

Democratic Republic of Congo (= former Zaire, “Congo-Kinshasa”)

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Location and area

The Democratic Republic of the Congo in central Africa is bordered on the north by the Central African Republic and Sudan, on the east by Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Lake Tanganyika (which separates it from Tanzania), on the south by Zambia, on the southwest by Angola, and on the northwest by the Republic of the Congo. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has a 40-km coastline to the west, on the Atlantic Ocean, which separates Angola's Cabinda province (an enclave lying within the Democratic Republic of the Congo) from the rest of that country.

The maximum width of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is about 1,900 km; its greatest length from north to south is about 2,000 km. Its total area is 2,344,885 km². (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Topography

The dominant physiographical feature of the country (occupying 60 % of its area) is the basin of the River Congo, a vast depression that slopes upward on all sides into plateaux and mountain ranges. The highest mountain group, running along the eastern border with Tanzania, Burundi, and Rwanda, is the Mitumba Range, with elevations above 4,800 m (16,000 ft).

The River Ubangi, chief northern tributary of the Congo, rises on the northwestern slopes of this range. In the southeast the mountainous Katanga Plateau (about 1,200 m a.s.l.) fringes the basin.

The sources of the Kasai, the chief southern tributary of the Congo, are found in the mountain chains of the Angola Plateau in the southwest of the country. Numerous rivers traverse both the Congo basin and the mountain regions.

Virtually impenetrable equatorial forests occupy the eastern and northeastern portions of the country. The country's rainforests constitute nearly 50 % of Africa's remaining woodlands. The largest, known variously as the Ituri, Great Congo, Pygmy, and Stanley Forest, extends east from the confluence of the Aruwimi and Congo rivers nearly to Lake Albert, covering some 65,000 km². In this area, on the Ugandan border, is the Ruwenzori Range. The more elevated regions around the edge of the Congo basin consist of savannah land. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Climate

Except in the upland regions, the climate of the country is equatorial, being extremely hot and humid, with rain throughout the year. The mean annual temperature is about 27° C in the low central area, with extremes considerably higher in February-April, the hottest months. In areas with altitudes above 1,500 m, the mean annual temperature is about 19° C. The average annual rainfall is about 1,500 mm in the north and 1,250 mm in the south. Outside the equatorial areas of year-round rains, there are rainy seasons from April to November north of the equator and from October through May south of the equator. The highest summits of the

mountains have considerable snowfall; at slightly lower elevations the climate is temperate alpine. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Land use

Large areas of the Congo basin are fertile, but only about 3 per cent of the total land area is under cultivation (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Wetlands

Without further reference or description, Lappalainen & Žurek (1996c) give a wetland area of 400 km² (cf. the “mire” area of Shrier 1985).

Peatlands

Schneider (1958) describes a peatland at Lake Kivu with a peat thickness of up to 30 m (is this the same as where Markov et al are referring to in Congo Brazzaville?), of which profiles were investigated in the Torfforschungsinstitut of Bad Zwischenahn (Germany)
Kivinen & Pakarinen (1981) mention the presence of peatland in the present DR Congo (“Zaire”) but present no estimates for its area.

Bord na Mona (1985) mentions the occurrence of peat deposits in mountainous areas of Bukavu in eastern DR Congo, immediately west of Lake Kivu in an extension of the Virunga volcanic range which stretches into the Kigezi District of Uganda. Individual peatlands are small (0,5 – 10 km²), with peat depths varying from 1 m to over 15 m in the volcanic craters at between 1600 m and 2200 m altitude.

Shrier (1985), referring to the FAO/UNESCO 1971-1981 Soil Map of the World 1:5,000,000 (=histosols), mention a “mire” area of 400 km². Peat deposits are found in the Bukavu region, west of Lake Kivu. The deposits occupy valleys and volcanic craters with individual areas ranging from 50 to 1000 ha and peat depths from 1m to over 15m. Extensive lowland deposits are estimated to occupy up to 400 km² in the swamp complex at the southern edge of Lake Mweru on the Zaire/Zambia border.
(=> has to be more than 400)

Markov et al. (1988) refers to the swamps in the floodplain of the **Zaire** river and mention that some peatlands exist in the delta of Lulaba river and at the Upemba lake, also in the Katanga province, and in the mangroves at the **Congo** river (cf. Dudal 1980). In the latter the peatlands have peat layers up to 60 cm thick. Markov et al. (1988) estimate the area of „peat resources“ (peat thickness not mentioned) in Zaire as being 10,000 km².

Andriess (1988) estimates the extent of organic soils in Zaire to be 14,000 km². **Schneider & Pfadenhauer (1980)** mentions the presence of *Phoenix reticulata* swamps in Zaire with a 50-60 cm thick peat-like substrate.

Schneider (1990) and Pfadenhauer et al. (1993) mention a peatland area for Zaire of 400 km² (probably on the base of Bouillenne et al. 1955).

Pfadenhauer (1980) mentions peatlands on the Ruwenzori with up to 6 m thick peats.

Table 1 gives an overview of further potential peatland areas in DR Congo

Table 1: Potential peatland areas in the Democratic Republic of Congo (after Thompson 1985, Howard-Williams & Thompson 1985). W = extent during wet season, D = extent during dry season (= permanent)

Area	countries	Wetland type	Extent (in km ²)
Upemba	DR Congo	Swamps	8,500 (W), 4,500 (D)
Kamulondo depression	DR Congo	Shallow lakes, swamps and floodplain	11,800 (W) 7,040 (D)
Tumba	DR Congo	Shallow lake	767
Chesi	DR Congo	Shallow lake	41
Maji Ndombe	DR Congo	Shallow lake	2,294
Kifukula depression	DR Congo, Zambia	Swamps, floodplain	1,502
Mweru (Luapula River)	Zambia, DR Congo	Shallow lake (Mweru)	4,580
Middle Congo swamps	DR Congo, Congo	Riverine swamps and floodplains	40,550
Malebo Pool	DR Congo, Congo	Shallow riverine lake	ca. 300
Ruzizi River	Burundi, Rwanda, DR Congo	Floodplain and swamps	?
Semliki delta	Uganda, DR Congo	Floodplain, delta	?

According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) 11,531 km² of histosols exist in the DR of Congo and 380,328 km² of gley soils.

Still to be checked:

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