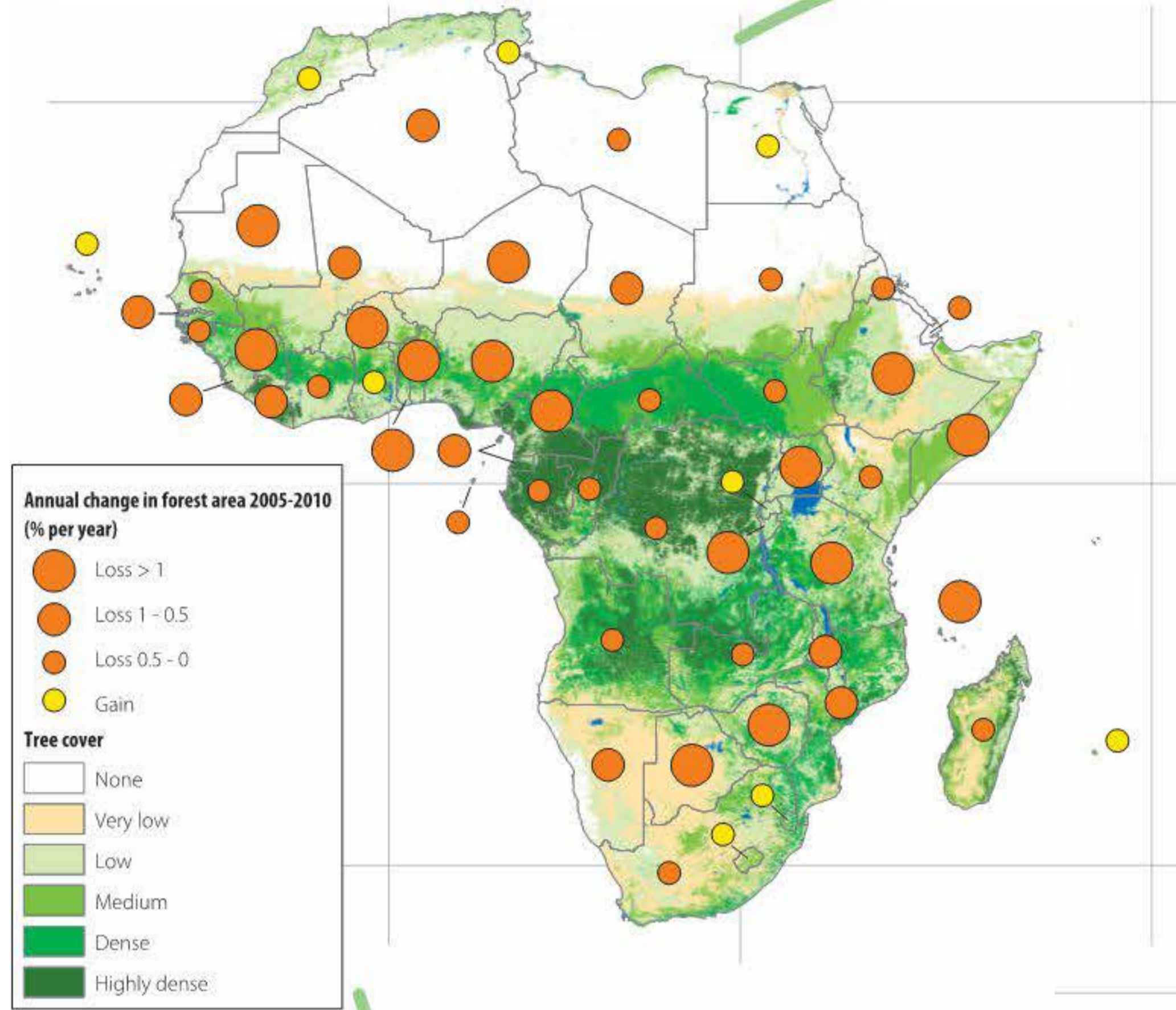


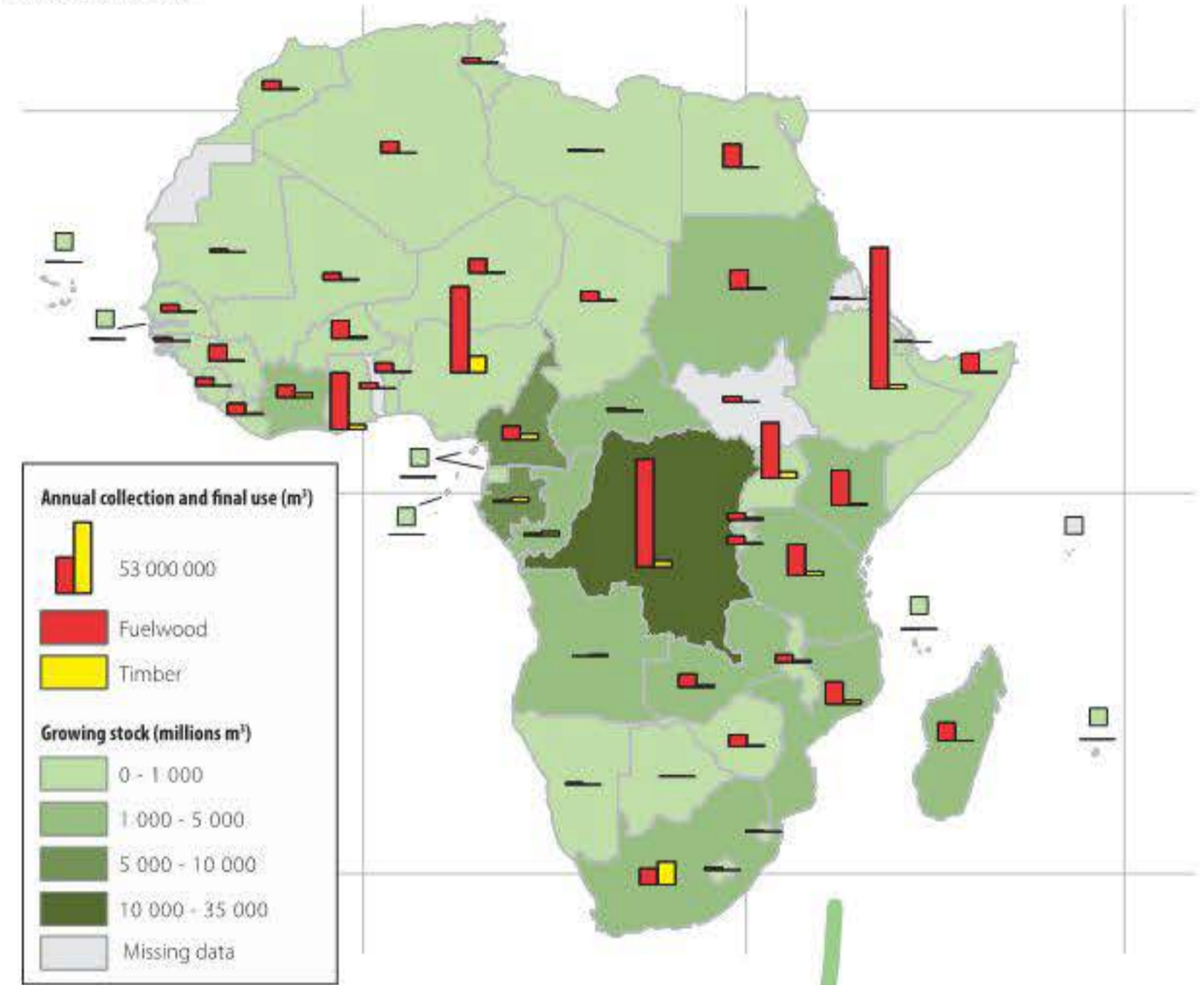
**M30. Tree cover and deforestation**

Source ESA 2010 and FAO 2010



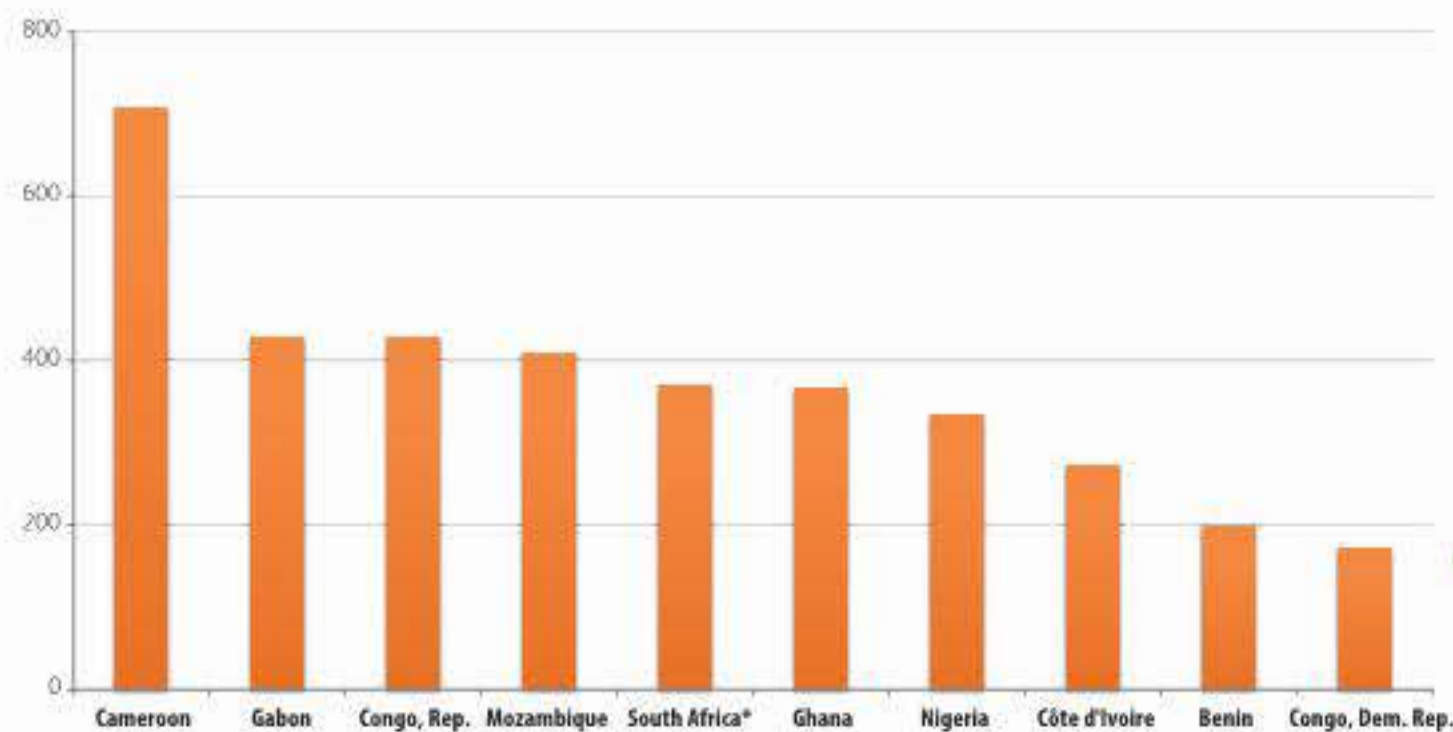
**M31. Standing wood stock and production**

Source FAO 2014



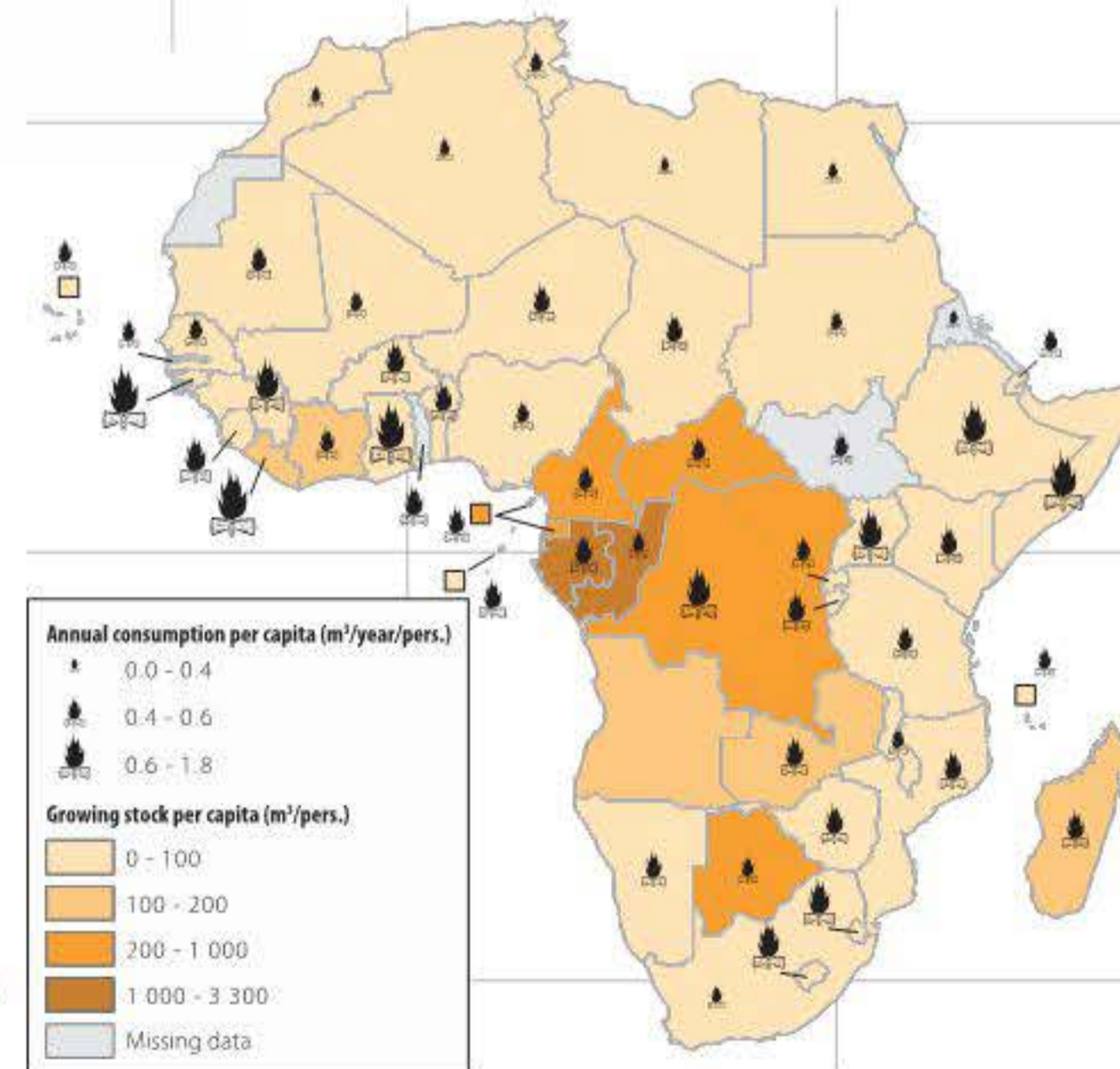
**Fig. 17. Major exporters of wood**

Source OIBT COMTRADE, 2016



**M32. Fuelwood consumption and standing wood stock per capita**

Source FAO 2014



## WOOD: A KEY RESOURCE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**With population growth and urban development, African demand for wood is growing steadily. Most of the countries of Africa are facing a major challenge: reconciling their economic development, which often implies deforestation, with the maintenance of tree canopy cover, which provides resources and basic services for rural and urban populations.**

- **A resource that is still abundant but rapid deforestation in densely populated areas**

Trees – and forests – are key components of African territories and often provide essential resources for rural households. Trees are present in almost all plant formations found on the continent, from the wooded savannas of the Sahel or the spiny forests of Madagascar to the dense rainforests of the Congo Basin, the mountain forests of Guinea and East Africa, and the dry forests (Miombo) of Southern and East Africa. Trees are also present in traditional cropping systems: in permanent fields in West Africa (tree parks), in complex agroforestry systems based on cacao and coffee trees in Central and East Africa, and in all shifting cultivation fallows.

The second largest tropical forest area in the world after the Amazon is in Africa: the Congo Basin forests span more than 200 million ha. African forests and savannas represent around 1 billion ha. In sub-Saharan Africa, they account for around 45% of the total land area. In per capita terms, forest area stands at 1 ha/person on average, compared to a global average of 0.8 ha/person, placing Africa ahead of

Europe (excluding the Russian Federation) and Asia in terms of per capita forest resources.

Deforestation is nevertheless affecting Africa, like all the other continents. From 2000 to 2010, Africa lost 34 million ha of forest at a relatively stable annual rate of -0.5% per year. This rate nevertheless varies considerably from one region to another and, contrary to popular belief, is higher in the dry regions of West and East Africa (1% per year) than in the great forest basin of Central Africa (0.2% per year). Thus, for the last 25 years, West Africa has been losing an average of 1 million ha of forest per year and East Africa 1.8 million ha, compared to 0.5 million ha in Central Africa. Deforestation is primarily due to agricultural expansion and to firewood gathering, which are more extensive in highly populated regions (the Rift Valley, the Soudano-Guinean zone) than in the "empty" parts of the Congo Basin.

- **Wood, a multi-purpose resource**

Wood has many uses in urban and rural areas. As bundles or charcoal, it is used to cook food; as logs, it is used to heat homes; and as planks, poles or beams, it is used to build houses and to make furniture.

Energy remains by far the main use of wood. Wood is the principal source of energy for rural households throughout sub-Saharan Africa and an important energy resource for isolated rural populations in North Africa. 750 million Africans depend on wood for cooking and heating, or around 70% of the population of the continent. Fuelwood is also used by

rural tradespeople (bakers, blacksmiths) and by farmers (smoking and drying food products, drying tea and tobacco). Average individual consumption is around 1.5 kg of wood/person/day. This figure varies considerably from one country to another according to eating habits, household size and access to wood resources.

Wood is also used to build rural and urban homes (frames, posts, joinery) and to make furniture (tables, chairs, beds). According to the country and the type of construction, each household uses an average of between 0.5 m<sup>3</sup> and 6 m<sup>3</sup> of wood for its home.

- **Dynamic wood sectors that provide jobs and income**

Logging and trade in timber are key economic activities for the African countries and their populations. International trade in lumber, mainly towards China and India, is an important source of foreign currency for the countries of the Gulf of Guinea and of Central and East Africa (Cameroon, CAR, Mozambique). But this formal trade represents only a fraction of total flows. More than 80% of all timber produced is sold on domestic markets.

Whether for energy or for construction, the production, processing and sale of timber are mainly conducted through local, informal channels involving millions of operators. African fuelwood production employs more than 13 million people and the industrial and artisanal lumber industry probably as many again. City supply chains are booming and new cross-border circuits are emerging from countries with abundant resources (Cameroon, CAR, DRC) towards regions with more limited resources (North Africa, the Sahel countries). These informal sectors appear only rarely in national accounts, but they generate turnovers estimated in billions of US dollars.

- **A major challenge: reconciling tree canopy cover and economic development**

With population growth, urban development, the emergence of a middle class demanding capital goods and the lack of alternative domestic energies, wood requirements are steadily increasing. A major challenge for most African countries is to ensure their economic development while preserving the essential ecosystem services provided by wooded areas to populations.

The response to this challenge requires public policies that, on the one hand, recognise informal lumber and fuelwood sectors as opportunities for local development that should be professionalised, monitored and more effectively supported and, on the other hand, integrate the preservation of ecologically functional and economically productive tree canopy cover into territorial planning policies.

Laurent Gazull