Comparison of Small- and Large-Footprint Lidar Characterization of Tropical Forest Aboveground Structure and Biomass: A Case Study From Central Gabon

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Abstract—NASA’s Global Ecosystem Dynamic Investigation (GEDI) mission has been designed to measure forest structure using lidar waveforms to sample the earth’s vegetation while in orbit aboard the International Space Station. In this paper, we used airborne large-footprint (LF) lidar measurements to simulate GEDI observations from which we retrieved ground elevation, vegetation height, and aboveground biomass (AGB). GEDI-like product accuracy was then assessed by comparing them to similar products derived from airborne small-footprint (SF) lidar measurements. The study focused on tropical forests and used data collected during the NASA and European Space Agency (ESA) AfriSAR ground and airborne campaigns in the Lope National Park in Central Gabon. The measurements covered a gradient of successional stages of forest development with different height, canopy density, and topography. The comparison of the two sensors shows that LF lidar waveforms and simulated waveforms from SF lidar are equivalent in their ability to estimate ground elevation (RMSE = 0.5 m, bias = 0.29 m) and maximum forest height (RMSE = 2.99 m, bias = 0.24 m) over the study area. The difference in the AGB estimated from both lidar instruments at the 1-ha spatial scale is small over the entire study area (RMSE = 6.34 Mg·ha⁻¹, bias = 11.27 Mg·ha⁻¹) and the bias is attributed to the impact of ground slopes greater than 10–20° on the LF lidar measurements of forest height. Our results support the ability of GEDI’s lidar to measure the complex structure of humid tropical forests and provide AGB estimates comparable to SF-derived ones.

Index Terms—AfriSAR, and ice sensor (LVIS), Gabon, Global Ecosystem Dynamic Investigation (GEDI), land, lidar, tropical forest, vegetation.

I. INTRODUCTION

NASA’s Global Ecosystem Dynamics Investigation Lidar (GEDI) space mission is planned to be onboard from the International Space Station for two years beginning late 2018. The sensor will collect 25-m diameter footprint full-waveform (FW) lidar data to help characterize vegetation structure and aboveground biomass (AGB) globally, and report on AGB dynamics across landscapes. Lidar is an active remote sensing technique that is well suited to provide high-resolution, 3-D information on vertical and horizontal forest structures and underlying topography [1]–[5]. Over the past few decades, lidar has been used to accurately retrieve ground and aboveground forest biophysical parameters, such as AGB, in temperate [6]–[9], boreal [10]–[13], and tropical forests [14]–[18]. Lidar systems for forestry applications are distinguished based on platform type (e.g., terrestrial, airborne, or spaceborne), signal recording (discrete return or FW), footprint size (e.g., small, i.e., <1 m or large, i.e., 10–25 m in diameter) and sample scanning pattern (profiling or scanning) [19], [20]. The most common lidar systems used in forestry applications have been small-footprint (SF) discrete return lidar and large-footprint (LF) FW lidar. SF lidar sensors record discrete heights at peak return of light and are typically flown on airborne platforms or operated on the ground, while LF FW lidar sensors record a continuous height distribution of surfaces illuminated by the laser pulse and are found mainly on spaceborne platforms, such as the geoscience laser altimeter system (GLAS) sensor [21]. Land, vegetation, and ice sensor

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(LVIS) is an airborne LF lidar sensor that provides coverage of large areas and can be used to simulate the characteristics of spaceborne observations such as GEDI [22]. In both LF and SF systems, canopy height metrics (i.e., maximum height, height percentiles, and canopy cover) can be derived from the recorded returned signals and may be used to retrieve aboveground forest structural properties. For example, Lefsky [23] used the GLAS data to produce a global map of forest height and Saatchi et al. [17] converted the GLAS height metrics to AGB to produce a benchmark map of carbon stocks of tropical forests across three continents. Drake et al. [14], [24] used metrics derived from LVIS to estimate a variety of forest attributes, including AGB, over a tropical forest area at the La Selva Biological Station, Costa Rica. Asner and Mascaro [25], using SF lidar, developed a series of aboveground carbon density models by calibrating the plot estimates to simple lidar metrics.

The study area is located north of the LNP in central Gabon (see Fig. 1) and covers an area of approximately 50 km². The study area is located north of the LNP in central Gabon (see Fig. 1) and covers an area of approximately 50 km². LNP is in the western Lower Congolian semievergreen forests of central Africa [32] and is made up of dynamic, diversified vegetation types. Forest boundaries have been advancing, invading savanna grasslands under the influence of post-Pleistocene climate [32]–[34], yet anthropogenic uses of fire [35], together with the presence of elephant seed dispersal and browsing [36] have been modifying and maintaining the Lopé forest edge configuration and creating a complex system of forest types across this forest-savanna mosaic.

Annual rainfall at the study area averages 1500 mm (SEGC data, 1984–2016), and there are two rainy seasons and two dry seasons. The longer dry season extends from June to mid-September, followed by the longer rainy season from mid-September to mid-December. The shorter dry and rainy seasons are less regular and can vary in duration and intensity. The savanna and forest vegetation are on undulating terrain ranging from 230 to 470 m a.s.l. within slopes that can reach more than 30° in the western region of the study area.

The vegetation cover in the study area can be divided into four structural types.

1) Savanna grasslands (SA V) dominated by herbaceous plants and fire-resistant woody shrubs. Two types of forest patches occur in the savanna-dominated areas: gallery forests over rocky or sandy soil along small watercourses; and isolated patches of forests or “bosquets” of anthropogenic origin, mainly found on hilltops [33], [37].

2) Young colonizing forests (YCFs) that grow as a result of fire suppression at the edge of forest-savanna boundary (YCF).

3) Okoumé (Aucoumea klaineana) dominated forests (ODF), containing mainly Okoumé and Azobe (Lophira alata) trees.

4) Marantaceae and Mature old growth forests (OGFs) found a greater distance from the current savanna edge with greater species diversity and structural complexity [33], [37].

These old forests are mainly located in the western portion of the study area at the edge of the Massif du Chaillu Pleistocene forest refuge and cover a more complex, steeply hilly terrain. Based on the SF lidar-derived canopy height model (CHM), we manually delimited four subareas across the site to represent the four major vegetation types for their variations in structure and AGB (see Fig. 1).

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

A. Study Area

The study area is located north of the LNP in central Gabon (see Fig. 1) and covers an area of approximately 50 km². LNP is located in the western Lower Congolian semievergreen forests of central Africa [32] and is made up of dynamic, diversified vegetation types. Forest boundaries have been advancing, invading savanna grasslands under the influence of post-Pleistocene climate [32]–[34], yet anthropogenic uses of fire [35], together with the presence of elephant seed dispersal and browsing [36] have been modifying and maintaining the Lopé forest edge configuration and creating a complex system of forest types across this forest-savanna mosaic.

Forest inventory data were collected in field plots (N = 12; LNL1–12) of either 1 ha (ODF, OGF, SA V; n = 9) or 0.5 ha (YCF; n = 3) that were designed to span a gradient of AGB from very low to high biomass values [38]–[40]. In each plot, all stems greater than 10 cm in diameter at breast height (dbh), at 1.30 m, or above stem irregularity and buttresses, were labeled and diameters and heights were measured. For the plots in SA V and YCF, stems 5–10 cm in dbh were also measured as they can represent a substantial portion of AGB in such vegetation types. In all plots, trees were identified to genus level and where possible to species level. Wood density values were extracted from global datasets [41], [42]. Using diameter, height, and wood density of trees, we calculated the AGB (dry weight) of each stem using the Chave et al. [43] pantropical moist tropical forest allometric equation

\[
\text{AGB (kg)} = 0.0673 \times (\rho \times \text{dbh}^2 \times \text{ht})^{0.976}
\] (1)
C. Lidar Data and Processing

1) SF Lidar: The SF DR lidar data were collected using a Riegl VQ480U sensor mounted on a helicopter model EC 135 in July 2015 with a variable point density and footprint diameter of ~10 cm. Data were preprocessed to remove artifacts due to helicopter motion. This provided a more uniform point density of ~10 points m$^{-2}$ for vegetation characterization. In this study, digital terrain model (DTM), slope, CHM, and canopy metrics derived from simulated pseudowaveforms were computed based on the following steps: first, ground returns were classified using the progressive triangulated irregular network densification algorithm [44], and a 1-m DTM was created. Slope (%) maps were derived from the DTM. Second, normalized height (i.e., the height above ground) was obtained for each point of the point cloud by subtracting ground elevation (obtained from the DTM) from the raw point elevation value, and the 1-m CHM was then computed using the highest points. Finally, within each LVIS footprint, the SF lidar point cloud was clipped and pseudo-waveforms were simulated by convoluting the returns within each footprint [see Fig. 2(a)] [27]

$$WV(z) = \left[ \sum_{i \in U} I_i \cdot w_h(x_i, y_i) \right] \ast w_v\left(\frac{z - c}{e}\right)$$

$$U = \left\{ i : \sqrt{(x_i - x_0)^2 + (y_i - y_0)^2} \leq r \text{ and } |z_i - z| \leq \frac{\Delta h}{2} \right\}$$
where \((x_i, y_i, z_i)\) are the coordinates of each discrete return, 
\((x_0, y_0)\) refer to the coordinates of the footprint center, \(r\) is the footprint radius (i.e., defined as half of the \(e^{-2}\) of the maximum 
rather than half of the full-width at half-maximum), \(\Delta h\) is the sensor discretization interval (15 cm for LVIS), \(U\) denotes the set of 
those SF lidar returns within the SF footprint (25 m 
in diameter), \(I_r\) is the intensity of each return, and \(\ast\) denotes the 
convolution operator. The Gaussian distribution of energy both along and across the laser beam was approximated by \(w_v\) and 
\[ w_v(x, y) = \exp \left( -\frac{(x - x_0)^2 + (y - y_0)^2}{r^2} \right) \] (4)

\[ w_h(t) = \exp \left( -\frac{(t - t_0)^2}{\sigma_t^2} \right) \] (5)

where \(t_0\) is a reference time corresponding to the peak of an emitted pulse, and \(\sigma_t\) is the interval from \(t_0\) to the time 
at which the intensity along the beam drops to \(e^{-2}\) of the maximum. The pulse duration was set to 10 ns [40].

After simulating the LVIS waveforms, canopy relative height metrics (SF RH) were calculated based on the cumulative waveform 
energy reflected from canopy-intercepted surfaces and the ground 
\((52)\). For each LVIS waveform, ground elevation (\(ZG\)) was de-

2) LF Lidar: The LF FW lidar data were acquired in 
February 2016 using the LVIS sensor, developed and operated 
by the Laser Remote Sensing Laboratory at NASA’s Goddard 
Space Flight. In this study, LVIS was mounted on the NASA 
Langley B200 aircraft and flown at \(\sim7315\) m with a footprint 
diameter of 25 m and nominal spacing of \(\sim10\) m both along and 
across track. LVIS footprints were geolocated to the global refer-
cence ellipsoid WGS 84, using a combination of GPS and inertial 
navigation system (INS) information [45], [50]. Our preliminary 
analyses indicate that LVIS data geolocation match very well 
with that of SF DR lidar data and that sensor comparison did 
not require any further geolocation correction.

LVIS is a FW digitizing system that records the vertical distribu-
tion of nadir-intercepted surfaces at 15 cm vertical resolution 
[51] using the return energy of Gaussian-shaped optical pulses 
at a wavelength of 1064 nm [51] [see Fig. 2(b)]. Essentially, the 
amplitude of a LVIS waveform signal is proportional to the en-
ergy reflected from canopy-intercepted surfaces and the ground 
[52]. For each LVIS waveform, ground elevation (ZG) was de-

\[ AGB = \beta_0 \cdot \overline{H}_L^{\beta_1} + \varepsilon \] (6)
with \( \varepsilon \sim N(0, \sigma^2) \)

\[
\text{RMSE} = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} (\hat{y}_i - y_i)^2}{n}}
\]

\[
\text{Bias} = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^{n} (\hat{y}_i - y_i)
\]

where AGB is the aboveground biomass in Mg·ha\(^{-1}\), \( \overline{H}_L \) is the lidar-derived mean forest canopy height metric (either SF_MCH_MEAN, or LF_RH75_MEAN), \( n \) is the number of plots, \( y_i \) is the observed value for plot \( i \), and \( \hat{y}_i \) is the predicted value for plot \( i \). We also calculated relative RMSE and biases by dividing the respective absolute values [cf. (7) and (8)] by the mean of predictions.

For validation purposes, the AGB models were embedded in a bootstrap procedure with 100 iterations. In each bootstrap iteration, we drew 12 times with replacement from the 12 available samples. In this procedure, on average 44% of the total number of samples (~5 samples) are not drawn. These samples were subsequently used as holdout samples for independent validation. In each bootstrap iteration, Adj. \( R^2 \) and relative and absolute RMSE and biases were computed based on the linear relationship between observed and predicted AGB using the holdout samples. Wilcoxon–Mann–Whitney rank-sum and equivalence tests were also used to assess if the mean of predicted AGB from the 100 iterations and the observed AGB mean differed at a significance level of 5%.

The height metrics SF_MCH and LF_RH75_MEAN were computed for the entire site at a spatial resolution of 100 m, and the fitted models were applied to map AGB at landscape level and summarized for the four vegetation types described in Section II-A.

The uncertainty analysis was performed at the landscape level, on the SF and LF AGB-derived maps for the entire site and for each subarea (see Section II-A). The total uncertainty was computed by integrating the pixel level errors over the regions of interest (ROI) and accounting for spatial autocorrelation of errors as follows [58]–[60]:

\[
\sigma_{\text{AGB}}^2 \left( \text{ROI} \right) = \frac{1}{m^2} \sum_{i=1}^{m} \sum_{j=1}^{m} \text{cov} \left( \sigma_i, \sigma_j \right)
\]

\[
= \frac{1}{m^2} \left( \sum_{i=1}^{m} \sigma_i^2 + 2 \sum_{i=1}^{m} \sum_{j<i}^{m} \rho \left( d \right) \sigma_i \sigma_j \right)
\]

where \( \sigma_{\text{AGB}}^2 \) is the variance of the estimator for the mean AGB for the ROI (i.e., the entire study area or subareas), \( m \) is the number of pixels, cov represents the covariance of pixel errors, \( \sigma_i \) is the estimated standard error (SE) of AGB at the \( i \)th pixel, and \( \rho(d) \) is the spatial correlation function based on an exponential semivariogram model depending on the distance \( d \) between pixels \( i \) and \( j \) within the ROI [58]. The square root of the variance \( \sigma_{\text{AGB}} \) is the SE, which is reported as the uncertainty [58]–[60] in our analysis.

E. Impacts of Sample Size on AGB Estimation

The GEDI instrument will operate with a footprint of 25 m similar to LVIS LF, but each footprint will be separated by 60 m along track and 500 m across track between each of 10 tracks. In order to evaluate the performance of GEDI for modeling AGB in tropical forests, we examine the number of footprints required to have a relatively unbiased estimate of AGB at 1 ha. By subsampling the LVIS LF footprints, we assessed the impacts of LF sample size on AGB modeling at the plot level. The footprint density from LVIS varied at different locations in the study area because of the spatial variation of overlapping flight lines during the campaign. On average, \( 72 \pm 23 \) (sd) footprints were registered over each field plot. We randomly downscaled the number of footprint to 10, 5, 3, and 1 for each plot, and LF_RH75_MEAN was then computed for AGB modeling. For the simulation where only one footprint shot was kept, we used the LF RH75 value for AGB modeling. Simulations were repeated 100 times and distribution histograms of \( R^2 \), RMSE, bias and model parameters were computed for each subsampling case. Thus, we were able to assess how well one GEDI footprint randomly located within a 1-ha plot will be able to retrieve plot AGB.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Comparison of SF and LF Lidar-Derived Ground Elevation and Canopy Height at Footprint Level

The SF and LF lidar-derived ground elevation data are strongly correlated (Adj. \( R^2 = 0.99 \); Fig. 3). The mean difference in ground elevation across all vegetation types is \( 1.01 \pm 0.99 \) m (n.s.; \( p \)-value = 0.78; Wilcoxon–Mann–Whitney rank-sum test). Difference in ground elevation between SF and LF is the highest in the most structurally complex OGF subarea (RMSE = 2.46 m, rRMSE = 0.63%). SF and LF lidar-derived RH98 over the study area show significant differences at footprint level for ODF, YCF, and SAV (mean RMSE = 2.06 ± 1.20 m, mean bias = 0.81 ± 0.71 m). Even though differences in RH98 can be higher than 10 m (RMSE ~ 4 m) in OGF, it is not significant for the four subregions combined and does not show a bias across the height range (bias = 0.47 m). Yet, based on equivalence tests, SF and LF lidar-derived ground elevation (ZG) and top-of-canopy height (RH98) at footprint level are found equivalent across all vegetation types.

Although we did not find significant differences between the two measurements when analyzing all footprints within the subregions, there were some large differences between the two datasets at individual footprint level (see Fig. 3). These differences reached up to 10 and 20 m for ground elevation and top-of-canopy height detection, respectively. Errors remained random though across footprints. By analyzing individual footprints with large differences in ZG and RH98, we found several potential sources of uncertainty in individual measurements when comparing the two datasets.

1) Ground topography is a significant source of error in LF lidar quantification of ZG and RH98. Slope (both its variations within a LF lidar footprint and its orientation against...
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Fig. 3. (a) Comparison of SF and LF lidar-derived ground elevation and (b) top-of-canopy height at footprint level using the equivalence test. Mixed OGF. Monodominant Okouné forest (ODF). YCFs of savanna. Grassland savanna (SAV). The equivalence plot design presented herein is an adaptation of the original equivalence plots presented by Robinson [57], examples are shown in [61]–[64]. The gray polygon represents the ±25% region of equivalence for the intercept, and the orange vertical bar represents a 95% confidence interval for the intercept. The LF ZG and RH98 are equivalent to SF ZG and RH98 on both intercept and slope as long as the orange bar remain completely within the gray polygon. If the gray polygon is lower than the orange vertical bar, the measurements would be negatively biased; and if it is higher than the orange vertical bar, the LF ZG and RH98 are positively biased. Moreover, the gray-dashed line represents the ±25% region of equivalence for the slope, the fit line is within the dotted lines, and the black vertical bar is within the gray rectangle, indicating that the pairwise measurements are equivalent. An orange and black vertical bar that are wider than the region outlined by the gray-dashed lines indicates high variance for SF measurements. The white dots are the pairwise measurements, and the solid line is a best-fit linear model for the pairwise measurements. The light gray-dashed line represented the 1:1 relationship.

Fig. 3. (a) Comparison of SF and LF lidar-derived ground elevation and (b) top-of-canopy height at footprint level using the equivalence test. Mixed OGF. Monodominant Okouné forest (ODF). YCFs of savanna. Grassland savanna (SAV). The equivalence plot design presented herein is an adaptation of the original equivalence plots presented by Robinson [57], examples are shown in [61]–[64]. The gray polygon represents the ±25% region of equivalence for the intercept, and the orange vertical bar represents a 95% confidence interval for the intercept. The LF ZG and RH98 are equivalent to SF ZG and RH98 on both intercept and slope as long as the orange bar remain completely within the gray polygon. If the gray polygon is lower than the orange vertical bar, the measurements would be negatively biased; and if it is higher than the orange vertical bar, the LF ZG and RH98 are positively biased. Moreover, the gray-dashed line represents the ±25% region of equivalence for the slope, the fit line is within the dotted lines, and the black vertical bar is within the gray rectangle, indicating that the pairwise measurements are equivalent. An orange and black vertical bar that are wider than the region outlined by the gray-dashed lines indicates high variance for SF measurements. The white dots are the pairwise measurements, and the solid line is a best-fit linear model for the pairwise measurements. The light gray-dashed line represented the 1:1 relationship.
footprint level. Our result in Fig. 3(b) shows that this error can be large and without any preference or bias toward one lidar measurement type. Simulation of LF footprint waveforms from SF measurements may include errors associated with the geometry of measurements, the form of Gaussian weighting and small geolocation error that may partially include or exclude large trees around the footprint edges.

B. Comparison of SF- and LF-Derived Ground Elevation and Canopy Height at Grid Levels

SF_ZG_MEAN and LF_ZG_MEAN were strongly correlated (AdjR.² = 0.99) with RMSE ≤ 1.02 m (0.31%) and bias ≤ 0.31 m (0.09%) whatever the spatial resolution (see Fig. 5). Moreover, LF_RH98_MEAN and SF_RH98_MEAN were also strongly correlated at all spatial scales with RMSE ≤ 1.66 m (6.14%) and bias ≤ 0.62 m (2.94%). The difference between SF and LF measurement of ZG_MEAN and RH98_MEAN decreased ~32% in relative RMSE from 25 to 100 m resolutions. Equivalence tests showed that SF and LF for both ZG_MEAN and RH98_MEAN were equivalent across all spatial resolutions, but Wilcoxon–Mann–Whitney rank-sum tests showed significant differences in SF and LF lidar-derived RH98 at spatial resolutions of 25 and 50 m [see Fig. 5(a2) and (b2)]. LF predominantly overestimated ground elevation when compared with SF lidar, yet differences exceeding 2 m were only found in the OGF area (see Fig. 6). For RH98_MEAN, we observed both under and overestimation, and differences ≥ 1.5 m were also found in the OGF area. As the grid cell size of the maps increased from 25 to 100 m, the spread of the differences of SF and LF also decreased as shown by the distribution of
their differences [see Fig. 6(a–g1.2–3.2)]. The comparison of the two sensors at different grid cells revealed the importance of aggregated measurements to capture the landscape variations of the forest structure. By averaging several LF lidar footprints within a 1-ha area, random errors between the two measurements were reduced significantly, allowing the measurements to converge in representing the landscape characteristics of the forests in the study area. Comparison of Figs. 3 and 5 readily shows the impact of LF footprint aggregation even with 25-m grid cells.

The comparison of LF- and SF-derived ground and canopy height measurements (see Figs. 5 and 6) might have been affected to an unknown degree due to the time lag of seven months between the two lidar datasets. However, this effect is subtle owing to the longer time spans that are needed for vertical structure of tropical forest to be changed. Moreover, this is presumably more influential on the RH98 metric on SAV and YCF than on OGF and ODF due to substantially faster growth rate of those subregions. The only potential impact on OGF and ODF layers would be due to natural tree falls or branch snapping between the two dates. Yet, these events are not widespread and although they may impact some LF lidar footprints (acquired after SF), the impact on the overall statistics should be small.

C. Comparison of SF and LF AGB Models

1) Biomass Model Performance: SF_MCH and LF_RH75_MEAN were significantly correlated with AGB at plot levels (see Table I). AGB was overestimated in both SF (Bias: 1.24 Mg · ha⁻¹) and LF (bias: 2.47 Mg · ha⁻¹) models after bootstrapping the performance with 100 repetitions. However, the Wilcoxon–Mann–Whitney rank-sum and equivalent tests showed that SF and LF AGB estimates at plot level are both equivalent to the ground-estimated AGB ($p$ value $\geq 0.93$). According to these tests, the mean AGB estimates from the bootstrapping procedure are equivalent with ground-estimated AGB.
Fig. 6. Spatial distribution of differences between SF and LF lidar-derived ground elevation (ZG_MEAN) and top-of-canopy height (RH98_MEAN) for different vegetation types and spatial resolutions. We focused on four vegetation types: (a1.1)–(a3.2) and (e1.1)–(e3.2) mixed OGF; (b1.1)–(b3.2) and (f1.1)–(f3.2) monodominant Okoumé forest (ODF), (c1.1)–(c3.2) and (g1.1)–(g3.2) YCFs of savanna; and (d1.1)–(d3.2) and (h1.1)–(h3.2) grassland savanna (SAV). Three spatial resolutions were considered: (a1.1) and (h1.1) 25 m, (a2.1) and (h2.1) 50 m, and (a3.1) and (h3.1) 100 m. The blue graphs represent the distribution of differences between SF and LF lidar-derived ZG_MEAN and RH98_MEAN. The black- and red-dashed lines represent the 0 and mean of difference distribution, respectively.

### TABLE I

Nonlinear Power-Law AGB Models ($n = 12$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lidar</th>
<th>Models</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>RMSE</th>
<th>Bias</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SF</td>
<td>$\text{AGB}<em>{SF} = 7.56 \times \text{SF}</em>{MCH}^{1.06}$</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>34.28</td>
<td>17.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LF</td>
<td>$\text{AGB}<em>{LF} = 6.40 \times \text{LF}</em>{RH75\text{MEAN}}^{1.11}$</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>37.28</td>
<td>18.72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

($p$ value $\geq 0.89$) as well [see Fig. 7(a)]. SF and LF AGB estimates at plot level, both from the model and bootstrapping procedure, are also equivalent ($p$ value $\geq 0.88$) [see Fig. 7(b)].

At the 1-ha scale, the number of plots was limited to 12, and although this captures variation in biomass across the forest types, it may not be enough to develop a more robust cross-validation test of model performance. However, the accuracies, both for training and validation models, presented herein were similar to those reported in previous studies [8], [14], [28]. This analysis can be done at different spatial scales to allow more GEDI footprints over larger landscapes, but requires either large ground plots or a more complex error propagation if compared with SF lidar-derived AGB. A more complex sampling approach to exactly mimic the GEDI samples over the landscape was beyond the scope of this study and hence is not considered in this paper.

2) **AGB Maps:** Landscape-wide AGB estimates based on models from Table I were mapped at 1-ha (i.e., 100 m $\times$ 100 m) grid cell resolution (see Fig. 8). The equivalence and Wilcoxon–Mann–Whitney rank-sum tests showed that LF and SF lidar-derived AGB maps were equivalent at landscape level ($p$ value $> 0.05$), with LF lidar-derived AGB predictions showing a RMSE and bias of 6.34 Mg · ha$^{-1}$ (2.84%) and 11.27 Mg · ha$^{-1}$ (5.05%), respectively, compared to SF ones. LF lidar-derived AGB was larger than SF-derived AGB across OGF [see Fig. 8(b)], that were predominantly distributed across areas with slopes larger than 10 degrees [see Fig. 8(c)]. The uncertainty of AGB estimates at landscape level for the entire study area and for the four ROI are derived by taking into account the pixel base model errors from the bootstrapping approach and the spatial correlation of errors as presented in Table II.
Fig. 7. Equivalence plots of the observed and predicted AGB (Mg ha\(^{-1}\)) obtained from the 100 bootstrapped model runs using (a) SF_MCH and (b) LF_RH75MEAN (\(N = 12\)). The white dots are the pairwise measurements, and the solid line is a best-fit linear model for the pairwise measurements. The horizontal red bar is the standard deviation of AGB estimates from the bootstrapping procedure. The light gray-dashed line represented the relationship 1:1. \(N = 12\).

Fig. 8. (a1) SF and (b2) LF lidar-derived AGB estimates at the landscape level. (b) Difference in AGB estimates between SF and LF lidar. (c) Slope (degree) map. Mixed OGF. Monodominant Okoumé forest (ODF). YCFs of savanna. Grassland savanna (SAV).
Table II
Summary of SF and LF Lidar-Derived AGB Estimates and Uncertainties at Landscape Level for the Entire Study Area and ROI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROI</th>
<th>Area (ha)</th>
<th>SF lidar</th>
<th>LF lidar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean ± Std (Mg · ha(^{-1}))</td>
<td>SE (Mg·ha(^{-1}); %)</td>
<td>Mean ± Std (Mg · ha(^{-1}))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OGF</td>
<td>74.15</td>
<td>320.13 ± 31.56</td>
<td>3.69 (1.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODF</td>
<td>32.42</td>
<td>323.72 ± 32.51</td>
<td>7.47 (2.30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YCF</td>
<td>15.92</td>
<td>48.97 ± 22.91</td>
<td>15.29 (31.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAV</td>
<td>51.69</td>
<td>12.68 ± 20.74</td>
<td>4.46 (30.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire study area</td>
<td>5044</td>
<td>223.01 ± 121.43</td>
<td>3.86 (1.73)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Std: standard deviation and SE: standard error (uncertainty).

Fig. 9. LF simulations for AGB modeling at 1 ha. (a1) and (b1) Relative and absolute RMSE and (a2) and (b2) biases. (c1) Parameters \(a\) and (c2) \(b\) and (d) \(R^2\) of the AGB models.

SF and LF lidar-derived biomass models are equivalent in performance based on Table I, but different in coefficients and if used interchangeably to predict forest AGB over the landscapes can introduce larger random or systematic errors. However, individually they provide similar mean biomass density and similar uncertainty over the study area. Results shown in Table II also suggest that the difference between the two approaches is within the margin of error in AGB estimation for each lidar approach [14], [54]. Those results also suggest that models developed with SF lidar data at landscape scale (≥1 ha) may be used for LF lidar data as long as equivalent height metrics between the two sensors are identified (e.g., mean top canopy height).

D. Impacts of LF Lidar Sample Size on AGB Estimation

Reduced sample size resulted in increased RMSE and bias values, but the effect was small until only one lidar footprint was selected [see Fig. 9(a1), (a2) and (b1), (b2)]. The variability of \(R^2\) and parameters \(a\) and \(b\) of the AGB models increased slightly in reduced sample sizes [see Fig. 9(c1), (c2), and (d)]. The results suggest that a minimum of three samples can potentially provide an unbiased estimate of AGB of a 1-ha area.

GEDI lidar is expected to provide global (between ±51° latitude) estimates of forest height structure at different spatial sampling schemas [68] such that unbiased forest biomass estimates are provided at 1-km\(^2\) (100 ha) resolution. However, by clustering the samples along tracks, there is a strong probability of having a minimum of three footprints within a 1-ha area. Building on the spatial distribution of a large number of 1-ha biomass values, further work involving geostatistical modeling or machine learning approaches [69] might help increase the spatial resolution of GEDI final products from 100 to 1 ha.

IV. Conclusion

In this paper, we performed a comparison of SF and LF lidar measurements of ground and forest structure, including AGB, across an AGB transition zone in central Gabon. We showed that in the dense and complex tropical forests of Central Gabon, the LF lidar measurements are equivalent to SF lidar measurements in characterizing ground elevation and maximum
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