

Synopsis of the Status of Key Development Statistics in Africa

Land Statistics

Motivation and Objectives

Land underpins Africa's agriculture, food security, climate resilience and household wealth. Managing it effectively requires an integrated statistical block covering land cover, land-cover change, land productivity and land tenure. Yet these statistics are incomplete, outdated and often irreconcilable because agencies use different definitions, classifications, satellite products and reference years. This leaves governments unable to establish a consistent account of how land is changing, who holds rights to it and how productively it is used.

The brief aims to: (i) appraise the recency and comparability of the four core land indicators for all 54 African countries from 2010 onward; (ii) benchmark Africa's land cover change, productivity and tenure position against the rest of the world; and (iii) illustrate the potential GDP gains associated with institutionalizing coherent and nationally owned land measurement.

Highlights of the Status of Statistics

1. Barren land covers 937 million hectares, or 31.0 per cent of Africa, compared with 25.0 per cent under trees and about 403 million hectares under cropland.
2. From 2010 to 2022, built-up surfaces expanded by 78.0 per cent. Yet FAOSTAT's Land Use data show forest land falling by 5.85 per cent, while its satellite-based Land Cover data show tree-covered areas rising by 1.24 per cent.
3. Four satellite products differ by about 270 million hectares in their 2020 estimates of Africa's tree-covered area, with the gap nearing 300 million hectares over the full record. These commonly used datasets are three to seven years old; all 54 countries rely on land cover data dated 2019 – 2023 and land degradation data dated 2019.
1. Forty-three of 52 countries with complete series lost forest land between 2010 and 2022. Africa's 5.9 per cent decline was nearly six times the world average of 1.1 per cent and represented about 91.0 per cent of global net forest loss.
2. Only about 10.0 per cent of Africa's rural land is formally registered, and 121 million adults in sub-Saharan Africa report insecure rights. Cereal yields average 1.7 tonnes per hectare, only 40.0 per cent of the global average of 4.2 tonnes.
3. Institutionalizing land statistics could generate an illustrative GDP uplift of 0.4 – 4.4 per cent. The central arithmetic estimate is 1.75 per cent, or US\$54 billion annually at 2024 GDP; adjusting for overlap gives 1.56 per cent, or US\$48 billion.