

POLICY BRIEF



GABON

FOREST ECOSYSTEM ACCOUNTS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ecosystem extent, condition, services and Asset Accounts, 2000–2020 for Gabon¹

Gabon’s forests are among the world’s most ecologically intact and valuable natural assets. Covering over 90 percent of the national territory, they serve as the ecological backbone of the country’s economy, support rural livelihoods, and are central to biodiversity conservation. As part of the Congo Basin, Gabon’s forests contribute significantly to global climate regulation by acting as a net carbon sink—storing over 8.1 billion tons of carbon in 2020, equivalent to nearly 86 percent of annual global CO₂ emissions from the energy sector. These forests are not only essential for global sustainability, but also for national economic resilience. They provide distinct national services that have not yet been reflected in national economic values. Forest services account for 3 percent of Gabon’s GDP, supporting rural livelihoods and economic diversification in the country. According to the country report, the total annual value of forest ecosystem services nearly doubled from US\$ 53.9 billion in 2000 to US\$ 103 billion in 2020. The total asset value of Gabonese forests also rose sharply from US\$ 1.18 trillion to US\$ 2.26 trillion over the same period. However, without urgent attention, these forest values can decline rapidly. Forest loss has been limited to 0.5% - about 120,000 hectares mainly in lowland forests since 2000, but the rate increased sevenfold during 2010–2020. These forest accounts were developed for the first time for Gabon.

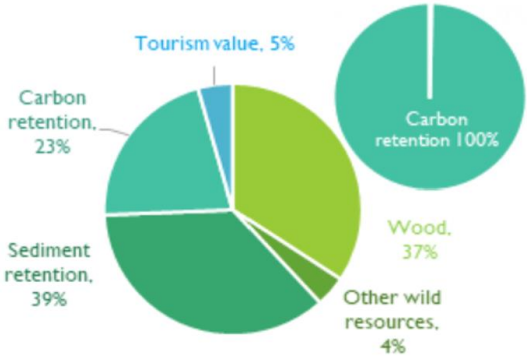
AN OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN RESULTS

Figure 1: Extent of Ecosystem types across Gabon in 2020



Lowland forests cover 85% of Gabon, making them its main ecosystem. From 2000 to 2020, these forests shrank by 120,000 hectares—a 0.5% decrease in area. Analysis of results by department indicates that Estuaire, Ngounié, and Moyen-Ogooué experienced higher rates of deforestation, areas

Figure 2: Share of assessed services in total forest value using Gabon’s social cost of carbon capturing only the domestic climate benefits (bottom), vs Global social cost of carbon (top), reflecting the worldwide benefits of Gabon’s forests in 2020

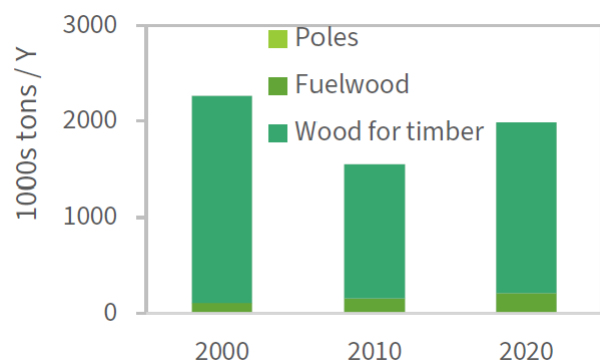


From 2000 to 2020, the value of the ecosystem services assessed across forest ecosystems almost doubled, from CFAF 32.6 to 62.2 trillion (US\$ 53.9 to US\$ 103.0 billion), with carbon retention accounting for almost all of the value. In 2020, ecosystem services accounted for 3% of GDP, with substantial contributions from carbon sequestration, timber production, and sediment retention.

¹ World Bank Group. 2025. Gabon Forest Ecosystem Accounts and Policy Recommendations: Ecosystem extent, condition, services, and asset accounts 2000-2020. Washington, DC: World Bank Group. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/7c432652-9ad2-4972-af06-f05428402f8d>

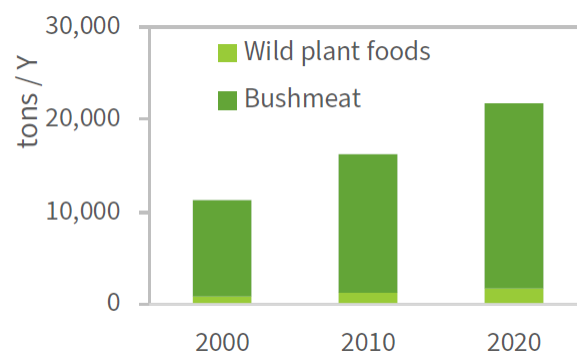
located near expanding urban regions, while Haute-Ogooué had comparatively low levels of deforestation.

Figure 3: Production of wood products, expressed in tons per year.



Formal and informal harvesting of industrial roundwood in Gabon contributed the largest share of wood use, but this decreased between 2000 and 2020 from 2.2 to 1.8 million tons, while the fuelwood use increased from 104,000 to 200,000 tons. Fuelwood production increased from 5 percent of wood extraction in 2000 to 10 percent in 2020.

Figure 4: Production of wild plants, expressed in tons per year.



The collection of various wild resources increased alongside population growth, with value increases due to market price. Bushmeat harvests representing 90 percent of the estimated harvest doubled from 10,472 tons in 2000 to 19,992 tons in 2020. The assessment did not include wild insects, mushrooms and medicinal products.

WHAT DO THE FOREST ACCOUNTS SAY?

KEY POINTS

1

GABON HAS MAINTAINED ITS EXTENSIVE FOREST COVER, BUT THE RATE OF FOREST LOSS HAS INCREASED OVER THE PAST DECADE. In 2000, **native forests covered 90.6 percent** of Gabon's land area, compared to **90.1 percent in 2020**; native forest cover **declined by 0.56 percent**. Of this, **94 percent was lowland forest, and 5 percent was swamp forest**, with the rest made up of submontane forest and mangrove forest areas. Of all forested ecosystems, lowland forest had the greatest net change in total area over both periods, declining by 0.5 percent **between 2000 and 2020**. Notably, the **rate of deforestation accelerated seven-fold** from 15,000 hectares in the first decade to over 100,000 hectares in the second decade. A total of 13,000 hectares of swamp forest was lost between 2000 and 2020 (1 percent reduction in cover) and there were also significant losses in woodland area.

2

FOREST LOSS HAS BEEN HIGHER NEAR POPULATION CENTRES AND FOREST CONDITION IS NEAR PRISTINE BUT DECLINING: Disaggregation of the results at the department level shows **highest rates of deforestation** in Estuaire,

5

GABON'S FORESTS PROVIDE AN INCREASINGLY VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION TO SEDIMENT REGULATION, BUT RETENTION CAPACITY IS DECREASING: Forest capacity to supply **sediment regulating services has decreased** due to reductions in forest extent and forest degradation. This **should be kept in check, as there is increasing demand for the service**. In Gabon, the amounts of sediments in river systems increased by about 2.6 percent from 2000-2010, and a further 5.6 percent from 2010 to 2020. The total **sediment retention value** of forests **increased from just under 53 billion CFAF (USD 88 million) in 2000 to 105 billion CFAF in 2020 (USD 175 million)**. Demand for the service has increased over time with increasing population and water supply and hydropower infrastructure.

6

GABON'S FORESTS HAVE BEEN A NET CARBON SINK, CONTRIBUTING POSITIVELY TO GLOBAL CLIMATE REGULATION: From 2000 to 2020, the value of the **ecosystem services assessed across forest ecosystems almost doubled, from CFAF 32.6 to 62.2 trillion (US\$ 53.9 to 103.0 billion)**, with carbon retention accounting for almost all of the value. It was estimated that

Ngounié and Moyen-Ogooué, which are **proximate to urban areas that are expanding**, while there was very little deforestation in Haute-Ogooué. More than **80 percent of lowland forest, and more than 95 percent of submontane forest was classified as pristine**. The gallery forests and forest-savanna mosaics in the Mayombe and Batéké plateau have lower condition scores relative to the main forest massifs, reflecting the lower tree height, canopy cover and forest connectivity scores and metrics on forest extent.

3 BIODIVERSITY IS HIGH BUT DECLINING: Gabon's forest biodiversity status, assessed by comparing forest extent and condition against natural baselines **shows 87 percent intactness in 2000 and 83 percent in 2020**. Submontane and mangrove forests retained the highest biodiversity, while lowland and swamp forests indices dropped to 85 percent and 75 percent by 2020 from 2000. The overall results were comparable to those obtained in a recent (once-off) study involving a range of taxonomic experts.

4 USE OF PROVISIONING SERVICES IS INCREASING: Provisioning services in the form of wood used for timber, poles and fuel, as well as plant foods, have **generally increased due to increasing demand and lack of energy alternatives**, while a **drop in the harvest of bushmeat** in the recent decade **suggests resource depletion**. Formal and informal **harvesting of industrial roundwood contributed the largest share of wood use**, but this decreased between 2000 and 2020 from 2.2 to 1.8 million tons, while the fuelwood use increased from 104,000 to 200,000 tons. Fuelwood production increased from 5 percent of wood extraction in 2000 to 10 percent in 2020. Bushmeat harvesting accounted for over 90 percent of the tonnage of wild foods assessed.

forest ecosystems in Gabon retained just over 8000 million tons of carbon in the above ground biomass, below ground biomass, and soils of its forest areas in 2020. This is equivalent to 29.78 billion tons of carbon dioxide. Despite overall declines in forest extent and condition, carbon retention increased by some 6 percent due to increased growth and carbon sequestration by intact forests and pricing.

7 FOREST ECOSYSTEM SERVICES ARE WORTH AT LEAST US\$ 103 BILLION/YEAR AND ARE APPRECIATING ASSETS: The **total asset value** of Gabon's natural forests is estimated to have almost **doubled from US\$ 1,184 billion in 2000 to US\$ 2,261 billion in 2020**. **When not including the global share of climate regulation services**, the overall asset value of the country's forests is **estimated as CFAF 4,971 billion (US\$ 8.2 billion) in 2000 and CFAF 6,410 billion (US\$ 10.6 billion) in 2020**. The asset value of the country's forests, based on this partial assessment of services assessed in the forest accounts. **Mangrove forests have the highest per unit area asset value** of forest ecosystem types, followed by lowland forests.

8 WHILE INCREASING FOREST VALUES HAVE KEPT UP WITH POPULATION INCREASE, ADJUSTED MACROECONOMIC INDICATORS REFLECT UNSUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: The per capita asset value of forests has increased by 5 percent over 20 years, indicating that the growth in value is proportional to population growth. Excluding the global public good value attributed to carbon, per capita asset value decreased by 29 percent. Adjusted Net National Income (ANNI) and Adjusted Net Savings (ANS) data show that bushmeat and timber harvesting surpassed sustainable levels; bushmeat extraction rates rose **from 21 percent in 2000 to 38 percent in 2020**. ANNI **increased by 83 percent between 2000 and 2010, and by 27 percent between 2010 and 2020**. ANS showed improvement in 2010 but declined by 2020, reflecting ongoing challenges in maintaining both economic growth and sustainability.



CALL TO ACTION



GABON HOLDS AN ASSET OF GLOBAL VALUE AND SHOULD WORK WITH GLOBAL PARTNERS TO GUARD AGAINST FOLLOWING THE FOREST TRANSITION PATH OF OTHER COUNTRIES:

As a “high forest, low-deforestation” (HFLD) country, Gabon has not yet lost much of its forest area. Gabon is still at a point where the country could invest in sustainable forest management to avoid forest loss, and the high costs of reinstating forest cover. By investing in sustainable forest management now, it can avoid the future costs of forest loss, maintain vital ecosystem services such as rainfall regulation and contribute to food and water security. This approach can also strengthen international and regional cooperation and access to finance, including through climate finance instruments, which can help Gabon develop strong national policies for sustainable forest management.



INVESTING IN AND INSTITUTIONALIZING NATURAL CAPITAL ACCOUNTING:

Natural capital accounting processes need to be institutionalized as a valuable tool in planning and decision support, so as to continue to improve ecosystem accounting over time. This will require strengthening national institutional capacity, data collection and statistics. Gabon needs to ensure the institutionalization of data-systems that are cyclically updated, including data pertaining to ecosystem extent and condition, timber statistics, population census data, agricultural productivity, fuelwood collection, rates of electrification, and the like, so that these can be used effectively in combination with high quality global datasets to continue improving the accuracy and utility of the accounts.



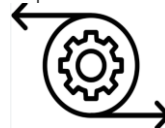
ECOSYSTEM ACCOUNTS SHOULD HELP TRACK KEY ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS TO PROVIDE VALUABLE INSIGHTS ON POLICY AND LAND-USE PLANNING:

Ecosystem Accounts provide indicators to support Gabonese national economic policy decisions and assess progress on sustainability goals. As Gabon develops markets for carbon and biodiversity credits achieved through improved ecosystem management, these accounts offer credible measures of progress—particularly for jurisdictional-level programs. Ecosystem accounts are useful because they are spatial, allowing variation in forest values and trends to be analyzed across the landscapes and geography in Gabon. This enables identification of priority areas for conservation, restoration, or sustainable use, such as forests with high carbon storage, key biodiversity habitats, or areas that support forest-dependent households.



PROMOTE INTEGRATED LAND USE PLANNING AND SOUND ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION BY TAKING POSITIVE ACTION TO MONETISE ECOSYSTEM SERVICES BENEFITS:

Gabon must prioritize integrated land-use planning to protect high-value forests from growing pressures like agriculture, infrastructure, and fuelwood extraction, while restoring degraded ecosystems. At the same time, forest-based economic diversification—through sustainable value chains, private sector incentives, and community engagement—can drive green, inclusive growth. Much of the value of forest ecosystem services remains unrealized, particularly in the case of regulating services. These significant opportunities can help to grow the country’s own wealth and sustain increasing asset values per capita.



MAINSTREAM FOREST VALUES IN POLICY AND PLANNING FOR INTEGRATED, HOLISTIC AND MULTISECTORAL MANAGEMENT:

Forest values and their relevance need to be fully understood across all sectors and be taken into account in national and sectoral policy planning. Mainstreaming of ecosystem accounting can help inform Gabon’s national and sectoral planning and policy decisions for smarter growth. However, this needs to be done with the recognition that Ecosystem services provided by native forests are of relevance to several other sectors as well as the forest sector, and compiling ecosystem accounts provides concrete evidence to inform policy and planning to secure these benefits sustainably.



LEVERAGE INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE FINANCE AND CARBON MARKETS:

Gabon has the opportunity to leverage its net carbon sequestration status to access climate finance by strengthening technical systems and ensuring equitable benefits for local communities. To access carbon and biodiversity credit markets effectively, Gabon must strengthen its technical and legal readiness by enhancing MRV systems, establishing transparent registries, and ensuring inclusive benefit-sharing with forest-dependent communities. The data from forest ecosystem accounts can guide the development of credible pipelines for climate finance, targeting priority areas like the Batéké Plateau for restoration and conservation, while attracting investments through mechanisms such as REDD+, performance-based payments and innovative financing instruments, such as sustainability-linked loans and green bonds.



Visit the Congo Basin Regional Synthesis Report – for more information or to access the full publication, scan the QR to connect to our website. *This work was supported by CAFI and CIF.*