

Contrasted land-surface processes along the West African rainfall gradient - Monsoon Multidisciplinary Analysis (AMMA): an integrated project for understanding of the West African climate system and its human dimension

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Contrasted. land-surface processes along the West AQ1 African rainfall gradient

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Abstract

We review the main results of land-surface studies obtained in the three sites of the long-term observing system AMMA-CATCH. Runoff in the Sahel enhances the variability of energy partitioning between non-infiltrative areas where sensible heat is dominant and infiltrative areas where soil water availability increases the latent flux. In terms of water resources, an increase in runoff over the past 50 years, already reported for the exoreic Sahel, was revealed in the endoreic Sahel. In the Sudanian domain, the subsurface origin of streamflow could explain its decrease over the same period. Copyright © 2010 Royal Meteorological Society

Keywords: energy fluxes; runoff; groundwater; Sahel; Sudanian climate; water resources

I. Introduction 2

3 As West Africa is located in the inter-tropical belt, 4 it has a monsoon climate (Lafore et al., 2011) and is subject to marked seasonal variability. Drought, 6 with relative deficits in precipitation of 25-50%, 7 was widespread in the Sahel (mean annual rain-8 fall 100-700 mm) during the 1970s and 1980s. 9 Wetter biogeographic zones such as the Sudanian 10 (700-1400 mm) and Guinean belts (>1400 mm) were also affected. Since the 1990s, a return to relatively 12 wetter conditions has been observed in much of West 13 Africa (Lebel and Ali, 2009).

14 The most populated regions of West Africa lie along 15 the coast and in the cultivated Sahel (400-700 mm 16 rainfall belt). A great part of the Sudanian region 17 is characterised by relatively low population den-18 sity, which explains the wide extent of forest even 19 today. However, over the past 60 years, forest clearing 20 and the establishment of croplands have considerably 21 expanded in sub-Saharan Africa to meet the demand 22 for food and firewood of the growing population (FAO, 23 2004). And the duration of fallow in the traditional 24 sustainable crop-long fallow cycle has been drastically 25 shortened since 1970 (Valentin et al., 2004).

West Africa presents considerable regional evi-26 dence of the impacts of changes, particularly con-27 28 cerning water resources: despite a decrease in rainfall during the 1968–1995 period, streamflow has been 29 increasing in most exoreic Sahelian basins (Mahé 30 31 and Paturel, 2009) over the last three decades. Con-32 versely, in Sudanian regions, reduced rainfall has led 33 to an even greater relative reduction in discharges 34 (Descroix et al., 2009). As a result, the main West 35 African rivers, such as the Niger and the Sene-36 gal, have undergone a significant decrease in flow 37 because their discharges are mainly supplied by Suda-38 nian and Guinean tributaries. Groundwater resources 39 have also been affected: for instance since the early 40 1960s, the level of the aquifer has been continu-41 ously rising in endorheic areas of Sahelian West Niger 42 (Favreau et al., 2009). As joint studies of water and 43 energy fluxes are rare in West Africa, documenting 44 the land-surface processes that drive the water and 45 energy budgets was one of the goals of the AMMA 46 project, which was designed to investigate the inter-47 actions between atmospheric, oceanic and terrestrial 48 systems and their joint control of tropical monsoon 49 dynamics in West Africa. This article highlights the 50 most original results obtained thanks to the large

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data set collected by the AMMA-Catch observing 2 system. 3

2. Data and methods

6 The AMMA-CATCH long-term observing system 7 (www.amma-catch.org; Lebel et al., 2009) is based 8 on three meso-scale sites (Figure 1) that represent 9 the West African eco-climatic gradient. Owing to the 10 low annual rainfall (100-450 mm), the northern Sahe-11 lian Gourma-Mali site (Mougin et al., 2009) is mainly 12 rangeland with semi-arid vegetation. It is divided into 13 a sandy part with dunes and a crystalline part with 14 large outcrops. The south-west Niger site (Cappelaere 15 et al., 2009), with \sim 500 mm rainfall, is typical of the 16 cultivated sandy Sahel with fallows and millet crops. 17 The vegetation at the Upper Ouémé catchment site 18 in crystalline Benin (1200-1300 mm) is composed of 19 open forests interspersed with mosaics of crops and 20fallows. Observation of the continental water cycle is 21 based on a multi-scale (spatial and temporal) approach, 22 combining local sites and meso-scale basins, and long-23 term and enhanced observation periods. A particular 24 effort was made to document water and energy fluxes 25 on an extensive set of surface types. 26

The meso-scale instrumentation (raingauges, stream-27 gauges and well networks) is used to study the cou-28 pling of surface hydrology with regional atmospheric 29 processes (Peugeot et al., 2010). Within each meso-30 scale site, local sites are used for the study of fine 31 surface processes. These include soil water monitoring 32 stations, piezometers, eddy-correlation flux stations, 33 and vegetation monitoring. An intermediate observa-34 tion scale between local and mesoscale is that of small 35 catchments used to upscale and validate the elementary 36 processes in hydrological and land-surface models. 37

39 3. Energy partitioning: soil water 40 availability is a particularly limiting factor 41 for latent heat flux in the Sahel

In the Sahelian region, net radiation (Rn) increases 43 sharply during the short rainy season. This strong 44



Figure I. Location of the three meso-scale sites of the 60 AMMA-CATCH observing system.

mono-modal seasonality results from the summer-61 time concomitance of high incoming radiation caused 62 by aerosol scavenging, with low outgoing radiation 63 related to a decrease in both the albedo (vegetation 64 growth) and the surface temperature (Ramier et al., 65 2009; Timouk et al., 2009). However, marked site-to-66 site variability of the seasonal cycle has been observed, 67 in particular in Gourma, between bare soil and flooded-68 forest sites (Figure 2). It has been reported that both 69 seasonal and spatial variability in energy partition-70 ing is mostly influenced by soil water availability 71 through evapotranspiration (ET) processes and veg-72 etation growth. This pattern fails in the case of weak 73 soil permeability or low annual rainfall (in north Sahel 74 and at bare soil sites in Gourma) which is a direct con-75 sequence of soil degradation. During the rainy season, 76 the latent heat flux replaces sensible, ground heat, and 77 outgoing radiation fluxes, the first of which dominates 78 during the rest of the year. Via ET, rainfall spatial het-79 erogeneity and scarcity increase the variability of the 80 energy budget from the event to the interannual scale. 81

82 Under the Sudanian bioclimate, the longer rainy season leads to smoother annual variations in Rn (Guyot, 83 2010). A local minimum occurs at the middle of 84 85 the rainy season related to cloud cover and a limited decrease in potential incident radiation due to 86 87 the position closed to the equator. In the dry season, net radiation is constrained not only by atmospheric 88 optical depth (aerosols) but also by the warmer bare 89 90 land surfaces, which produce higher outgoing longwave radiation. During a 5-month period in the rainy 91 season, actual ET was found to be close to ETO, con-92 93 firming that water availably is not a limiting factor for 94 the latent heat flux during the rainy season.

Both at the Sahelian and Sudanian sites, ET dom-95 inates the water balance. In cultivated Niger, Ramier 96 et al. (2009) showed that millet evaporated less than 97 fallow during two crop cycles. Over the year, ET on 98 sandy soils with natural vegetation (fallow in Niger or 99 grassland in Gourma) accounted for 65-85% of the 100 rainfall whereas in the millet field, it only accounted 101 for about half the rainfall. In the context of general 102 land clearing in the cultivable area of the Sahel, this 103 significant difference could have a major impact on 104 the coupled land-atmosphere water cycle. In the Suda-105 nian region, on a mixed cover of shrub savannah and 106 fallow-crop at a small catchment scale, ET at a small 107 eatchment scale (deduced from a scintillometer (Guyot 108 et al., 2009)) represented 83% of the annual rainfall. 109 110

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4. Pre-eminence of surface runoff in the Sahel versus subsurface exfiltration in Sudanian regions and links with heat fluxes and energy balance

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Major differences in flow generation were revealed at 117 our Sahelian and Sudanian sites. Endoreic Sahelian 118 sites are composed of patches with contrasted infiltra-119 tion capacity. In low infiltrative areas, surface flow is 120



Figure 2. Course of 24-h average net radiation and latent heat flux for three surfaces of the Gourma site (bare soil with runoff and no vegetation, grassland with vegetation and a moderate soil water availability and a forested seasonally flooded depression) (**ofrom** Timouk et al., 2009).

produced by Hortonian runoff determined by rainfall 1 2 intensity and by the infiltration capacity of the sur-3 face soil. Water is routed to either highly-infiltrative depressions (temporally flooded ponds like in Niger 4 5 or in sandy Gourma) or poorly-infiltrative depressions 6 flooded for longer periods (like in crystalline Gourma) 7 (Cappelaere et al., 2009; Mougin et al., 2009). In 8 sandy areas in Gourma, water routing is local from 9 dune hillslopes to inter-dune depressions. In crystalline 10 Gourma, water produced on shallow soils is routed 11 over longen, but also ends up in depressions. At the 12 cultivated and wetter Niger site, runoff from the patch-13 work of surfaces is channelled down the slope in sandy 14 gullies and ends up in ponds where water accumulates 15 before recharging the sedimentary aquifer (Cappelaere 16 et al., 2009).

17 In the Sahel region, surface water redistribution by 18 runoff exerts strong control over the seasonal cycle 19 of heat fluxes and radiation balance. On outcrops or 20extensively crusted soils, water is lost by runoff and 21 most Rn is converted into sensible heat flux. Con-22 versely, infiltrating surfaces and depressions exhibit a 23 significant seasonal cycle in soil moisture and plant 24 growth, resulting in marked variation in Rn, sensible and latent heat fluxes (Timouk *et al.*, 2009). When 25 rainfall events are particularly intense and concen-26 trated, infiltration can exceed ET and deep drainage 27 can occur. On a millet cover in Niger, Ramier *et al.* 28 (2009) observed variations in humidity at a depth of 29 2.5 m. 30

In the sub-humid zones of West Africa, infiltration 31 rates are generally higher than in the Sahel due to the 32 33 higher organic matter content of the top soils (Valentin 34 et al., 2004). At the hillslope scale, previous studies 35 showed that most infiltration excess water infiltrates before reaching an expanse of open water (van de 36 37 Giesen et al., 2000; •Masiyandima et al., 2003; Giertz et al., 2006). Consequently, Hortonian runoff should 38 39 contribute little to total streamflow. At the Ouémé site, two saturated ground layers coexist from July 40 41 to September. The deeper one is the permanent water table located on the saprolite of the crystalline bedrock. 42 43 It is recharged during this period and is then depleted 44 slowly and regularly from September to the follow-45 ing June. The general drying up of rivers in October-November follows the end of the rains but does 46 not coincide with the lowest level of the water table 47 48 (June), reflecting the weakness or even absence of

Figure 3. Hydrological functioning of a headwater channel with its wetland (*Bas-fond*) in the Ouémé site. During the rainy season, baseflow, the principal component of annual discharge, is provided by perched groundwater located on hillslopes and in shallow sandy layers of *bas-fonds*. The permanent groundwater in the weathered cover of the fractured bedrock is disconnected from the hydrograph network (from Kamagaté *et al.*, 2007).

permanent groundwater inputs to the base flow (Kam-1 2 agaté et al., 2007). The second seasonally saturated 3 layer is located close to the surface. It emerges locally 4 in the headwaters (called *bas-fonds*) of the hydrograph 5 networks. Streamflow can be explained by drainage of these seasonal shallow groundwaters and excess 6 7 runoff on saturated areas around the waterlogged bas-8 fonds (Figure 3). In the upper Ouémé, the drainage of the shallow groundwaters into the bas-fonds rep-9 10 resents 60-80% of the annual discharge (Kamagaté et al., 2007). 11

12 The absence of drainage from the permanent groundwater into the hydrographic network from local 13 to mesoscale meant that another process was needed 14 15 to explain its depletion during the dry season. One suggested hypothesis is tree transpiration (Kamagaté 16 17 et al., 2007). In a detailed analysis of ET after an isolated rainfall event in the dry season, Guyot et al. 18 19 (2009) demonstrated that one month after the rain-20 fall event, observed ET had emptied available water 21 in the instrumented first metre of soil. Consequently, 22 the subsequently observed continuing ET could only 23 be explained by the contribution of water uptake from 24 vadose or saturated layers by vegetation. 25

Surface changes, causes of the historical evolution of Sahelian water resources, new evidence revealed by remote sensing and coupled modelling

At the cultivated Niger site, a continuous rise of the water table has occurred since the 1960s, with an acceleration of the rise starting from the middle of the 1980s (Favreau *et al.*, 2009) (Figure 4d). Land clearance in favour of an intensive crop-fallow system 36 is thought to produce more runoff. Unfortunately, no 37 long-term records of runoff exist for this area. At the 38 rangeland Gourma site, a potential change in water 39 resources had not been investigated before the Amma 40 Experiment. 41

At both Sahelian sites, intensive use of historical 42 remote sensing data provided evidence of an increase 43 in runoff since 1950. At the Niger site, Leblanc 44 et al. (2008) showed that the density of drainage lines 45 retrieved from aerial photographs revealed a moderate 46 increase between 1950 and 1975, and a doubling from 47 1975 to 1992 (Figure 4c). In the pastoral Gourma 48 region, •Gardelle et al. (2010) combined satellite 49 and aerial remote sensing information and revealed 50 a marked increase in the area of surface water, 51 starting from the 1970s and accelerating in the mid 52 1980s (Figure 5). This long-term increase in pond 53 surface area is an indication of intensification in runoff 54 triggered by the lasting impact of the 1970-1980s 55 droughts on the vegetation over the shallow soils 56 prevailing over a third of Gourma. Changes in land 57 cover due to human pressure (Niger) or to water stress 58 (Gourma) both resulted in increasing runoff. The same 59 phenomenon of runoff intensification has also been 60 observed outside the two Sahelian meso-scale sites, 61 particularly in large exoreic catchments where long 62 time series are available (upper catchment of Volta, 63 Sahelian tributaries of Niger) (Descroix et al., 2009; 64 Karambiri et al., 2011). 65

Modelling is needed for water balance quantification under changing land use and climate conditions. 66 By coupling a physically based spatially distributed hydrological model with an explicit model of vegetation dynamics over a small catchment ($\sim 2 \text{ km}^2$) 70

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Figure 4. Historical trends in annual water cycle in the Niger site (reprinted from Cappelaere *et al.*, 2009); (a) rainfall; (b) rainy-season evapotranspiration (ET); (c) catchment runoff (line) and drainage density (dots), and (d) water table level. Dots correspond to field data: at Niamey airport for rainfall (courtesy DMN Niger); in a 500-km² section of Niger site for drainage density (Leblanc *et al.*, 2008); areal mean difference with 1963 for water table (Favreau *et al.*, 2009). Lines for ET and runoff are simulations for a small intensive catchment (Boulain *et al.*, 2009).

at the Niger site, Boulain et al. (2009) assessed the 1 2 impact of three different land use/land cover (LULC) 3 patterns on the hydrologic cycle. The assessment con-4 cerned two contrasted rainy season patterns (simulat-5 ing dry and wet years respectively) with LULC maps 6 for 1950, 1975 and 1992. The LULC chronology illus-7 trated the extension of land clearance. ET during the 8 rainy season appeared to be more sensitive to land-9 use changes than to rainfall but with variations that 10 remained below 10%. The simulated ET amounted to 11 60-65% of annual rainfall for the wet year, and to 12 over 85% for the dry year. These figures are con-13 sistent with point ET measurements (Ramier et al., 14 2009). The simulated runoff appeared to be much more 15 sensitive to land-use changes than to climate forcing. 16 Beyond this sensitivity analysis, Boulain et al. (2009) 17 reconstructed the historical trend of the water bal-18 ance by combining rainfall and LULC records. The 19 simulated trend showed a reduction in ET during the

rainy season mainly due to changes in land use after 20 1975 (Figure 4b) and a threefold increase in runoff to 21 the valley pond (Figure 4c). The increase in simulated 22 runoff after 1980 was due to the combined action of a 23 return to relatively wetter conditions (Figure 4a) and 24 the continuation of land clearance. This reconstruction 25 appears to fit well with observations (drainage den-26 sity increase (Figure 4c) retrieved from remote sensing 27 images (Leblanc et al., 2008) and the historical rise in 28 the water table. 29

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6. Discussion and conclusion

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Studies of the changes in landscape by remote sensing 34 undertaken during the experiment provided evidence 35 for an increase in runoff in endorheic regions of the 36 Sahel. The complex interactions between vegetation 37 and hydrology in a changing context were modelled 38



Figure 5. Average surface of water per pond (open square) in the Gourma site for the 51 ponds present in all Landsat images at the peaks of the pond's annual flood and surface of the case study pond (full diamond) where Landsat images were completed by aerial photographs for the oldest dates (data from Gardelle et al., 2010). The increase of the pond area in Gourma is an indicator of the increase of runoff.

1 at the scale of a small catchment paving the way for 2 modelling both the water balance and vegetation at 3 larger scales.

4 Although both Sahelian and Sudanian regions are 5 facing a decrease in precipitation, their responses in terms of water resources are quite different: the annual 6 7 flow of Sudanian rivers declined while discharge, 8 surface water stored in ponds and the recharge of the 9 ground water increased in the Sahel. Runoff influenced 10 by surface features governs streamflow in the Sahel, 11 while at the Sudanian site, annual streamflow is mainly composed of subsurface flux exfiltration, and runoff 12 13 (Hortonian and on saturated areas) is secondary. The 14 contrasted change in the two climatic regions could 15 result from differences in the nature of the dominant 16 streamflow generation process and of the land-surface 17 characteristics combined. Sudanian land covers are 18 less degraded than Sahelian ones. There are many 19 reasons for this including weaker human pressure, 20 better structural stability due to higher organic matter 21 and clay contents of Sudanian soils (Valentin et al., 22 2004). In Sudanian zones, due to the predominance 23 of shallow groundwater exfiltration in the streamflow, 24 the decrease in streamflow is not counterbalanced by an increase in the Hortonian runoff capacity due to 25 26 high land-surface degradation like in the Sahel. The 27 surface water resource depends on the saturation level 28 of the upper layers which are highly influenced by 29 ET and rainfall intermittency. Mechanisms controlling the change in water resource have been identified and 30 31 their modelling is in progress in the Sahel. In the 32 Sudanian region, we have not yet reached a thorough understanding of the redistribution of surface water. 33 34 Mechanisms identified in Ouémé need to be validated 35 in other Sudanian zones before being generalised.

36 During the rainy season ET is the major component 37 of the surface water budget in both Sahelian and 38 Sudanian regions. Pluri-annual monitoring of energy 39

and water budgets shed new light on the interactions 61 between the land surface and the atmosphere. In the 62 energy balance, the latent heat flux influenced by 63 soil water availability (as forcing radiation is not a 64 65 limiting factor in the Sahel) supplants the sensible heat flux during the rainy season. First, rainfall amount 66 and distribution govern soil humidity. The interannual 67 variability of rainfall has a direct impact on the 68 radiation distribution between latent and sensible heat 69 fluxes. But our understanding of exchanges between 70 the land surface and the atmosphere cannot be limited 71 to strictly vertical processes. In the cultivated or 72 dryer pastoral Sahel, runoff redistribution controlled 73 74 by soil surface is also a key factor to explain spatial variability of the energy balance. If runoff and runon 75 surfaces comprise large landscape units as is the case 76 77 in Gourma, their contrasts in energy partitioning could 78 create horizontal gradients of surface heat flux which persist throughout the rainy season and have an impact 79 on meso-scale atmospheric circulations. 80

81 Clearance will go on. Thanks to the AMMA Experiment, advances in our understanding of land-surface 82 83 processes will enable us to suggest possible changes in the future. In the cultivated Sahel, the weaker evap-84 oration of crops or degraded surfaces could lead to 85 less water returning to the atmosphere which could 86 have a general impact on the monsoon (Taylor et al., 87 88 2011). In the Sudanian region, the process involved in streamflow generation reduces the role of soil surface 89 features. Surface water resources influenced by the 90 91 storage of the shallow groundwater with low capac-92 ity depend directly on the distribution and frequency 93 of major rainfall events. With the increase in deforestation, the tree water uptake could be reduced and 94 if, as assumed, the annual depletion of the permanent 95 96 groundwater is controlled by tree uptake, the water 97 table could thus end up rising as it did in the Sahel. 98 However, all these scenarios are still largely hypothet-99 ical and call for the continuation of surface water cycle observations at dedicated sites. 100

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