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Research paper

Diversity and structure of *Prunus africana* (Hook.f.) Kalkman stands in the Tchabal forest massif: a case study from Adamawa Cameroon

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ABSTRACT The aim of this work is to provide basic data for a better knowledge of *Prunus africana* (Hook.f.) Kalkman stands through a non-exhaustive floristic inventory in the Sudano-Guinean zone of Cameroon. Transects of 2,000 x 20 m² were installed in these stands in the Tchabal forest massif. The inventory concerned timbers with dbh ≥ 10 cm. Herbaceous were counted according to the "sigmatiste zuricho-montpelléraine" method. In total, 25 families distributed in 41 genera and 46 species and for herbaceous, 19 families distributed in 42 genera and 46 species were recorded in the stands. The stands of Bontadji and Horé-Déo are the richest. Euphorbiaceae, Fabaceae, *Ficus thonningii* Blume and *Croton macrostachyus* Hochst. ex Delile are the most abundant taxa in each site. The Fongoy I locality stands are the most diversified (ISH: 0.87 ± 0.07; H': 0.99 ± 0.01). There is a floristic similarity of about 30% between localities. The stands of Fongoy I are very dense and basal area (D=394 ± 0.31 individuals/ha and BA= 25.80 ± 8.05 m²/ha). Structural analysis shows an "L" shape attesting to the presence of future stems. This observation is supported by the vertical structure of the stands. This information constitutes an important argument for the protection of the environment.

KEYWORDS: Biodiversity, *Prunus Africana*, Cameroon.

Introduction

Congo Basin is considered as the second largest forest in the humid tropics after the Amazon Basin in terms of natural resources and biodiversity (FAO 2007). It contains an extraordinary biodiversity that constitutes an invaluable potential for the socio-economic development of the region (SCDB 2009). However, in the African zone, the perpetual growth of the population leads to the degradation of biodiversity (Wezel and Haigis 2000). This degradation of natural ecosystems is accentuated by climatic factors that have become a worrying phenomenon in the Sudanian zone (Thiombiano 2005). It may lead to the erosion of certain forest species that are still unknown (Tiokeng et al. 2015). Indeed, (Triébré et al. 2016) pose the problem of plant species conservation and sustainable management of forest ecosystems in the face of risks of reduction and disappearance in an environment subject to strong anthropogenic pressure.

In addition, interest in Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) in Cameroon is growing. This interest in NTFPs is due to a decline in the purchasing power of populations whose financial means can no longer ensure good health and food coverage (Kémeuze et al. 2012) and to exponential demand on the international market (Betti et al. 2016). This exponential demand is obviously accompanied by an increase in the level of exploitation of NTFPs. In recent years, concerns have emerged regarding their sustainability. This situation has prompted many researchers to be alarmed by the disastrous management of these species in their natural environments (Guedje 2002, Jiofack et al. 2005, Nkuinkeu and Wanty 2007). Faced with this situation, suggestions have been made for a more rational use of these NTFPs. Among them, those of Nkuinkeu and Wanty 2007 on sustainable harvesting techniques for *Prunus africana* (Hook.f.) Kalkman bark. Many resources in natural ecosystems are becoming scarce due to high anthropogenic pressure. It is therefore necessary to meet the needs of present and future local populations for plant resources while ensuring the conservation of native taxa.

Faced with the seriousness of environmental degradation on our planet, the safeguarding of biodiversity has become one of the major issues of the 21st century (SCBD 2010). It is in this perspective that many forest inventories have been conducted in different ecological systems including those of Tchouto et al. 2006, Gonmadjé et al. 2011, Tiokeng et al. 2015, Zapfack et al. 2015, Noiha et al. 2015a, Noiha et al. 2015b, Tabué et al. 2016, Zapfack et al. 2016a, Zapfack et al. 2016b, Noiha et al. 2017, Noiha et al. 2018a, Noiha et al. 2018b, Noiha et al. 2018c, Awé et al. 2021. Furthermore, the conservation of an ecosystem requires a good knowledge of its contents. It is in the same way of idea that (Kent and Coker 2003, Cisse et al. 2020, Gnoumou et al. 2020) argue that floristic inventories and studies of plant groupings are the essential basis for the management and conservation of ecosystems. The purpose of this study is to assess the current status of *Prunus africana* stands in the Tchabal forest massif (MFT) in an era when natural ecosystems are disappearing at an alarming rate.

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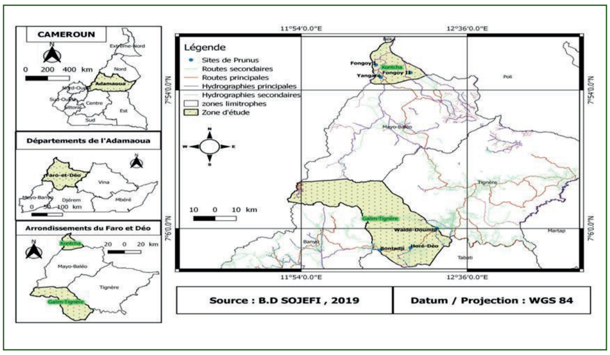
Methods

Study area

The study was conducted in the Adamawa-Cameroon, more precisely in the Faro and Déo department located between 7°26'16" N and 13°33'34" E (Fig.1). In the subdivisions of Kontcha and Galim-Tignere of this department of the Sudano-Guinean zone, which covers an area of 10,435 km^2, six localities were selected (Fongoy I and II, Yangaré, Bontadji, Horé-Déo, and Waldé-Doumbi). These localities have a transitional subtropical climate. Rainfall ranges from 1,000 to 2,000 mm. Temperatures vary from 15°C in December to 30°C in March, with an annual average of 23°C. The soil is described as red or yellow ferralitic and black alluvial (MINFOF 2018). The landform is rugged, consisting of a succession of mountain and plateau at the top. The vegetation is represented by shrub savanna with the predominance of *Daniellia oliveri* (Rolfe) Hutch. & Dalziel and *Lophira lanceolata* Tiegh (Letouzey 1985). The peasant populations, with a density of 4 inhabitants/km^2, are mostly composed of Mbororos, Fulbe and Nyem-Nyem. Agriculture and livestock are important activities. Among the plant products frequently harvested in the forest, *Prunus africana* is sought after for its medicinal properties (MINFOF 2018).

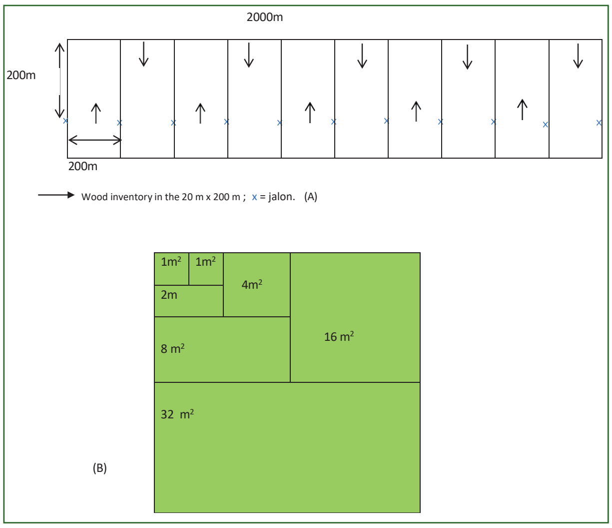
Figure 1 - Geographic location of the study area.



Data collection

The surveys were conducted in 24 transects of 2,000 m x 20 m installed in 6 localities; 4 transects in each locality for a total sampling area of 96 ha. These transects were positioned in a north-south direction using a GPS, a compass and string. In each plot, all timbers with a dbh ≥ 10 cm were systematically measured and counted using a tape measure. The diameter was measured at 1.30 m aboveground for trees and at 0.30 m and 0.50 m for shrublets and shrubs respectively. Herbaceous were considered and sampled using the "Zuricho-montpelléraine" method known as "sigmatiste" method (Fig. 2). The species were recorded end preserved according to the rules of the art of systematics and then sent to the National Herbarium of Cameroon in Yaoundé (HNY) for identification. The adopted classification method is that of APG III (2009).

Figure 2 - Illustration of the sampling method for woody species (A) and herbaceous (B).



Taxonomic diversity

The inventory sheets were manually filled out and then entered into Excel. The data from these floristic surveys were used to calculate ecological parameters such as the relative frequency, relative dominance and relative density of each species. The sum of the values of these parameters was used to obtain the importance of each species in relation to the other species on the site through the IVI (Index Value Importance) (Curtis and MacIntosh 1950, Kent and Coker 2003). This index is frequently used in tropical forests to describe the ecological importance of species (Yao and N'Guessan 2005, Gonmadjé et al. 2011, Agbodjogbe 2011). The Family Importance Value Index (FIV) of Cottam and Curtis (1956) used by several authors (Yao and N'Guessan 2005, Gonmadjé et al. 2011, Awe et al. 2021) was also used to assess the role of each family in the structure of the plant stand. The analysis consists of determining the parameters that allow appreciating the floristic composition and structure.

The different parameters studied are expressed through the following formulas:

- Specific richness defined as the total number of species recorded in a considered space and beta diversity (diversity-β) which is a quantitative measure of community diversity were adopted for this study (Bisby 1995, Tchouto et al. 2006, Rajemison 2010, Gonmadjé et al. 2011, Agbodjogbe 2011). The Shannon Weaver index (H') and Piélou equitability were chosen to quantify this diversity.

- The effective species richness (N) indicates the number of species responsible for the observed diversity. It is given by the formula: $N = 2^H$; 2 is the base of the logarithm used to calculate the Shannon diversity index H;

- The Shannon Diversity Index (ISH): $ISH = -\sum (ni/N) \text{Log}_2 (ni/N)$, with ni= number of species i, N= number of all species; ISH is expressed in bits and varies from 1 to 5;

- The Equitability of Piélou (EQ) (1966): $EQ = ISH/\text{Log}_2 N$. (Frontier and Pichod-viale 1992) and is between 0 and 1;

- Simpson's index: $D = 1 - S [(ni ' (ni - 1)) / (N ' (N - 1))]$;

- Coefficients of similarity: (2C/A+B) with A the number of species in environment 1; B the number of species in environment 2 and C the common number of species in both environments;

- The index of importance value of the species (IVIE) (Curtis and Macintosh 1950):

IVIE = Relative dominance (Species) + Relative density (Species) + Relative frequency (Species), it is expressed in %;

- Density (D): D= n/S; D: density (trees/ha), n: number of trees present on the considered surface and S: considered surface (ha);

- Relative dominance = (total basal area for one species/ total basal area of all species) × 100;

- Relative density = (number of individuals of the species/ total number of individuals of all species) × 100;

- Relative frequency = (frequency of the species/sum of all frequencies of other species) × 100;

- Relative diversity = (number of species in the family/total number of species present) × 100;

- Family importance value index (FIV) = relative dominance + relative density + relative diversity.

Floristic structure

The floristic structure refers to the horizontal and vertical distributions. The timbers were arranged in diameter and height classes. The diameter classes were grouped into eight modalities of amplitude 10 and the histograms of stem distribution were drawn up to characterize the diametric structure of the vegetation. From the height measurement results, individuals were grouped into 5 cm amplitude classes.

Statistical analyses

The data were encoded in the EXCEL spreadsheet and then analyzed using STATGRAPHICS plus 5.0 and R software. Significance and correlation tests were performed using ANOVA and Duncan's 5 % test.

Results

Floristic composition

Inventories of woody plants revealed 25 families distributed in 41 genera and 46 species. The understories of the Bontadji and Horé-Déo localities were the most represented in term of species (27 species; Tab.1)

The understory woody species in *Prunus africana* stands that have a high value index (VI) are: *Croton macrostachyus* Hochst. ex Delile in the localities of Fongoy II, Horé-Déo, Bontadji and Waldé-Doumbi. In Foungoy I locality, *Ficus thonningii* Blume and *Croton macrostachyus* Hochst. ex Delile are ecologically important. In the Yangaré locality, *Ficus insipida* Willd. and *Croton macrostachyus* are the most important species (Tab. 2).

Table 1 - Understory species richness of *Prunus africana* stands.

Subdivision	Localities	Genera	Species	Families
KONTCHA	Fongoy II	12	14	11
	Yangaré	10	14	9
	Fongoy I	18	21	13
	Total	27	20	15
GALIM-TIGNERE	Horé-Déo	24	27	19
	Bontadji	23	27	15
	Waldé-Doumbi	14	14	11
	Total	40	33	24
	Total General	41	46	25

Table 2 - Relative frequency, relative dominance, relative density and importance value index of the most represented species in the Understory of *Prunus africana*.

Localities	Species	FeRe	DoRe	DeRe	IVIE
Fongoy II	*Croton macrostachyus*	2.95	1.84	2.95	7.75
	Pterocarpus erinaceus	2.67	0.93	2.67	6.29
	Albiziacoriaria	1.26	1.81	1.26	4.35
	Vitex doniana	0.56	1.89	0.56	3.02
	Other species	92.56	93.53	92.56	278.58
Yangaré	*Ficus insipida*	2.81	7.08	2.81	12.72
	Croton macrostachyus	1.54	1.16	1.54	4.25
	Vitex doniana	0.28	1.67	0.28	2.24
	Ficus thonningii	0.84	0.42	0.84	2.11
	Other species	94.53	89.67	94.53	278.68
Fongoy I	*Ficus thonningii*	4.50	13.77	4.50	22.78
	Croton macrostachyus	7.60	5.30	7.60	20.52
	Vernonia tinctoria	2.67	0.08	2.67	5.43
	Syzygium guineense var. Guineense	1.12	1.91	1.12	4.17
	Other species	84.11	78.94	84.11	247.1
Horé-Déo	*Croton macrostachyus*	1.97	0.92	1.97	4.86
	Burkeaafricana	0.56	1.51	0.56	2.64
	Vitex doniana	0.56	1.01	0.56	2.14
	Bombax costatum	0.42	0.90	0.42	1.75
	Other species	96.49	95.66	96.49	288.61
Bontadji	Croton macrostachyus	2.95	1.51	2.95	7.43
	Ficus thonningii	1.40	2.14	1.40	4.96
	Afzelia africana	1.54	1.41	1.54	4.51
	Albiziacoriaria	1.26	1.13	1.26	3.67
	Other species	92.85	93.81	92.85	279.43
Waldé-Doumbi	Croton macrostachyus	2.81	1.78	2.81	7.41
	Ficus thonningii	0.70	1.44	0.70	2.85
	Albizia coriaria	0.98	0.39	0.98	2.36
	Vernonia tinctoria	1.12	0.03	1.12	2.28
	Other species	94.39	6.36	94.39	285.1

Fabaceae is the most abundant family in the localities of Bontadji, Horé-Déo and Foungoy II (Tab. 3). In Yangaré and Fongoy I, Moraceae and Euphorbiaceae are dominated. In Waldé-Doumbi, Euphorbiaceae and Fabaceae families have the highest IVI values.

Table 3 - Relative frequency, relative dominance, relative density and importance value index of the most represented families in the understory of *Prunus africana*.

Localities	Families	FeRe (%)	DoRe (%)	DeRe (%)	IVIF (%)
Fongoy II	Fabaceae	3.66	2.4	3.66	9.73
	Euphorbiaceae	2.95	1.84	2.95	7.75
	Moraceae	1.12	1.88	1.12	4.13
	Other families	92.27	93.88	92.27	278.37
Yangaré	Moraceae	4.22	8.33	4.22	16.78
	Euphorbiaceae	1.54	1.16	1.54	4.25
	Lamiaceae	0.28	1.67	0.28	2.24
	Other families	93.96	88.84	93.96	276.73
Fongoy I	Moraceae	7.04	16.09	7.04	30.18
	Euphorbiaceae	8.3	5.6	8.31	22.22
	Myrtaceae	1.4	2.93	1.4	5.74
	Other families	83.26	75.38	83.26	241.86
Horé-Déo	Fabaceae	1.83	2.81	1.83	6.47
	Euphorbiaceae	1.97	0.92	1.97	4.86
	Anacardiaceae	0.84	1.45	0.84	3.14
	Other families	95.36	94.82	95.36	285.53
Bontadji	Fabaceae	5.21	4.62	5.21	15.05
	Euphorbiaceae	3.09	1.67	3.09	7.87
	Moraceae	1.97	2.81	1.97	6.75
	Other families	89.73	90.9	89.37	270.33
Waldé-Doumbi	Euphorbiaceae	2.95	1.8	2.95	7.72
	Fabaceae	2.11	0.97	2.11	5.2
	Moraceae	0.7	1.44	0.7	2.85
	Other families	94.24	95.79	94.24	284.23

Inventories of herbaceous plants revealed 19 families distributed in 42 genera and 46 species were recorded. The Understory of the Fongoy II locality is the richest (20 species; Tab. 4). *Cyathea spinulosa* Wall. ex Hook, *Tithonia diversifolia* (Hemsl.) A.Gray, *Kalanchoe pinnata* (Lam.) Pers., *Hyparrhenia rufa* (Nees) Stapf, *Mimosa pudica* L., *Centella asiatica* (L.) Urban, *Chromolaena odorata* (L.) R.M.King & H.Rob, *Sida rhombifolia* L., *Andropogon tectorum* Schumach. & Thonn., *Panicum repens* L., *Sporobollus pyramidalis* Beauv., and *Ageratum conyzoides* L. are the dominant herbaceous species in the flora of the Tchabal forest massif (Fig. 3). Poaceae, Asteraceae, Cyatheaceae, Crassulaceae, Mimosaceae, Apiaceae, Malvaceae and Rubiaceae are the most abundant families (Fig. 4).

Table 4 - Herbaceous species richness in *Prunus africana* stands.

Subdivision	Localities	Genera	Species	Families
KONTCHA	Fongoy II	20	20	17
	Yangaré	14	14	11
	Fongoy I	14	15	10
	Total	**28**	**29**	**18**
GALIM-TIGNERE	Horé-Déo	11	12	6
	Bontadji	14	15	10
	Waldé-Doumbi	16	17	11
	Total	**28**	**31**	**14**
	Total General	**42**	**46**	**19**

Figure 3 - Relative abundance of herbaceous.

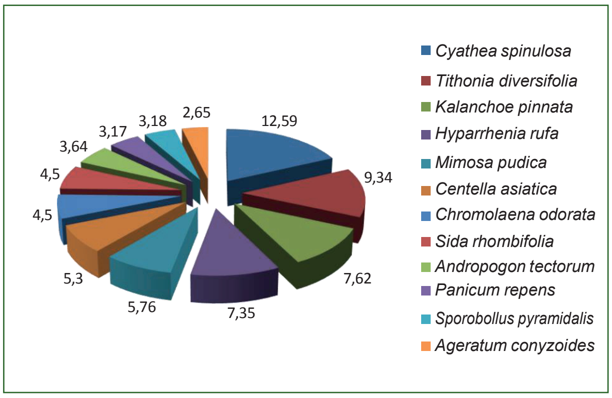
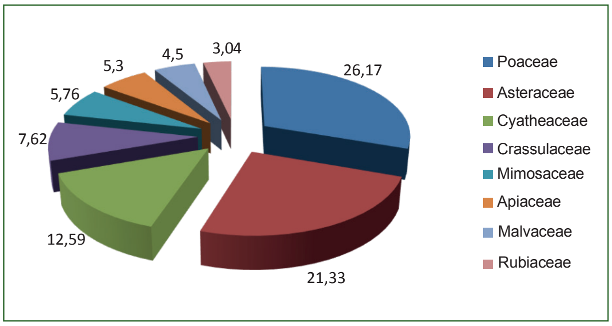


Figure 4 - Relative abundance of families.



Ecological diversity

Table 5 shows that between localities and subdivision, the analysis of variance does not show any significant difference in the values of Shannon's diversity indices, Piélou's equitability and Simpson's indices between the different understories of *Prunus africana* stands ($P < 0.05$). Between localities, the Shannon index was higher in the Fongoy I locality (0.87 ± 0.07 bit). On the other hand, between the two subdivisions, the Shannon index is higher in the subdivision of Kontcha (0.55 ± 0.29 bit). Between localities and subdivisions, Piélou's equitability values are very low and Simpson's index values are very high (H'=0.99 ± 0.01).

Table 5 - Ecological diversity indices of *Prunus africana* stands.

	ISH	EQ	H'
Fongoy I	0.87 ± 0.07a	0.27 ± 0.04a	0.99 ± 0.01a
Yangaré	0.28 ± 0.01a	0.09± 0.00a	0.99 ± 0.01a
Fongoy II	0.51 ± 0.03a	0.16 ± 0.02a	0.99 ± 0.01a
Horé-Déo	0.45 ± 0.05a	0.14 ± 0.01a	0.99 ± 0.01a
Bontadji	0.62 ± 0.06a	0.19 ± 0.01a	0.99 ± 0.01a
Waldé-Doumbi	0.39 ± 0.04a	0.12 ± 0.00a	0.99 ± 0.01a

Floristic similarities

Similarity indices are generally high, with floristic affinities greater than 50%, except between the Horé-Déo locality and the localities of Fongoy II, Fongoy I, Yangaré and Waldé-Doumbi, and Yangaré and Bontadji (Tab. 6).

Table 6 - Ecological diversity indices of *Prunus africana* stands.

Localities	Fongoy II	Yangaré	Fongoy I	Horé -Déo	Bontadji	Waldé-Doumbi
Fongoy I	100					
Yangaré	57.14	100				
Fongoy II	62.85	51.42	100			
Horé-Déo	43.90	34.14	45.83	100		
Bontadji	58.53	43.90	58.32	51.85	100	
Waldé-Doumbi	78.56	57.02	57.14	43.90	53.64	100

Structural characterization

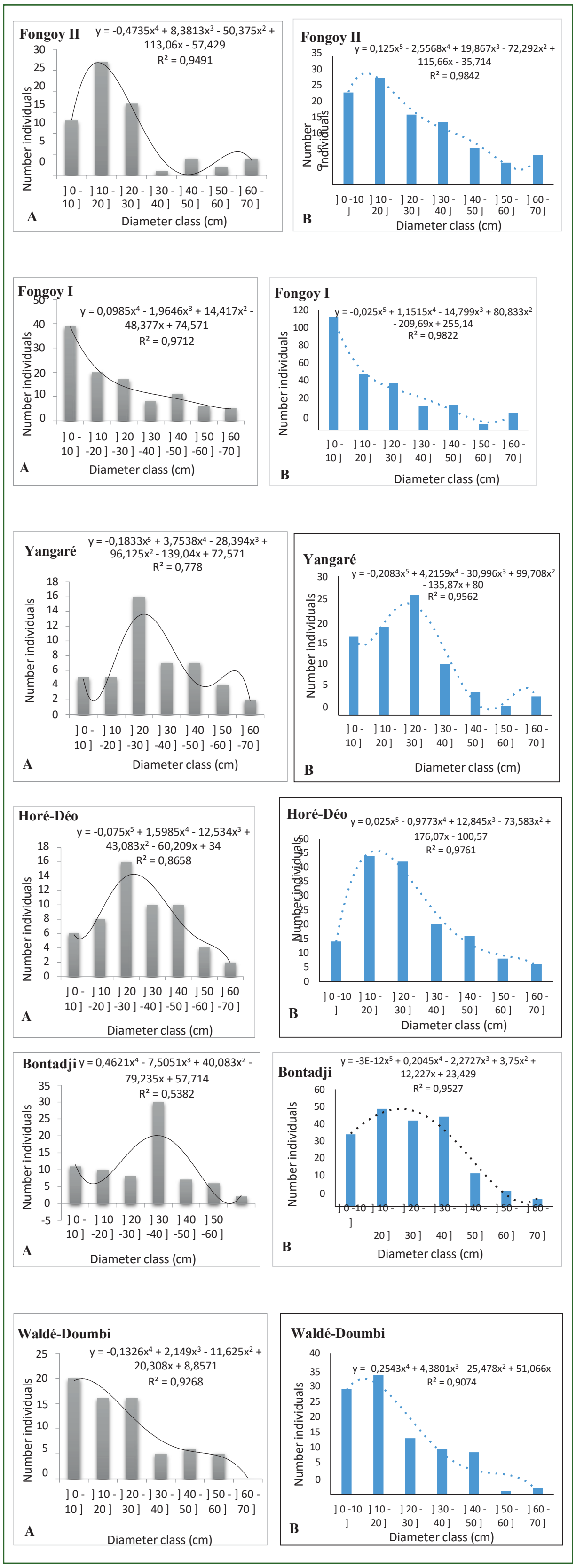
The analysis of variance attests to significant differences in density and basal area values within the different understories of *Prunus africana* stands ($P > 0.05$) between the localities. Between the two subdivisions, no significant difference was found in density ($P < 0.05$) but a significant difference was found in basal area ($P > 0.05$). Between locations, density and basal area values are higher in Fongoy I (394 ± 0.31 individuals/ha and 25.80 ± 8.05 m²/ha) (Tab. 7).

Table 7 - Structural characterization of the understory of *Prunus africana* stands.

	D n/ha	BA
Fongoy I	394 ± 0.31c	25.80 ± 8.05e
Yangaré	130 ±0.52a	11.77 ± 2.81c
Fongoy II	234 ± 0.14a	9.77 ± 1.01b
Horé-Déo	206 ± 0.19a	11.18 ± 2.91c
Bontadji	280 ±0.17b	15.14 ± 2.13d
Waldé-Doumbi	176 ± 0.31a	5.12 ± 1.61a

Analysis of the diameter structure of understory timbers in *Prunus africana* stands shows an “L” shape in the Waldé-Doumbi localities. These three L-shaped structures fit best to polynomial functions of degree six. These three “L” structures show that the class 0-10 cm is more represented in terms of number of individuals. On the other hand, between the Fongoy I, II, Horé-Déo, Yangaré and Bontadji localities, the analysis of the diameter structure of the woody plants in the understory of *Prunus africana* stands shows a “bell-shaped” appearance. These three bell-shaped structures also fit better to polynomial functions of degree six. These three “bell” structures show that the numbers of the highest individuals are centered respectively in the classes 20-30 cm for the Horé-Déo and Yangaré localities and 30-40 cm for the Bontadji locality (Fig. 5).

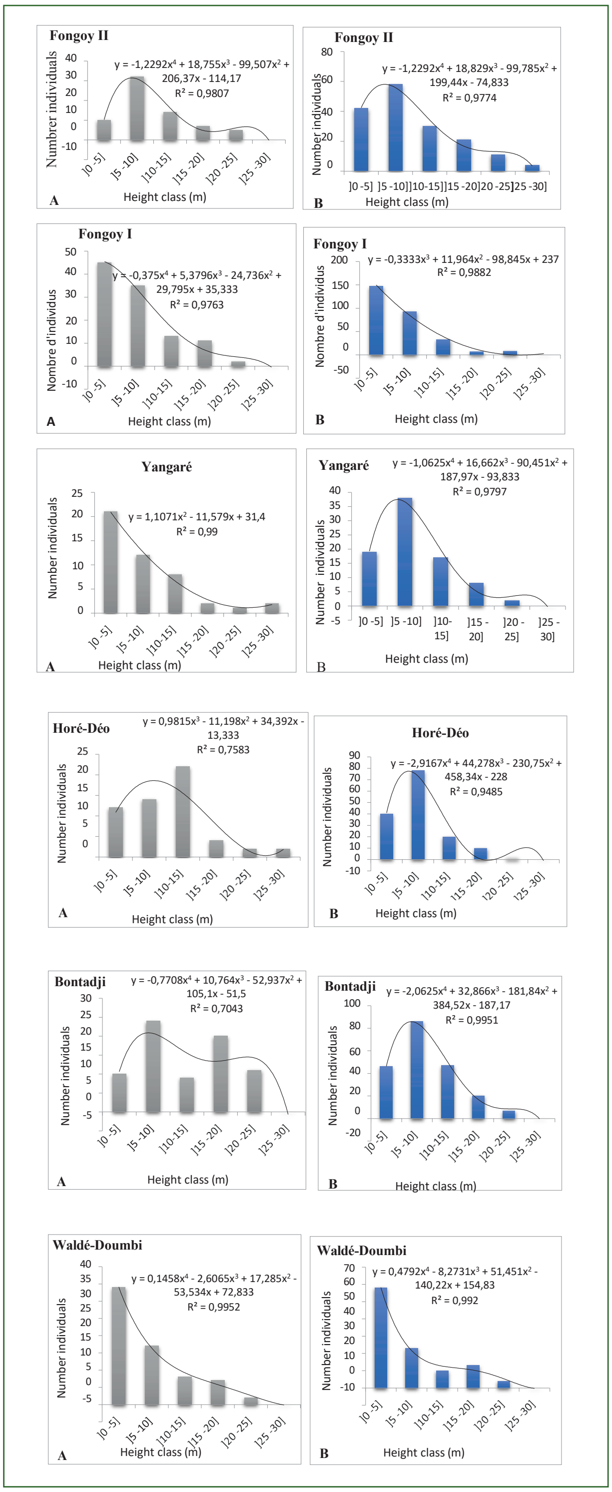
Figure 5 - Distribution of species individuals according to the diameter classes of *Prunus africana* stands in the MFT.



Height structure of understory trees in Prunus africana stands

Analysis of the height structure of the understory timbers in *Prunus africana* stands shows an "L" shape in the localities of Fongoy I, II and Waldé-Doumbi. These "L" structures show that the classes 0-5 cm are the most represented in terms of number of individuals. On the other hand, between the Horé-Déo, Yangaré and Bontadji localities, the analysis of the height structure of the Understory of *Prunus africana* stands shows a "bell" shape.

Figure 6 - Distribution of species individuals according to the height classes of *Prunus africana* stands in the MFT.



These three "bell" structures show that the highest numbers of individuals are centered in the classes 0-10 cm, 0-5 cm; 0-5 cm and 10-15 cm respectively for the localities of Horé-Déo, Yangaré, Fongoy II and Bontadji (Fig. 6).

Discussion

The results of this study provide information on the structural and taxonomic characterization of *Prunus africana* stands in Faro and Déo. A total of 25 families distributed in 41 genera and 46 species. These results are similar to those of Ngueguim et al. (2010) who recorded 26 families, 42 genera and 46 species in *Mansonia altissima* A. Chev., *Lovoa trichilioides* Harms and *Terminalia ivorensis* A. Chev. stands. However, these results are superior to those of Ibrahima and Abib (2008) who recorded 21 species belonging to 14 families in tree and shrub facies in the Sudano-Guinean savannahs of Cameroon and Awé et al. (2021) who recorded 17 families, 20 genera and 36 species in cashew plantations in the northern parts of Cameroon. This floristic richness is highest in Horé-Déo and Bontadji with 27 species each. The subdivision of Galim-Tignère has the lowest number of individuals. Among the localities, Waldé-Doumbi, Yangaré and Fongoy I have the lowest number of species (14 species). This difference could be explained by accentuated anthropogenic activities such as overgrazing and overexploitation of resources, as well as inaccessibility in some localities. According to Wezel (2004), more than the climatic factor, it is the anthropogenic pressure that completes the disappearance of species and therefore of biodiversity after the climatic changes that lead to the loss of density of timbers.

In the understory of the *Prunus africana* stands, Euphorbiaceae and Fabaceae are the most dominant families. The dominance of these two families could be justified by the fact that the ecological conditions are favorable to their regeneration and also their adaptability to the anthropogenic disturbances present in the studied sites.

The specific frequencies of *Croton macrostachyus* and *Ficus thonningii* are very high in the understory. The dominance of these two species may be due to biotic and abiotic factors favorable to their development (Tiokeng et al. 2015). This could also be justified by the presence of anthropogenic activities that substitute the dominance of *Lophira lanceolata* and *Daniellia oliveri* in the Sudano-Guinean zone (Letouzey 1985). In general, in all six localities, herbaceous species are the most developed with the Poaceae family dominating the flora. This result is similar to those of Kodji et al. (2021) and Tchobsala et al. (2010) who state that when trees are overcut, there is a re-colonization of the vegetation by the herbaceous layer. However, the high proportion of Poaceae in the site may be due to the fact that these taxa have a very high possibility of tillering and a high speed of regrowth after grazing when the environmental conditions are favorable (Kouassi et al. 2014), or else the species of this family are more resistant to climatic hazards and pathogens.

Floristic diversity indices are objective criteria for assessing the diversity of a plant community. The Shannon index varies from one stand to another. Diversity is low when ISH< 3; medium if ISH is between 3 and 4, it is high when ISH > 4 (Yédomonhan 2009). In the whole understory of the studied *Prunus africana* stands, the Shannon index value is lower than 3 and the equitability is close to 0. This confirms that we are in the presence of an ecosystem in a "highly degraded" state. These results are much lower than those obtained by several authors (Gonmadje et al. 2011, Tiokeng et al. 2015, Awé et al. 2021). The differences noted here show that despite its potential, the Tchabal Forest Massif is under high pressure due to: *(i)* the superposition of several groups of actors (herders, hunters and farmers) with different objectives (Kabelong 2013), *(ii)* the massive influx of populations coming from unstable areas (Nigeria and the NW of Cameroon) and *(iii)* the poor exploitation of *Prunus africana* barks. In addition, there is the roaming of animals and the absence of local initiatives for tree planting and conservation (Jiagho 2021). These low values can also be explained by the fact that only a few species have a high cover (Honvou et al. 2021). Furthermore, these results reflect an increased demand for Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) due to the economic crisis, logging, bush fires, soil conditions and conversions of Sudano-Guinean savannahs to crops that have taken on major importance in recent years in subtropical Africa and in particular in the Adamawa region (Ibrahima et al. 2006).

A pairwise comparison of the floristic composition of the six localities, using Sorensen's method, indicates a similarity threshold between 34 and 78%, which is relatively low and thus shows that some of the localities surveyed are part of different floristic ensembles. The relative heterogeneity between some localities shows that an inventory with a larger sampling rate should be considered to obtain more precise characteristics. However, the diversity index shows greater similarity between localities in the same subdivision.

Comparing localities, it should be noted that the stand in Fongoy I locality is denser (394 ± 0.31 individuals/ha) and contains the largest basal area (25.80 ± 8.05 m^2/ha). Compared to the work of Samb et al. (2018), Noiha et al. (2018c), Temgoua et al. (2019), Awé et al. (2021), this large difference can be linked on the one hand to ecological characteristics, notably soil types, cover, and altitude, and on the other hand by the impact of anthropogenic activities in the localities, such as poor practices observed during debarking, firewood felling, and the collection of medicinal species and other NTFPs. In addition to this, there is the divagation of animals with their devastating actions and the absence of local tree planting and conservation initiatives (MINFOF 2018).

The analysis of the structure according to the diameter classes shows that the understory of the stands obtained in Fongoy I, Fongoy II and Waldé-Doumbi describes an "L" shape while in Horé-déo, Bontadji and Yangaré it describes a bell shape. This "L" shape reflects the overexploitation of large diameters and good regeneration of the stands through the importance of individuals from smaller diameter classes. This indicates that the soils have certain fertility favorable to this dynamic. The bell-shaped distribution characterizes mono-specific stands with a predominance of small diameter individuals. Such a distribution is typical of stable populations likely to be renewed by natural regeneration (Mbayngone et al. 2008) which deduces the fertility of the soil. This pattern has also been described by several authors such as Sambou (2004), Ouédraogo et al. (2006), Sahu et al. (2007), Awé et al. (2021) who concluded that this structural pattern hides a degradation process that affects the populations of certain species with high economic potential, such as the exploitation of *Prunus africana* barks, a species used in the manufacture of medicines for the treatment of benign prostatic hyperplasia, which has increased significantly with the exponential demand. However, the height class distribution exhibits a bell-shaped structure except in the Fongoy I locality which exhibits an "L" shape. This L-shaped structure is similar to that of Tchobsala et al. (2010), observed in the Sudanian zone, who consider this structure to be an indication of degradation.

Conclusion

The understory of *Prunus africana* stands in Faro and Déo contains a significant diversity of species. The species richness and density of trees are much lower than the results found by other researchers. Fabaceae and Euphorbiaceae have the highest values of importance. Analysis of individuals larger than 10 cm in diameter shows that effective natural regeneration is generally good in the small diameter classes. However, increasing anthropogenic pressure during NTFP harvesting and devastating cattle activities could lead to irreversible erosion of understory species in the little known *Prunus africana* stands. This anthropogenic pressure is therefore leading to an alarming destruction of the largest trees of this species and prompts reflection on viable management strategies for this important resource for the farming populations in the Subtropical Africa.

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