Partitioning carbon sources between wetland and non-flooded forest in a first-order catchment in the tropics - Implications for understanding carbon cycling in the whole watershed (Nyong, Cameroon)

~~Partitioning carbon sources in a tropical watershed (Nyong River, Cameroon) between wetlands and terrestrial ecosystems – Do CO_2 emissions from tropical rivers offset the terrestrial carbon sink?~~

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Abstract.

Tropical rivers emit large amounts of carbon (C) to the atmosphere, in particular due to great wetland to river C inputs. Yet, tropical African rivers remain largely understudied and little is known about the partitioning of C sources between wetland and well-drained ecosystems to rivers. In the Nyong watershed (Cameroon, 27 800 km²), we fortnightly measured in groundwater located in a well-drained forest (hereafter referred as non-flooded forest groundwater) and in stream orders 1 to 6, total alkalinity, dissolved inorganic C (DIC) used together with pH to compute the partial pressure of CO_2 (pCO_2), dissolved and particulate organic C (DOC and POC) and total suspended matter. In addition, we occasionally measured heterotrophic respiration in the river. In the first-order stream, DOC and POC concentrations increased during rainy seasons when the hydrological connectivity with the riparian wetland increased whereas the concentrations of the same parameters decreased during dry seasons when the wetland was shrinking. In stream orders higher than 1, the same seasonality was observed showing that wetland in headwaters were significant sources of organic C for these rivers, even though higher POC concentration

evidenced an additional source of POC in these rivers during rainy seasons that was most likely POC originating from floating macrophytes. This seasonal flush of organic matter from the wetland in the first order catchment and from the macrophyte in higher-order rivers during rainy seasons significantly affected downstream metabolism, as evidenced by lower oxygen saturation together with higher pCO_2 in stream orders 5 and 6 compared to 1. In the first-order catchment, the hydrological export of C from non-flooded forest groundwater (6.3±3.0 tC yr^{-1}) and wetland (4.0±1.5 tC yr^{-1}) to the stream represented 3-5% of the local catchment net C sink. In the first-order catchment, non-flooded forest groundwater exports 1.6 times more C than wetland, however, when weighed by surface area, C inputs from non-flooded forest groundwater and wetland to the stream contributed to 27% (13.1±6.2 tC yr^{-1}) and 73% (33.3±12.5 tC yr^{-1}) of the total hydrological C inputs, respectively. At the scale of the Nyong watershed, the yearly integrated C degassing from the entire river network was 650±160 10^3 tC yr^{-1} (23.5±5.6 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}) whereas average heterotrophic respiration in the river and C degassing rates were 99±27 and 1160±580 mmol m^{-2} d^{-1}, which implied that only ~8.5% of the degassing at the water-air interface was supported by heterotrophic respiration in the river. In addition, the total fluvial C export of 190±100 10^3 tC yr^{-1} (10.3±5.9 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}) plus the yearly integrated C degassing from the entire river network represented ~10% of the net C sink estimated for the whole Nyong watershed. Finally, we highlight that attributing to a unique terrestrial source the whole amount of riverine C emitted to the atmosphere and hydrologically exported at the outlet and ignoring the river–wetland connectivity might lead to the misrepresentation of C dynamics in headwaters, and thereby in the whole watershed.

~~We characterized the spatio-temporal dynamics of carbon (C) in rivers of the tropical Nyong catchment (South Cameroon). In 2016, we measured fortnightly at 6 locations along an upstream-downstream gradient from groundwater to the main stream of order 6, total alkalinity, dissolved inorganic C (DIC) used together with pH to compute pCO_2, dissolved and particulate organic C (DOC and POC) and total suspended matter. Forest, groundwater had low DOC content (<1 mg L^{-1}) as its leaching was probably prevented in the overlaying lateritic soils. Forest groundwater was supersaturated in CO_2 (~50 times the atmospheric value) because of the solubilisation of the CO_2 originating from soil respiration. Wetlands water exhibited higher DOC (>14 mg L^{-1}) and similar DIC concentrations than the forest groundwater. Surface runoff was considered negligible in the basin due to low slopes and high infiltration capacity of the soils, making wetlands and forest groundwater the two main sources of C for surface waters. The influence of wetlands on C dynamics in rivers was significant during periods of high waters when the hydrological connectivity between surface waters and wetlands was enhanced. On annual scale, wetlands exported 60% (15.4±7.2 t C km^{-2} yr^{-1}) of the total amount of C transferred laterally to surface waters, the remaining 40% (12.1±5.8 t C km^{-2} yr^{-1}) being transferred from forest groundwater. Heterotrophic respiration in rivers averaged 89 mmol m^{-2} d^{-1} whereas CO_2 degassing was 1260 mmol m^{-2} d^{-1}, which shows that it is unlikely that the river heterotrophic respiration was the main process sustaining CO_2 emission. The comparison of the hydrological export of terrestrial C via forest groundwater with the net terrestrial C sink in the Nyong watershed shows that only ~4% of the net terrestrial C sink reach the aquatic ecosystem. The carbon mass balance of the Nyong watershed highlights that attributing to a unique terrestrial source the whole amount of riverine carbon emitted to the atmosphere and exported to the ocean and ignoring the river–wetland connectivity can lead to the misrepresentation of C dynamics in tropical watersheds.~~

1. Introduction

Despite their small surface area worldwide (Allen and Pavelsky, 2018), inland waters (rivers, lakes and reservoirs) have a disproportional critical role in the global carbon (C) cycle because as They receive large amount of C from terrestrial ecosystemsthe drainage of land (*terra firme* as non-flooded soils and groundwater) and wetland (flooded soils and groundwater), which is processed and subsequently transferred and export it to the atmosphere and the ocean (Abril and Borges, 2019; Allen and Pavelsky, 2018; Cole et al., 2007; Ludwig et al., 1996; Meybeck, 1982). Terrestrial aquatic ecosystemsBesides, inland waters are significant hotspots of C dioxide (CO_2) degassing (e.g., Raymond et al., 2013) since inland waters arebecauseas they are usually supersaturated in with CO_2 and CH_4 compared to the overlying atmosphere. Since the seminal paper by Cole et al. (2007) who estimated that 0.75 PgC-CO_2 was emitted annually to the atmosphere from global inland waters, global emissions estimates have increased substantially.The dissolved CO_2 in riverine waters originates from internal metabolism (mainly heterotrophic decomposition of organic matter in the aquatic system itself) and from lateral external inputs (mainly groundwater and riparian wetlands) (Abril and Borges, 2019; Borges et al., 2015; Hotchkiss et al., 2015). In the most spatially explicit scaling study, degassing estimate from Gglobal inland waters emit was 2.1 Pg C-$CO_2$$O_2$ yr^{-1} of CO_2 to the atmosphere(Raymond et al., 2013). Later thisLater, this estimate has been updated with more accurate CO_2C emissions estimates from African and Amazonian rivers and from small ponds, resulting in the latest estimate of 3.9 PgC CO_2 yr^{-1} to which 0.2-0.55 PgC-CO_2 yr^{-1} might be still added because CO_2 emissions estimates infor rivers are usually not integrated over a full day (Borges et al., 2015a; Drake et al., 2018; Gómez-Gener et al., 2021; Holgerson and Raymond, 2016; Raymond et al., 2013; Sawakuchi et al., 2017). (Raymond et al., 2013). However, the dataset used by Raymond et al. (2013) is based on the CO_2 water partial pressure (pCO_2) calculated from pH and alkalinity (TA), which calculation method leads to overestimation of pCO_2 (up to 75 times), notably in low buffered, and high organic waters, such as boreal and tropical rivers (Abril et al., 2015). In addition, the most recent estimates of river areal extent by (Allen and Pavelsky, 2018) are higher by 44% than those used by Raymond et al. (2013), which should lead to an upward revision of CO_2 emissions from inland waters (Abril and Borges, 2019). At the global scaleGlobally, the latest estimate of the degassing of CO_2 from inland waters wasis of in the same order of magnitude as the net terrestrial C sink (Drake et al., 2018). (3.4 PgC yr^{-1}; Friedlingstein et al., 2020)

Raymond et al. (2013) showed that CO_2 emissions from global rivers (1.8 PgC yr^{-1}) mainly depends on emissions in tropical rivers, since these account for ~80% of the global emissions. However, the magnitude of C emissions from tropical rivers was poorly constrained because its estimation was based on very few data from the tropics and probably biased by the overwhelming dominance of data from the Amazon basin over other tropical basins, resulting in uncertain interpolation and scaling. Indeed, based on CO_2 emissions measurements in African and Amazonian rivers including the Amazon and the Congo, Borges et al. (2015a) estimated that tropical rivers could emit alone 1.8±0.4 PgC-CO_2 yr^{-1}. This significant flux at the global scale, estimated from direct measurements, demonstrates the importance of C emissions from tropical rivers, calling for attention to tropical systems, in particular to Africa, where very few data on C stock and C cycle are available. These data are

crucial to refine the global CO_2 budget since tropical rivers have been identified in global earth modelling approaches as systems exhibiting higher CO_2 emission rates per unit area than those in the temperate and boreal regions (Lauerwald et al., 2015; Raymond et al., 2013). In addition, in these modelling studies the CO_2 emission upscaling was done using the GLORICH dataset, in which the water CO_2 partial pressure (pCO_2) is actually estimated from pH and total alkalinity (TA). This calculation method leads to overestimate pCO_2 up to 75 times, notably in low buffered and high organic waters, which are representative for boreal and tropical rivers (Abril et al., 2015).

The dissolved CO_2 in riverine waters originates concomitantly from heterotrophic respiration in the river, i.e., from the decomposition of organic matter (OM) in the aquatic system itself, and from the drainage of land and wetland (Abril and Borges, 2019; Borges et al., 2015; Hotchkiss et al., 2015). In tropical watersheds, riverine respiration is usually a small component of the riverine CO_2 budget because of the large dominance of the drainage of land and wetland in the overall budget (e.g., Borges et al., 2019). The quantification of hydrological C fluxes originating from the drainage of land and wetland is thus fundamental to close the riverine C budget in tropical watersheds. In the Amazon and the Congo watersheds, the intensity of the CO_2 degassing from the rivers has been related to the percentage of the wetland cover (Abril et al., 2014; Borges et al., 2019, 2015b), showing that wetlands are the main source of OM fuelling CO_2 production in tropical watersheds. Indeed, tropical wetlands are productivity hotspots and a large fraction of their biomass is released to the water through litter-fall and roots exudation, which fuels heterotrophic respiration in the wetland and enrich the water in CO_2 (Abril et al., 2014; Abril and Borges, 2019). The drainage of wetlands also releases large amounts of OM directly to the rivers, enhancing heterotrophic respiration in the river and therefore supports CO_2 degassing from the rivers (Abril et al., 2014; Abril and Borges, 2019). Still, in tropical watersheds, questions remain about the quantification and partitioning of hydrological C fluxes originating from the drainage of land and wetland at the plot scale and their significance in comparison to the local net terrestrial C sink (Duvert et al., 2020a). At smaller scale, the very few studies that compare the local net terrestrial C sink with direct measurements of the hydrologic export of C from land showed that only a small fraction (between 3 and 7%) of the net terrestrial C sink is actually exported to the aquatic environment, whether in temperate or tropical ecosystems (Deirmendjian et al., 2018; Duvert et al., 2020a; Kindler et al., 2011), but to the best of our knowledge this kind of work has never been done in tropical Africa. As the hotter and wetter conditions expected in tropical Africa in a near future will likely modify C fluxes at the watershed scale, integrative studies on C cycling in tropical watersheds are required to understand the present conditions and thus to better predict future changes (Duvert et al., 2020a).~~The quantification of dissolved C fluxes in inland waters originating from lateral hydrological inputs (i.e., soil and groundwater from well-drained terrestrial ecosystems vs. wetland from semi-aquatic ecosystems) is fundamental to close the riverine C budget at the catchment scale (Abril and Borges, 2019; Deirmendjian et al., 2018) Yet, lateral hydrological export of C from terrestrial ecosystems to inland waters has been under attention only in the last 10 years (Ciais et al., 2008; Cole and Caraco, 2001). However, , and he flux of C across the boundary between land and water cannot be determined experimentally at the global scale (Abril and Borges, 2019). Therefore, hydrological C export from terrestrial systems is usually estimated from the sum of the inputs and outputs of C entering or escaping inland waters~~

(e.g., Cole et al., 2007), which does not allow to close the anthropogenic C budget in a whole watershed encompassing terrestrial ecosystems, rivers and wetlands (Abril and Borges, 2019). Abril and Borges (2019) showed that the hydrological C export necessary to balance the inland water C budget is 1.9–3.2 Pg C yr^{-1}, which corresponds to 75%–125% of the terrestrial C sink estimated by Ciais et al. (2013). The offset of the terrestrial C sink by inland waters is in discrepancy with atmospheric CO_2 inversions, terrestrial ecosystem models and forest inventories that all located a net terrestrial C sink at the global scale. As a result, at the global scale, it is unlikely that only the C exported laterally from land would sustain all C fluxes in inland waters. Indeed, at the plot scale, studies in temperate forest system that compare the net C sink with the hydrological C export showed that only a minor portion (~3%) of the terrestrial C is in fact exported laterally from land to the river network (Deirmendjian et al., 2018; Kindler et al., 2011). Abril and Borges (2019) proposed a new conceptual model of the global C cycle in inland waters, where part of the discrepancy between CO_2 emissions estimates from inland waters and the hydrological export of C from terrestrial well-drained systems could be actually attributed to carbon transfer from wetlands to inland waters. There is now consensus that tropical regions are hotspots of riverine C export and degassing (Borges et al., 2015a, 2019; Sawakuchi et al., 2014). Indeed, recent estimates of CO_2 emissions from tropical rivers (latitude < 25°) (Borges et al., 2015b) based on results in several African rivers (Borges et al., 2015a) and in the Amazon (Abril et al., 2014) is about 1.8±0.4 Pg C yr^{-1}. Noteworthy, the estimate of Borges et al. (2015a) is conservative since it does not account for lakes and extensive tropical wetlands that act as hotspots of biological productivity, which could fuel C emissions to the atmosphere from rivers to which they are connected (e.g., Abril et al., 2014; Abril and Borges, 2019; Borges et al., 2015). C global emissi

The Nyong River basin (South Cameroon) has been subject to multidisciplinary hydro-biogeochemical monitoring since 1993. This basin belongs to the Critical Zone Observatories' (CZOs; (Gaillardet et al., 2018) network named Multiscale TROPIcal CatchmentS (M-TROPICS; https://mtropics.obs-mip.fr; Audry et al., 2021) and is, a long-term monitoring program of hydrobiogeochemical cycles in the tropicsological and environmental parameters in the tropics. In this study, we used rainfall, water table level and river discharges measured during the . in the framework of the M-TROPICS effortsobservatory.The main objectives of this study are the description of the spatial (from groundwater to increasing stream order) and temporal (through the hydrological cycle) variations in C concentrations in the waters of the Nyong basin; and to decipher the impact of wetlands on these variations through the establishment of the riverine C budget. In the study, the estimated C fluxes are lateral hydrological inputs from land (i.e., from forest groundwater) and from wetlands to the river network, C degassing from the rivers and total C export to the ocean. The different C fluxes are estimated independently, allowing the quantitative determination of both C inputs from terrestrial ecosystems and from wetlands at the catchment scale. To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to estimate lateral hydrological export of C both from wetland and from well-drained terrestrial ecosystem (i.e., from forest groundwater) in a tropical catchment. In lines with recent studies in tropical rivers (Abril et al., 2014; Borges et al., 2015; 2019), we expected that lateral inputs of C from wetlands to the river network are significant in comparison with C exported laterally from forest groundwater. We therefore hypothesized that the contribution of the net terrestrial C sink to the riverine carbon budget was minor. The first objective of this study is to estimate the riverine C budget

of a first-order catchment, the Mengong catchment, a nested sub-catchment of the Nyong watershed. The hydrological inputs of C from the drainage of land (i.e., from groundwater located in a well-drained forest; hereafter referred as non-flooded forest groundwater) and from wetland to the stream, the heterotrophic respiration in the river, the CO_2 degassed to the atmosphere, and the C hydrologically exported at the stream outlet are estimated and compared with the local net terrestrial C sink, and will be discussed. In lines with recent studies in large tropical watersheds (Abril et al., 2014; Borges et al., 2015; 2019), we expect that lateral inputs of C from wetland to the stream are significant in comparison with lateral inputs of C from non-flooded forest groundwater. The second objective of this study is to evaluate the changes in organic and inorganic C concentration over the seasons in the riverine continuum, from non-flooded forest groundwater to the different stream orders (order 1 to 6). Ultimately, the variations of the C concentrations in the Nyong watershed throughout a water cycle will be compared with those observed in the Mengong sub-catchment in order to evaluate how the biogeochemical cycle of C and its resulting CO_2 emissions to the atmosphere in a large tropical watershed is affected by the connectivity with the wetland domain.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study site

2.1.1. The Nyong watershed

The Nyong ~~catchment~~ watershed (27800 km^2, Cameroon) is located between 2.8 and 4.5~~.~~° N and 9.5~~9~~ and 13.3~~5~~ ° E, mainly in the Southern Cameroon Plateau (600-900 m high) (Fig. 1). The landscape of the Southern Cameroon Plateau mostly consists in a succession of convex rounded hills separated by flat wetlands of variable sizes (Olivry, 1986). We adopt the common definition of wetlands as habitats with continuous, seasonal, or periodic standing water or saturated soils (Mitsch et al., 2012). The main stem (the Nyong River, stream order 6) is 690 km long and ~~flows~~ is flowing west ~~in~~to the Atlantic Ocean (Fig.1). In the eastern part of the basin (from Abong Mbang to Akonolinga; Fig. 1), the Nyong River is flowing trough large riparian wetlands of variable size according to seasons, up to 2-3 km width (Olivry, 1986). In the western part of the basin (downstream to Akonolinga; Fig. 1), riparian wetlands extent is less pronounced and the Nyong river is flowing trough mature forest in a well-chanelled river bed (Olivry, 1986).

The Nyong watershed experiences an equatorial climate with four seasons of unequal importance with two maxima and minima: a short rainy season (SRS: Apr-June), a short dry season (SDS: July-August), a long rainy season (LRS: Sept.-Nov) and a long dry season (LDS: Dec-March) (Suchel, 1987). The catchment lithology is composed of metamorphic and plutonic rocks with the absence of carbonate rocks and minerals (Viers et al., 2000). Slopes and hills are recovered by a thick lateritic profile (20-40 m) poor in C, whereas in the wetlands (i.e., in the depressions) the upper part of the hydromorphic soils shows an enrichment in OM (Boeglin et al., 2003; Nyeck et al., 1999). Ferrealitic soils covers about 80% of the Nyong watershed,

and this soil cover can reach 40 m thick (Braun et al., 2005). On hills and hillsides, the vegetation cover is dominated by semi deciduous-forest whereas in the wetlands Raffia palm trees usually dominates.

In the Nyong watershed, six sites were sampling fortnightly from January to December 2016 (22 times during the sampling period), namely from upstream to downstream: the small first-order Mengong catchment (at the source and the outlet of the catchment), the Awout River (order 3), the So'o River (order 4), and the Nyong River at Mbalmayo (order 5) and Olama (order 6); all sampling sites were located in the western part of the watershed (Table 1; Fig. 1). Noteworthy, the Mengong catchment is described in detail in the next section 2.1.2. The Awout River is flowing for about 30 km in a partially marshy river bed. The So'o River is the southern forest extension of the Nyong Watershed and is the main tributary on the left bank of the Nyong River. The Mbalmayo sampling station is located on the Nyong River upstream the confluence with the So'o, while the Olama sampling station is located downstream this confluence. Each sampling site (except the Mengong source) are gauging stations calibrated for discharges measurements, monitored daily since 1998 and are publicly available at https://doi.org/10.6096/BVET.CMR.HYDRO (Audry et al., 2021). The yearly average discharge of the Nyong River at Olama was ~195 m^3 s^{-1} for both the 1998-2020 period (long-term average) and the year of sampling 2016. Also, the average monthly discharges during the year 2016 did not differ significantly from the average monthly discharges from the 1998-2020 period (Fig. 2). The annual rainfall in the Nyong watershed was 1986 mm in 2016 which is in the upper range of rainfall (1600±290 mm) for the 1998-2020 period (Fig. 2). Altogether, this shows that hydrological fluxes occurring during the sampling year 2016 were typical of the hydrological fluxes usually occurring in the Nyong watershed.

In addition, the C exported at the most downstream station (Nyong at Olama) is considered as representative as the C exported to the Atlantic Ocean by the whole Nyong watershed because the contribution of the tributaries downstream from this station is negligible (Nkoue-ndondo, 2008). Indeed, Brunet et al. (2009) measured both hydrological export of DIC and DOC from the Nyong River at Olama and also more downstream near Déhané (very close to the Nyong river outlet; Fig. 1) and they showed that these fluxes (in tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}, weighed by the catchment surface area drained at Olama or Edea) were similar at Olama (4.2±0.1 and 0.8±0.1 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}, for DOC and DIC, respectively) and Déhané (3.9±0.2 and 1.1±0.1 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}).

~~The Nyong catchment~~watershed ~~experiences an equatorial climate with four seasons of unequal importance with two maxima and minima: a short rainy season (SRS: Apr-June), a short dry season (SDS: July-August), a long rainy season (LRS: Sept.-Nov) and a long dry season (LDS: Dec-March) (Suchel, 1987). In 2016, t~~The average annual precipitation ~~rainfall in the Nyong basin measured in the Mengong catchment~~was 1600±290 and 1986 mm ~~was ~ 1610 mm for the 1998-2020 period and the year of sampling 2016, respectively (Fig. 2). The catchment lithology is mainly composed of metamorphic and granitplutonic rocks with the absence of carbonate minerals (Viers et al., 2000) (Maurizot et al., 1986; Toteu et al., 2001). Slopes and hills are recovered by a thick lateritic profile (20-40 m) poor in C, whereas in the depressions and the swamps~~wetlands (i.e., in the

depressions) the upper part of the hydromorphic soils shows an enrichment in organic matter (OM) (Boeglin et al., 2003; Nyeck et al., 1999). Ferrealitic soils covers about 80% of the Nyong basin, and this soil cover can reach 40 m thick. On hills and hillsides the vegetation cover is dominated by semi deciduous-forest whereas in the wetlands Raffia palm trees usually dominates. Most of the catchment area is covered by a dense permanent forest whereas semi aquatic plants such as raffia or palm tress predominates in the swampy depressions. The Nyong catchment experiences an equatorial climate with four seasons of unequal importance with two maxima and minima: a short rainy season (Apr-June), a short dry season (July-August), a long rainy season (Sept.-Nov) and a long dry season (Dec-March) (Suchel, 1987). In 2016, the average annual precipitation in the basin measured in the Mengong catchment was ~1610 mm (Fig. 2). In 2016, the hydrological cycle, based on the hydrograph, can be separated into three four months periods: base (Jan-Apr), medium (May-Aug) and high (Sep-Dec) flows (Fig. 2).

In the Nyong catchment, 6 sampling sites were selected: 2 located on the main stem (Mbalmayo and Olama) and 4 in the So'o sub-catchment (Mengong source, Mengong outlet, Awout and So 'o) (Fig. 1). The sampling sites cover a wide range of stream orders: from groundwater to order 6 (Table 1). Each sampling site (except the Mengong source) are equipped with gauging gauges calibrated for flow measurement, monitored daily since 1993 and are publically available at https://doi.org/10.6096/BVET.CMR.HYDRO. In 2016, the Nyong River flow at the most downstream station (Nyong at Olama) was 200 $m^3 s^{-1}$ (Fig. 2) and export or riverine C at this site is considered as representative of the C epxorted to the Atlantic Ocean by the Nyong basin because the contribution of the tributaries downstream from this station is negligible (Nkoue ndondo, 2008).

2.1.2. The first-order Mengong catchment

The Mengong catchment is considered representative of the tropical lateritic environments of the South Cameroon plateau (Braun et al., 2012). Therefore, hydro-biogeochemical processes occuring in the Mengong catchment are considered as representative of hydro-biogeochmical processes ocurring in the other first-order basins of the Nyong catchment. Noteworthy, at the Mengong source, groundwater seeps out from the hillside of the Mengong catchment and eventually converge to the stream (i.e., Mengong stream). Then, the Mengong flows donwstream trough a swamp located in the lowland part of the Mengong basin to eventually reach the Mengong outlet 850 m downstream of the seepage point (Maréchal et al., 2011). In the lowland part of the Mengong catchment, the Mengong stream is indeed adjacent to the swamp whose extent is on average through the year ~ 20% of the total surface area of the catchment (Braun et al., 2005). Accordingly, water at the Mengong outlet is fed by two different sources: the forest groundwater that seeps from the hillside of the Mengong catchment and by the swamp located in the lowland part of the basin (Maréchal et al., 2011). In the Mengong catchment, surface runoff on the slopes is negligible due to the high infiltration capacity of the soils and the relatively low slope (Maréchal et al., 2011). At the Nyong catchment scale, surface runoff is also of small magnitude and might not contribute significantly to the input of terrestrial C to surface waters (Nkoue ndondo, 2008). The geographical and hydrological characteristics of the different sub-catchments are shown in Table 1. The Mengong Catchment is 0.6 km^2 and consists of a convexo-concave landscape, ranging from 669 m at

the river outlet to 703 m at the top of the hill, separated by a flat wetland that covers 0.12 km² (Fig. 3). Semi-deciduous rainforest (*Sterculiaceae-Ulmaceae,* C3 plant) covers most of the hills and hillsides, whereas most of the wetland vegetation comprises semi-aquatic plants of the Araceae family (C4) and tree populations of Gilbertiodendron deweverei *(Caesalpiniaceae,* C3) and Raffia monbuttorum (raffia palm trees, C3) (Braun et al., 2005, 2012). The hillside soil cover is a thick lateritic soil that consists of a succession of four main horizons, namely from the bottom to the top, the saprolitic horizon, the mottled clay horizon, the ferruginous horizon, and the soft clayey topsoil; the thickness and distribution of these soil layers depend on the topographic position (Fig. 3). The groundwater floods the fractured bedrock, the entire saprolite, and partly the mottled clay horizon (Braun et al. 2005; Fig. 3). The soil cover is 15 m thick at the top of the north hill (piezometer 1); the depth however, decreases progressively towards the flat wetland (Fig. 3). The roots of the hillside vegetation are essentially located in the topsoil horizon, which has a depth of 5 to 6 m at the top of the hill (at piezometer 1) and has a depth of 3 to 4 m (at piezometer 2) at the mid-slope (Braun et al. 2005; Fig. 3). In the wetland, a dark-brown organic-rich sandy material with a thickness ranging from 0.1 to 1 m tops the hydromorphic soil. In this organic horizon, OM can reach up to 20% by weight, and it is composed of a thick mat of dead and living roots and tubers originating from the wetland vegetation (Braun et al. 2005; Fig. 3). Noteworthy, the first-order Mengong catchment is considered representative of the South Cameroon plateau (and thus of the Nyong watershed) that also consists itself in multiconvex land form developed on granitic terrains separated by flat wetland (Braun et al., 2012). Moreover, the same soil cover and plant species are observed in the Mengong catchment and in the Nyong watershed but it should be noted that the wetland extent is larger in the Mengong Catchment (20%) than in the whole watershed (~5%) (Table. 1). Note that wetland extent in catchment higher than 1 were estimated from GIS analysis using the global wetland map by Gumbricht et al., 2017)

Groundwater draining the hillside emerges at two sources (Q_{hill}) in the watershed head and at specific seepage points (Q_{base}) along the hillside/wetland boundaries (Fig. 3). Only one of these two sources is perennial, the other dries up during dry periods (Fig. 3; Braun et al., 2005; Maréchal et al., 2011). Note thatgroundwater that emerges at sources and at specific seepage points will be further referred as non-flooded forest groundwater. Q_{hill} is conveyed to the stream with negligible interaction with the wetland, while Q_{base} fed the wetland, which is flooded all year long (Maréchal et al., 2011). In addition, according to observations made in the Mengong catchment during most of the rainfall events by Maréchal et al. (2011), it is assumed that the overland flow can be neglected on the forested hillside as the porous soil have a high infiltration capacity. Therefore, the water budget of the hillside aquifer system, as shown in Fig. 3, is the following:

$$R_{hill} = Q_{hill} + Q_{base} \quad \textit{(Eq. 1)}$$

where,

R_{hill} is the recharge rate of the hillside by infiltration of rain water. Maréchal et al. (2011) estimated R_{hill} at 20% of the yearly rainfall occurring in the Mengong catchment, based on a hydrological model related to chloride mass balance at the catchment scale. Q_{hill} and Q_{base} represents 90 and 10% of R_{hill}, respectively.

The total streamflow at the outlet of the Mengong catchment (Q_{ST}), as shown in Fig. 3, is the sum of the contributions of Q_{hill}, the exchange flow between the wetland and the stream ($Q_{WL/ST}$) and the overland flow on the wetland surface (OF_{WL}), as the following:

$$Q_{ST} = Q_{hill} + Q_{WL/ST} + OF_{WL} \quad \textit{(Eq. 2)}$$

where,

OF_{WL} represents 35% of the of the yearly rainfall in the Mengong catchment (Maréchal et al. 2011). Note that both Q_{hill} and OF_{WL} can be estimated from the yearly rainfall over the Mengong catchment and Q_{ST} is measured. $Q_{WL/ST}$ can be thus obtained by difference, but only on a yearly basis.

2. 2. Sampling and laboratory work

The ~~W~~water samples in the Nyong, So'o and Awout Rivers were~~as~~ collected from bridges ~~with from the~~using a Niskin Bottle (3L) ~~linked~~ attached to a rope. At the Mengong source, the water samples were taken directly from the source where ~~the~~ non-flooded forest groundwater seeps out ~~through an inert~~from a polyvinyl chloride ~~PVC~~ pipe. ~~In addition,~~Note that the pipe is only a few centimetres long, thus limiting considerably the contact time between ~~the non-flooded forest ground~~water ~~that seeps out from the hillside~~ and atmospheric air. ~~Also~~Additionally, each sampling bottle was left to overflow ~~in order~~ to avoid catching air bubble ~~air.~~ At the Mengong outlet, ~~because of~~ the shallow depth permitted retrieving, ~~the~~ water samples ~~were cautiously taken~~ directly from~~in~~ the stream. ~~WThe water samples were collected from January to December 2016 with a fortnightly frequency (22 times during the sampling period). We measured d~~Dissolved inorganic C (DIC), TA, dissolved organic (DOC) and particulate organic (POC) C, ~~and~~ total suspended matter (TSM) and the POC content of the TSM (POC%) were measured in replicates from one-off sample. At each samplig site, we measured the physico-chemical parameters of the water (temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen as O_2, and specific conductivity). In addition, we carried out 14 measurements of ~~pelagic riverine~~heterotrophic respiration in the river at two sampling sites (in the Mengong ~~outlet~~ Stream and in the Nyong River at Mbalmayo~~, which are first- and fifth-order streams, respetively~~).

The water temperature, pH, oxygen saturation and specific conductivity were measured *in-situ* using portable probes (WTW®) between January and March 2016 and using an YSI® ProDSS Multiparameter Digital Water Quality Meter between April and December 2016. Calibration of sensors was carried out prior to sampling campaigns and regularly checked during the campaigns. For the WTW® probes, the conductivity cell was calibrated with a 1000 µS cm^{-1} (25°C) standard and the pH probe was calibrated using NBS buffer solutions (4 and 7). The YSI® ProDSS was calibrated using the protocols recommended by the manufacturer. ~~The water temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen and specific conductivity were measured *in situ* in 2015 and between January and March 2016 using portable probes (WTW®). Calibration of sensors was carried out prior to the sampling campaigns and regularly checked during the campaigns. The conductivity cell was calibrated with a 1000 µS cm^{-1} (25°C) standard. The oxygen optical probe was calibrated with humidity saturated ambient air. The pH probe was calibrated using NBS buffer solutions (4 and 7). From April 2016, a multi-parameter probe (YSI ProDSS) was used for *in situ* measurements~~

~~of the same physico-chemical parameters. The multi-parmater probe was calibrated before each sampling campaign using standard protocols (YSI Proplus).~~ The conditioning of water samples was done directly after the field trips in Cameroon at the Institut de Recherches Géologiques et Minières of Yaounde, while chemical analyses were done in France at Toulouse in the laboratory of Géosciences Et Environnement (GET). For TSM~~, and~~ POC and POC%~~, ~~, a ~~firs~~t filtration (0.5-1.5 L) was carried out on pre-weighed and pre-combusted GF/F glass fiber filters (porosity of 0.7 µm). The filters were then dried at 60 °C and stored in the dark at room temperature for subsequent analysis. TSM was determined by gravimetry with a Sartorius scale (precision of the scale was ±0.1 mg). The filters were acidified in crucibles with 2N HCl to remove carbonates and were then dried at 60 °C to remove inorganic C and the remaining acid and water and then analyzed by the Rock Eval pyrolysis method to measure POC and POC% (Lafargue et al., 1998). For DOC ~~analysis~~, a portion of the POC filtrate was kept in glass bottles (60 mL) ~~previously~~prealably pyrolyzed, in which 3 drops of H_3PO_4 (85%) were added to convert all ~~the~~ DIC sepcies ~~in~~to CO_2. The glass bottles were sealed with septas made of polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE). ~~The~~ DOC samples were stored at 3-5°C and ~~before analysis.~~ DOC concentrations were measured by thermal oxidation after a DIC removal step with a SHIMADZU TOC 500 analyser in TOC-IC mode (Sharp, 1993). ~~The repeatability was better than 0.1 mg L^{-1}.~~

We stored TA samples at 20°C in polypropylene bottles after filtration using a syringe equipped with acetate cellulose filters (porosity of 0.22 µm). TA was then analyzed ~~on filtered samples~~ by automated electro-titration (Titrino Metrohm) on 50 mL-samples with 0.1N HCl as the titrant. The equivalence point was determined from pH between 4 and 3 with the Gran method (Gran, 1952). ~~The~~ DIC samples were collected ~~using~~ in 70 mL glass serum bottles sealed with a butyl~~rubber~~ stopper and treated with 0.3 mL of $HgCl_2$ at 20 g L^{-1} to avoid microbial respiration during storage. Vials were carefully sealed such that no air remained in contact with samples and were stored in the dark to prevent photo-oxidation. ~~The~~ DIC was measured with the headspace technique. The headspace was created with 15 mL of N_2 gas, and 100 µL of phosphoric acid 85% ~~(H_3PO_4, 85%)~~ was added in the serum bottles ~~in order~~ to convert all ~~the~~ DIC species to CO_2. After overnight equilibration at constant room temperature, a subsample of the headspace (1 mL) was injected with a gastight syringe into a gas chromatograph equipped with a flame ionization detector (SRI 8610C GC-FID). The gas chromatograph was calibrated with CO_2 standards of 400, 1000 and 3000 ppm (Air Liquide® France). In addition, ~~In the surface waters of the Nyong catchment,~~ we estimated the water pCO_2 from the CO_2SYS software (Lewis et al., 1998), using DIC, pH, ~~and~~ water temperature measurements ~~using~~, and the carbonic acid dissociation constants of Millero (1979) and the CO_2 solubility from Weiss (1974)~~; using the CO_2SYS software (Lewis et al., 1998).~~

In the Mengong stream and in the Nyong River at Mbalmayo, s~~S~~ix extra 70 mL serum bottles ~~were~~ collected similarly as ~~the~~for DIC samples ~~and then~~ were used for the determination of ~~pelagic riverine~~ heterotrophic respiration in the river. Three serum bottles were directly poisoned in the field with 0.3 mL of $HgCl_2$. The three other serum bottles were incubated in a cool-dark box during 24 hours. The cool-dark box was protected from light and filled with water from the river to maintain inside the cool-dark box a water temperature similar to the one observed in the river. At the end of the incubations, the serum bottles

were poisoned with 0.3 mL of $HgCl_2$ and stored in the dark and at room temperature. To estimate ~~pelagic~~ riverine respiration, we measured the increase in CO_2 in the incubated serum bottles compared to those poisoned directly in the field. CO_2 was measured similarly as DIC, using a headspace technique but without a prior acidification with H_3PO_4. Noteworthy, ~~F_{respi}~~ our method does not represent total respiration in the river since it does not include benthic respiration. A mean benthic respiration measured in various tropical rivers of 21 mmol m^{-2} d^{-1} (Cardoso et al., 2014) ~~was~~will be therefore added to estimate ~~total F_{respi} which is used throughout the manuscript.~~ total respiration in the river. ~~In the surface waters of the Nyong catchment, we estimated the pCO_2 from DIC, pH and water temperature measurements using the carbonic acid dissociation constants of Millero (1979) and the CO_2 solubility from Weiss (1974); using the CO_2SYS software (Lewis et al., 1998).~~

2.3. Determination of catchments surface area, water surface area, slope and gas transfer velocity (k_{600})

The sub-catchments surface areas and the determination of the diffferent stream orders were estimated from the hydrological modeling tools available in ~~ArcGIS10.5~~QGIS3.16® and the digital elevation model (DEM, 15 sec resolution) conditioned for hydrology (HydroSHEDS; Lehner et al., 2008). ~~Wetlands surface areas were estimated from Gumbricht et al. (2017).~~ In the Nyong ~~catchment~~watershed, the HydroSHEDS flowline dataset (15 sec resolution) enabled the precise determination of the total length of each stream order (1 to 6). To estimate the average monthly river width (W) in each stream order of the Nyong watershed, ~~W~~we ~~combined~~ used the average monthly ~~river flow~~ discharges ~~measurements~~ from the five gauging stations (located on stream-orders 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6) ~~(Table 1)~~ and the hydraulic equation described by Raymond et al. (2012), as follows: ~~in order to estimate the average river width (W) for all rivers of a given stream orders:~~

$$W = 12.88Q_{monthly~~ean~~}^{0.42} \quad (Eq.\ 3)$$

~~W~~where,

$Q_{monthly~~ean~~}$ is the ~~mean~~ average monthly ~~river~~ discharge ~~flow~~ in 2016 in the stream orders 1, 3, 4, 5 or 6.

~~Within a basin, river length, width, and surface area scale exponentially with stream order for all river orders (Strahler, 1957).~~ Since we did not measure ~~river flow~~ discharge in stream order 2, the average width of stream order 2 was extrapolated from the best exponential regression curve ~~obtained~~ from the relationship between stream order and average monthly river width, as indeed, river width within a basin scale exponentially with stream order for all river orders (Strahler, 1957). ~~in the catchment~~. We ~~then~~ used the average monthly river width ~~(estimated from hydraulic equation by Raymond et al. 2012)~~ and the total length per stream order ~~(estimated from HydroSHEDS flowline dataset)~~ to ~~calculate~~ estimate the monthly water surface area per stream order. ~~Also, w~~We fused the HydroSHEDS DEM and flowline dataset~~s~~ to assign an altitude to each river point and thus to determine the average slope (S) per stream order. To calculate the average monthly flow velocity (V) per stream order, we used the following hydraulic equation described by Raymond et al. (2012), as follows:

$$V = 0.19Q_{monthly~~ean~~}^{0.29} \quad (Eq.\ 4)$$

~~where Q_{mean} is the mean river flow in 2016 in the stream orders 1, 3, 4, 5 or 6~~. The average monthly flow velocity in stream order 2 was extrapolated from the best exponential regression curve from the relationship between stream order and monthly average flow velocity ~~similarly as the the average river width (see above).~~ In each stream order, ~~T~~the monthly gas transfer

velocity normalized to a Schmidt number of 600 (k_{600} in m d^{-1}) was derived from the parameterization as a function of S (unitless) and V (m s^{-1}) as in the Eq. 5 by Raymond et al. (2012):

$k_{600} = VS*2841+2.02$ *(Eq. 5)*

As described by Borges et al. (2019), we chose this parameterization because it is based on the most comprehensive compilation of k values in streams which, in addition, was used in the global upscaling of CO_2 emissions from rivers by both Raymond et al. (2013) and Lauerwald et al. (2015).

2.4. C fluxes estimation at the Nyong watershed scale

2.4.1. C degassing

In each stream order, ~~T~~the ~~monthly~~ monthly rate if CO_2 degassing at the water-air interface (F_{degas}; in mmol m^{-2} d^{-1}) was estimated monthly as follows:

$F_{degas} = k_{600} K_0 (pCO2w - pCO2a)$ *(Eq. 6)*

~~W~~where,

K_0 is the solubility coefficient of CO_2 determined from the water temperature (Weiss, 1974), k_{600} is the monthly gas transfer velocity of CO_2 (see section 2.34), pCO_{2w} and pCO_{2a} are the monthly partial pressures of CO_2 in the surface waters and in the overlying atmosphere (set to 400 ppmv), respectively.

~~We estimated~~ In each stream order, ~~W~~we multiplied the monthly F_{degas} (mmol m^{-2} d^{-1}) ~~in each stream order of the Nyong basin (1 to 6) and we multiplied F_{degas} by~~by the respective monthly water surface area ~~of each stream order~~ to estimate the ~~total~~ monthly CO_2 emissions ~~(in Gg~~ tC yr^{-1} ~~)~~ per stream order. We summed the total CO_2 emission in each stream order to estimate the total quantity of CO_2 degassed from the Nyong watershed from the entire river network and then normalized by the Nyong watershed area (tC km^{-2} yr^{-1})~~in the basin by the entire river network. We normalized the latter flux by the surface area of the Nyong catchment to estimate an average degassing weighed by the surface area of the basin (t C km^{-2} yr^{-1})~~. Note that we did not measure pCO_2 in second-order streams but estimated the pCO_2 by averaging the pCO_2s measured in the first- and third-order streams.~~Note that we did not measured pCO_2 in second-order streams. However, we estimated the average pCO_2 in second order streams by averaging the pCO_2s observed measured in the first and third order streams.~~

2.4.2~~1~~. C export to the ocean

The ~~annual~~monthly ~~average~~ C hydrologically exported to the ocean (F_{ocean}) was calculated monthly at the most downstream station (Nyong at Olama) as the following:

$F_{ocean} = Q_{olama} [C]_{olama}$ (Eq. 7~~5~~)

where Q_{olama} and $[C]_{olama}$ are the ~~annual~~monthly average discharges~~flow~~ and concentrations of POC, DIC or DOC at Olama, respectively. F_{ocean} was estimated in ~~Gg~~ tC yr^{-1} and then normalized by the catchment surface area at Olama (t-C km^{-2} ~~year~~$^{-1}$).

2.5. Riverine C budget of the first-order Mengong catchment

2.5.1. The different C fluxes

At the Mengong catchment scale, as described above in the section 2.1.2, there are two sources fuelling the Mengong stream with C, namely,: ~~-~~non-flooded forest groundwater (F_{GW}) and wetland (F_{SWL}). The C entering the Mengong stream has two outputs as this C is either degassed at the water-air interafce (F_D) or hydrologically exported at the ~~river~~ streamoutlet (F_{OUT}). Noteworthy, heterotrophic respiration in the stream ~~river heterotrophy~~ (F_{RH}) is considered as an C input for the DIC budget, while a C output for the DOC budget (assuming respiration occurs on DOC only). Riverine DIC, DOC and POC budgets (DIC_{budget}, DOC_{budget}, POC_{budget}) are thus the difference between C inputs and outputs as follows:

$$DIC_{budget} = F_{GW} + F_{SWWL} + F_{RH} - F_D - F_{OUT} \quad \text{(Eq. 8~~6~~)}$$

$$DOC_{budget} = F_{GW} + F_{SWWL} - F_{RH} - F_{OUT} \quad \text{(Eq. 9~~7~~)}$$

$$POC_{budget} = F_{SWWL} - F_{OUT} \quad \text{(Eq. 10~~8~~)}$$

Noteworthy, these C budgets at the Mengong catchment scale cannot be estimated monthly as for F_{degas} or F_{ocean} at the Nyong watershed scale, because water fluxes described in Equations 1 and 2, in particular R_{hill} and OF_{WL}, which are needed to estimate F_{GW} and F_{WL} (see section 2.5.2), can be estimated only yearly from yearly rainfall in the Mengong catchment (see section 2.1.2).

2.~~5~~4.~~2~~2. ~~Lateral~~ Hydrological inputs of C from ~~land and wetland~~non-flooded forest groundwater and wetland

~~In the Nyong basin, we considered that lateral inputs of C in the river network originates from two sources: forest groundwater (i.e., terrestrial C) and wetlands (i.e., semi-aquatic C). In our study, these two lateral inputs were estimated from data acquired in the Mengong catchment. Maréchal et al. (2011) estimated that the recharge rate of the hillside of the Mengong catchment was 332 mm yr^{-1} (between 1994-1998). The recharge rate of the hillside comprises two hydrological fluxes: one is hillside groundwater outflow and one is baseflow from the hillside to the swamp (Maréchal et al. 2011). The hillside drains a surface area of 0.48 km^2, thereby the average annual outflow of the terrestrial groundwater (Q_{GW}) is ~0.005 $m^3 s^{-1}$, from which an hydrological lateral export of C from forest groundwater to surface waters (F_{GW}) can be estimated as the following:~~

According to equations 1 and 2 we can estimate the quantity of dissolved carbon leached from non-flooded forest groundwater to the Mengong stream (F_{GW}) as the following:

$$F_{GW} = Q_{hill}~~Q_{GW}~~ [C]_{GW} \quad \text{(Eq. 11~~9~~)}$$

~~W~~where,

$[C]_{GW_F}$ is the yearly average ~~annual~~ concentration of DIC or DOC in the Mengong source. F_{GW} ~~Fex_{GW}~~ (t C yr^{-1}) is normalized by the surface area of 0.48 km^2 drained by the hillside (t C km^{-2} yr^{-1}). Noteworthy, a part of non-flooded forest groundwater fed the wetland ($F_{GW\text{-}bis}$) and can bes estimated as the following:

$$F_{GW\text{-}bis} = Q_{base}\,[C]_{GW} \quad \text{(Eq. 12θ)}$$

$F_{GW\text{-}bis}$ does not account to the stream C budget because Q_{base} is not feeding the stream, but does account to the total quantity of C hydrologically leached from land.

According to equations 1 and 2, we can estimate the quantity of dissolved C leached from the wetland to the Mengong stream (F_{WL}) as the following:

$$F_{WL} = (OF_{WL} + Q_{WL/ST}) * [C]_{WL} \quad \textit{(Eq. 13)}$$

where,

$[C]_{WL}$ are the concentrations of DOC or DIC in the topsoil solution (0.4 m) of the Mengong wetland, measured at 1 420±750 and 1 430±900 µmol L^{-1} by Braun et al. (2005) and Nkoue Ndondo et al. (2020), respectively. F_{WL} (tC yr^{-1}) is normalized by the surface area of 0.12 km^2 drained by the wetland (tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}).

~~$[C]_{SW}$ is the concentration of DOC or DIC in the top soil solution of the wetland. DOC (680±500 µmol L^{-1}) and DIC (1430±900 µmol L^{-1}) concentrations in the top soil solution of the wetland were estimated from Nkoue-ndondo et al. (2020). F_{SW} $F_{SW_{DIC,DOC}}$ (t C yr^{-1}) is normalized by the surface area drained by the swamp (t C km^{-2} an^{-1}). DOC and DIC concentrations in the swamp were estimated from DIC and DOC measured by Nkoue-ndondo et al. (2020) in the soil solution of the swamp at 0.4 meter depth~~

~~In the Mengong catchment, Maréchal et al. (2011) estimated that the swamp flows to the stream at an average rate of 589 mm yr^{-1} and the swamp drains an average surface area of 0.12 km^2, thereby the average annual outflow of the swamp (Q_{SW}) is ~0.002 m^3 s^{-1}. Hydrological lateral export of semi-aquatic C ($F_{SW_{DIC,DOC}}$) from the swamp (wetland domain) to surface waters can thus be estimated as the following:~~

~~$F_{SW_{DIC,DOC}} = Q_{SW}\,[C]_{SW}$~~

~~where $[C]_{SW}$ is the average annual concentration of DIC or DOC in the swamp of the Mengong catchment. $F_{SW_{DIC,DOC}}$ (t C yr^{-1}) is normalized by the surface area drained by the swamp (t C km^{-2} an^{-1}). DOC and DIC concentrations in the swamp were estimated from DIC and DOC measured by Nkoue-ndondo et al. (2020) in the soil solution of the swamp at 0.4 meter depth~~.

In the Mengong catchment, as described in the section 2.1.2, ~~surface runoff~~overland flow on ~~the~~ hillsides is negligigble and there is no particulate C in non-flooded forest groundwater. Therefore, it can be safely assumed that ~~, therefore, we assumed that the~~ POC at the Mengong outlet should originates mostly from the drainage and erosion of the ~~swamp (which is adjacent to the stream).~~wetland. Accordingly, ~~we considered assumed~~ it was assumed that the ~~lateral~~ hydrological export of POC at the

Mengong outlet ~~of the Mengong catchment (i.e., Mengong outlet)~~is ~~representative~~ similar of ~~the~~ POC hydrologically exported ~~laterally~~ from the ~~swamp~~ wetland ($F_{SWPWLOC}$). For POC, $F_{SWWLPOC}$ can thus be ~~thus~~ estimated as the following:

$F_{SWWLPOC} = Q_{outlet}[POC]_{outletOUT}$ *(Eq. 142)*

~~W~~where,

~~Q_{outlet} and $[POC]_{OUT}$ are is the yearly average annual river flow~~discharge ~~at the Mengong outlet and $[POC]_{outlet}$ is and the yearly average annual concentration of POC~~ Q_{outlet} and $[POC]_{OUT}$ are the yearly average discharge and POC concentration at the Mengong outlet, respectively. $F_{SWPWLOC}$ (~~t~~ C yr^{-1}) is normalized by the surface area ~~of 0.12 km^2 drained by the swamp~~of the wetland (~~t~~ C km^{-2} yr~~an~~$^{-1}$).

2.5.3. C degassing

It has been shown that a large fraction of C degassing in headwaters was actually missed by conventional stream sampling because a large fraction of the degassing occurs as hotspots in the vicinity of groundwater resurgences (e.g., Deirmendjian and Abril, 2018; Johnson et al., 2008). Therefore, we estimated F_D from a mass balance that calculates the loss of the dissolved CO_2 between non-flooded forest groundwater ($F_{D\text{-}GW}$) (or wetland; $F_{D\text{-}WL}$) and stream water, using CO_2 concentrations and drainage data, a method similar to Duvert et al. (2020a), as the following

$F_{D\text{-}GW} = ([CO_2]_{GW} - [CO_2]_{OUT}) * Q_{Hill}$ *(Eq. 15)*

$F_{D\text{-}WL} = ([CO_2]_{WL} - [CO_2]_{OUT}) * (OF_{WL} + Q_{WL/ST})$ *(Eq. 16)*

$F_D = F_{D\text{-}GW} + F_{D\text{-}WL}$ *(Eq. 17)*

where,

$[CO_2]_{GW}$, $[CO_2]_{WL}$ and $[CO_2]_{OUT}$ are the yearly average CO_2 concentrations in non-flooded forest groundwater, wetland, and stream outlet, respectively.

2.5.4. C hydrologically exported at the Mengong stream outlet

Based on equation 3, the quantity of C hydrologically exported at the outlet of the Mengong catchment can be estimated as the following:

$F_{OUT} = Q_{ST}[C]_{OUT}$ *(Eq. 18)*

where, $[C]_{OUT}$ is the concentration of POC, DOC or DIC at the Mengong stream outlet, respectively.

2.54.43 Internal metabolism in the river network

~~F_{respi} F_{RH} (mmol m^{-3} d^{-1}) is the average pelagic riverine respiration obtained from the increase in CO_2 in the incubated serum bottles over 24h. F_{respi} was converted in mmol m^{-2} d^{-1} by multiplying by the average river Mengong stream depth at the corresponding sampling siteoutlet. Noteworthy, F_{respi} does not represent total respiration in the river since it does not include benthic respiration. A mean benthic respiration measured in various tropical rivers of 21 mmol m^{-2} d^{-1} (Cardoso et al., 2014)~~

was therefore added to estimate total F_{respi} which is used throughout the manuscript. F_{RH} in mmol m^{-3} d^{-1} is the average heterotrophic respiration in the Mengong stream obtained from the increase in CO_2 in the incubated serum bottles over 24h. F_{RH} was converted in mmol m^{-2} d^{-1} by multiplying by the average depth at the Mengong stream outlet.

2.4.4 C export to the ocean

The annual average C exported to the ocean (F_{ocean}) was calculated at Olama as the following:

$F_{ocean} = Q_{olama} [C]_{olama}$

where Q_{olama} and $[C]_{olama}$ are the annual average flow and concentrations of POC, DIC or DOC at Olama, respectively. F_{ocean} was estimated in Gg C yr^{-1} and then normalized by the catchment surface area at Olama (t C km^{-2} $year^{-1}$).

2.5 C budget in the waters of Nyong basin

The sum of the C transferred by forest groundwater (F_{GW}) and by wetland (F_{sw}) represents the total C inputs (C_{inputs}) transferred laterally to the river network, thus:

$C_{inputs} = F_{SW\ (DOC, DIC, POC)} + F_{GW\ (DOC, DIC)}$

The C entering the surface network has two outputs ($C_{outputs}$) as this C is degassed at the water-air interafce (F_{degas}) or exported to the ocean (F_{ocean}), thus:

$C_{outputs} = F_{ocean\ (DOC, DIC, POC)} + F_{degas}$

The difference between C_{inputs} and $C_{outputs}$ represents the C budget (C_{budget}) in inland waters of the Nyong basin, as the following:

$C_{budget} = C_{inputs} - C_{outputs}$

Noteworthy, external C_{inputs} assumed to be provided by both forest groundwater and wetland should sustain total F_{respi}. Therefore, total F_{respi} is not included in the estimation of C_{budget}.

2.6 Statistical procedures

To assess statistical differences between stream orders (upstream-downstream) or between seasons (related to base, medium and high flows), we used the ordinary one-way ANOVA with Tukey's multiple comparisons test for data normally distributed whereas we used Kruskall-Wallis test with Dunn's multiple comparison test for data that were not normally distributed. For both statistical tests, $p>0.05$ indicated that samples did not differ significantly, while $p<0.05$ indicated a statistical difference and $p<0.001$ an even higher confidence level of statistical difference. To assess correlations between a given parameter and river flow we used a Pearson correlation test for data normally distributed and Spearman correlation test for data that were not normally distributed. For these correlation tests, $p>0.05$ indicated that samples were samples were not correlated, while $p<0.05$ indicated a correlation and $p<0.001$ an even higher confidence level of correlation. Normality was tested with the Agostino & Pearson normality test. All tests were made with Golden Software Prism (version 7).

3 Results

3.1. Hydrology

In 2016, the discharges were 0.009±0.002 (range was 0-0.35), 3.9±4.8 (0-35), 35.6±40.6 (3.4-175), 146±112 (21-392) and 195±160 (8-640) $m^3 s^{-1}$, in stream orders, 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6, respectively (Table 1, Fig. 2). All river discharges seasonally peaked twice a year during the two rainy seasons, both separated by dry seasons; the groundwater water table followed the same trend (Figs. 2, 4-5). Specifically, the beginning to middle of the rainy seasons corresponded to a period of increasing river discharge and groundwater water table level, while the end of the rainy seasons and the dry seasons corresponded to a period of decreasing river discharge and groundwater water table level (Figs. 2, 4-5). In each stream order, low-water period and lowest discharges were observed during the long dry season (Figs. 2). The stream orders 1 and 3 were dried up during the long dry seasons (from the 01st Jan. to the 15th Mar. 2016 and to the 28th Apr. 2016, for stream order 1 and 3, respectively) whereas the streams with orders higher than 3 were never dried up (Fig. 2).

3.2. Seasonal variations of C and ancillary parameters in non-flooded forest groundwater

Yearly averages and ranges in C and ancillary parameters in non-flooded forest groundwater are detailed in Tables 2 and 3. The coefficients of variation of groundwater temperature, pH and specific conductivity were lower than 5% showing a strong stability for these parameters throughout the water cycle. Oxygen saturation in non-flooded forest groundwater increased during the long dry season and peaked at the end of the same season (up to 68% the 30th Mar. 2016), then slowly decreased towards the end of the long rainy season (down to 38% the 15th Nov. 2016) (Fig. 4). pCO_2 in non-flooded forest groundwater concentration exhibited strong temporal variations (coefficient of variation was about 50%), and peaked in the middle of the short (up to 100 000 ppmv the 16th Feb. 2016) and long (up to 200 000 ppmv the 01st Aug. 2016) dry seasons, while decreasing during the two wet seasons (Fig. 4). All year long, DOC in non-flooded forest groundwater was below the detection limit of 1 mg L^{-1} (<83 µmol L^{-1}); note we considered this threshold as the average DOC concentration in non-flooded forest groundwater. Despite one peak of TA that was up to 138 µmol L^{-1} the 29th Sep. 2016, TA in non-flooded forest groundwater was relatively stable through the water cycle (Fig. 4).

3.3. Seasonal variations of C and ancillary parameters in surface waters

Yearly averages and ranges in C and ancillary parameters in surface waters are detailed in Tables 2 and 3. In streams orders 1 and 3 variations of pH, specific conductivity and oxygen saturation were weakly affected by the discharge as indicated by non-correlations between these parameters and the discharge in these streams (Table 4, Fig. 5). Nonetheless, in the stream order 3, we observed an increased in oxygen saturation during dry periods (Fig. 5). On the contrary, in streams orders 4, 5 and 6, variations of pH, specific conductivity and oxygen saturation as a function of river discharge were more pronounced as these parameters peaked during dry seasons and decreased during rainy seasons as indicated by significant negative correlations between these parameters and the discharge in these streams (Table 4, Fig. 5).

DOC concentration in stream order 1 increased at the beginning of the re-flowing period (i.e., at the beginning of the short rainy season, up to 4 140 µmol L^{-1} the 14th Apr. 2016) (Fig. 5). In the other stream orders, a similar DOC trend occurred but with a slight delay of about a couple of weeks in comparison to the one observed in stream order 1 (Fig. 5). After this seasonal peak, DOC concentration quickly decreased to reach minimum values during the following short dry season, then DOC concentration was rather stable until the first rains fall again in the next short rainy season (Fig. 5). In stream order 1, POC and TSM concentrations also peaked significantly at the beginning of the re-flowing period, driving the negative correlation of these two parameters with the discharge in this stream; we did not observe a similar increase in higher order streams (Table 4; Fig. 5). In addition, in stream order 1, POC%, POC and TSM concentrations increased during the two wet seasons, while decreased during the short dry season; a similar trend was observed in stream orders 5 and 6 as indicated by the positive correlation between POC and TSM and the discharge in these streams (Table 4; Fig. 5). In contrast, in stream orders 3 and 4, TSM concentration did not follow this trend as it peaked during short dry season and at the beginning of the long dry season (Fig. 5).

In all stream orders, we observed an increase in TA concentration during the long rainy season followed by a quick decrease (Fig. 5). Overall, there was also a peak in TA concentration at the end of the long dry season followed by a decrease during the following short rainy and dry seasons, driving the significant negative correlation between discharge and TA concentration in stream orders 4, 5 and 6 (Table 4, Fig. 5). In the stream order 1, pCO_2 exhibited a similar trend to the POC, with values peaking during the two wet seasons (Fig. 5). In stream orders higher than 1, pCO_2 seasonally peaked during the long rainy season, but more significantly in stream orders 5 and 6 as indicated by the positive correlation between pCO_2 and discharge in these streams (Table 4).

3.4. Spatial variations of C and ancillary parameters across non-flooded forest groundwater, and increasing stream orders

TSM and POC concentrations were not significantly different in streams orders 3, 5 and 6, but were significantly lower in stream order 1, while being significantly higher in stream order 4 ($p<0.001$, Kruskall-Wallis with Dunn's multiple comparisons tests) (Fig. 6). POC content of the TSM was significantly higher in stream order 1 in comparison to all other stream orders, while not being significantly different between stream orders 3 to 6 ($p<0.05$, Kruskall-Wallis with Dunn's multiple comparisons tests) (Fig. 6). DOC concentration was not significantly different between streams orders 1, 4, 5 and 6, but was significantly lower in non-flooded forest groundwater, while being significantly higher in stream order 3 ($p<0.001$, Kruskall-Wallis with Dunn's multiple comparisons tests) (Fig. 6).

The oxygen saturation was not significantly different between non-flooded forest groundwater and streams orders 1, 3 and 4, whereas it was significantly lower in the Nyong River (streams orders 5 and 6) ($p<0.05$, Kruskall-Wallis with Dunn's multiple

comparisons tests) (Fig. 6). TA concentration was significantly higher in stream order 1 than in non-flooded forest groundwater ($p>0.01$, Mann-whitney test) (Fig. 6) (Fig. 5). In addition, TA concentration was significantly higher in streams orders 5 and 6 than in non-flooded forest groundwater and in streams orders 1, 3 and 4 ($p<0.001$, Kruskall-Wallis with Dunn's multiple comparisons tests) (Fig. 6). pCO_2 was significantly higher in non-flooded forest groundwater, while was similar in all other stream orders ($p<0.001$, Kruskall-Wallis with Dunn's multiple comparisons tests) (Fig. 6).

3.5. C budget at the Mengong catchment scale

The DIC_{budget} was well-balanced, showing inputs and outputs fluxes not statistically different ($p>0.05$; Mann-Whitney test) and differing only by 6%. This indicate that all DIC fluxes have been considered and well constrained (Table 5). In contrast, the DOC_{budget} was not balanced, showing statistically different inputs and outputs fluxes ($p<0.001$; Mann-Whitney test) by 235%. This shows that unidentified DOC inputs were overlooked from the estimated budget (Table 5). The quantity of hydrologically exported C from non-flooded forest groundwater (F_{GW} + $F_{GW\text{-}bis}$) was 7.0±3.0 tC yr^{-1} (14.6±6.2 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}). Noteworthy, 10% of this export go to the wetland rather than the stream; and 97% of this hydrological export of C occurred as DIC (Fig. 7). The annual flux of the hydrologically exported C from wetland to the stream (F_{WL}) was 4.0±1.6 tC yr^{-1} (33.3±12.5 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}); DOC, DIC and POC contributing for 45, 45 and 5%, respectively (Fig. 7). The annual flux of C degassed to the atmosphere as CO_2 (F_D) was 5.5±2.3 tC yr^{-1}, while the heterotrophic respiration in the stream (F_{RH}) was 0.3±0.1 tC-CO_2 yr^{-1} (Fig. 7)

3.6. C degassing and C export to the ocean at the Nyong watershed scale

Spatially, yearly averages of monthly k_{600} increased from stream order 1 (2.2±0.1 m d^{-1}) to 4 (3.0±0.3) and subsequently decreased downstream in stream orders 5 (2.3±0.1) and 6 (2.5±0.2[1]). In contrast, monthly k_{600} did not exhibit much seasonal variations (Table 6; Fig. S1). Spatially, yearly averages of monthly CO_2 degassing rates were similar in stream orders 1, 2, 3 and 4 but significantly lower in stream orders 5 and 6 ($p<0.001$, Kruskall-Wallis with Dunn's multiple comparisons tests) (Table 6). Rates of heterotrophic respiration were 46±22 and 151±31 mmol m^{-2} d^{-1} in stream order 1 and 5, respectively, whereas CO_2 degassing rates were 1220±640 and 846±350 mmol m^{-2} d^{-1} in the same stream orders, respectively (Table 6). Seasonally, considering all stream orders, the monthly average CO_2 degassing rates during rainy seasons were in average 20% higher in comparison to average CO_2 degassing rates during dry seasons, explaining higher integrated CO_2 degassing during rainy seasons at the Nyong watershed scale (Fig. 8). In addition, at the Nyong watershed scale, the yearly integrated CO_2 degassing (F_{degas}) was 650±160 10^3 tC-CO_2 yr^{-1} (23.5±5.6 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}); and the yearly integrated hydrological C export to the ocean (F_{ocean}) was 12±9 10^3 tC yr^{-1} (0.6±0.5 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}) for POC, 130±90 10^3 tC yr^{-1} (7.2±5.4 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}) for DOC, and 46±42 10^3 tC yr^{-1} (2.5±2.3 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}) for DIC; more than 50% of these fluxes occurring during the long rainy season (Tables 6-7; Fig. 8).

3.1 Seasonal and spatial variations of physico-chemical parameters

In forest groundwater and surface waters of the Nyong Basin, water temperature ranged between 21.9 and 29.0 °C, pH between 4.6 and 6.8, O_2 between 12 and 81% and specific conductivity between 5.1 and 86.3 µS cm^{-1} (Table 2; Fig. 3). Minimum values of water temperature and specific conductivity were observed in the Mengong outlet (21.9 °C and 13.1 µS cm^{-1}, respectively, stream order 1) whereas maximum values were observed in the Nyong River at Mbalmayo (29.0 °C and 86.3 µS cm^{-1}, stream order 5) (Table 2; Fig. 3). For oxygen saturation, both minimum and maximum values were observed in the Nyong River at Mbalmayo (13-81%) (Table 2; Fig. 3). For pH, minimum values were observed in the Mengong source (4.6, groundwater) whereas maximum values were observed in the Nyong River at Mbalmayo (6.9) (Table 2; Fig. 3).

Spatially, on average throughout the year, water temperature, pH and specific conductivity increase from upstream (i.e., groundwater) to downstream (i.e., order 6) (Table 2; Fig. 3). Along an upstream-downstream gradient, annual-averaged oxygen saturation peaked significantly ($p<0.001$) in the So'o River (57%, order 4) (Table 2; Fig. 3). In the groundwater and stream orders 1, 3 ,5 and 6 oxygen saturations were significantly lower than in the So'o River but similar ($p>0.05$) between each other's (Table 2; Fig. 3). In general, temporal variation are related to river flows pH, oxygen saturation and specific conductivity were inversely related to the river flow in the groundwater and all stream orders (Fig. 3). During base flow conditions, values of water temperature increased significantly ($p<0.05$) in forest groundwater and most of the stream orders (Fig. 3). Specific conductivity was also significantly higher ($p<0.05$) during base flow conditions in all stream orders, except in groundwater (Fig. 3).

3.2 Seasonal and spatial variations of particulate compounds (i.e., TSM, POC% and POC)

In surface waters of the Nyong Basin, TSM ranged between 1.8 and 27.5 mg L^{-1}, POC content in the TSM (i.e., POC%) between 9 and 29% and POC between 14 and 360 µmol L^{-1} (Tables 2-3; Fig. 4). On average throughout the year, TSM was significantly ($p<0.05$) lower in in the Mengong outlet (stream order 1) than in stream orders 3, 4, 5 and 6 (Table 2; Fig. 4). POC% was significantly ($p<0.05$) higher in stream order 1 than in stream orders 3, 4, 5 and 6 (Table 3; Fig. 4). In general, on average throughout the year, we observed from upstream (stream order 1) to downstream (stream order 6) an increase in TSM and a concomitant decrease in POC% (Tables 2-3; Fig. 4). In contrast, on average throughout the year, POC was similar ($p>0.05$) within all stream orders (Table 3; Fig. 4). Irrespective of the stream orders, TSM, POC% and POC were in general higher (sometimes significantly) during medium and high flows than base flow (Fig. 4). Besides, when all data are plotted together, TSM and POC are both strongly correlated ($p<0.001$) with river flow (data not shown).

3.3 Seasonal and spatial variations of dissolved compounds (i.e., pCO_2, TA, DIC and DOC)

The surface waters of the Nyong Basin were low-buffered (TA: 10-265 µmol L^{-1}), highly oversaturated in CO_2 in comparison to the overlying atmosphere (pCO_2: 3000-41000 ppmv) and organic-rich (DOC: 1,020-7,550 µmol L^{-1}) (Table 3; Fig. 5). Forest groundwater was also low-buffered (TA: 15-138 µmol L^{-1}) and highly oversaturated by CO_2 in comparison to the overlying

~~atmosphere (pCO_2: 12700-209000 ppmv but exhibited very low DOC concentrations (108±10 µmol L^{-1}) (Table 3; Fig. 5). On average throughout the year, pCO_2 generally decreased along the upstream-downstream gradient, but particularly between the Mengong source and its outlet, which is located 850 m downstream the source (Table 3; Fig. 5). Water at the Mengong outlet exhibited a pCO_2 ~four times lower than at the Mengong source (Table 3; Fig. 5). In the Mengong source, DIC was mostly in the dissolved CO_2 form (~97%), TA representing ~3%, contrasting with surface waters where TA represented on average 26% of the DIC (Table 3). In forest groundwater and stream orders 1, 3 and 4, TA did not differ significantly ($p>0.05$) but TA increased significantly ($p<0.001$) in the main course of the Nyong River (stream order 5 and 6) (Table 3; Fig. 5). On average throughout the year, DOC concentration in surface waters did not exhibit variations in relation with stream order. However, DOC in the Awout River (order 3) peaked significantly ($p<0.001$) in comparison with other stream orders (Table 5; Fig. 5). Seasonally, TA was inversely related ($p<0.001$) with the river flow in each stream order (data not shown), except in the groundwater where TA was constant ($p>0.05$) throughout the year (Fig. 5). The coefficient of variation of pCO_2 was 48% (Mengong source), 42% (Mengong outlet), 56% (Awout), 58% (So'o), 55% (Nyong at Mbalamayo) and 60% (Nyong at Olama), which indicated a strong temporal variability of pCO_2 in the groundwater and surface waters of the Nyong basin (Table. 2). Indeed, in the groundwater and surface waters, pCO_2 was generally higher (but not significantly) during medium and high flow conditions than during base flow (Fig. 5). However, in the stream orders 4, 5 and 6, pCO_2 is positively correlated ($p<0.05$) with river flow (data not shown). In stream order 1, DOC peaked significantly ($p<0.05$) during base flow conditions whereas in stream orders 3, 4, 5 and 6, DOC was similar ($p>0.05$) for all seasons (Fig. 5).~~

~~3.4 Carbon mass balance of the Nyong River~~

~~At the basin scale, 12.1±5.8 and 15.5±7.2 t C km^{-2} yr^{-1} are drained by forest groundwater and wetlands, respectively (Fig. 6). POC, DOC and DIC represents 5, 30 and 65%, respectively, of the C exported laterally to surface waters by wetlands (Fig. 6). DOC and DIC represents 3 and 97%, respectively, of the C exported laterally to surface waters by forest groundwater (Fig. 6). At the most downstream station, 7.2±0.5 t C km^{-2} yr^{-1} are exported to the Atlantic Ocean, in which 25, 69 and 6% are in the DIC, DOC and POC forms, respectively (Fig. 6). Total inputs from wetlands and terrestrial ecosystems and total outputs (emissions to the atmosphere and export to the ocean) are fairly balanced as the difference between $C_{outputs}$ and C_{inputs} was 16%, and $C_{outputs}$ and C_{inputs} were not statistically different from each other's. Given the high temporal variability in streams and rivers, this shows that our methodology was fairly robust.~~

4 Discussion

~~4.1 Dynamics and origin of C in forest groundwater~~ Non-flooded forest groundwater and wetland as C sources in a first-order catchment

~~Considering the granitic lithology (i.e., absence of carbonate minerals) of the Nyong basin (Maurizot et al., 1986), TA in forest groundwater originates from the weathering of silicate minerals as dissolved CO_2 can react with silicate minerals to produce~~

~~bicarbonates (Meybeck, 1987). In forest groundwater, the low TA concentrations and the absence of significant seasonal variations of TA were likely related to low weathering rates in the lateritic soil cover, which exhibits a relatively inert mineralogy (Braun et al., 2005, 2012). Based on TA concentrations (53±26 µmol L^{-1}) in forest groundwater and seepage of the groundwater of ~0.005 $m^3 s^{-1}$, we estimated a weathering rate in forest groundwater and overlaying lateritic soil of 0.2±0.1 t C $km^{-2} yr^{-1}$. The low weathering rates are mainly attributed to the thickness of the lateritic cover on hills and slopes, which considerably slows the advance of percolating water in the bedrock (Boeglin et al., 2005). This was confirmed by the low mineral dissolved load in the aquifer of the Nyong basin (Braun et al., 2002) and by the dissolved silica fluxes in rivers that were significantly lower compared to the annual rainfall (e.g., White and Blum, 1995). Accordingly, in the Nyong basin, forest groundwater is therefore a limited source of TA for surface waters, as reported in other monolithic catchments draining only silicate rocks (Meybeck, 1987).~~

~~The dissolved CO_2 in groundwater originates from the solubilization of soil CO_2 that originates itself either from soil OM respiration in the unsaturated soil (Raich and Schlesinger, 1992), in the saturated soil or in the groundwater itself, using DOC that has been leached from the soil (Deirmendjian et al., 2018). In the Mengong source, groundwater pCO_2 and O_2 were not correlated ($p>0.05$, data not shown) and groundwater was free of DOC (Table 2; Braun et al., 2012; Brunet et al., 2009). In the lateritic soil overlaying the Mengong source, iron oxides represent up to 50% of the average volumetric weight of the soil (Braun et al., 2005). Thus, the low concentrations of dissolved iron (Fe^{2+}) observed in the Mengong source indicated that despite the oxidizing environment above the groundwater, the transfer of Fe^{2+} from the soil to the aquifer is not allowed (Braun et al., 2005). OM in the upper organic rich horizons of the soil is probably well complexed with iron oxides and prevents DOC leaching to groundwater (Deirmendjian et al., 2018; Sauer et al., 2007). Based on this information, we hypothesize that groundwater pCO_2 did not originate from respiration in the groundwater itself but originated mainly from soil respiration occurring in the overlaying unsaturated soil (Fig. 6). On average throughout the year, groundwater pCO_2 was ~50 times higher than the atmospheric value showing that forest groundwater is a major source of CO_2 for the river network of the Nyong basin (Table 3).~~

~~In tropical forests, seasonal variations of soil temperature are relatively low throughout the year, and therefore, the soil water content is the main parameter controlling the intensity of soil respiration (Adachi et al., 2006; Hashimoto et al., 2004). During base flow, precipitation was low compared to the two other hydrological periods (Fig. 2), likely decreasing soil moisture and thus soil respiration.. During the following periods of medium and high flows, precipitation increased (Fig. 2), which in turn had likely a positive effect on soil respiration. In addition, during medium and high flows periods the groundwater level has risen closer to surface organic rich horizons where soil respiration is more intense (Amundson et al., 1998; Maréchal et al., 2011). During high flow conditions, the percolation of rainwater through the soil pores may also facilitated the transport and the dissolution of soil CO_2 to the underlying groundwater. Altogether, this may explain the lower groundwater pCO_2 and the higher groundwater O_2 observed during base flow conditions (Figs. 3, 5).~~

The drainage of non-flooded forest groundwater (i.e., groundwater from the hillside lateritic system) and wetland (i.e., hydromorphic system) fuels the Mengong stream with organic and inorganic C (Figs. 3, 7; Boeglin et al., 2005; Viers et al.,

1997). In the hillside lateritic system, overland flow is negligible owing to limited soil erosion due to dense vegetation cover and high soil porosity facilitating rainfall infiltration (Braun et al., 2005; Maréchal et al., 2011). Consequently, hydrological export of soil C to the stream by overland flow from the hillside is considered as negligible. In contrast to the hillside lateritic system, overland flow is a possible C pathway from the hydromorphic wetland system to the stream (Fig. 3; Maréchal et al., 2011).. Thus, the stream POC shall originates mostly from the overland flow over the wetland, as also suggested by similar $\delta^{13}C$ values of total organic carbon (TOC) in the wetland soil and in the POC observed in the stream outlet (range was -28 to -31‰) of the Mengong catchment by Nkoue-Ndondo et al. (2020). The fact that POC and TSM concentrations in the Mengong stream increased during rainy seasons, when the hydrological connectivity with the surrounding wetland is enhanced, is also in a good agreement with the identification of wetland as the main (if not exclusive) source of POC and TSM. Furthermore, Nkoue-Ndondo et al. (2020) did not observe seasonal variations of the $\delta^{13}C$-POC signature in the Mengong stream. This suggests that the additional POC source observed at the beginning of the reflowing period also originates from the erosion of the wetland even though this hydrological period was characterized by a weaker hydrological connectivity with the wetland compared to rainy seasons. In the Mengong wetland, litter-fall measurement by Nkoue-Ndondo (2008) was 116 t yr^{-1} of wet OM with a mean C content of 22.5%, which is equivalent to 26 tC yr^{-1}, a flux 65-times higher than our conservative estimation of the POC leached from the wetland to the stream (0.4 tC yr^{-1}, Fig. 7). This implies that most of the wetland litter-fall accumulates in the wetland soil rather than being hydrologically exported to the stream in the form of POC, in particular due to limited overland flow in the wetland due to flat topography (Maréchal et al., 2011). However, the *in-situ* degradation of this highly labile OM might contribute to the DOC and DIC fluxes from the wetland to the stream. Indeed, tropical wetlands are recognized as productivity hotspots and a large fraction of the litter-fall is degraded *in-situ* by heterotrophic respiration in the water and sediment, enriching wetland waters in DOC and DIC (Abril et al., 2014; Borges et al., 2015a).

In the Mengong catchment, waters originating from the drainage of non-flooded forest groundwater and wetland are considered as clear and coloured waters, respectively, the colour reflecting their DOC content (Boeglin et al., 2005; Viers et al., 1997). Indeed, DOC concentration was low in clear waters (<83 µmol L^{-1}) whereas it was high in coloured waters (1420±750 µmol L^{-1}) (Table 3; Viers et al., 1997). The DOC in the soil solution has distinct sources that are litter leaching, root and microbial exudates, rainfall (throughfall and stemflow), and decaying fine roots (Bolan et al., 2011; Kalbitz et al., 2000). Once in the soil solution, DOC is however rapidly adsorbed onto soil minerals during its percolation through the soil column due to the soil capacity for DOC stabilization (Kothawala et al., 2009; Neff and Asner, 2001) by sorption on Fe (and Al) oxides and hydroxides and clay minerals (Kaiser et al., 1996; Kothawala et al., 2009; Sauer et al., 2007). This process significantly reduces DOC mineralisation rates in soils (Hagedorn et al., 2015; Kalbitz et al., 2005; Kalbitz and Kaiser, 2008) and DOC export from soils (Shen et al., 2015). It also partly explains the decreasing gradient of DOC concentration with depth commonly observed in boreal (e.g., Moore, 2003), temperate (e.g., Deirmendjian et al., 2018) and tropical (e.g., Johnson et al., 2006) soils. DOC sorption in soils is actually strongly related to the availability of Fe (and Al) oxides and hydroxides, and clay minerals, which are present both in the hillside lateritic and in the hydromorphic wetland soils of the Mengong catchment (Fig. 3). In the hillside

lateritic system, soil DOC is probably well stabilized in the iron-rich and clay horizons preventing DOC leaching to the non-flooded forest groundwater (Braun et al., 2005, 2012). Furthermore, DOC must be desorbed from soil minerals in order to be exported to groundwater (Deirmendjian et al., 2018; Sanderman and Amundson, 2008). Studies have shown that water saturation of the topsoil generates reducing conditions in the saturated soil (Camino-Serrano et al., 2014; Fang et al., 2016) and that this process limits the retention of soil DOC and thus enhances its export to groundwater (Deirmendjian et al., 2018). In the hillside lateritic system, the non-flooded forest groundwater table never reaches the topsoil where soil DOC is high. Therefore, DOC adsorption in these soils might be enhanced. In the hydromorphic wetland system, the groundwater saturates the topsoil all year long (Fig. 3) which might reduce DOC adsorption in this compartment. In addition, hydromorphic conditions occurring in the Mengong wetland soil favour the solubilisation of Fe (Oliva et al., 1999), which is supposed to reduce DOC sorption. Altogether, this explains the low and high DOC concentrations observed in the non-flooded groundwater and the wetland, respectively. In addition, the results showed that stream DOC increased during the first wet season only. In the Mengong catchment, Nkounde-Ndondo (2008) described the piston flow that occurs at the beginning of the short rainy season, which is caused by new infiltration of water on the hills and hillsides that pushes the older soil water downstream (e.g., Huang et al. (2019) and references therein), allowing pressure on the aquifer and thus exfiltration at the bottom of the slope (i.e., in the wetland; Fig. 3). This implies that wetland DOC is quickly flushed during the first rains and originates from the subsurface horizons of the wetland soil. Later in the season, the decrease of stream DOC is due to dilution with non-flooded forest groundwater with low DOC content. Noteworthy, our stream DOC budget was not balanced (Table 5; Fig. 7), indicating that sources contributing to the DOC content of the Mengong stream were overlooked. An additional DOC source that was quantified by Braun et al. (2005) during 4 years in the Mengong catchment is DOC in the throughfall. These authors determined that the average DOC concentration in the throughfall was 3.6±3.5 mg L^{-1}. Applying this average concentration to the rainfall in 2016 and the catchment surface area gives an additional DOC input from precipitation of 4.3±4.3 tC yr^{-1}, which allows closing the DOC budget at the Mengong catchment scale.

Non-flooded forest groundwater and wetland exhibited high DIC concentrations, 2 940±1485 and 1 430±900 µmol L^{-1}, respectively and, in both systems, DIC was mostly in the CO_2 form (>90%) (Table 3). In the hillside system, non-flooded forest groundwater was free of DOC. This result, along with the fact that microbial activity has been shown to be limited in many aquifers by the availability of DOC (e.g., Malard and Hervant (1999) and references therein),suggest that CO_2 in non-flooded forest groundwater comes from soil respiration in the overlaying non-saturated soil - rather than respiration in the groundwater itself – and then is transported downward by diffusion rather than percolation with rain water. Indeed, the thickness of the lateritic cover on hills and slopes of the Mengong catchment considerably slows the water percolation in the bedrock (Boeglin et al., 2005). In the tropics, the soil respiration rate is mostly affected by soil moisture as soil temperature exhibits low seasonal variations (Davidson et al., 2000). Accordingly, soil respiration rates usually decrease from rainy to dry seasons in tropical ecosystems (Davidson et al., 2000) due to decreasing, soil moisture. Nevertheless, in the Mengong catchment, pCO_2 in non-flooded forest groundwater peaked during dry seasons and started to decrease later in the same season

and then during the following rainy season (Fig. 4). In mature forest of Amazonia, Johnson et al. (2008) observed a similar trend in groundwater that they attributed to an increase in vegetation water uptake and roots activity in deep soils during the onset of the dry seasons;, they also showed that groundwater pCO_2 decreased later in the season because of losses due to drainage and diffusional losses. Furthermore, during dry seasons, the diffusion of CO_2 in the porous soil is facilitated in tropical forest (Adachi et al., 2006), very likely favouring the downward diffusion of soil CO_2 and its subsequent dissolution in groundwater, as also observed in temperate forest (Deirmendjian et al., 2018). In the non-flooded forest groundwater, oxygen saturation was about 40% but increased during dry seasons whereas decreasing during rainy seasons (Fig. 4). This shows that atmospheric air can penetrates the soil atmosphere deeply, in particular during dry seasons when the diffusion in the porous soil is facilitated, and can reach the non-flooded forest groundwater. In the wetland hydromorphic system, the soil is permanently saturated which limits aerobic respiration of microbes in the soil and leading to the accumulation of OM in the soil profile. This likely explains the lower CO_2 concentration observed in the wetland compared to non-flooded forest groundwater (Table 3). Nonetheless, it should be noted that wetland vegetation can actively transport oxygen to the root zone via their aeremchyma (Haase and Rätsch, 2010), creating a complex oxic-anoxic interface that promotes aerobic respiration but also supplies labile OM to anaerobic degradation (and methanogenesis) fuelling CO_2 (and CH_4) production (Piedade et al., 2010). This is in a good agreement with δ^{13}C-DIC signatures of -16‰ measured by Nkoue Ndondo et al. (2020) in the wetland soil, which are indeed close to the C4 signature of aquatic grassland found in the Mengong wetland. In addition to drainages of non-flooded forest groundwater and wetland, stream DIC can also originates from *in-situ* respiration of DOC. This process is corroborated by our results of incubations (Table 5), and by the δ^{13}C-DIC at the Mengong stream outlet that was more depleted in ^{13}C than in non-flooded forest groundwater and wetland (Nkoue Ndondo et al., 2020), which highlights in-stream respiration from an organic ^{13}C-depleted source.

Non-flooded forest groundwater and wetland both exhibited low TA concentrations, 53±26 and 122±46 µmol L^{-1}, respectively; nonetheless TA concentration was significantly higher in wetland (Table 3; Fig. 6). Considering the granitic lithology (i.e., absence of carbonate minerals) of the Nyong watershed, TA in non-flooded forest groundwater and wetland might originate from the weathering of silicate minerals as dissolved CO_2 can react with silicate minerals to produce bicarbonates (Meybeck, 1987). Applying TA concentration in non-flooded forest groundwater into Equations 11 and 12 results in a silicate weathering rate in the overlaying lateritic soil of 0.2±0.1 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}, whereas applying TA concentration in wetland into Equation 13 results in a silicate weathering rate in wetland of 1.3±0.4 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}. The silicate weathering rate in wetland is thus 550% higher than in the non-flooded lateritic soil. Even though these two rates remain low compared to weathering rates in carbonated environment, they are typical of silicate weathering rates which are in the range 0.1-5.2 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1} as estimated from diverse worldwide basins by Amiotte Suchet et al. (2003). In non-flooded forest groundwater, the low TA concentrations and silicate weathering rates, along with, the absence of significant seasonal variations of TA, are likely related to the relatively inert mineralogy of the lateritic soil cover (Braun et al., 2005, 2012).. In the Nyong watershed, these low weathering rates are in a good agreement with the low mineral dissolved load in the aquifer (Braun et al., 2002) and by the dissolved silica fluxes

in rivers that were significantly lower compared to the annual rainfall (White and Blum, 1995). In addition, weathering rates in the wetland might be enhanced by the leaching of humic acids from the vegetation to the hydromorphic soils (Braun et al., 2005; Nkoue-ndondo, 2008).

4.2 ~~Dynamics and origins of C in the Mengong catchment (first-order stream)~~ Influence of wetland-river connectivity at the Nyong watershed scale

~~There are two main types of waters in the Mengong catchment (and in the Nyong catchment): clear waters and colored waters (Boeglin et al., 2005). Clear waters exhibited very low DOC concentrations (<0.1 mg L^{-1}) and come from springs (i.e., forest groundwater) that seeps out from hills and slopes, whereas colored waters, constituting the river waters, exhibited higher DOC concentrations (>14 mg L^{-1}) and originated from surface waters located in depressions (i.e., from swamp located in the lowland part of the catchment) (Boeglin et al., 2005; Ndam Ngoupayou, 1997). When clear waters flow through swamps, the chemistry of clear waters is significantly affected downstream. Accordingly, significant increases in DOC and POC concentrations were observed between the Mengong source (i.e., clear water) and its outlet (i.e., colored water) because the Mengong stream has flowed through the swamp which occupies 20% of the surface of the basin (Table 2). The Mengong source is free of both DOC and POC (i.e., below the detection limit) and is oxygenated throughout the year (Table 2). Therefore, POC and DOC at the Mengong outlet originates almost exclusively from the drainage and erosion of the swamp, as observed by Nkoue Ndondo et al. (2020) based on the stable isotopic composition of DOC and POC in the Mengong basin. Tropical wetlands such as swamps are recognized as productivity hotspots (Borges et al., 2015b; Saunois et al., 2019) and a large fraction (excluding wood) of their biomass is degraded *in situ* by heterotrophic respiration in the water and sediment which enrich swamp water in CO_2 (Fig. 6; Abril and Borges, 2019). High biological productivity in wetlands also explains significantly higher POC% observed in the Mengong outlet in comparison with the other stream orders, which exhibited lower wetland surface area in their basin, diluting POC% (Table 3; Fig. 4). In addition, wetland vegetation can actively transport oxygen to the root zone via their aeremchyma (Haase and Rätsch, 2010). This creates a complex oxic anoxic interface that promotes aerobic respiration, but also supplies labile OM to anaerobic degradation and methanogenesis fuelling CO_2 and CH_4 production and other fermentative organic compounds that are transferred to waters and pore waters (Piedade et al., 2010). Nkoue Ndondo et al. (2020) measured on average through the year, high concentrations of DIC and DOC in the swamp of the Mengong catchment in the range of 150-3270 and 140-1510 µmol L^{-1} for DIC and DOC, respectively. Noteworthy, we observed significant higher DOC concentrations during base flow at the Mengong outlet (Fig. 5), which might be explained by longer water residence time in the swamp during this period.~~

~~In comparison to the Mengong source, TA concentrations significantly increased (~ two times) in the Mengong outlet after the stream has flowed through the swamp (Table 3; Fig. 5). In addition, based on TA concentrations (90±36 µmol L^{-1}) and average river flow at the Mengong outlet, we estimated a weathering rate of 0.5±0.2 t C km^{-2} yr^{-1}, which is 150% higher than weathering rate in forest groundwater. This weathering rate was comparable to the previous estimate by Boeglin et al. (2005) for the entire Nyong catchment of 0.8-1.1 t C km^{-2} yr^{-1}, but was three times lower than those previously estimated for other lateritic basins~~

~~(see Boeglin et al., 2005). This indicates that swamps in the Nyong river basin are a limited but significant source of TA for surface waters of the watershed. Under reducing conditions usually occurring in swamps, ferro-reducing bacteria can use iron oxides to oxidized OM and this process produces TA (ΔTA = + 2.2 moles of TA produced for 1 mole of iron oxide consumed; Abril and Frankignoulle, 2001). The contribution of Fe(III) reduction to anaerobic carbon metabolism in a given environment is mainly proportional to the availability of labile OM and reducible Fe(III) (Roden and Wetzel, 2002). In the Mengong catchment, these two substrates are abundant in the hydromorphic soils of the swamp (Braun et al., 2005). In the swamp of the Mengong basin, Braun et al. (2005) observed a vertical decrease in Fe(III) in the soil profiles, confirming that the swamp behaves as hotspot of Fe(III) reduction and TA production (Liesack et al., 2000). In addition, weathering rates in the swamp area of the Mengong catchment is enhanced by the leaching of humic acids from the vegetation to the hydromorphic soils (Braun et al., 2005; Nkoue Ndondo, 2008).~~

The role of wetland on riverine C cycling in tropical watersheds is commonly explored using empirical relationships between wetland extent and C concentrations in the stream water of the different sub-catchments of a given watershed (e.g., Abril et al., 2014; Borges et al., 2015a, 2015b). Establishing such empirical relationships in the Nyong watershed is extremely challenging owing the similar wetland extent (about 5% of the surface area; Table 1) in the sub-catchments, with the exception of the first-order Mengong catchment where the wetland extent represents 20%. However, this role can be explored by comparing the seasonality of C concentrations in stream order 1 - in which the wetland dynamic as a riverine C source has been discussed in the above section - with respect to the other stream orders. Thus, for a given parameter, similar seasonality in stream order 1 and the other stream orders might suggest that C sources and processes are similar in both (sub)systems.

Similarly to what we observed in the Mengong catchment, wetlands might be also considered as the main source of POC for surface waters in the whole Nyong watershed based on (1) the low slopes in the watershed, (2) the high infiltration capacity of the soil, (3) the similar normalized export of POC from wetland to the Mengong stream order 1 and from the Nyong watershed to the ocean (Tables 5 and 7), and (4) the probable low pelagic primary production in the surface waters of the Nyong watershed, as usually observed in tropical rivers with high DOC concentrations (>1500 μmol L^{-1}) where light attenuation caused by browning (coloured waters) strongly limits aquatic photosynthesis (Borges et al. 2019). Moreover, the seasonality of POC was similar in stream order 1 and in high-order streams, increasing during rainy seasons while decreasing during dry seasons (Fig. 5). This suggests that in high-order streams, the POC leached from wetlands from low-order catchments might acts as an important POC source. However, during rainy seasons, the higher POC concentration observed in high-order streams in comparison to the stream order 1 (Figs. 5-6) might also suggests an additional POC source in these streams during rainy seasons. In high-order streams, given that POC% increased during rainy seasons, river bed and banks erosion is not likely as this process would have exported more TSM than POC, as observed in the tropical Tana River in Kenya by Tamooh et al. (2012). As pelagic primary production is also unlikely, POC leached from wetlands riparian to high-order streams and POC leached from floating macrophytes that develops in the river bed during the dry seasons anterior to the rainy seasons are more

suitable hypotheses to explain the additional POC source observed in high-order streams. Indeed, as in the Amazonian basin (e.g., Abril et al., 2014; Engle et al., 2008; Silva et al., 2013), we observed in high-order streams the development of floating macrophytes during dry seasons. In high-order streams, the development of these floating macrophytes was accompanied by peaks of oxygen saturation during dry seasons (Table 4; Fig. 5). This last feature is in line with the high photosynthesis capacity of macrophytes that results in oxygen-enriched water during daylight (Sabater et al., 2000). According to the flood pulse concept in tropical rivers by Junk et al. (1989), floating macrophytes might be hydrologically exported during rainy seasons when the river discharge increased sufficiently. In high-order streams of the Nyong watershed, this seasonal wetland and floating macrophytes flush of OM is also supported by other evidences such as higher pCO_2 and POC% along with lower oxygen saturation observed in these streams... On the one hand, these features might be attributed to enhanced heterotrophic respiration in the river fuelled by export of freshly-produced and young OM (Engle et al., 2008; Mayorga et al., 2005; Tamooh et al., 2014). Besides, OM leached from tropical wetland can be photodegraded downstream into more labile lower molecular weight compounds that in turn also enhances heterotrophic respiration in the river, as observed in the Congo River by Lambert et al. (2016) On the other hand, the drainage of wetland can also directly account for CO_2 emissions from surface waters as under flooded conditions, roots and microbial respiration occurring in wetland directly release CO_2 to the water(Abril et al., 2014; Moreira-Turcq et al., 2013). These two patterns usually explain the positive correlation between pCO_2 and river discharge in tropical systems (Table 4; Borges et al., 2019). On the contrary, during dry periods, the wetlands are shrinking and the river become more hydrologically disconnected from wetlands, explaining the lower pCO_2 in tropical rivers during dry seasons (Abril and Borges, 2019). The importance of river-wetland connectivity was also evidenced by the first POC increase at the beginning of the re-flowing period that was not observed downstream (Fig. 5). This suggests POC was quickly oxidized *in-situ*, or did not reach downstream due to weak hydrological connectivity with high-order streams during this period. Indeed, when the Mengong (stream order 1) was flowing again, the downstream Awout River (stream order 3) was still dry. This highlights the complex deposition and remobilisation cycles of TSM and POC in tropical rivers (Geeraert et al., 2017; Moreira-Turcq et al., 2013). Finally, in stream orders 3 and 4, we observed an additional increase of TSM during dry seasons, while POC% decreased (Fig. 5). This suggests that more TSM than POC was leached into these streams during dry seasons. We assume that river bed and banks erosion could drive this seasonal trend. In the tropical Tana River in Kenya, based on radionuclide's ratio reflecting the age of TSM, Tamooh et al. (2014) showed that TSM was old and increased during dry seasons. This was attributed to inputs of older sediments, with river banks erosion and/or resuspended sediments suggested as the main sources.

In surface waters, in contrast to pCO_2 and POC data, we did not observe a positive correlation between DOC and the river discharge, in agreement with Brunet et al. (2009) who showed that DOC in the Nyong watershed was only flushed during a short period of time at the beginning of the short rainy season (Fig. 5). In contrast to POC, DOC did not peak a second time during the long rainy season (Fig. 5). We have no explanation to this, except the fact that this probable second flush of DOC was faster than our fortnightly sampling frequency. Nonetheless, DOC exhibited a similar seasonality in stream order 1 and

high-order streams, but with a slight lag time due to the time the water needs to flow from upstream to downstream showing that wetland from low-order streams are significant sources of C for downstream rivers. In addition, in the Awout River (order 3), a significant increase in DOC was observed at the beginning of the reflowing period indicating an additional source of DOC (Fig. 5). Actually, before the reflowing period, the bed of the Awout River was completely vegetated by large macrophytes (up to 2 m tall) and many small pockets of stagnating water remained. DOC could accumulate in these stagnating waters and be remobilized when the water flows again, as observed in temperate rivers (Deirmendjian et al., 2019; Sanders et al., 2007). The seasonal wetland flush in high-order streams can be also evidenced by peaks of TA during the long rainy seasons, while the increase in TA in streams orders 5 and 6 during the long dry seasons could not be explained by wetland inputs to river. In stream orders 5 and 6, during the long dry season, surface waters are likely fed by deeper groundwater, which are older and likely characterized by higher TA concentrations than shallower levels, as observed in temperate (Deirmendjian and Abril, 2018) and tropical (Duvert et al., 2020b) catchments. In the later study situated in a small tropical catchment in Australia, the authors gave additional evidence of a shift from biogenic (wetlands) to geogenic C source during dry seasons caused by changing water sources.

~~4.3 C variations at the scale of the Nyong catchment~~ C fluxes at the plot (first-order) and the watershed scales

~~At the scale of the Nyong basin, TA increased along an upstream-downstream gradient and TA was inversely related with river flow (Fig. 5). During base flow period, surface waters are fed by deeper groundwater level, which are older and likely exhibited higher TA concentrations than shallower levels. In addition, we suppose that during high flow TA is diluted by forest groundwater and swamp waters with lower TA concentrations.~~

~~In contrast to temperate rivers, the pCO_2 in the surface waters of the Nyong basin peaked during periods of high waters (Fig. 5). This seasonality can be explained by the fact that soil moisture increases during the rainy season, enhancing the respiration in the soil surface organic rich horizon. Concomitantly, period of high waters probably increases the hydraulic gradient between forest groundwater and surface waters, increasing the flushing of forest groundwater when groundwater pCO_2 is the highest (Fig. 5). In addition, the rise of the water level in the watershed enhances of the connection of surface waters with wetlands during periods of high waters. Therefore, the CO_2 resulting from the degradation of the wetland biomass can be transferred to the river main stem. These two processes explain why usually pCO_2 is positively correlated with river flow in tropical rivers, (e.g., Borges et al., 2019; Bouillon et al., 2012).~~

~~In the surface waters of the Nyong catchment, the supersaturation in CO_2 in comparison to the overlying atmosphere and the decrease of pCO_2 from groundwater to stream order 6 showed a gradual degassing of CO_2 at the water-air interface along an upstream-downstream gradient (Table 3; Fig. 5). In acidic waters, CO_2 degassing at the water-air interface is related with an the increase of the $\delta^{13}C$ of the DIC (Deirmendjian and Abril, 2018). Such a pattern was observed by Brunet et al. (2009) in the waters of the Nyong basin confirming the upstream-downstream degassing. It confirms that headwaters are a major source of CO_2 for the river system. Groundwaters are obviously a significant source of CO_2 for the headwaters. However, in tropical~~

~~rivers like the Nyong which do not have floodplains, most of the wetlands are actually located in low order streams and therefore fuels small tributaries with CO_2 which is mostly degassed further downstream in the main stem.~~

~~We also observed an increase in POC, in the surface waters during periods of high waters, concomitant to the increase in pCO_2 (Figs. 4-5). Similarly to what we observed in the Mengong catchment, wetlands can also be considered as the main source of POC for surface waters in the entire Nyong basin based on (1) the low slopes in the catchment, (2) the high infiltration capacity of the soil and (3) the probable low pelagic primary production in the surface waters. During the high water stage, dissolved and particulate C from wetlands are flushed to surface waters, as frequently observed in tropical catchments and confirmed by the increase in POC% in stream orders 4, 5 and 6 during periods of high water stages (Fig. 5) which reflect the high biological productivity of these ecosystems. Indeed, wetlands exhibited higher POC% compared to rivers, as indicated by the highest values of POC% observed in the Mengong outlet, the latter being strongly influenced by wetland (Fig. 5). In addition, the normalized export of POC from wetland to rivers and from the watershed to the ocean is similar (Fig. 6). This confirms that wetlands are the main source of POC for surface waters, in particular during periods of high waters, and that degradation of POC in the riverine water is not significant. At the scale of the Nyong basin, the increase in connectivity between wetlands and surface waters during periods of high waters is also in agreement with a significant drop in O_2 saturation during these periods because the flooding of OM-rich wetlands enhance respiration (Fig. 3). We also observed a remobilization of mineral matter from the riverbanks and beds during high waters periods, as evidenced by higher TSM in the Nyong River during these hydrological periods (Fig. 4). When all data are plotted, POC% and TSM were negatively correlated together ($p<0.001$), showing a dilution of the POC with mineral matter from upstream to downstream.~~

~~In surface waters, by contrast to pCO_2 and POC, we did not observe a positive correlation between DOC and the river flow, in agreement with Brunet et al. (2009) who showed that DOC was only flushed during a short period of time at the beginning of the rainy season (in September and in April). In the Awout River (order 3), a significant increase in DOC was observed during medium flow period indicating an additional source of DOC (Table 2; Fig. 4). The Awout River was dry during the previous base flow period: its riverbed was completely invested by large macrophytes (up to 2 m tall) and many small pockets of stagnating water remained (visual observations). During base flow period, DOC could accumulate in these stagnating waters and then it is remobilized when the water flows again, as observed in temperate rivers (Deirmendjian et al., 2019; Sanders et al., 2007). As we do not see a general increase of DOC in base flow period in the whole watershed we believe that these local vegetation regrowth in river beds and riverbanks have a minor impact of the whole carbon balance in the Nyong watershed.~~

At the first-order Mengong catchment scale, we estimated each fluxes of the stream C budget independently (Fig. 7). C inputs from wetland (F_{WL}) and non-flooded forest groundwater (F_{GW}) to the stream contributed to 38% (4.0±1.5 tC yr^{-1}) and 62% (6.3±3.0 tC yr^{-1}) of the total hydrological C inputs, respectively (Table 5; Fig. 7). However, when the later fluxes are weighed by respective surface area, F_{WL} and F_{GW} contributed to 73% (33.3±12.5 tC yr^{-1}) and 27% (13.1±6.2 tC yr^{-1}) of the total hydrological C inputs to the stream, respectively (Fig. 7). In the first-order Mengong catchment, 83% and 17% of the C

degassing (58% and 42% if weighed by surface area) from the stream are sustained by inputs of DIC from non-flooded forest groundwater and wetland, respectively (Fig. 7). From our study design it was not possible to estimate these two contributions at the Nyong watershed scale. However, we might assume that the wetland contribution become greater with increasing stream order, particularly considering larger riparian wetlands in high-order streams and the development of floating macrophytes in river bed during dry seasons (Olivry, 1986). Nonetheless, our results are in line with the growing consensus that tropical wetlands contribute significantly to the C inputs in tropical rivers (Abril et al., 2014; Borges et al., 2015a, 2019, 2015b; Duvert et al., 2020a, 2020b). In the Mengong catchment, an important fraction (~50%) of the C entering the stream directly returns to the atmosphere through degassing at the water-air interface (Fig. 7); the remaining C is transported, processed and further degassed downstream (Abril et al., 2014). In the Nyong watershed, our estimated k_{600} are typical of lowland tropical rivers (e.g., Alin et al., 2011; Borges et al., 2019) and their weak seasonality show that higher degassing rates during rainy seasons are rather a function of the increase of CO_2 water-air gradient during rainy seasons - which is due to seasonal flush of wetland and macrophytes – rather than the increase in k_{600} usually observed during high water periods because of increasing water turbulence. In the Nyong watershed, heterotrophic respiration in the river (pelagic plus benthic) rate was 99±27 mmol m^{-2} d^{-1} on average whereas the average CO_2 degassing rate was 1160±580 mmol m^{-2} d^{-1} (Table 6). This implies that only ~8.5% of the degassing at the water-air interface was supported by heterotrophic respiration in the river. These rates are consistent with observations by Borges et al. (2019), who showed that, in the Congo basin, the heterotrophic respiration in the river averaged 81 mmol m^{-2} d^{-1} and represented ~11% of the average C degassing rate of 740 mmol m^{-2} d^{-1}. In the same way, heterotrophic respiration in the river accounts for less than 20% of the degassing flux from the Amazon Basin (Abril et al., 2014). Moreover, in the Nyong watershed, the ratio between C degassing rates and heterotrophic respiration in the river decreased in the stream order 5 (ratio of 6.5) compared to stream order 1 (ratio of 48) (Table 6). This is in line with the recent findings by Hotchkiss et al. (2015) in temperate rivers, where they showed that the contribution of internal metabolism to account for CO_2 emissions increased from upstream to downstream, or with the more recent findings by Borges et al. (2019) in the Congo basin who found a ratio of C degassing rates to heterotrophic respiration in the river of 29-137 and 3-17 in low-and high-order streams, respectively. These authors attributed their observations to the prevalence of lateral CO_2 inputs in sustaining CO_2 emissions.

In the Nyong watershed, about 6% (0.6±0.5 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}), 69% (7.2±5.4 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}) and 24% (2.5±2.3 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}) of the F_{ocean} occurs in the POC, DOC and DIC forms, respectively. These C exports to the ocean are consistent but slightly different from those reported by Meybeck (1993) for rivers in tropical humid regions, as he estimated that 20% (1.9 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}), 53% (5.1 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}) and 27% (2.6 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}) occurs in the POC, DOC and DIC forms, respectively. Therefore, in the Nyong watershed, the export of DIC to the ocean was typical of humid tropical regions while the export of POC was lower and DOC was higher. In the Nyong watershed, lower POC export to the ocean might be explained by the low watershed slope and the negligible overland flow that limits soil erosion. In contrast, DOC concentration in the surface waters of the Nyong watershed was in the upper range of those reported for other African rivers (range is 50 to 4 270 µmol L^{-1}; Tamooh et al. 2014 and references therein), thereby driving the higher DOC export to the ocean, which might be explained by higher wetland extent

than in the other African rivers. Huang et al. (2012) estimated the quantity of C exported to the ocean from African tropical rivers (30°N-30°S) at 0.3, 1 and 0.6 tC km^{-2} yr^{-1} for the POC, DOC and DIC forms, respectively, but they did not partition these tropical rivers in humid or dry climates; our estimations of C export to the ocean were significantly higher for the tropical Nyong watershed located humid climate region. This shows the importance to upscale C fluxes for the same climatic regions, such as the widely used Koppen-Geiger climate classification system (Koppen, 1936) recently updated by Peel et al. (2007), otherwise upscaling might be strongly biased. In the Nyong watershed, the ratio between the C exported to the ocean and emitted to the atmosphere is 1:0.3, in agreement with ratio of 1:0.2 measured by Borges et al. (2015b) in the Congo River but contrasting with the global ratio of 1:1 estimated by Ciais et al. (2013) during the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). It shows that at least African rivers but probably all tropical rivers are strong emitters of C and therefore biogeochemical data in these rivers are urgently required to improve accuracy of regional and global C emission estimates from inland waters, and understand how they will respond to climate change (warming, change in hydrological cycle).

The integration of the different C fluxes can be done by comparing them with the terrestrial C budget. In the Mengong catchment, the total hydrological export of C (F_{GW}, $F_{GW\text{-}bis}$, F_{WL}) represents ~3-5% of the catchment net C sink (range 201-336 tC yr^{-1}) (Fig. 7). This conclusion agrees with two plot studies in temperate ecosystems, which have shown that the hydrological export of C from forest ecosystems is ~3% (Deirmendjian et al., 2018; Kindler et al., 2011). In the Nyong watershed, the sum of the yearly C degassed (F_{degas}) and hydrologically exported to the ocean (F_{ocean}) represented ~10% of the net terrestrial C sink estimated by Brunet et al. (2009) (Table 8). This conclusion agrees with Duvert et al. (2020a), which showed that the C degassed and hydrologically exported at the river outlet represented ~7% of the local net terrestrial C sink in the small (140 km^2) tropical Howard catchment in Australia, ~20% if accounting to C losses via fire. In contrast, from a modelling approach in the entire Amazon watershed, Hastie et al. (2019) found that C degassed and hydrologically exported might represents 78% of the net terrestrial C sink. This is in line with findings of Abril et al. (2014) and Borges and al. (2019) who respectively found that C degassed from the Amazon and Congo watersheds was greater than the local net terrestrial C sink. Besides, Abril et al. (2014) attributed this C riverine C degassing to wetland C inputs as they showed that tropical wetland can hydrologically export 36-80% of their gross primary production (GPP) while terrestrial landscapes hydrologically export few percent of their net C sink, between 3% for forests and 13% from grasslands (Kindler et al., 2011). Altogether, this shows that in large watersheds such as the Amazon or the Congo rivers, fluvial C losses could offset more significantly the local net terrestrial C sink compared to relatively small tropical watersheds such as the Nyong or the Howard rivers, which is likely due to both more extensive wetland and greater hydrological fluxes in the Amazon and the Congo

4.4 C budget in the Nyong basin

We measured each fluxes of the riverine C budget independently and we show that 60% of the carbon entering the riverine system originates from wetlands, which makes them the main source of C in the river, the remaining 40% being transferred by forest groundwater. Therefore, our results are in lines with the growing consensus that tropical wetlands contribute significantly to the riverine C budget in the tropics. (Abril and Borges 2019; Abril et al., 2014; Borges et al., 2015a b,)

A major portion (~ 80%) of the C entering surface waters returns to the atmosphere trough degassing at the water-air interface. In the Nyong catchment, *in situ* respiration (pelagic plus benthic) was on average 89 mmol m^{-2} d^{-1} whereas the average degassing was 1260 mmol m^{-2} d^{-1} (Table. 4), which implies that only ~7% of the degassing at the water-air interface was supported by *in situ* respiration. This is coherent with previous observations by Borges et al. (2015a) and (2019) in 12 African watersheds. Accordingly, our observations and measurements in the Nyong basin suggest the same conclusion: net heterotrophy in the river *sensu stricto* plays a minor role in the riverine CO_2 budget. Therefore, we can hypothesize that most of the CO_2 emitted by the rivers is actually produced in the wetlands and soils/groundwater and transferred to rivers where it escapes to the atmosphere.

In the Nyong catchment, the ratio between the C exported to the ocean and emitted to the atmosphere is 1:0.3, in agreement with ratio 1:0.2 measured by Borges et al., (2015a) in the Congo river but contrasting with the global ratio of 1:1 estimated by Ciais et al. (2013) during the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). It shows that at least African Rivers but probably all tropical rivers are strong emitters of C and therefore biogeochemical data in these rivers are urgently required to improve accuracy of regional and global C emission estimates from inland waters, and understand how they will respond to climate change (warming, change in hydrological cycle).

The integration of these fluxes at the scale of the whole watershed can be done by comparing this carbon budget with the terrestrial carbon budget. Brunet et al. (2009) estimated the net terrestrial C sink of the mature forest of the Nyong basin at approximately 300 t C km^{-2} yr^{-1}. Thus, the hydrological export of terrestrial C (via forest groundwater) represents ~4% of the terrestrial C sink. This conclusion is in agreement with the two local studies in temperate rivers, which have shown that the hydrological export of C from forest ecosystems is ~3% (Deirmendjian et al., 2018b; Kindler et al., 2011). Altogether, this study not only confirms the importance of the C inputs from wetlands for fuelling the riverine C cycle and most importantly CO_2 emissions to the atmosphere but it shows that high emissions from inland waters are compatible with a strong terrestrial C sink.

Conclusions

The current paradigm to explain CO_2 emissions from inland waters is based on the prevalence of heterotrophy sustained by terrestrial OM inputs from the terrestrial ecosystems to the aquatic systems. However, in the present study, we showed that degassing of riverine C at the water-air interface cannot be supported by river heterotrophy, as river heterotrophy represents

~~~7% of the average degassing. Thus, we highlighted the importance of lateral inputs of C from soils and groundwater on the one side (40% of the total C inputs), and from wetlands (60%) on the other side, to understand C dynamics in tropical rivers. Terrestrial groundwater was a significant source of C for surface waters, particularly for CO_2, whereas in contrast, DOC and POC in surface waters were mainly provided by the drainage and erosion of wetlands. The C exported laterally from wetlands to surface waters occurs mainly during periods of high waters when the connectivity with surface waters is enhanced. We showed here by determining all the terms of the carbon mass balance independently that attributing the whole amount of carbon emitted to the atmosphere and exported to the ocean to a terrestrial source and ignoring the river–wetland connectivity can lead to the misrepresentation of C dynamics in tropical watersheds~~ In a first-order catchment, we showed here by determining all the terms of the C mass balance independently that attributing the whole amount of ~~carbon~~ C emitted to the atmosphere and exported to the outlet to a unique terrestrial source and ignoring the river–wetland connectivity might leaded to the misrepresentation of C dynamics in small tropical catchments and thus likely at larger scales. Indeed, in addition to the drainage of non-flooded forest groundwater to the stream, we highlighted the drainage and erosion of wetland as an important C source for the stream. Non-flooded forest groundwater was a significant source of C for surface waters, particularly for CO_2, whereas in contrast, DOC and POC in surface waters were mainly provided by the drainage and erosion of wetlands. The flush of C from wetland to first-order streams is seasonally enhanced during rainy seasons when the connectivity with surface waters is greater, allowing the leaching of freshly and young OM to the stream, and thus increasing heterotrophic respiration in the river downstream. Nonetheless, at the Nyong watershed scale, the C emissions from the entire river network remained largely sustained by inputs of C from land and wetland, as heterotrophic respiration in the river represents only ~8.5% of the C degassing at the water-air interface. Moreover, at the Nyong watershed scale, we showed that the C degassed from the entire river network and hydrologically exported to the ocean might offset ~10% of the net terrestrial C sink estimated from the watershed. This study supports the view that African rivers are strong emitters of C to the atmosphere, mostly sustained by wetland inputs, and this must be better considered in global models.

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~~Rivers Stations~~	~~Mengong Source~~	~~Mengong Outlet~~	~~Awout Messam~~	~~So'o Pont So'o~~	~~Nyong Mbalmayo~~	~~Nyong Olama~~
~~Latitude~~	~~3.17° N~~	~~3.17° N~~	~~3.28° N~~	~~3.32° N~~	~~3.52° N~~	~~3.43° N~~
~~Longitude~~	~~11.83° E~~	~~11.83° E~~	~~11.78°E~~	~~11.48° E~~	~~11.5 °E~~	~~11.28°E~~
~~Gauging station~~	~~No~~	~~Yes~~	~~Yes~~	~~Yes~~	~~Yes~~	~~Yes~~
~~Altitude (m)~~	~~680~~	~~669~~	~~647~~	~~634~~	~~634~~	~~628~~
~~Catchment area (km^2)~~	~~0.48~~	~~0.6~~	~~206~~	~~3070~~	~~13,555~~	~~18,510~~
~~Wetlands (%)~~	~~NA~~	~~20~~				~~20~~
~~Catchment slope (‰)~~	~~1.3~~	~~1.3~~	~~1.2~~	~~1.1~~	~~0.16~~	~~0.15~~
~~Stream order~~	~~Groundwater~~	~~1~~	~~3~~	~~4~~	~~5~~	~~6~~
~~Averaged-annual river flow ($m^3 s^{-1}$)~~	~~0,00544~~	~~0.009±0.002~~	~~3.9±4.8~~	~~35.6±40.6~~	~~146±112~~	~~195±160~~
~~Averaged-annual rainfall[b] (mm yr^{-1})~~	~~1986~~					

Rivers Stations	*Mengong* Source	*Mengong* Outlet	*Awout* Messam	*So'o* Pont So'o	*Nyong* Mbalmayo	*Nyong* Olama
Latitude	3.17°N	3.17°N	3.28°N	3.32°N	3.52°N	3.43°N
Longitude	11.83°E	11.83°E	11.78°E	11.48° E	11.5°E	11.28°E
Gauging station	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Altitude (m)	680	669	647	634	634	628
Catchment area (km^2)	0.48	0.6	206	3070	13,555	18,510
Wetlands (%)		20	5.7	5.3	4.6	4.4
Catchment slope (‰)	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.1	0.16	0.15
Stream order	groundwater	1	3	4	5	6
Averaged-annual river flow in 2016 ($m^3 s^{-1}$)	0.00544[a]	0.009±0.002	3.9±4.8	35.6±40.6	146±112	195±160
Averaged-annual rainfall (mm yr^{-1})	1986	-	-	-	-	-

Table 1: geographical and hydrological catchments characteristics. [a] represents Q_{hill} (Fig. 3) and it is estimated from Eq.1.

~~**Table 1: geographical and hydrological catchments characteristics. [a]During the year 2016. [b] From Brunet et al. (2009). [c]From Maréchal et al. (2011).**~~

Parameters	T	pH	Specific ~~C~~onductivity	~~O~~$_2$ Oxygen saturation	TSM
Units	°C	Unitless	µS cm^{-1}	%	mg L^{-1}
Wetland[a]	24.2~~23.6~~±1.4	5.5±0.6			
	[21.9-26.3]	[4.9-6.6]			
Mengong source	23.2±0.1	5.0±0.1	15.1±0.8	50±8	~~NA~~
	[23~23.6]	[4.6~5.3]	[14.1~17.4]	[38~68]	~~NA~~
Mengong outlet (order 1)	22.9±0.7	5.6±0.2	16.7±4.5	50±9	5.3±2.1
	[21.9~24.4]	[5.3~6.0]	[5.2~24.7]	[23~62]	[1.8~11.1]
Awout (order 3)	22.5±0.5	5.6±0.2	21.6±5.5	47±9	10.4±6.1
	[22~23.5]	[5.0~~4~~6.1]	[16.5~40.3]	[37~67]	[4.9~27.5]
So'o (order 4)	23.9±1.3	6.1±0.2	23.4±5.0	57±6	14.4±3.8
	[22.4~27.6]	[5.7~6.6]	[18.3~35]	[46~69]	[8.2~22.9]
Nyong (Mbalamayo, order 5)	26.1±1.3	6.2±0.3	36.6±19	40±20	8.9±2.0
	[24.3~29.0]	[5.5~6.9]	[19.6~86.3]	[13~81]	[4.3~12.0]
Nyong (Olama, order 6)	25.7±1.4	6.2±0.3	31.4±12.8	43±12	9.7±3.2
	[24.1~28.8]	[5.5~6.6]	[20.1~69.3]	[24~67]	[3.7~14.8]

Table 2: Spatial distribution of physicochemical parameters (yearly average±standard deviation) in waters of the Nyong watershed during the sampling year 2016. The range is shown in square brackets. [a] was measured in the topsoil solution of the Mengong wetland at 0.4 m depth by Nkoue-Ndondo et al. (2020).

~~**Table 2: Spatial distribution of physicochemical parameters (mean ± standard deviation) in rivers of the Nyong basin during the sampling period. The range is shown in square brackets.**~~

Parameters	pCO_2	TA	DIC	DOC	POC	POC
Units	ppmv	µmol L^{-1}	µmol L^{-1}	µmol L^{-1}	%	µmol L^{-1}
Wetland	36 840±23 190 [a]	122±46 [a]	1 430±900 [a]	1 420±750 [b]		
	[3 900-84 240]	[50-216]	[150-3 270]	[1 250 - 2 920]		
Mengong source	78 800±40 110	53±26	2 940±1 485	~~108±10~~[a]83	NA	NA
	[12____700~209 000]	[15~138]	[500~7 560]	NA	NA	NA
Mengong outlet	15 600±8 900	90± 36	670±360	1 925±970	23±5	101±44
	[3 980~41 000]	[20~156]	[170~1 710]	[1 090~4 150]	[14~26]	[14~213]
Awout	15 400±7 300	67±39	670±315	3 200±1 840	16±3	130±50
	[5 760~26 710]	[11~166]	[260~1 170]	[2 000~7 550]	[11~21]	[72~243]
So'o	12 700±5 100	74±34	670±260	2 170±980	18±4	210±60
	[4 900~23 200]	[10~145]	[300~1 320]	[1 100~5 320]	[12~29]	[125~360]
Nyong (Mbalamayo)	11 800±5 100	123±63	720±270	2 000±860	20±3	150±40
	[3 620~22 460]	[20~230]	[220~1 200]	[1 020~5 300]	[16~26]	[62~220]
Nyong (Olama)	11 000±5 550	134±70	640±330	1 860±440	18±2	150±50
	[3 000~21 700]	[10~265]	[170~1 240]	[1 100~2 880]	[15~23]	[55~235]

Table 3: Spatial distribution of C variables (yearly average±standard deviation) in waters of the Nyong watershed during the sampling year 2016. The range is shown in square brackets. [a] ~~was~~ [a]measured~~estimated~~ in the topsoil solution of the Mengong wetland at 0.4 m depth by Nkoue-Ndondo et al. (2020). [b] measured ~~was estimated~~ in the topsoil solution of the Mengong wetland at 0.4 m depth by Braun et et al. (2005).

~~**Table 3: Spatial distribution of dissolved and particulate C concentrations (mean ± standard deviation) in rivers of the Nyong basin during the sampling period. The range is shown in square brackets.. [a]From Brunet et al. (2009).**~~

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	F_{respi} mmol m^{-2} d^{-1}	k_{600} m d^{-1}	F_{degas} mmol m^{-2} d^{-1}	Water surface area km^2	F_{degass_CO2} Gg C yr^{-1}
1	15±11 (36[a])	2-2.3	1235	7.7	42
2		2.2-2.8	1469	19.3	126
3		2.5-3.3	1694	20.1	149
4		2.5-3.4	1311	23.2	133
5	120±120 (141[a])	2.2-2.5	913	26.0	104
6		2.3-2.7	934	40.3	165
Total					718[b] (*25.8*[c])

Table 4: C degassing at the water-air interface and pelagic respiration. Fluxes in mmol m^{-2} d^{-1} are related to the water surface area. [a] taking into account an additional benthic respiration of 21 mmol m^{-2} d^{-1}. [b] calculated from the sum of C degassing (Gg C yr^{-1}) in each stream order. [c] in t C km^{-2} yr^{-1}, which fluxes are weighed by the surface area of the entire Nyong basin.

	Mengong Discharge	Awout Discharge	So'o Discharge	Nyong at Mbalmayo Discharge	Nyong at Olama Discharge
Oxygen saturation			-0.5	-0.8	-0.8
pH			-0.5	-0.7	-0.7
Specific conductivity			-0.5	-0.6	-0.6
TA			-0.4	-0.4	-0.4
pCO_2				0.5	0.4
DOC					
TSM	-0.4	-0.6		0.3	0.6
POC%			0.4	0.6	0.3
POC	-0.4	-0.6		0.5	0.7

Table 4: ~~Significant c~~Correlations with p<0.05 (Pearson correlation test) between C or ancillary parameters and the discharge in the different stream orders. The Pearson correlation coefficient is indicated.

-	DOC_{budget}	DIC_{budget}	POC_{budget}
F_{GW}	0.2±0.02	6.1±3.0	-
F_{WL}	1.8±0.6	1.8±1.1	0.4±0.1
F_{D}	-	5.5±2.3	-
F_{RH}	0.3±0.1	0.3±0.1	-
F_{OUT}	6.4±3.2	2.2±1.2	0.4±0.1
Imbalance (inputs-outputs)	-4.7	0.5	0

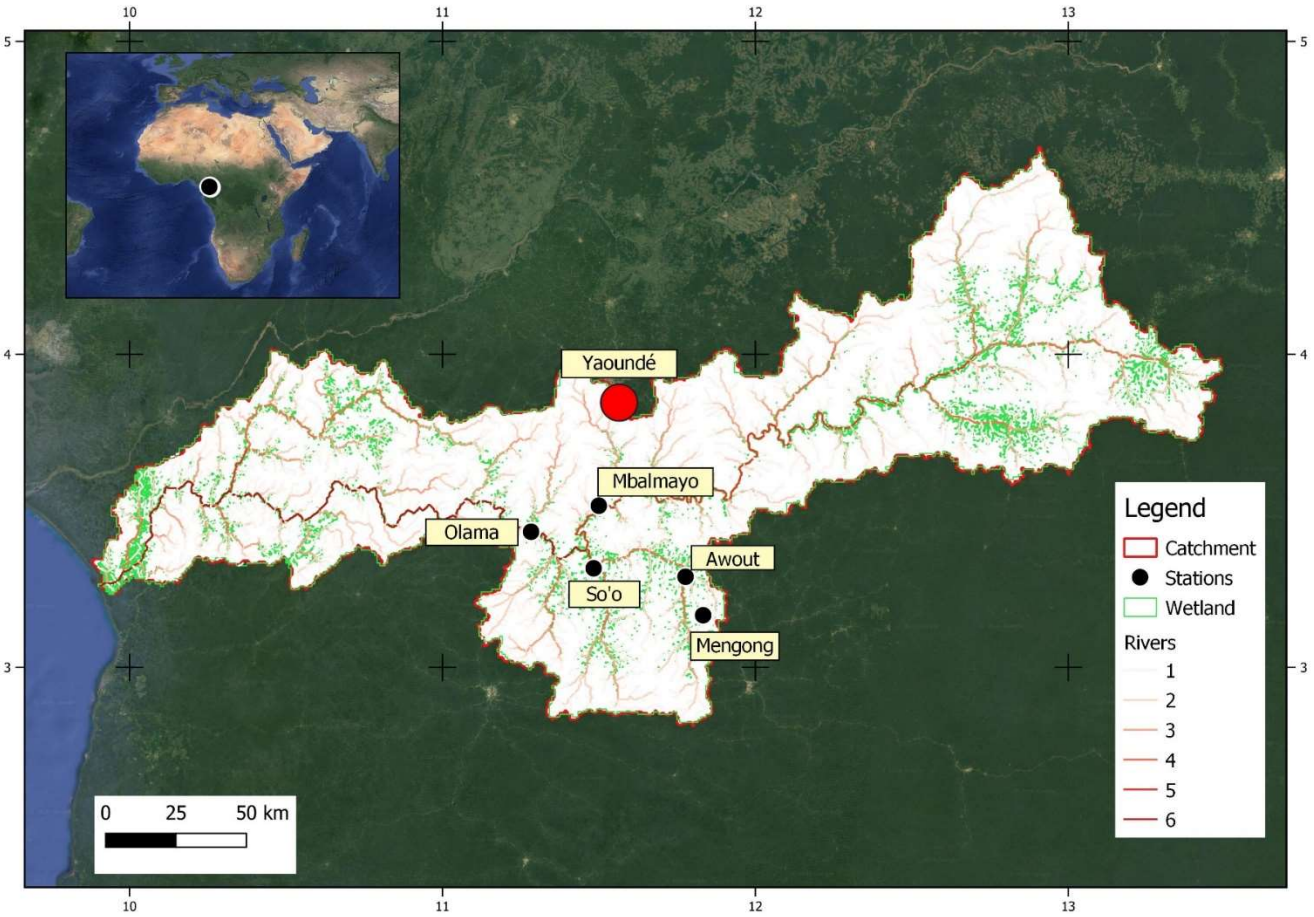
Table 5: DOC, DIC and POC budgets in the first-order Mengong catchment (Eqs. 8-10). Fluxes are in tC yr^{-1} and are described in details in the section 2.5. Briefly, F_{GW} is the quantity of dissolved carbon leached from non-flooded forest groundwater to the Mengong stream (Eq. 11), F_{WL} is the quantity of carbon leached from the Mengong wetland to the Mengong stream (Eqs. 13-14), F_{D} is the quantity of C degassed from the Mengong stream to the overlying atmosphere, F_{RH} is the heterotrophic respiration in the Mengong stream, and F_{OUT} is the quantity of carbon hydrologically exported at the outlet of the Mengong catchment.

Stream order	F_{RH}	k_{600}	F_{degas}	Water surface area	F_{degas}
	mmol m^{-2} d^{-1}	m d^{-1}	mmol m^{-2} d^{-1}	km^2	10^3 tC yr^{-1}
1		2.2±0.1	1220±640	6.7±3.4	43±26
	25±11 (46±22[a])	[2-2.3]	[560-2760]	[0.3-11.6]	[14-100]
		2.6±0.2	1450±570	16.6±7.5	126±60
2		[2.2-2.8]	[670-2450]	[2.8-27.2]3	[50-220]
		2.9±0.3	1580±610	17.1±7.4	137±57
3		[2.5-3.3]	[720-2564]	[5.7-27.5]	[60-240]
		3.0±0.3	1205±530	20.2±8.4	114±79
4		[2.5-3.4]	[80-2280]	[8.1-34.1]	[4-320]
		2.3±0.1	846±350	23.2±9.4	90±60
5	130±10 (151±31[a])	[2.2-2.5]	[255-1420]	[9.6-40.2]	[20-220]
		2.5±0.2	855±390	37.0±15.1	141±90
6		[2.3-2.7]	[220-1450]	[15.7-65.1]	[35-320]
					650±160[b] (*23.5*±5.6[c])

Table 6: At the Nyong watershed scale, yearly averages with standard deviations (based on averaging monthly values in each stream orders) of C degassing rates (F_{degas} in mmol m^{-2} d^{-1}), k_{600}, water surface area, and integrated C degassing flux (F_{degas} in tC yr^{-1}), estimated in the different stream orders. Range (based on monthly values) is shown between brackets. In addition, heterotrophic respiration (F_{RH}) measured in the stream orders 1 and 5 is indicated. [a] considering an additional benthic respiration in tropical rivers of 21 mmol m^{-2} d^{-1} by Cardoso et al. (2014). [b] calculated from the sum of the integrated C degassing flux in each stream order. [c] in tC km^{-2} yr^{-1} , i.e., the later flux weighed by the surface area of the entire Nyong watershed.

	F_{ocean}	F_{degas}	F_{ocean}	F_{degas}	Watershed net C sink[a]
	10^3 tC yr^{-1}	10^3 tC yr^{-1}	tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}	tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}	tC km^{-2} yr^{-1}
DOC	130±90		7.2±5.4		
DIC	46±42	650±160	2.5±2.3	23.5±5.6	
POC	12±9		0.6±0.5		
Total	188±100	650±160	10.3±5.8	23.5±5.6	300

Table 8: At the Nyong watershed scale, averages of monthly hydrological export of C to the ocean (F_{ocean}) and of monthly C degassing to the atmosphere (F_{degas}). [a] the net C sink estimated by Brunet et al. (2009) for the entire Nyong watershed is also indicated.



~~Figure 1: Figure 1: Map of the Nyong catchment showing location of the sampling sites, the different sub-catchments and the river network.~~

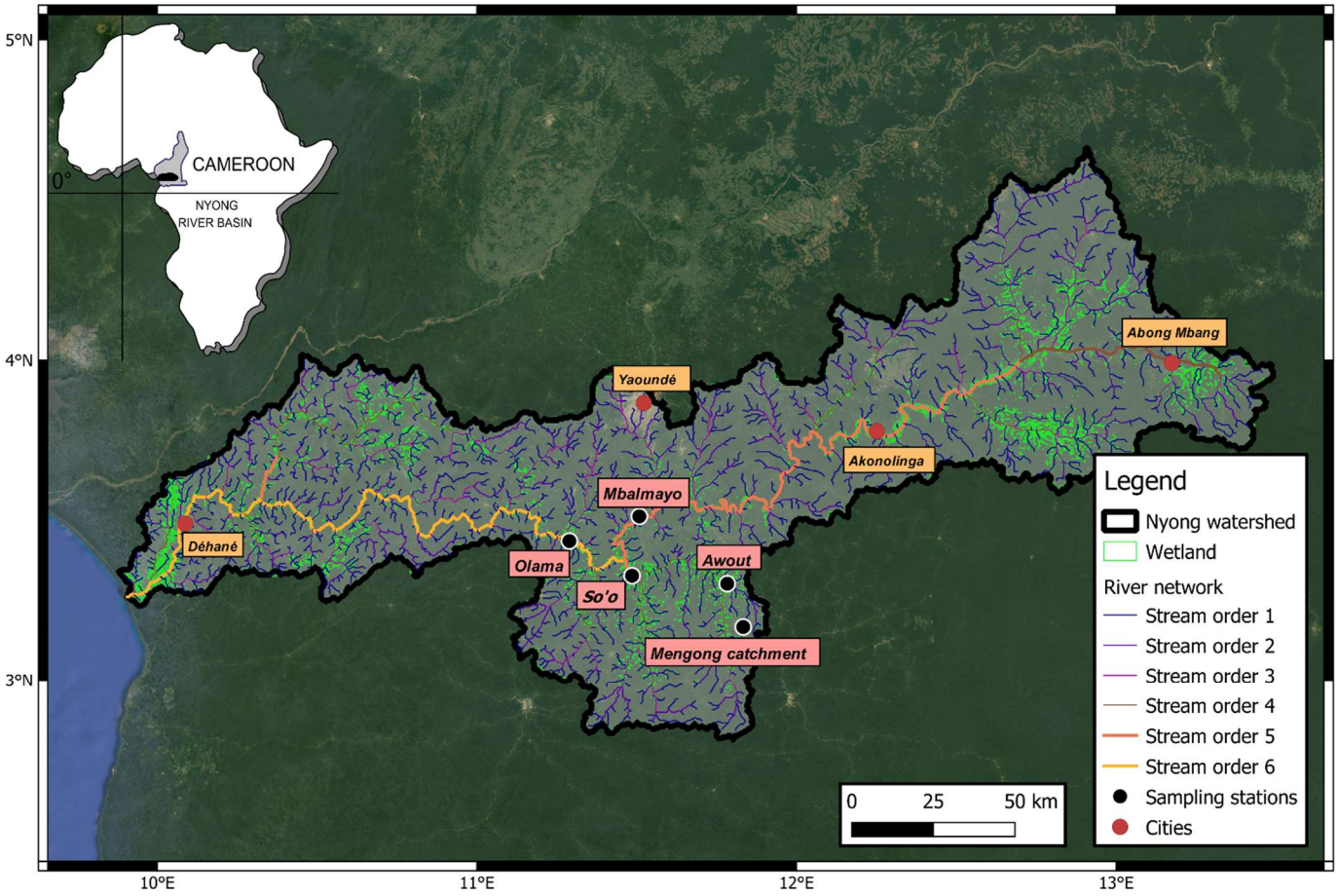
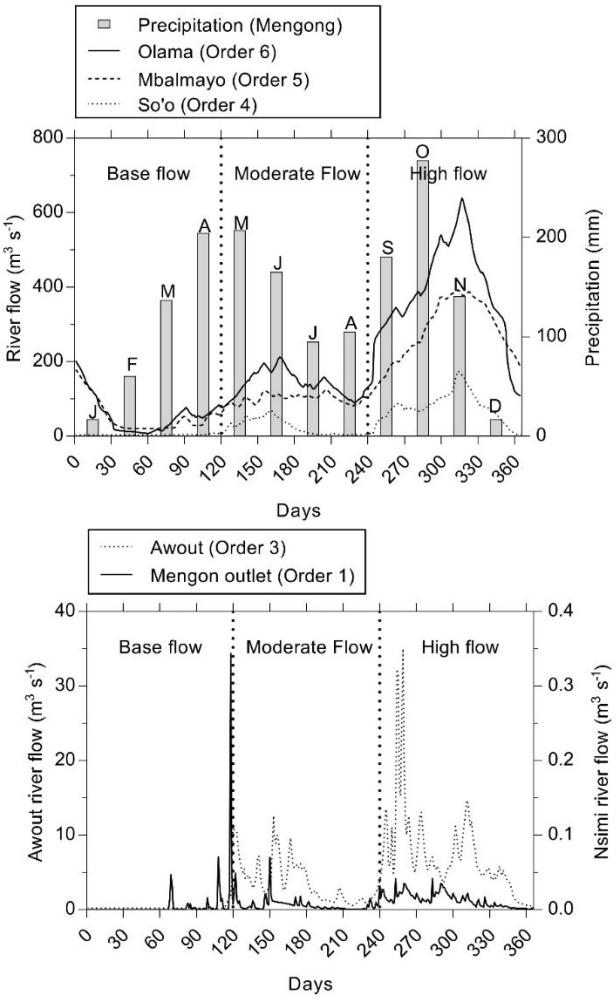


Figure 1: Map of the Nyong watershed showing the river network, the wetland extent from Gumbricht et al., (2017) and the location of the sampling stations and some cities. Note, the Nyong River is displayed bolder than the other rivers. The background map is from Google Satellite®.



~~**Figure 2: River flows of the different gauging stations during the year 2016, associated with precipitation measured at the Mengong catchment.**~~

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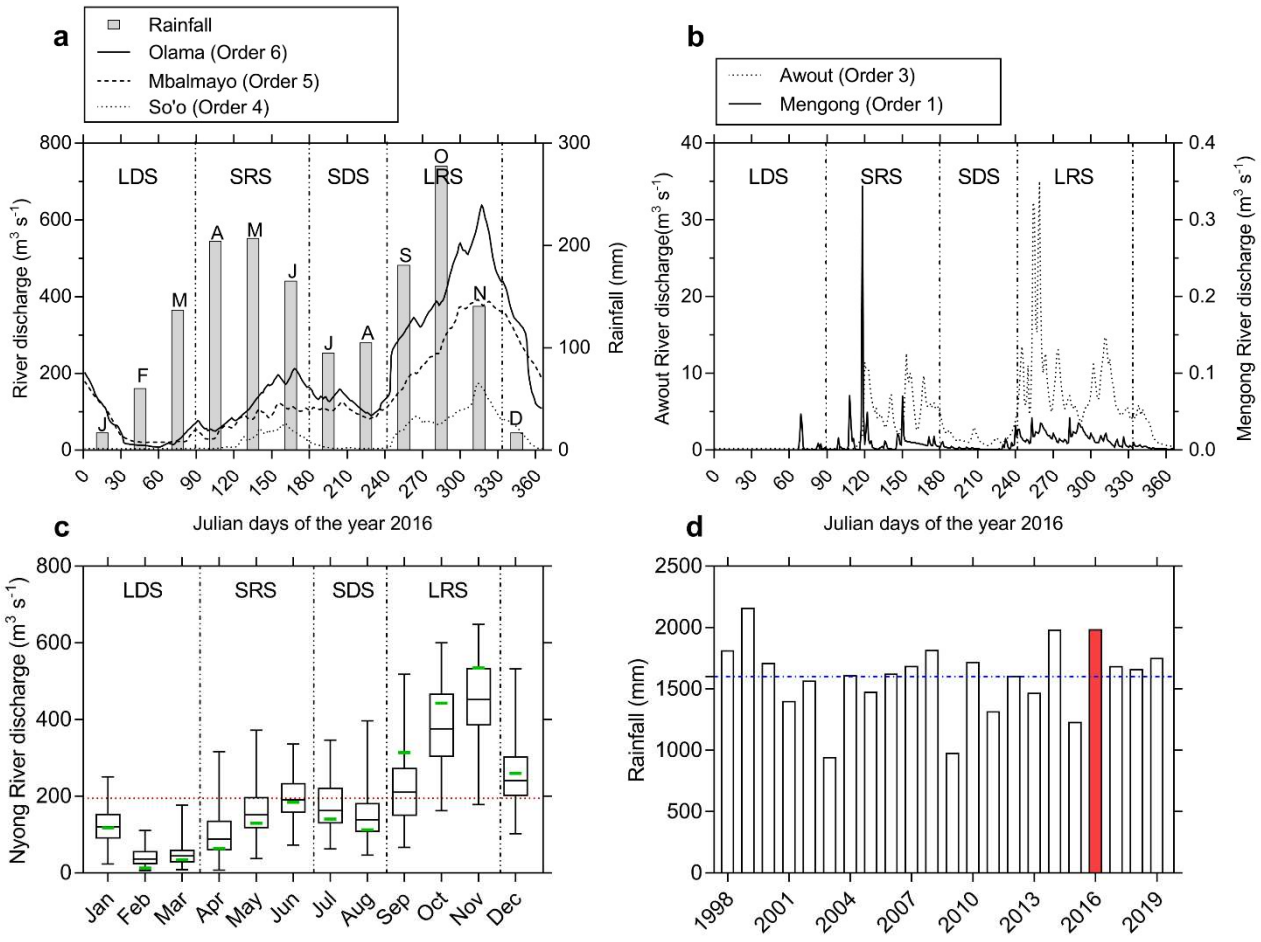

Figure 2: (a-b) River discharges of the different gauging stations during the sampling year 2016, associated with rainfall measured at the Mengong catchment. (c) The box plots represent the variability of monthly Nyong River discharges from 1998 to 2020 and extreme box plots values represent minimum and maximum monthly discharges during the same period; whereas the green lines represent the average monthly discharges in 2016, and the red dashed line represents the yearly average discharge of 194.5 $m^3 s^{-1}$ for the 1998 to 2020 period (very close to the yearly average discharge of 195 $m^3 s^{-1}$ measured in 2016). (d) Yearly rainfall in the Nyong watershed (measured in the Mengong catchment); the blue line represents the mean rainfall over the 1998-2020 period (1600±290 mm), and the red bar represents the yearly rainfall during the sampling year 2016. Hydrologic and rainfall data are from Audry et al. (2021).

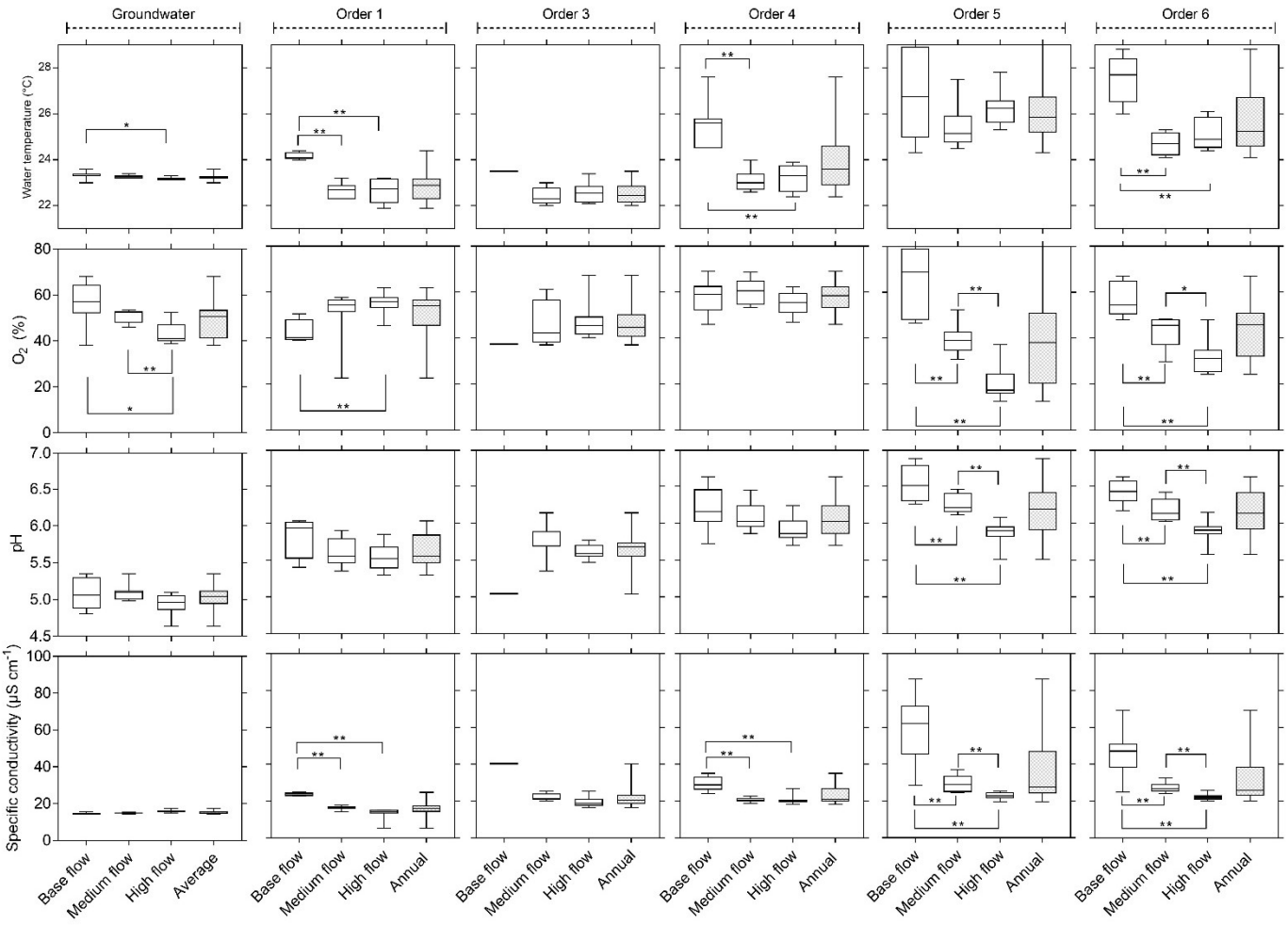

Figure 3: Box-plots showing the seasonal (related to the river flow) and the spatial (related to stream order) variations of water temperature (°C), O_2 (%), pH and specific conductivity (µS cm^{-1}). One star (*) and two stars (**) indicate a p value <0.05 and <0.001, respectively.

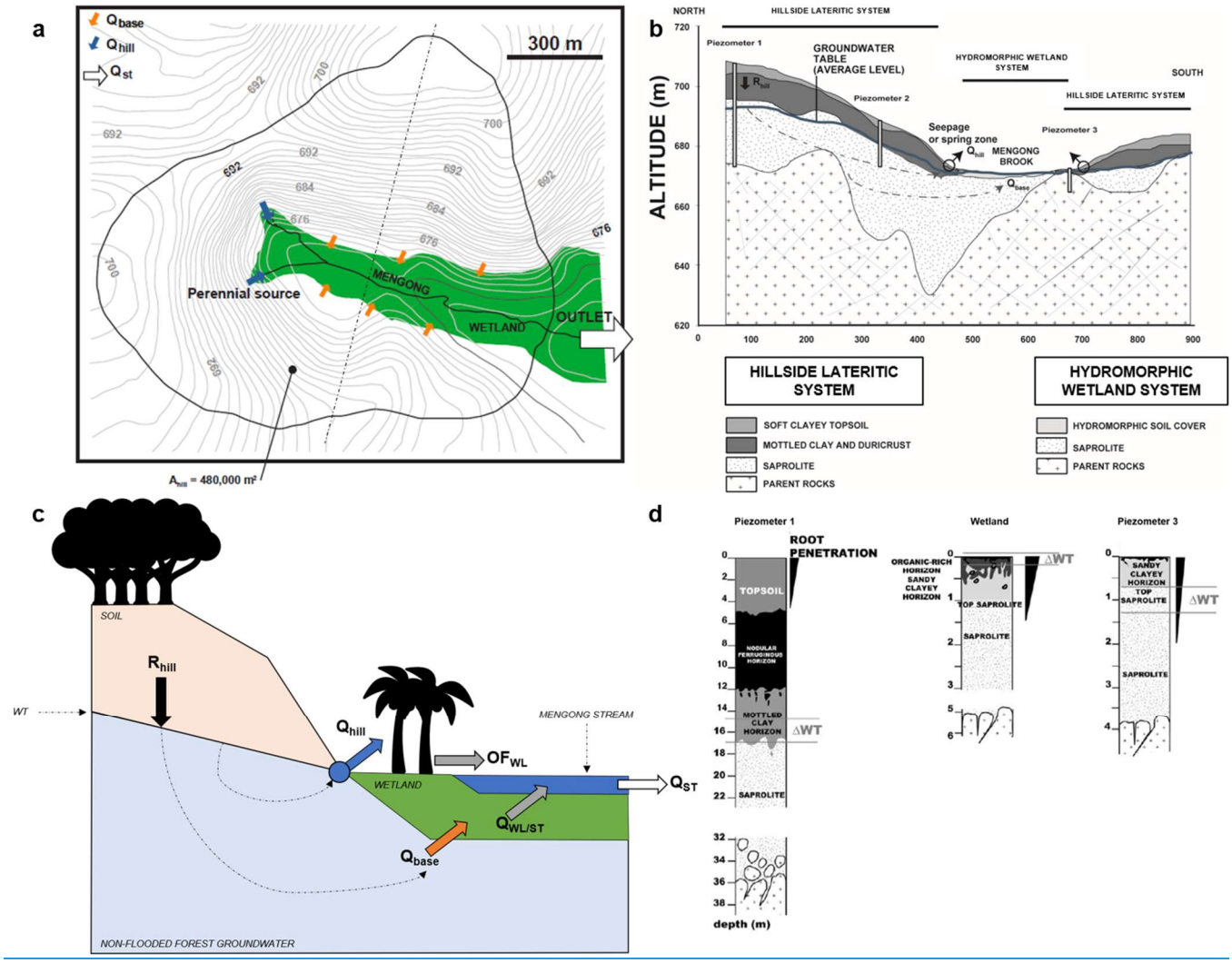

Figure 3: (a) Map of the first-order Mengong catchment showing the wetland area and the hydrological fluxes that are partitioned between the main perennial source (Q_{hill}, blue arrows) of the non-flooded forest groundwater, specific seepage points all around the hillside/wetland boundaries (Q_{base}, orange arrows) of the non-flooded forest groundwater, and the discharge at the stream outlet (Q_{st}, white arrow). Note, A_{hill} is the surface area drained by the non-flooded forest groundwater. (b) Cross section of the dashed line from the map (a), showing the lithology of the hillside lateritic system and the hydromorphic wetland system, the recharge of the hillside system (R_{hill}); Q_{base} and Q_{hill} are also indicated. (c) Hydrological functioning of the first-order Mengong catchment. Note, $Q_{WL/ST}$ represents the groundwater flow exchanged between the wetland and the stream and OF_{WL} is the overland flow on the surface of the wetland. (d) Characteristic soil profiles at piezometers 1, 2 and 3, in which water table level was measured and showed in the Figure 4. Note, ΔWT represents the

variation of the water table level. The figure 3 was adapted from Braun et al. (2005) and (2012) and from Maréchal et al. (2011).

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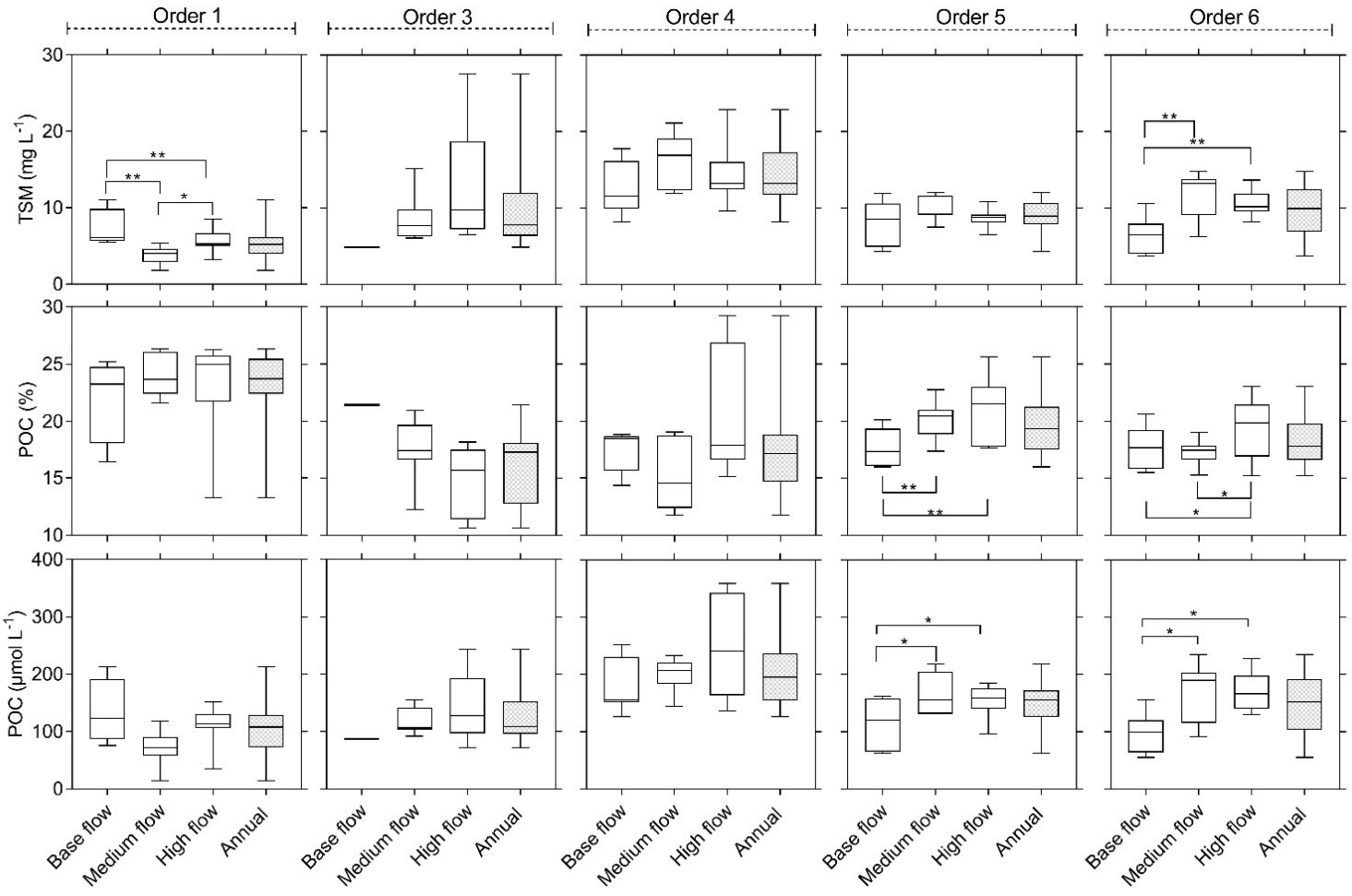

Figure 4: Box plots showing the seasonal (related to the river flow) and the spatial (related to stream order) variations of TSM (mg L^{-1}), the POC content of the TSM (POC%, %) and POC (µmol L^{-1}). One star (*) and two stars (**) indicate a p value <0.05 and <0.001, respectively.

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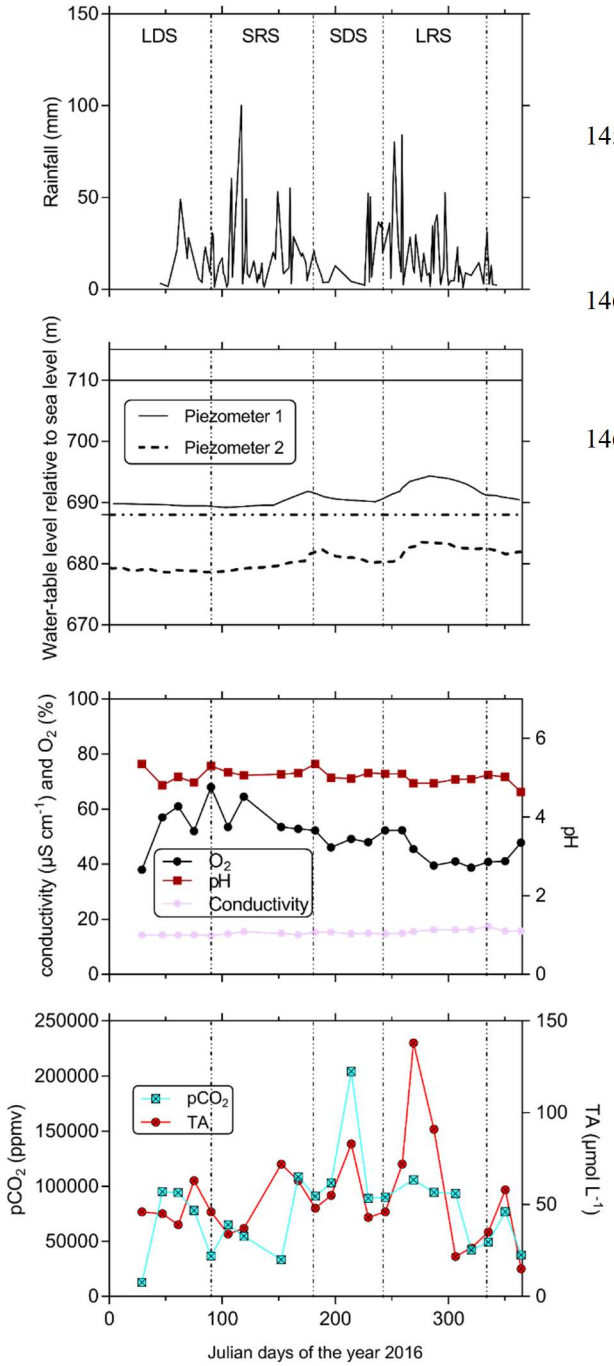

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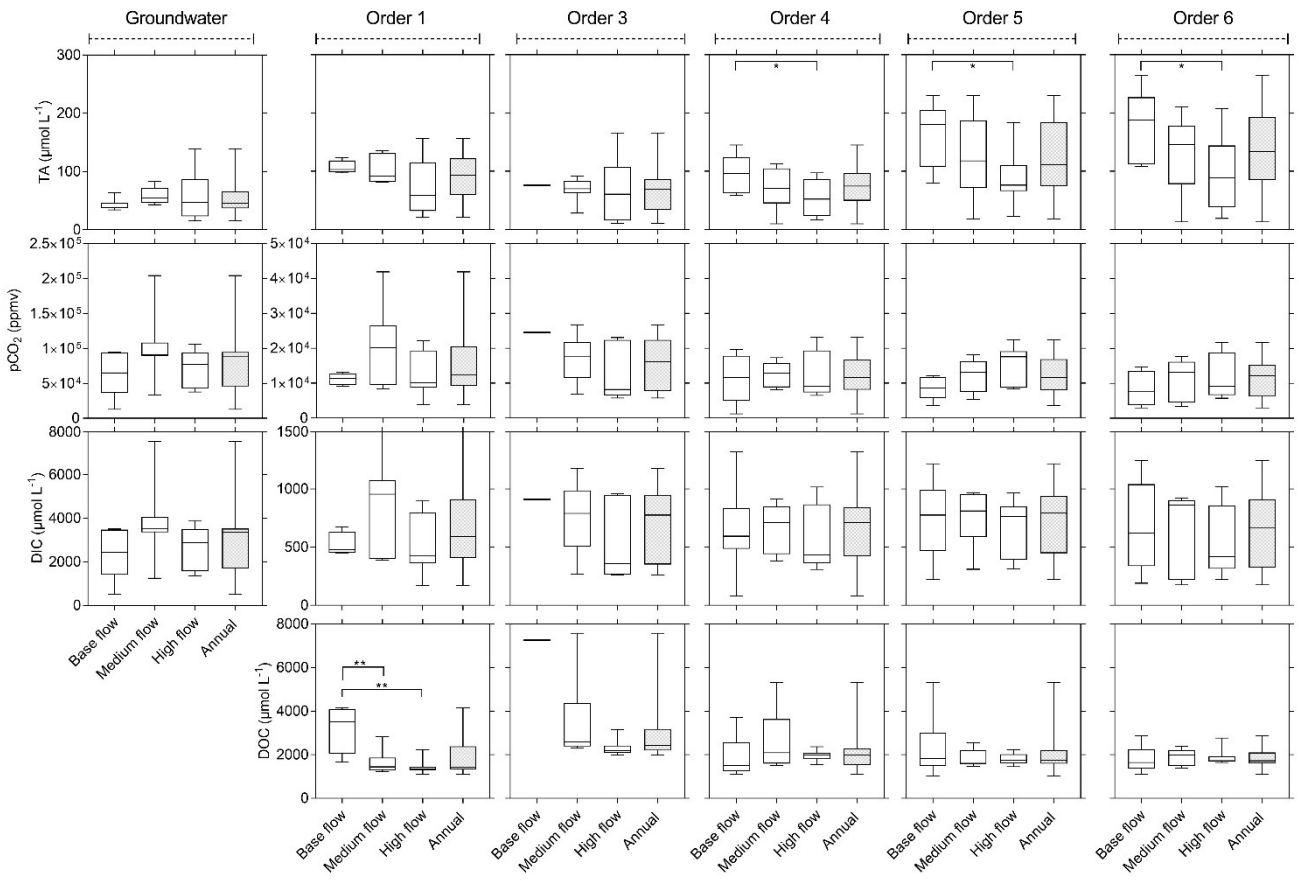
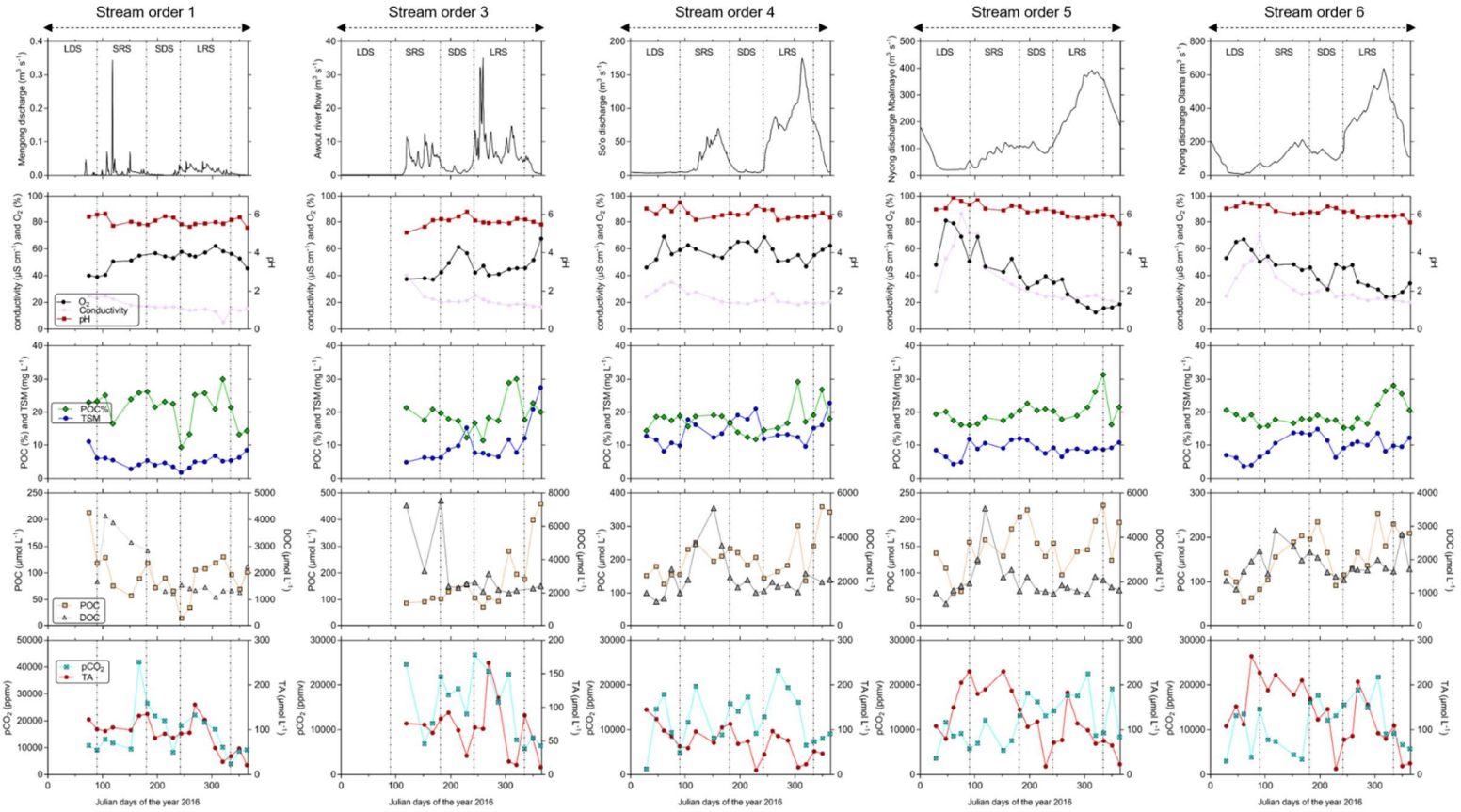
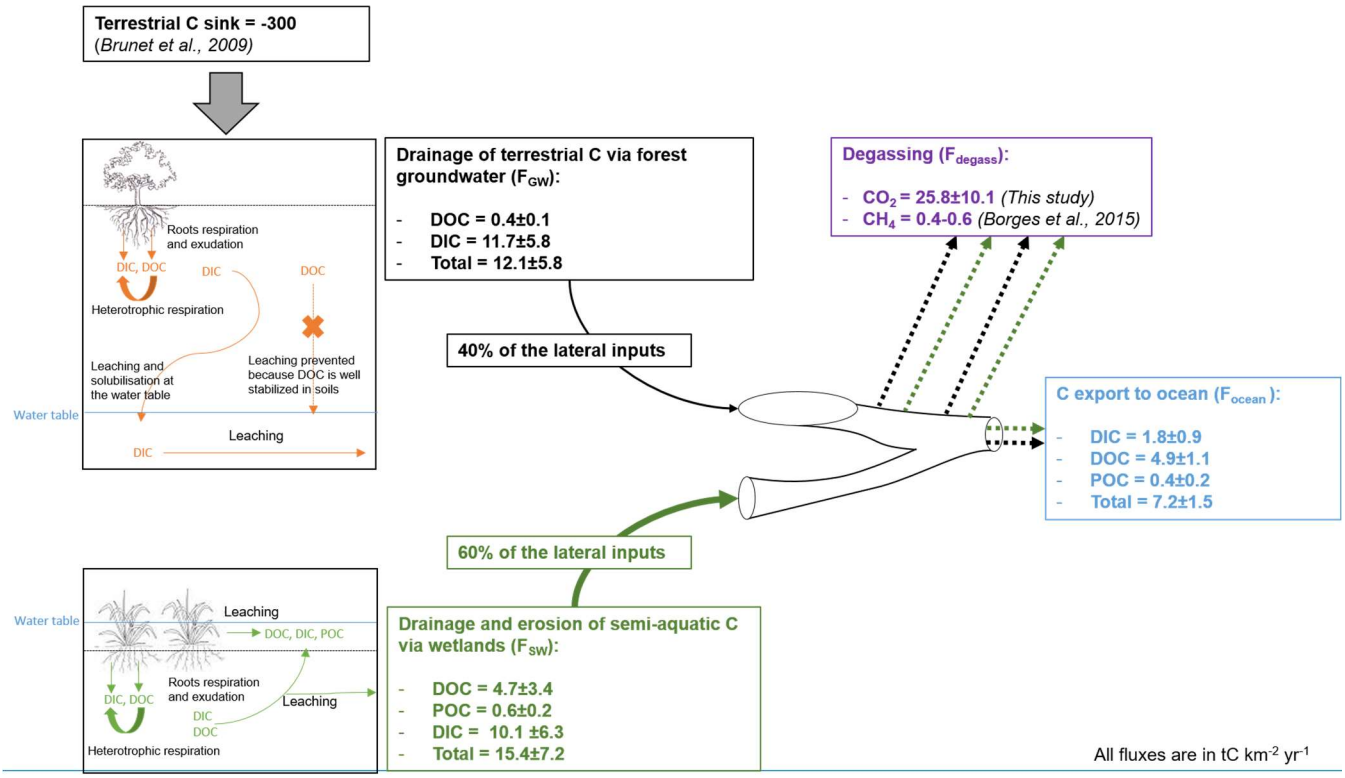
Figure 4: temporal variations in the first-order Mengong catchment of rainfall, water-table level in piezometer 1 and 2 (see figure 3b) relative to sea level (elevation of the soil surface at piezometers 1 and 2 relative to sea level is also indicated by the horizontal lines); and pCO_2, TA and ancillary parameters (O_2, pH, specific conductivity) in non-flooded forest groundwater (measured at the perennial source). The temporal variations are separated into the four seasons that occurs in the Nyong watershed that are LDS as long dry season, SRS as short rainy season SDS as short dry season and LRS as long rainy season.



1470 **Figure 5: Box plots showing the seasonal (related to the river flow) and the spatial (related to stream order) variations TA (µmol L^{-1}), pCO_2 (ppmv), DIC (µmol L^{-1}) and DOC (µmol L^{-1}). One star (*) and two stars (**) indicate a p value <0.05 and <0.001, respectively.**



1475 **Figure 5: temporal variations of river discharge, carbon (pCO_2, TA, DOC, POC) and ancillary parameters (O_2, pH, specific conductivity, TSM) in surface waters of the Nyong watershed. The temporal variations are separated into the four seasons that occurs in the Nyong watershed that are LDS as long dry season, SRS as short rainy season SDS as short dry season and LRS as long rainy season.**



~~Figure 6: Eco-hydrological processes occurring in wetlands and forest groundwater associated with the riverine carbon budget at the catchment scale.~~

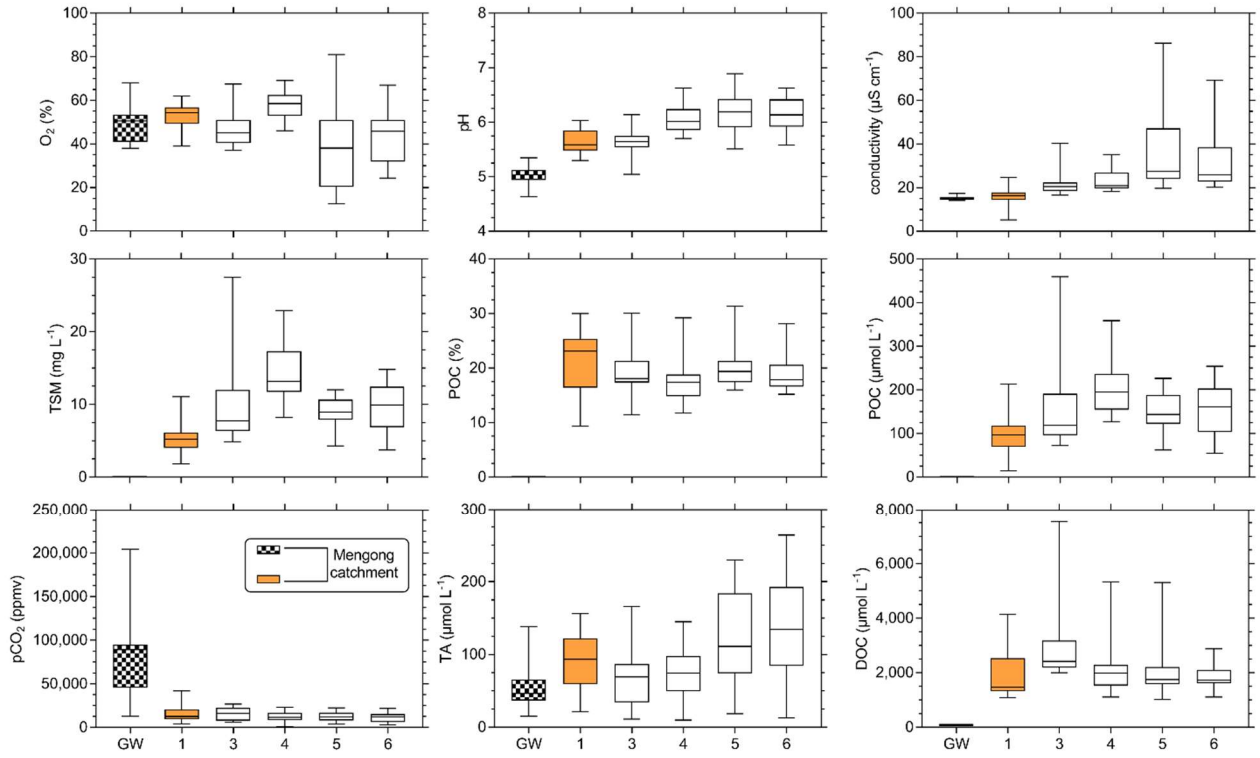


Figure 6: spatial variations of carbon parameters (pCO_2, TA, DOC, POC) and ancillary parameters (O_2, pH, specific conductivity, TSM) across non-flooded forest groundwater (GW) and streams orders 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 in the Nyong watershed.

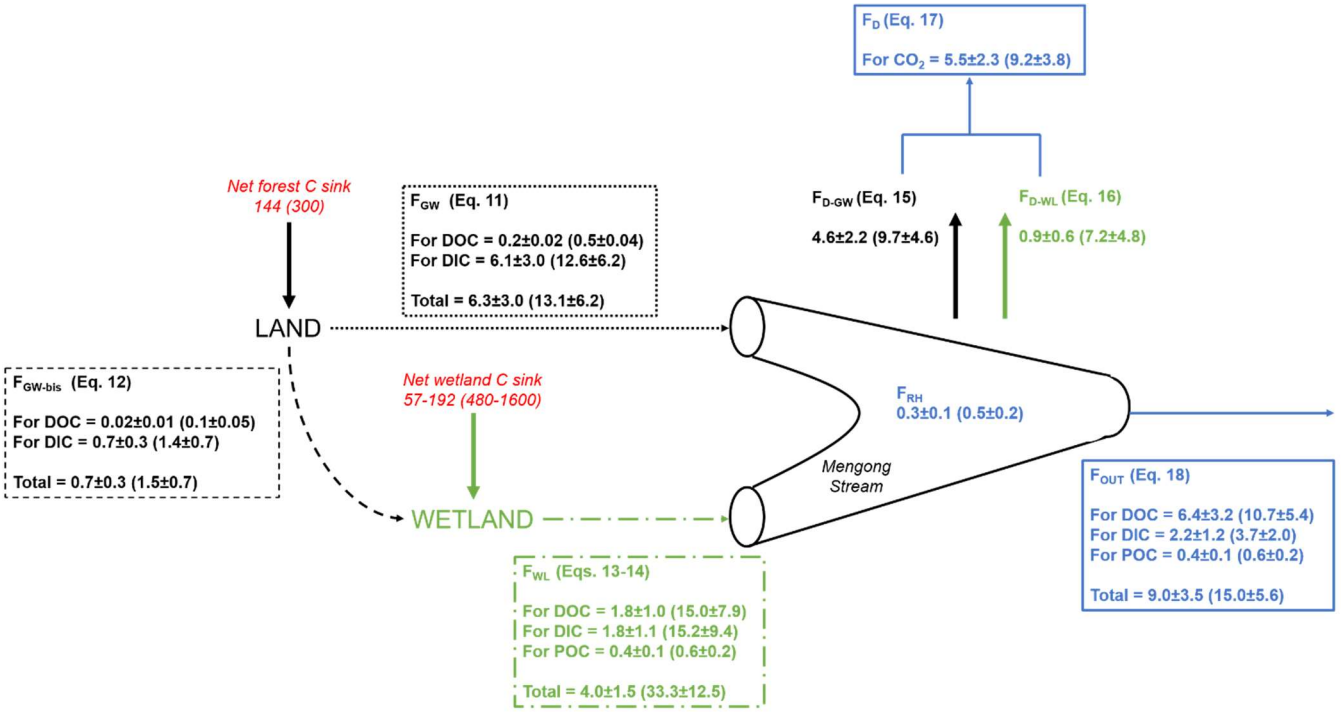


Figure 7: mass balance of C in the first order Mengong catchment. All fluxes are in tC yr^{-1}, and in tC km^{-2} yr^{-1} when between brackets (weighed by the surface area of 0.48 km^2 drained by non-flooded forest groundwater for the net forest C sink, F_{GW}, F_{GW-bis} and F_{D-GW}, by the wetland surface area of 0.12 km^2 for the net wetland C sink, F_{WT} and F_{D-W}, and by the Mengong catchment area of 0.6 km^2 for F_{OUT}, F_D and F_{RH}), and they are associated with their corresponding equations as described in details in the section 2.5. Briefly, F_{GW} is the quantity of dissolved carbon leached from non-flooded forest groundwater to the Mengong stream (Eq. 11), F_{GW-bis} is the quantity of dissolved carbon leached from non-flooded forest groundwater to the Mengong wetland (Eq. 12), F_{WL} is the quantity of carbon leached from the Mengong wetland to the Mengong stream (Eqs. 13-14), F_D is the quantity of C degassed from the Mengong stream to the overlying atmosphere, F_{RH} is the heterotrophic respiration in the Mengong stream, and F_{OUT} is quantity of carbon hydrologically exported at the outlet of the Mengong catchment. In addition, net local forest C sink of mature forest of the Mengong catchment estimated by Brunet et al. (2009), and a range of typical net wetland C sink measured in wetlands in Africa by Saunders et al. (2007) and Jones and Humphries (2002)are both indicated.

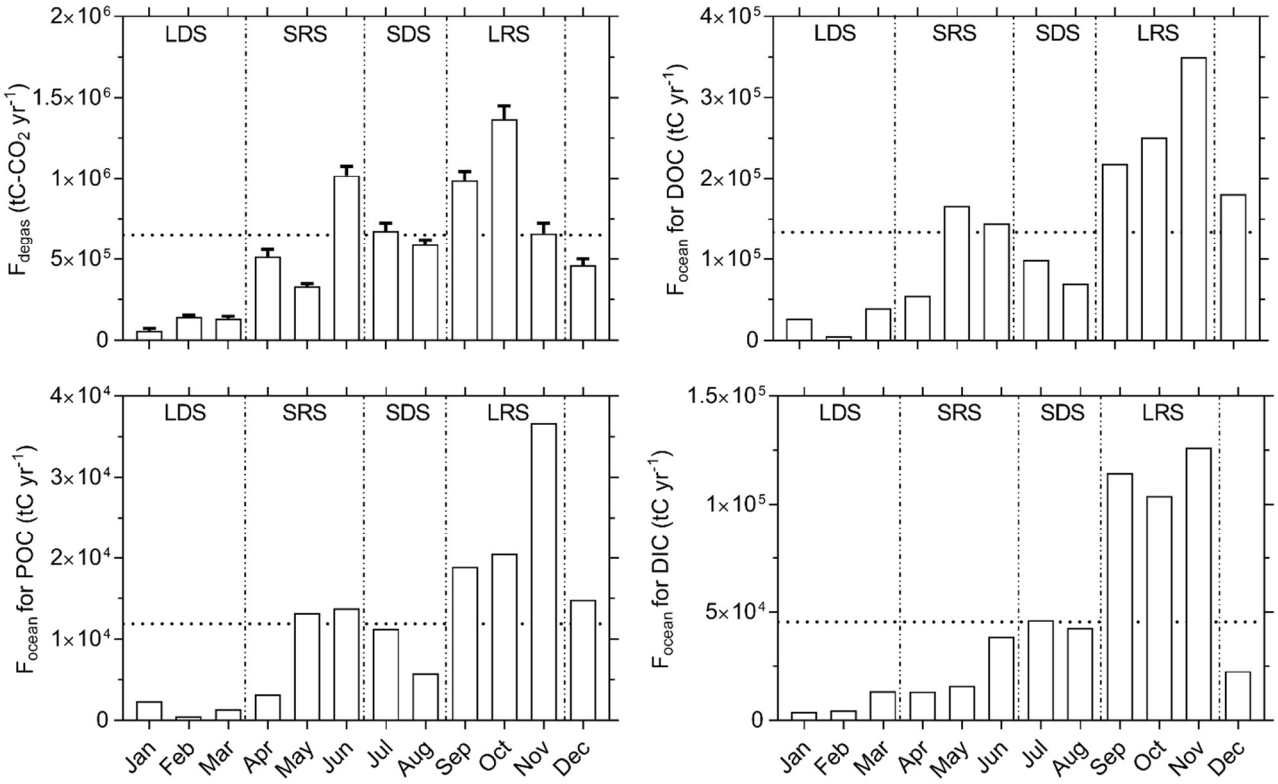


Figure 8: Monthly C fluxes at the Nyong watershed scale described in the section 2.4. The dashed lines represent the yearly average of the different monthly C fluxes. The figures are separated into the four seasons that occurs in the Nyong watershed that are LDS as long dry season, SRS as short rainy season SDS as short dry season and LRS as long rainy season.

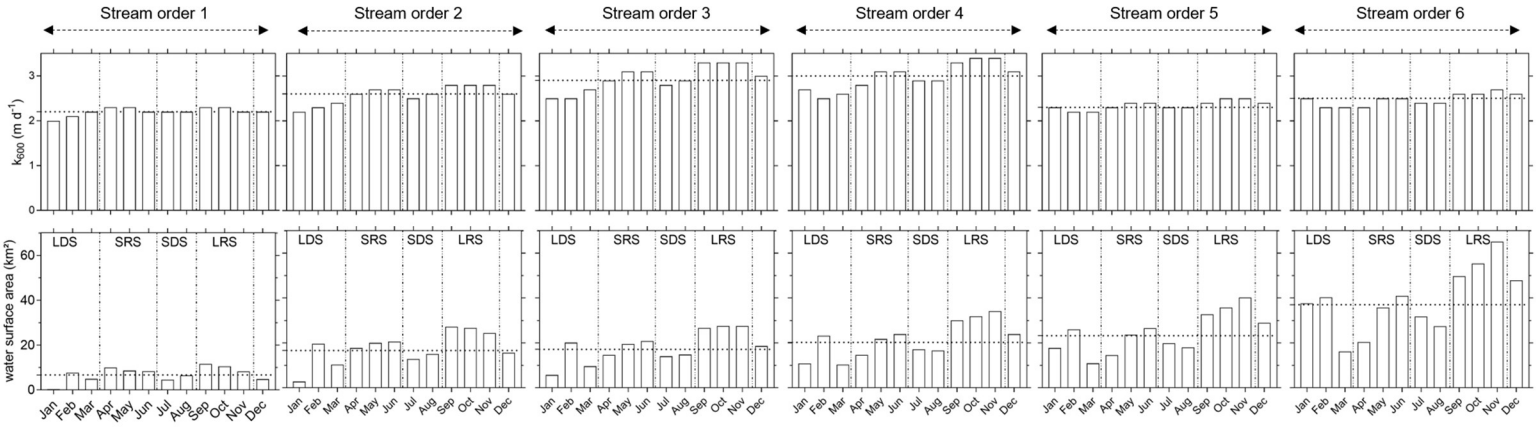


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Figure S1: Monthly variations of k_{600} (m d^{-1}) and water surface area (km²) in each stream order across seasons. The temporal variations are separated into the four seasons that occurs in the Nyong watershed that are LDS as long dry season, SRS as short rainy season SDS as short dry season and LRS as long rainy season.