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Climate data rescue from the Belgian colonial archives : helping to close the data-gap for Central Africa

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Abstract Text:

During the first half of the twentieth century, climate data was rigorously collected in the former Belgian Congo, currently the Democratic Republic of the Congo . Yet, today this data is practically absent from (international) data repositories and not included in (re-analysis) climate models. The historical archives of La régie des plantations de la colonie (REPCO) and the Institut National d'Etudes Agronomique du Congo Belge (INEAC) hold vast amounts of (eco-) climatological data, with great potential and relevance for basic and applied research in the central Congo Basin. They are currently stored at the State Archives of Belgium, the Royal Museum for Central Africa and the Botanic Garden Meise in Belgium.

The 4-year project COBECORE, short for "Congo basin eco-climatological data recovery and valorization", was launched in 2017 with the aim to unlock this legacy data using computer vision, machine learning and citizen science. Here we report on the scanning activities during the first year of the project for 575 climatological stations distributed across the Congo Basin, equivalent to 4300 site-years, totalling 58 639 scans. We provide an overview of the climatological stations where this data was collected during colonial times (1901-1960), as well as the parameters and timeframe for which we have data.

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