, Marielle Gosset¹, Eric Mougin⁴, Christophe Peugeot², Luc Seguis²

¹LTHE, IRD, BP 53, 38041 Grenoble Cedex 9, France

²HSM, IRD, BP 64501, 34394 Montpellier cedex 5, France

³Natural Resource Ecology Laboratory, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523, U.S.A.

⁴CESBIO, CNRS, Toulouse, France

⁵National Center for Atmospheric Research, Boulder, CO, USA

⁶School of Civil Engineering and Environmental Science, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK, USA

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Corresponding author address: Dr Thierry Lebel, LTHE, BP 53, F-38041 Grenoble cedex 9, France

E-mail: thierry.lebel@hmg.inpg.fr

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3

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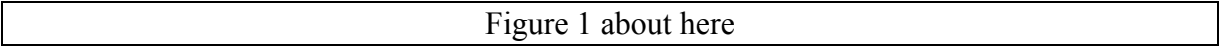
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9 **Abstract.**

10 The African Monsoon Multidisciplinary Analysis (AMMA) is an international and
11 interdisciplinary experiment designed to investigate the interactions between atmospheric,
12 oceanic and terrestrial systems and their joint controls on tropical monsoon dynamics in West
13 Africa. This special issue reports results from a group of AMMA studies regrouped in the
14 component “*Couplage de l’Atmosphère Tropicale et du Cycle Hydrologique*” (CATCH).
15 AMMA-CATCH studies focus on measuring and understanding land surface properties and
16 processes in West Africa, the role of terrestrial systems in altering boundary layer dynamics,
17 and thus the potential that surface hydrology and biology, and human land use practices, may
18 directly or indirectly affect monsoon dynamics and rainfall in the region. AMMA-CATCH
19 studies focus on three intensively instrumented mesoscale sites in Mali, Niger and Benin that
20 sample across the 100-1300 mm/annum rainfall gradient of the Sahel, Sudan and North-
21 Guinean bioclimatic zones. Studies report on i) surface-boundary layer interactions that may
22 influence atmospheric convergence and convective processes and thus rainfall type, timing
23 and amount; ii) vegetation dynamics at seasonal to decadal time-scales that may respond to,
24 and alter, atmospheric processes; iii) surface-atmosphere fluxes of heat, water and carbon
25 dioxide that directly influence the atmosphere; iv) soil moisture variability in space and time
26 that provide the proximate control on vegetation activity, evapotranspiration and energy
27 balance; and v) local and mesoscale modeling of hydrology and land surface-atmosphere
28 exchanges to assess their role in the hydrological, atmospheric and rainfall dynamics of West
29 Africa. The AMMA-CATCH research reported in this issue will be extended in future years
30 as measurements and analysis continue and are concluded within the context of both CATCH
31 and the wider AMMA study. This body of research will contribute to an improved
32 understanding of the functioning of the coupled West African system, and enhance our ability
33 to model and predict rainfall, vegetation and biogeochemical dynamics across time-scales
34 (day, year, decade, century), and in response to changing climate and land use. Such
35 information is vital for policy makers and managers in planning for future economic
36 development, sustainability and livelihoods of the growing populations of the region.

37
38 **Key Words:** West Africa, Sahel, Land Surface Processes, Continental Scale Experiments, Water Resources
39

1 Introduction

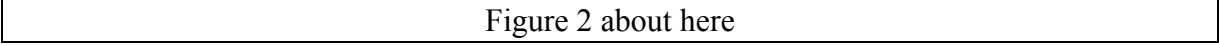
2 The generalised drought that struck West Africa during the 1970s and 1980s was one of the
3 most significant regional scale climatic events of the 20th century (AMMA ISSC, 2005). The
4 average annual rainfall deficit of the 1970s and 1980s was around 200 mm with respect to the
5 average of the previous 20 years (1950-1969). The spatial pattern of this deficit was not
6 correlated to the average latitudinal gradient characterizing the rainfall pattern of the region
7 (Fig.1).

8
9  Figure 1 about here

10

11 The consequences of this drought were devastating due to both its spatial extent and its
12 continuity in time (Fig. 2): every year of the period 1970-1988 was in deficit in the Sahel (the
13 region south of the Sahara desert where mean annual precipitation is 100-700 mm), and most
14 years were in deficit over the Soudanian region to the South (between the Guinea Gulf and the
15 Sahel). The spatial and temporal continuity of this dry anomaly and of the preceding wet
16 anomaly are all the more remarkable when compared to rainfall time series of other tropical
17 regions, where runs of dry years are usually limited to 4-5 years (Nicholson, 2000).

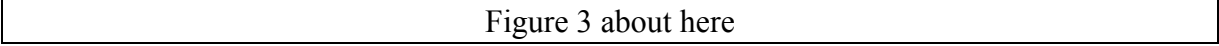
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19  Figure 2 about here

20

21 Despite unfavourable climatic and environmental conditions, the cultivated Sahel is one of
22 the most densely populated areas in West Africa (Fig.3). The drought has thus devastating
23 effects on the population, through famines, migrations, and low economic growth, underlying
24 its vulnerability to climatic fluctuations (see e.g. Davidson et al., 2003; ECOWAS-SWAC,
25 2006; Stige et al., 2006).

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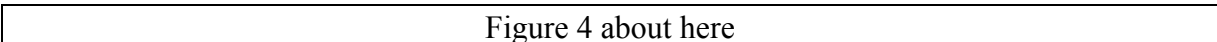
27  Figure 3 about here

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29 In the last two decades (1990-present) a return to wetter conditions was observed in much of
30 West Africa, but below average rainfall continued almost unabated in the Sahel region, at
31 least until the end of the 1990s (as described in Lebel and Ali, this issue, the situation changed

1 somewhat later on). This is a confirmation of the fact already mentioned in previous works
2 (see e.g., Janicot,1992; Nicholson, 1980) that, while the climate of the whole of West Africa
3 is under the control of the West African Monsoon (WAM), the Soudanian and Sahelian
4 regions are not systematically, or directly, coupled in terms of annual rainfall fluctuations.
5 The possible role of changing surface conditions in this pattern of rainfall variability has long
6 been questioned, starting with the seminal paper of Charney (1975).

7 The issue of changing surface conditions is especially acute in a region which has to support
8 one of the fastest population growths in the world, with a growth rate now above 3 %.yr⁻¹
9 (Guengant and Banoin, 2003). Rapidly increasing needs for food crops and firewood have led
10 to extensive forest clearing and degradation, and the densely populated southern band of the
11 Sahel (~400-700 mm of annual rainfall), has consequently undergone the transformation of an
12 essentially natural, savanna landscape before the first drought of the 1970s, into the highly
13 modified environment of today, with considerably reduced vegetation cover and generalized
14 soil degradation. Charney's hypothesis was that vegetation degradation over the Sahel might
15 induce a long term inhibiting feedback on rainfall. This assumption has been tested in
16 numerous modelling studies. In the first experiments carried out with Global Circulation
17 Models (GCMs), Laval and Picon (1986) and Xue and Shukla (1993), for example, diagnosed
18 that the Sahelian climate was sensitive to changes in the surface roughness and albedo.
19 Ensuing simulations paid greater attention to the role of the vegetation and of the water cycle:
20 Polcher (1995), Douville et al. (2001), Douville (2002), Koster et al. (2004), Taylor et al.,
21 (2007), among others, all showed that soil moisture is a significant factor influencing the
22 dynamics of the tropical monsoon systems, especially in West Africa where recycling
23 processes play an important role (Fig. 4).

24
25  Figure 4 about here
26

27 Diagnostic studies also show that the interannual variability of specific patterns of deep soil
28 wetness and moist static energy south of the Sahel during the pre-monsoon onset months are
29 significantly correlated with the recent interannual variability of Sahelian rainfall (Fontaine et
30 al., 1999; Philippon and Fontaine, 2002). Despite all these converging results that the WAM

1 does show sensitivity to feedback effects associated with land use / land cover changes, these
2 effects are still very poorly understood and inadequately represented in GCMs. This creates
3 much variation in projections on future rainfall trends, and call for improvement in the
4 documentation of the underlying processes through field research programs and long term
5 monitoring strategies. The *African Monsoon Multidisciplinary Analyses* (AMMA), an
6 initiative launched at the beginning of the millennium is rooted in this context (AMMA-ISSC,
7 2005; Redelsperger et al., 2006). AMMA-CATCH (CATCH stands for *Couplage de*
8 *l'Atmosphère Tropicale et du Cycle Hydrologique*) is the long term monitoring component of
9 AMMA, focused on documenting the simultaneous variability of rainfall, continental surface
10 conditions and WAM dynamics. While AMMA-CATCH deals with both the Sahelian and the
11 Soudanian sub-regions of West-Africa, the focus of this special issue is on the Sahel, for this
12 is where specific monitoring sites have operated for the longest time (see the description of
13 the observation strategy below).

14

15

16 **A brief review of biosphere-atmosphere coupling and the Sahelian climate**

17 HAPEX-Sahel (Goutorbe et al., 1994; Goutorbe et al., 1997a) was the first attempt ever
18 made at documenting comprehensively over a whole seasonal cycle the various variables and
19 processes that control the land surface - atmosphere linkages in this semi-arid environment.
20 An ensemble of 67 individual investigations deployed specific instruments for periods
21 ranging from a few weeks to two years within a 1°x1° area (13°N-14°N; 2°E-3°E) in the
22 region of Niamey (South-West Niger).

23 The data collected during HAPEX-Sahel and the ensuing studies (many of them were
24 reported in the 1997 HAPEX-Sahel special issue of *Journal of Hydrology*, see Dolman et al.,
25 1997b, for a summary) confirmed previous observations and some intuitive assumptions pre-
26 existing the experiment. They also led to new findings and raised new questions, thus forming
27 the single most significant contribution to the science of land surface - atmosphere
28 interactions in the Sahel at that time.

29 The intuitive assumptions that were confirmed were essentially:

- 1 • the temporal distribution of rainfall is as important as total seasonal rainfall for water
2 balance control (Desconnets et al., 1997; Peugeot et al., 1997); this observation made on
3 small catchments was confirmed for larger catchments in later studies, as illustrated in
4 Fig. 5 showing from model results that for roughly the same annual rainfall, the amount
5 of deep infiltration recharging the aquifer beneath a 5,000 km² catchment was 4 times
6 larger in 2004 than in 2005.
- 7 • Changing vegetation patterns led to a changing of the regional water balance (Gash et
8 al., 1997; Gaze et al., 1997; Kabat et al., 1997).
- 9 • At the seasonal scale, rainfall is the primary driver of vegetation growth and annual
10 rainfall patterns are mirrored in crop yield patterns as well as in vegetation index
11 patterns from satellite imagery.
- 12 • There is a close linkage between carbon and water (Moncrieff et al., 1997).

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Figure 5 about here

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16 The specific data collected during HAPEX-Sahel also led to less intuitive results, including
17 (see Dolman et al., 1997b and Nicholson, 2000, for a more systematic review):

- 18 • Interannual variations of observed rainfall are associated with the fluctuations of the
19 number of rain events rather than with the fluctuations of their intensity (Le Barbé and
20 Lebel, 1997; Le Barbé et al., 2002).
- 21 • From a multi-year monitoring that followed HAPEX-Sahel, Balme et al (2005) also
22 found that the total seasonal rainfall does not correlate well with the length of the rainy
23 season, a result enforcing the idea of Nicholson (2000) that the position of the ITCZ is
24 not a major factor in determining seasonal rainfall totals.
- 25 • The spatial pattern of annual rainfall is rather patchy, with local gradients that can reach
26 30 mm/km in any direction, to be compared to the average 1mm/km South to North
27 negative gradient, characterizing the Sahelian climate (Lebel et al., 1997).
- 28 • More than vegetation, it is soil crusting (Casenave and Valentin, 1992) that determines
29 the spatial pattern of runoff areas and infiltration areas (Peugeot et al., 1997). For

1 hydrological modeling the correct specification of crusted and non-crusted areas is thus
2 very important (Braud et al., 1997).

- 3 • Runoff at large scale is very small and more than 95% of the rainfall is recycled as
4 evapotranspiration.
- 5 • In Mali and Niger, most small catchments nominally drained by the Niger river (at least
6 on its left bank) are in fact endorheic, meaning that locally produced runoff does not
7 reach the Niger river, but rather infiltrates in spreading areas or is collected into
8 temporary pools, from which it infiltrates towards the aquifer or evaporates. The
9 increased proportion of degraded (hence encrusted) areas has led to an increase of the
10 local runoff coefficients and thus to an increased infiltration towards the aquifer,
11 producing what has been termed “the Niamey paradox” (Leduc et al., 2001): despite
12 lower rainfall since the 1970s, the level of the aquifer has been continuously raising in
13 West Niger since the mid-1960s (Fig. 6).
- 14 • From the data collected by the flux stations installed in the region in 1991 and 1992,
15 Gash et al. (1997) and Kabat et al. (1997) suggested that the diurnal variations in
16 evapotranspiration are dominated by soil evaporation. Nevertheless interlacing of bare
17 soil and vegetated areas and their respective areal proportions are a key controlling
18 factor for evaporation (Simioni et al., 2003).
- 19 • The same data also showed that a millet field is evaporating much less than a fallow
20 composed of grass and shrubs.
- 21 • Dolman et al. (1997a) and Said et al. (1997) argued that vegetation driven changes in
22 Boundary Layer response may not always be visible due to the stronger effects of large
23 scale advections.
- 24 • The strong local gradients of annual rainfall were shown to be sometime related to a
25 persistence phenomenon, whereby an initial gradient associated with an earlier
26 convective event maintained itself through the whole rainy season, with rainfall at the
27 “wet” station being systematically larger than rainfall at the “dry” station for ensuing
28 rain events (Taylor and Lebel, 1998).

29 Other results that are not directly relevant to this special issue are related to the role of

1 aerosols (Goutorbe et al., 1997b) and their effects on radiation divergence resulting from the
2 high aerosol loading in the HAPEX-Sahel region.

3 Many of the above results deduced from HAPEX-Sahel observations are coherent with our
4 general understanding of the changes that affect the water cycle and the climate of the region.
5 Anthropogenic pressure, especially around the largest towns, has led to a strong increase in
6 cropped surfaces, primarily devoted to millet. Since, as mentioned above, the annual
7 evapotranspiration from a millet field is significantly smaller than from a fallow, this has led
8 to a change in partitioning between evapotranspiration and runoff/infiltration at the regional
9 scale. For South-West Niger, Favreau et al. (2008) have estimated that the average deep
10 infiltration, which was about 1 to 4 mm.yr⁻¹ in the 1950s (representing ~0.5% of the average
11 rainfall of this period), has now increased to 25±7 mm.yr⁻¹, representing ~4% of the average
12 rainfall of the 1990s (Fig. 6).

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Figure 6 about here

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16 As argued by Dolman et al. (1997b), the large scale transformation of fallow savanna into
17 millet fields could have two potentially opposite effects on rainfall: i) by decreasing the
18 evapotranspiration it could act as a rainfall reduction factor; ii) by increasing the sensible heat
19 fluxes it could favour an increase of precipitation. There are also dynamical factors to
20 consider since changing the pattern and roughness of vegetation also has potential effect on
21 rainfall triggering. The balance between mesoscale processes that are the primary rainfall
22 producing factors, and local-scale features that are important drivers in producing regional
23 variability, has been investigated through numerous modelling studies in the years following
24 the HAPEX-Sahel field campaigns (see e.g. Xue and Shukla, 1993; Rowell et al., 1995; ,
25 Eltahir and Gong, 1996; Zeng et al., 1999). However, rather than converging towards a well
26 established vision of the respective roles of land surface processes and the SSTs in the
27 interannual to decadal variability of the Sahelian rainfall, these studies serve primarily to
28 highlight the remaining uncertainties. The problem with GCM simulations is that they cannot
29 realistically simulate the meso to local scale factors, such as orography, which is of limited
30 amplitude in West Africa but can still play a role in convection triggering and organisation.

1 Conversely, simulations with simple models that show that surface hydrology can lock the
2 system into persistent drought mode, fail to consider how large scale forcings influence local
3 and regional conditions. As pointed out by Nicholson (2000), the link between boundary layer
4 processes and interannual rainfall has yet to be understood, and this might well be the “most
5 important area of future research on land-atmosphere interactions in the Sahel”. Similarly
6 Dolman et al. (1997b) insist on “the complicated balance between surface driven variation
7 and large scale flow pattern”, which means that improving our understanding of the
8 interactions between climate dynamics and land surface variability/changes requires
9 documentation of contrasting large scale synoptic situations. These situations do not occur
10 every year, since they are associated with global-scale forcing conditions that have multi-
11 annual to decadal time-scale temporal characteristics (for example the El Nino Southern
12 Oscillation, ENSO). An illustration of this multi-year problematic is given in Fig. 7, showing
13 for the AMMA-CATCH site of Niger the relationship between the annual rainfall (R_A) and
14 the number of mesoscale rain events recorded each year (N). These mesoscale rain events
15 account for about 90% of the total annual rainfall. The determination coefficient of the linear
16 correlation between the annual rainfall and the number of mesoscale events is 0.50 (0.57
17 when replacing the total annual rainfall by the annual rain falling only during these mesoscale
18 rain events, R_A^*). At the same time the coefficient of determination for the linear correlation
19 between annual rainfall and the mean annual event rainfall (R_E) is 0.04 (unchanged when
20 replacing the total annual rainfall by the annual rain falling only during these mesoscale rain
21 events). Since $R_A^* = N \cdot R_E$, it is puzzling that the interannual fluctuations of R_A^* are explained
22 only by those of N , displaying no correlation at all with those of R_E . At the same time, the
23 variability of N explains only half of the variability of R_A^* , which is food for thought
24 regarding the predictability of the interannual rainfall variability in the Sahel.

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Figure 7 about here

28 All this points to the necessity of a more systematic documentation of the interacting
29 atmospheric and water cycle processes over several seasonal cycles in order to catch the
30 diversity of situations controlling these interactions, the memory effects from one year to the
31 next and the possible decadal-scale trends. This latter point is of particular concern. Indeed, as

1 underlined by the Niamey paradox described above, the eco-climatic system is clearly in a
2 non steady state –at least in some parts of the region – and it is thus of utmost importance to
3 monitor what is happening during this transition phase that lasted several decades and may be
4 continuing.

5 The shortcomings of the existing operational observing systems when it comes to
6 documenting simultaneously the various components and scales of the interacting land-
7 atmosphere West African system stimulated the establishment of the CATCH long term
8 observing system. This system was designed in 2001, with funding from the French Ministry
9 of Research and IRD. The ensuing launch of the AMMA international program led to the
10 integration of this observing system into the broader AMMA field program run over the years
11 2005-2007.

12

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14 **Observational strategy**

15 **Three mesoscale sites sampling the eco-climatic gradient**

16 The AMMA-CATCH observing system is based on three mesoscale sites sampling the
17 West-African eco-climatic gradient (Fig. 8). The larger scale picture is obtained through
18 various non-CATCH specific observation networks (national raingauge networks,
19 hydrological networks) and remote sensing imagery. Each of the mesoscale sites also includes
20 super-sites and local intensive sites (Table 1) allowing for more detailed process studies and
21 water balance estimation.

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Figure 8 about here

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25 The Gourma-Mali site is located in the Northern Sahel (14.8°N to 17.3°N) with average
26 annual rainfall decreasing from 400 mm in the South to 150 mm in the North (1990-2007
27 averages). It is a typical rangeland region, covered with semi-arid natural vegetation
28 composed of annual grasses and a sparse tree layer. The South-West Niger site (13°N to
29 14°N) is typical of the central Sahel conditions with average annual rainfall decreasing from
30 570 mm in the South to 470 mm in the North (1990-2007 averages), and a semi-arid
31 vegetation now essentially composed of millet fields, fallows and tiger bush on the plateaux.

1 The capital of Niger, Niamey, is located within this region, generating heavy demographic
 2 pressure in its surroundings, including intensive agricultural usage and wood cutting for fuel-
 3 wood purposes. The third site is the Ouémé catchment site in Benin (9°N to 10.2°N), where
 4 annual rainfall averages 1200 to 1300 mm. The rainfall gradient is not North-South, as is
 5 typically the case for the two other sites but rather East to West. The natural vegetation is
 6 wooded savanna typical of Sudano-Guinean formations, with interspersed crops including
 7 maize and niébé.

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 9

Table 1. The AMMA-CATCH meso-sites.

	Gourma Mali Site	SW Niger Site	Ouémé Catchment
Position	Mali; 14.8°N-17.3°N; 2°-1°W 27000 km²	Niger; 13°N-14°N; 1.6°E-3°E 16000 km² <i>Catchment in the North-East of the site: 5800 km²</i>	Bénin; 9°N-10°N; 1.5°E-3°E 14200 km²
Period of activity	1984- to date	1990- to date	1997- to date
Description	North Sahelian climate (between isohyets 400 ? and 100 mm). Semi-arid natural vegetation composed of annual grasses and a sparse tree layer. Crops only present in the southern part of the area. 16 vegetation sites monitored since 1984.	The survey of the “Niamey square degree” started in 1990. Intensive observations in 1991-92, monitoring from 1994 to 2002, with more intensive activities starting again in 2003. South Sahelian climate with semi-arid vegetation and crops (millet, fallows and Tiger bush,). Long series of high resolution rain data and groundwater levels.	Densely instrumented catchment with denser instrumentation on sub-catchments (Donga, Aguima, Ara). Soudanian climate (different types of rain systems) and Guinean savanna vegetation.

10

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A long term monitoring effort

13 The three meso-sites that comprise the AMMA-CATCH observing system were built in
 14 three independent phases. The Gourma site was initially focused on vegetation studies, with
 15 unique long-term monitoring of vegetation production and dynamics in 25 parcels distributed
 16 north-south on the 100-450 mm rainfall gradient since the mid 1980s. The major effort of the
 17 1990s was on the Niger site, where intensive measurements during the Hapex-Sahel
 18 experiment gave birth to long term monitoring of the main components of the hydrological
 19 cycle on this site (rainfall, runoff, ground water). The instrumentation of the Ouémé site was
 20 installed at the end of the 1990s and was also initially focused on the hydrological cycle as a
 21 Soudanian counterpart of the Niger Sahelian site. Since the major challenge of studying the
 22 interactions between climate and vegetation cover requires a joint observation of the

1 atmosphere, the surface conditions and the water cycle, it was decided at the beginning of the
2 2000s to merge the three sites in a single project – CATCH. It took a few years to upgrade the
3 instrumentation of these three sites, especially regarding soil moisture and surface flux
4 measurements (see Mougin et al., this issue and Cappelaere et al., this issue). In 2005, the
5 Enhanced Observing Period (EOP) of AMMA started (Redelsperger et al., 2006). The
6 AMMA EOP (2005-2007; also referred to as AMMA-CATCH) is the second phase of the
7 project. For AMMA-CATCH the hydrometeorological instrumentation across the observing
8 system was considerably strengthened, with increased of the radio-sounding frequency,
9 temporary installation of C-band and X-band radar systems and profilers, and deployment of
10 additional flux stations, including the Atmospheric Radiation Measurement (ARM) Mobile
11 Facility (AMF) ARM mobile facility (Miller and Slingo, 2007). Following the EOP some
12 instruments have been removed but core measurements will be maintained until 2010 at least
13 and a few key instruments installed during the EOP will also continue to operate (flux and soil
14 moisture stations, additional recording rain gauges). The results presented in this special issue
15 are based on the data collected during the first two phases of AMMA-CATCH, covering
16 2001-2007, but in some cases extending earlier into the 1990s.

17

18

19 **Scope and content of the special issue**

20 This special issue reports some important results obtained from this unique experimental
21 setup for the two Sahelian sites, those which have been in operation for the longest time. A
22 more precise description of the specific environment and experimental setup of these two sites
23 is given in Mougin et al. (this issue) for the Gourma site and in Cappelaere et al. (this issue)
24 for the Niger site. A few papers also present the first results obtained for the Ouémé
25 mesoscale site, thus providing an idea of the contrasting characteristics and processes in the
26 Sahel and Soudano-Guinean region.

27 A particular interest of the two AMMA-CATCH Sahelian sites from the hydrologist's
28 standpoint lies in the endorheic nature of their surface hydrology: catchments are limited to
29 scales of only up to a few tens of square kilometres at most, and most include both highly
30 runoff-prone and infiltration-prone surfaces. These properties, typical of many arid to
31 semiarid areas, raise challenging questions and difficulties for field observation as well as

1 modelling.

2 The West African droughts of the 1970s and 1980s caused widespread vegetation
3 degradation and loss of woody cover in the region and heightened concerns that
4 desertification, overgrazing and global climate change would inevitably lead to serious
5 environmental problems for the foreseeable future. While vegetation degradation and loss of
6 woody cover do indeed present serious challenges to the livelihoods of many West African
7 communities, in some areas recovery of vegetation with recent returns to more average
8 rainfall provides evidence that Sahelian ecosystems may be more resilient than previously
9 thought (Anyamba and Tucker, 2005; Herrmann et al., 2005; Herrmann and Hutchinson,
10 2005; Nicholson, 2005; Olsson et al., 2005; Prince et al., 1998). Studies of vegetation
11 dynamics in response to climate, grazing and human land use patterns are, therefore, vital for
12 our understanding of the dynamics and resilience of Sahelian and Sudanian ecosystems.

13 This special issue presents a collection of the results obtained at this point from the various
14 program components, covering both the physical and biological processes of interest. New
15 field data of great quality contribute to the improvement of our understanding of this
16 environment through a combination of data-driven analyses and modelling studies.

17 After a presentation of the specific scientific questions of and experimental setup on the two
18 meso-sites (Cappelaere et al., this issue; Mougin et al., this issue), three framework papers
19 present the key features of rainfall regime variability, land use changes and hydrology of the
20 region over the past decades. After 30 years of generalised rainfall deficit over the whole
21 Sahel, Lebel and Ali (this issue) observe that the central Sahel has been recording wetter
22 conditions over the last decade, while the drought remain unabated in the Western Sahel.
23 However, by comparison to the wet period 1950-1969, the rainfall regime of the Central Sahel
24 – as analysed from a 5°x5° box – is still characterised by an earlier and less intense rainfall
25 peak during the core of the rainy season, associated with a smaller number of rain events,
26 which means an increased probability of intraseasonal droughts. Vegetation changes result
27 from both the long lasting drought of the period 1970-2000 but also from increased
28 anthropogenic pressure, as analysed by [Hiernaux et al. \(this issue, a\)](#) on a sample of 71 field
29 sites sampled among the crop fields, fallows and rangelands in the Fakara region (Niger)
30 monitored from 1994 to 2006. The overall trend in land use confirmed continuation of the
31 historical increase of cropped area since the mid 20th century, at an annual rate of 2.7% from

1 1994 to 2006. This trend arises because of increases in the extent of permanently cropped
2 fields, and reductions in the duration of fallow in intermittently cultivated fields. **Descroix et**
3 **al. (this issue)** then discuss how rainfall regime modifications and the overexploitation of the
4 environment combined to cause changes in catchment water balance and sediment budget..
5 Runoff has been increasing in most Sahelian basins for 3 decades, despite a 20-25% decrease
6 in observed rainfall during the period of 1968-1995. On the contrary, in the Southern Sahel
7 and in regions of Sudanian climate, a 15% reduction in rainfall has led to a larger relative
8 reduction in runoff and annual discharges. As a result, the large West African rivers, mainly
9 the Niger and the Senegal, have suffered a significant decrease in flows despite their
10 considerable extension into Sahelian areas because their discharges are mainly provided by
11 regions in the Sudanian climate.

12 The special issue then proceeds by presenting contributions in the four main domains that
13 are essential for the understanding of the coupling between vegetation and the water cycle: i)
14 meteorology, rainfall and boundary layer studies; ii) vegetation studies; iii) soil moisture; iv)
15 hydrological processes and modelling.

16

17 **Regional Meteorology**

18 Guichard et al. (this issue) present a quantitative analysis of the pronounced seasonal and
19 diurnal cycles of surface thermodynamics and radiative fluxes in the Northern Sahel, where
20 pasture is the predominant land use. Based on data collected from 2002 to 2007 in the Malian
21 Gourma, close to Agoufou, at 1.5°W15.3 °N and sounding data collected during the AMMA
22 field campaign, the paper assesses how the strong dynamics associated with the transition
23 from a drier hot spring to a cooler moist summer climate involves large transformations of the
24 diurnal cycle, even within the monsoon season, which significantly affect both
25 thermodynamical, dynamical and radiative fields. These results are believed to hold for the
26 whole Northern Sahel and provide valuable ground truth for assessing models over an area
27 displaying a rich variety of surface atmosphere regimes.

28 This study is complemented by that of **Frappard et al. (this issue)**, looking at the

1 mesoscale rainfall regime over the Gourma site and the Niger site.

2 **Depraetere et al.** use a new method, referred to as the Average Synchronized
3 Hyetograph, to analyze the kinematics and assess the spatial organization of sudanian rain
4 patterns. They find that 55% of rain events show the signature of a Mesoscale Convective
5 System (MCS) and have similar characteristics to MCSs in the Sahel. Their results, which
6 draw data from a rain gauge network, are consistent with results derived from satellite
7 tracking and from radar.

8

9 **Vegetation**

10 Surprisingly few studies investigate the long-term response of vegetation to climate in
11 West Africa, which severely impairs the understanding of ecosystem-climate interactions. As
12 a result, modelling studies usually do not converge. The fundamentals of the Sahelian
13 ecosystem dynamics and the response to the severe droughts of 70' and 80' are still a matter
14 of debate, especially since human impact and land use combine with rainfall variability in
15 shaping plants behaviour. **Hiernaux et al. (this issue, b)** document the response of Sahelian
16 trees to the Sahelian drought across a rainfall, edaphic and grazing gradient in the Gourma
17 based on a long-term dataset covering 1984-2006. They were able to show how recruitment
18 took place after the strong mortality following the 1984 drought and to detail how soil type
19 impacted tree mortality, which occurred sooner after drought in shallow soils and with a lag
20 of a year or two on flooded clay soils. Time-constant of tree dynamics is indeed a key to
21 possible inter-annual memory effect in surface-atmosphere interactions (Zeng et al. 1999). At
22 a shorter time-scale, **Seghieri et al. (this issue)** investigate the phenology of trees, comparing
23 sites in the Gourma and in the Benin sites of AMMA. Beside the ecological significance of
24 the relationships between flowering, fruiting and environmental factors, their study provides
25 clues to the control of evaporation by trees, which depends on both soil moisture availability
26 and leaf unfolding. Averaging seven dominant species at each site, they found that maximum

1 leafing largely precedes the water cycle in Benin and less so in the Sahel, with a clearer
2 relationship to soil moisture than to rainfall. Last, [Hiernaux et al. \(this issue, c\)](#) address the
3 question of herbaceous productivity response to climate variability and grazing pressure. In
4 addition to quantifying the response of productivity to the drought, they present evidence of a
5 decadal trend in floristic composition. The impact of grazing on the Sahelian ecosystems has
6 been and still is highly controversial, mostly because of the lack of adequate dataset. Hiernaux
7 et al. (this issue, c) were able to diagnose opposite effects of grazing, either decreasing or
8 increasing productivity depending on the floristic composition, which was also impacted by
9 grazing. In combination with the surface fluxes studies, these contributions provide the
10 necessary bases for a realistic long term analysis of the possible feedbacks of vegetation
11 changes on the atmosphere dynamics within the West African monsoon.

12

13 **Surface fluxes and Energy Budgets**

14 The surface-atmosphere exchange (flux) of momentum, heat, water, and carbon dioxide
15 are the most important pathways through which biospheric processes can influence and
16 interact with atmospheric boundary layer processes and thus monsoonal dynamics.
17 Exchanges of momentum, heat and water, in particular, influence atmospheric stability,
18 humidity and convective processes and thus the potential for the land surface to impact both
19 cloud formation and rainfall. Heat and water fluxes, and thus energy partitioning, are also
20 intimately coupled with carbon dioxide fluxes where, at short time-scales, water and carbon
21 dioxide exchange is mediated by leaf-level stomatal conductance, and at longer time-scales,
22 water exchange depends on antecedent carbon dioxide exchange, vegetation growth and leaf
23 area.

24 [Timouk et al. \(this issue\)](#), highlight the large spatial variability in the seasonal cycles of
25 net radiation and sensible heat flux within the Malian Gourma site, associated with variations

1 in vegetation and water regime, which in turn depend on lateral water redistribution. Using a
2 simple upscaling scheme, they show that the landscape-scale sensible heat flux behaves
3 similarly to point-scale flux measured at the grassland site and provides fluxes at the scale of
4 atmospheric models.

5 Two companion papers (Ramier et al., Boulain et al., this issue) provide new insights into the
6 local-scale interacting physical and biological processes in the cultivated Sahelian
7 environment of west Niger. An integrated, continuous monitoring of the water, energy,
8 carbon, and vegetation cycles at two sites representing the dominant, cultivated and semi-
9 natural, land-use/land-cover types, allows progress towards a better understanding of the
10 couplings between hydrologic, vegetation and atmospheric processes via energy and
11 biogeochemical cycles.

12 Two papers make use of data collected by a large aperture scintillometer (LAS) to derive
13 area-averaged sensible and latent heat fluxes. **Ezzahar et al.**, describe a LAS experiment
14 during a two month period in Niger (and propose a methodology to interpret LAS
15 observations made over heterogeneous terrain spanning several vegetation types. It was
16 successfully implemented over the Wankama catchment, and compared favourably to eddy
17 covariance measurements in the various vegetation types.

18 The second LAS study took place during two seasonal cycles at the sudanian Benin site.
19 **Guyot et al. (this issue)** combine LAS observations of sensible flux with the energy balance
20 method to estimate hourly latent heat flux during a two-month period with isolated rain
21 events. Water balance verification suggests that rainfall inputs to the shallow soil trigger an
22 additional contribution to evapotranspiration, assumed to originate from the underlying water
23 table through tree-root uptake.

24

25 **Soil moisture**

1 The analysis of feedback effects between continental surfaces and the atmosphere is a key
2 element in the understanding of the WAM dynamics. Monitoring of surface parameters, in
3 particular soil moisture, is consequently essential. A ground network was thus designed to
4 document the temporal and spatial variability of soil moisture profiles over the three AMMA-
5 CATCH sites. This network covers different vegetation types and climates. In the Sahel **De**
6 **Rosnay et al. (this issue)**, use soil moisture measurements from the Gourma site to
7 characterise soil moisture at different spatial scales. They thus identify the critical spatial
8 scale needed to make soil moisture measurements that provide an accurate indication (low
9 variance and bias) of soil moisture dynamics at the scale of the super site. These relationships
10 are then used to evaluate the performance of microwave remote sensing data to assess surface
11 soil moisture in Sahelian areas where the vegetation is sparse (NDVI below 0.5) and does not
12 mask the soil signal. **Zribi et al. (this issue)**, explore the capacity to monitor surface soil
13 moisture of Sahelian sites in Niger and Mali at a 25 km resolution from passive microwave
14 (ERS) data. The ERS products are evaluated against the AMMA campaign (2005-2006)
15 ground and satellite data. They are then used to simulate the surface soil moisture over the
16 1992-2006 period. Differences between the northern and the southern Sahel are observed and
17 can be related to precipitation cell size and to the very high evaporation rates in the northern
18 regions, which lead to a rapid decrease in soil moisture following a precipitation event.

19 **Pellarin et al. (this issue)**, demonstrates the feasibility to reproduce regional microwave
20 brightness temperatures as seen by the AMSR-E radiometer (6.9 GHz), based on a coupled
21 land surface model / microwave model driven by a dense raingauge network as well as soil
22 and vegetation information over a 120 by 100 km region near Niamey (Niger). In-situ
23 observations from about 50 raingauges were essential to obtain accurate rainfall fields and to
24 evaluate the simulation outputs at the local scale by comparison with soil moisture,
25 evapotranspiration and runoff measurements. This study is a first step to perform large scale

1 simulations driven by satellite rainfall fields and constrained by AMSR-E measurements.

2

3 **Hydrological processes and modeling**

4 Two complementary modelling approaches are used to improve the representation of the
5 water cycle on the Niger site of the AC observing system. The first is a stochastic approach
6 which aims at exploring how the data collected by the AC observing system may help in
7 assessing the sensitivity of water cycle modelling to the resolution of the models forcing
8 fields. The illustration given here is with regard to rainfall fields (Vischel et al., this issue); it
9 builds on the wealth of previous hydrological studies at the Niger site, to put forward an
10 innovative meso-scale model formulation for rainfields. The scope of the paper is to evaluate
11 the potential for improved climate modelling via downscaling of coarse-scale rainfall data in
12 terms of uncertainty assessment and bias reduction for runoff estimation.

13 The fully physical approach is illustrated by the paper of Saux-Picart et al performing a
14 mesoscale modelling of the Sahelian land surface, based on field data collected at the
15 AMMA-Niger site. They apply a land surface model, which was adapted to the local
16 environment, in order to spatialize water and energy fluxes over the ACN meso-site, with the
17 help of input and validation data from remote sensing.

18

19

20

1 **Concluding remarks**

2 The AMMA-CATCH observing system represents a unique infrastructure for long term
3 monitoring of land use / land cover and the associated hydrological cycle over an array of
4 three mesoscale sites sampling the eco-climatic gradient of West Africa. The observational
5 and preliminary modelling results presented in this special issue essentially deal with the
6 Sahelian sub-region. Several papers make use of datasets initiated in the 1980's and 1990's at
7 the two Sahelian sites, providing a long term perspective on the evolution of climatic and
8 environmental variables in a region under great climatic stress and demographic pressure.
9 Other papers focus on the information brought by the additional sensors installed for the
10 AMMA Enhanced Observing Period (EOP) in 2005. Even these shorter series of data prove to
11 be a rich source of information on a region where the environment and the water cycle are
12 poorly monitored by operational networks. First results from the Soudanian site observing
13 system are also reported, but there is clearly a wealth of data that have yet to be analysed in
14 order to provide a picture as detailed as the one obtained on the Sahelian sites. The challenge
15 faced by our scientific community is clearly now to integrate and compare the results obtained
16 on the three sites and to use this data set for integrated modelling studies of the coupled
17 atmosphere – land surface – water cycle system in West Africa. One research direction of
18 particular existence is the study of possible feedbacks of a changing environment and related
19 water budget components on mesoscale and regional atmosphere dynamics; since land use
20 changes remain strong and widespread in this region, feedback effects, if proven, should be
21 taken into account in land management not only from the perspective of its direct impact on
22 resources available to the populations but also as a factor influencing the rainfall regime.
23 Clarifying this issue at the regional scale would be a great contribution to Earth System
24 Science, whose goal is precisely to observe, understand and predict global environmental
25 changes involving interactions between land, atmosphere, water, biosphere, societies,

1 technologies and economies. This goal is reachable only through long term monitoring and
2 modelling strategies on regional systems such as West Africa.

3 An important issue for the future is the possibility of maintaining such an observing system
4 beyond the present decade. This will first require a greater involvement of the African
5 scientific community who often lack the financial resources enabling them to participate in
6 intensive field work or use and develop the point, regional and global models that benefit
7 from such field measurements. African scientists have a vested and deep scientific interested
8 in studying the impact of climate and land cover changes on water resources, agriculture,
9 health, social and economic developments in West Africa. Increasing opportunities for
10 involvement should be a significant part of the AMMA-CATCH strategy for the years to
11 come. Another important point is to work on a better integration between the ground
12 observing strategy of AMMA-CATCH and satellite missions. Two missions are of special
13 interest in this respect: the Soil Moisture and Ocean Salinity mission (SMOS) and the Megha-
14 Tropiques mission (MT), scheduled to be launched in 2009 and 2010 respectively. SMOS is
15 devoted to soil moisture monitoring using a 2D L-Band (1.4 GHz) interferometer equipped
16 with a synthetic aperture antenna. MT is focused on the tropical atmospheric water cycle with
17 a strong emphasis on rainfall and estimation of the radiative budget at the top of the tropical
18 atmosphere. Using these new satellite data along with those of the AQUA Train and MSG in
19 conjunction with the ground AMMA-CATCH data is an exciting perspective for all the
20 scientists involved in the science of the Earth System in West Africa.

21

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AMMA-CATCH studies in the Sahelian region of West-Africa: an overview.

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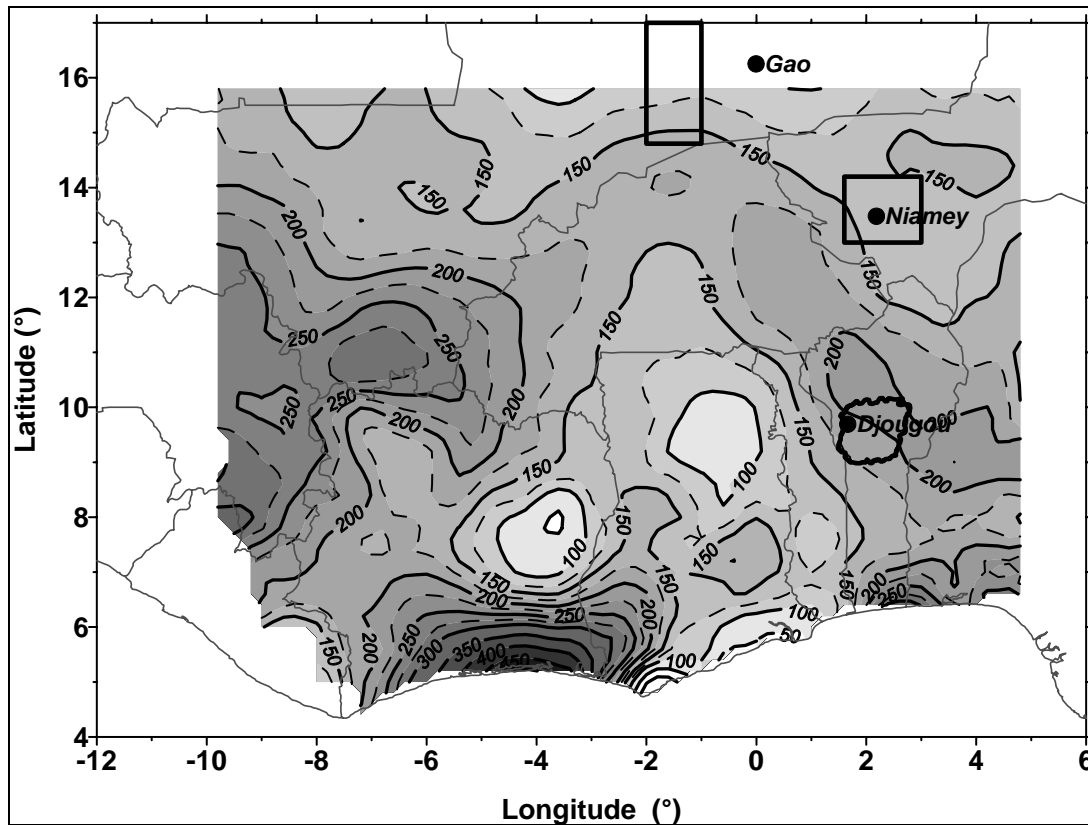


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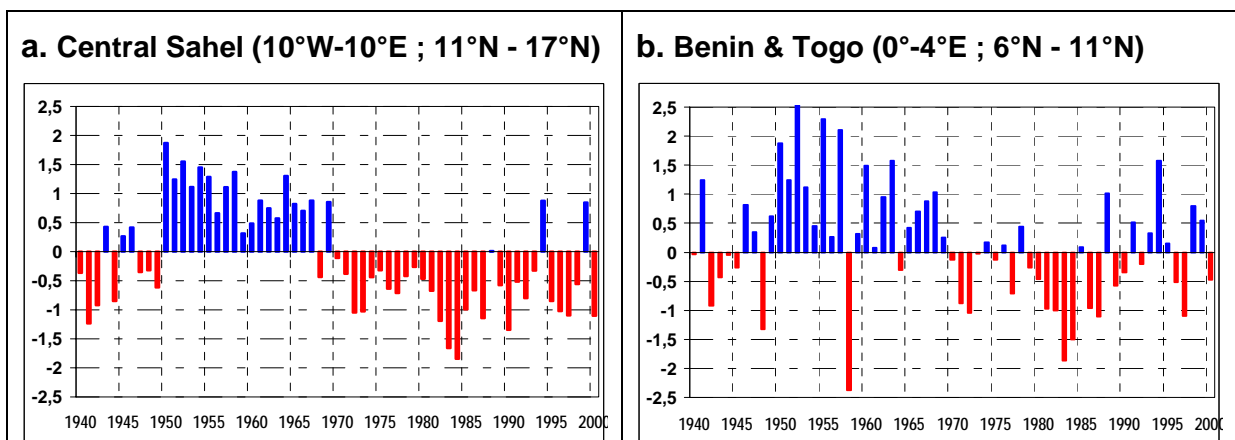


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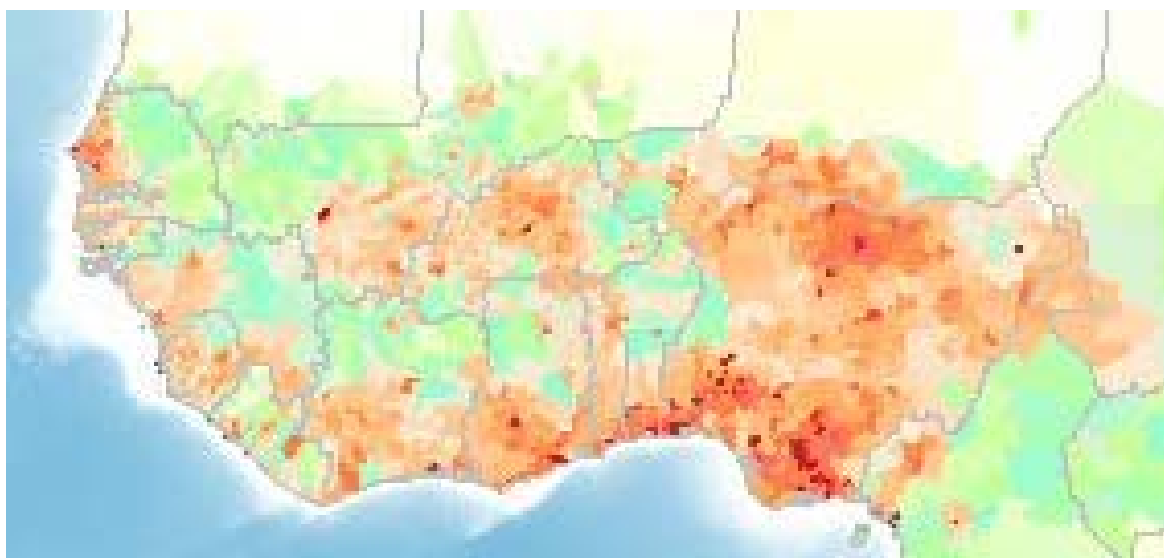


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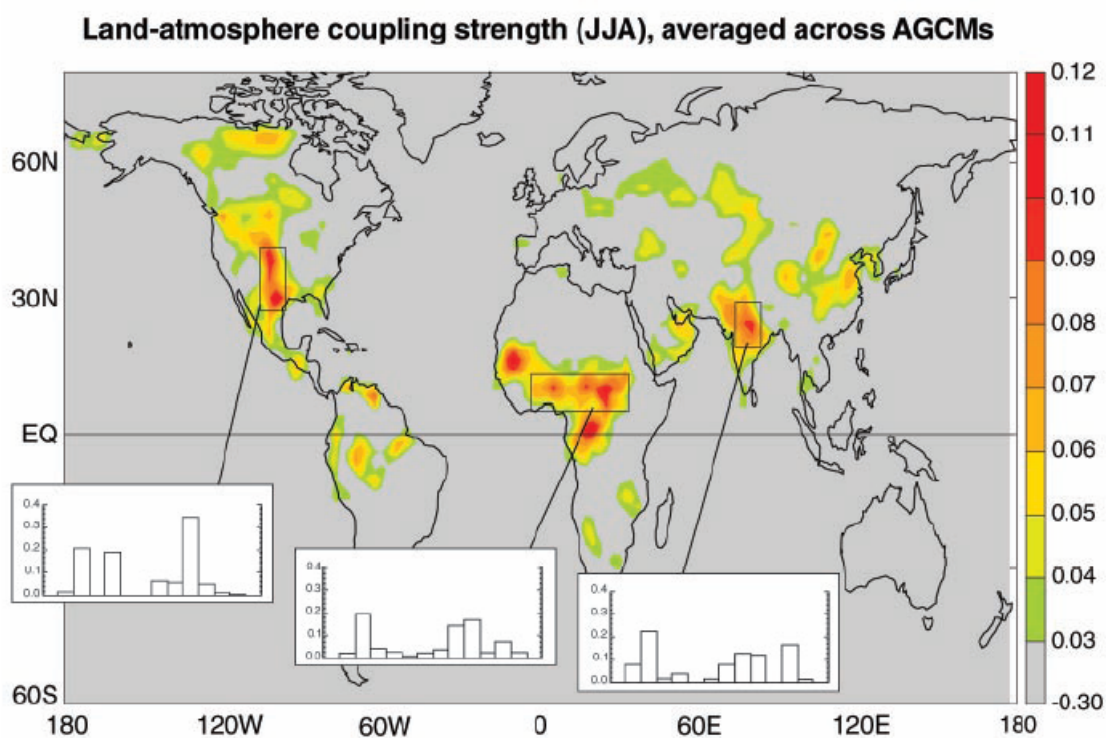


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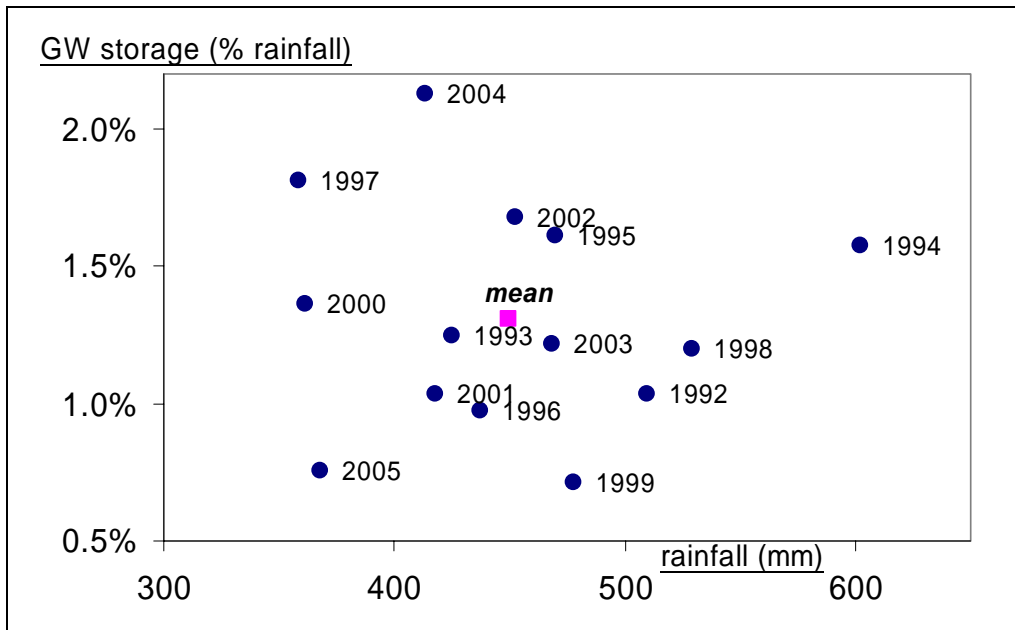


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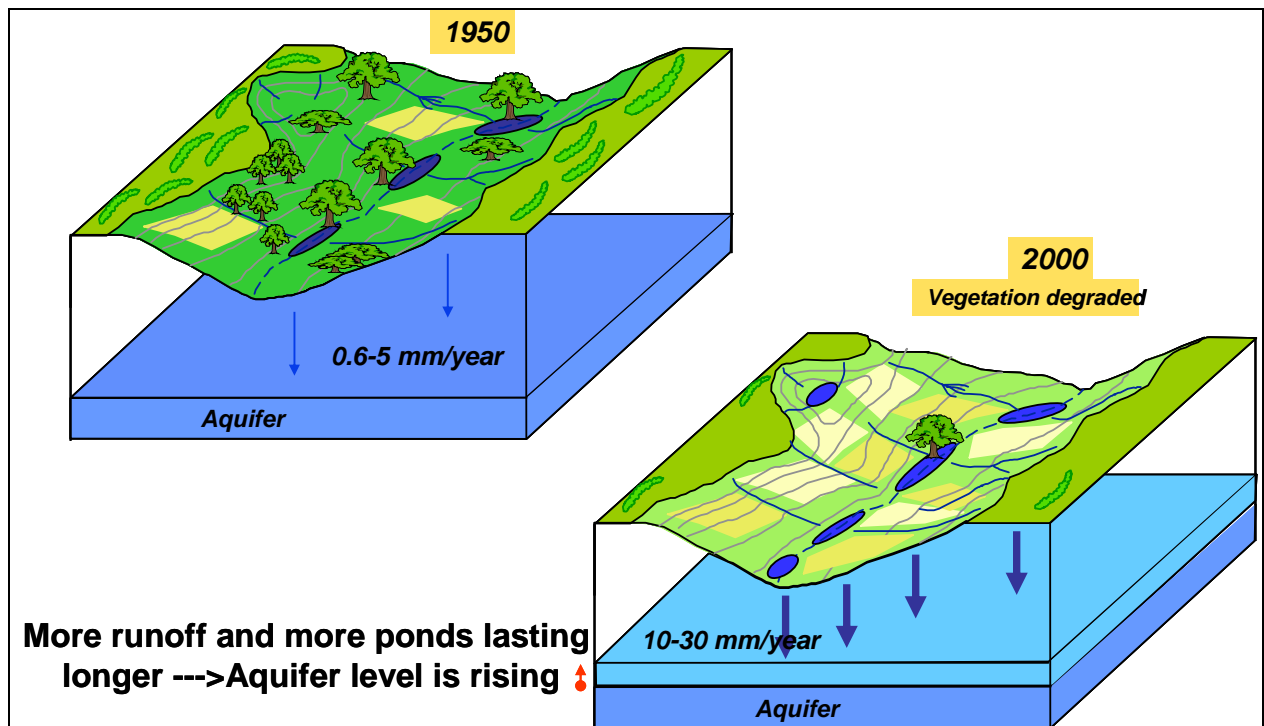


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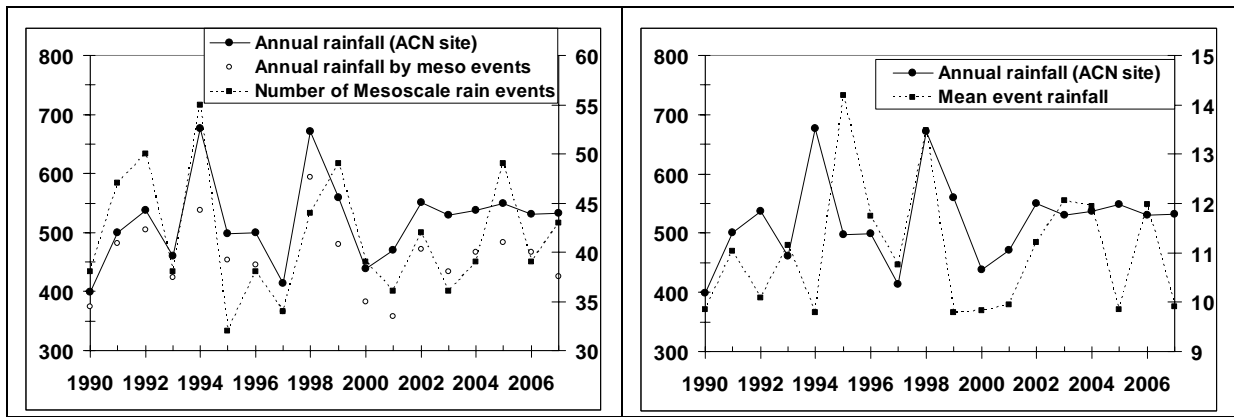


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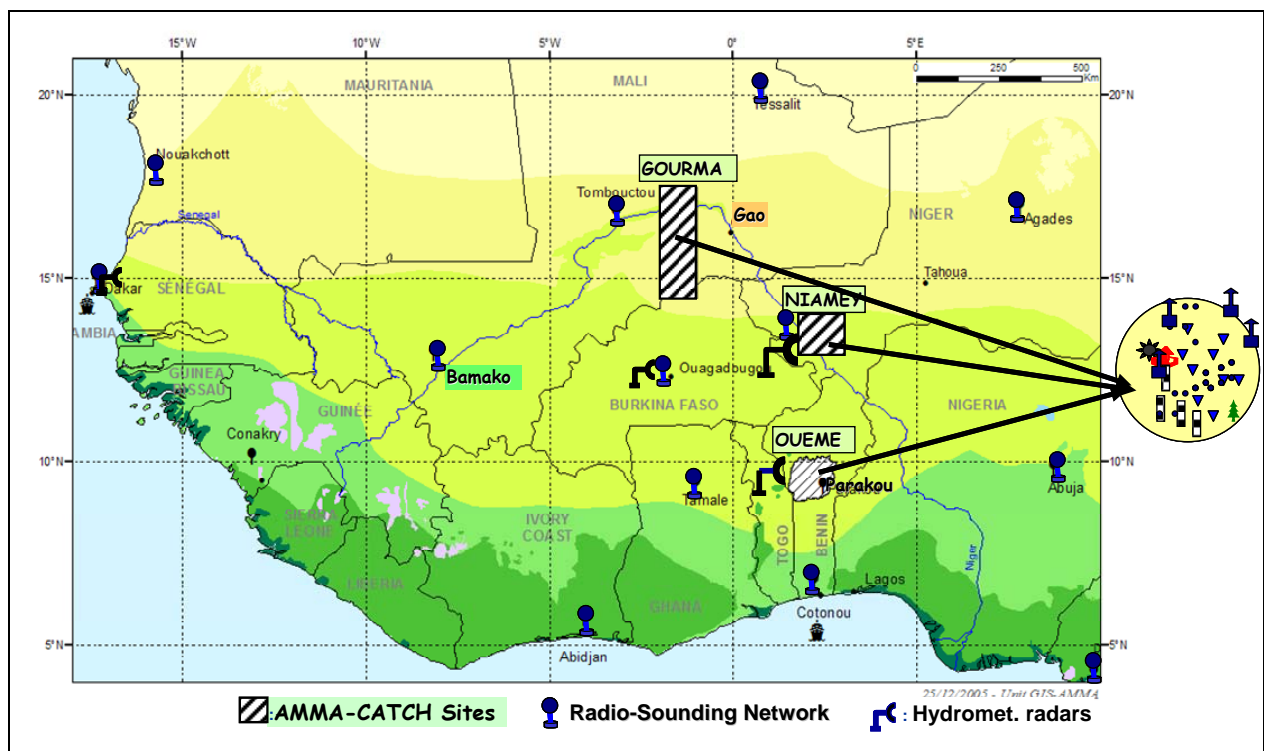


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