

Angola (Republic of)

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Location and area

Angola is an independent state in southwestern Africa, bordered on the north and east by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaïre), on the east by Zambia, on the south by Namibia, and on the west by the Atlantic Ocean. A small exclave, Cabinda, is located some 30 km to the north and is bounded on the north by the Republic of the Congo, on the east and south by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and on the west by the Atlantic Ocean. Angola has a total area of 1,246,700 km². (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Topography

The country can be divided into three major geographical regions:

- The low-lying coastal plain varies from about 50 to 150 km in width.
- The transitional zone, which consists of a series of terraces or escarpments, is about 150 km wide in the north, but diminishes to about 30 km in the centre and south.
- To the east of this zone is the Angolan plateau, which covers about two thirds of the country and lies 1,000 to 1,500 m above sea level. Higher elevations are reached in the mountains of the central section, culminating in Mount Moco (2,620 m).

Most of the country's rivers rise in the central mountains. Of the many rivers that drain to the Atlantic Ocean, the Cuanza and Cunene are the most important. Other major rivers include the Kwango (Cuango), which drains north to the River Congo system, and the Kwando (Cuando) and Cubango (Okavango), both of which drain generally southeast to the Okavango delta and swamp in Botswana. Angola has no sizeable lakes.

Climate

Angola has a tropical climate, with a dry season that lasts from September to April. The country is prone to drought. The cool Benguela Current offshore moderates the temperatures of the coastal region and reduces rainfall, especially in the south. Annual rainfall is 340 mm in Luanda, but only 50 mm in Namibe, which borders the Namib Desert. On the cooler central plateau, rainfall decreases from 1,500 mm in the north to 750 mm in the south. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Land use

Tropical rainforest grows in the north and in the Cabinda exclave. To the south the rainforest gives way to savannah, which in turn gives way to grasslands to the south and east. Sparse desert vegetation is found south of Namibe.

Arable land constitutes 2.4 % of Angola's total area, but only 0.4 % is under permanent cultivation (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

Wetlands

Angola has 5,750 km² of wetlands in the form of sponges, dambos, floodplains, and various types of coastal wetlands, but no systematic inventory of wetlands has been carried out to

date. Valley bottom wetlands generally have hydromorphic soils and have always supported small-scale agriculture (www.fao.org/DOCREP/003/X6611E/x6611e04c.htm). Lappalainen & Žurek (1996c) mention without further reference or description a wetland area: of 100 km² (incl. coastal mangroves).

Peatlands

Kivinen & Pakarinen (1981) mention the presence of peatlands in Angola but present no estimates for their area.

Bord na Mona (1985) and Shrier (1985), based on information of the Ministry of Energy in Luanda, mention peat deposits in the valley of the River Cuanza, south east of Catate and about 50 km from Luanda. In some areas the peat is a surface deposit, while in others it is covered by up to 10 m of alluvium.

Andriess (1988) estimates the extent of organic soils in Angola to be 100 km².

According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) 10,261 km² of histosols exist in Angola and 138,292 km² of gley soils.

Mire and peatland losses

According to Benneh et al. (1996), open peat mining occurs in littoral zones of Angola which contributes to the destruction of vegetation and the acceleration of coastal erosion.

Still to be checked:

Azevedo, A.L. 1954. The technology of peaty soils in Mozambique and Angola. Transactions of the 5th International Congress of Soil Science, Leopoldville 3:398-401.