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# Life cycle assessment of biofuels from *Jatropha curcas* in West Africa: a field study

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## Abstract

In recent years, liquid biofuels for transport have benefited from significant political support due to their potential role in curbing climate change and reducing our dependence on fossil fuels. They may also participate to rural development by providing new markets for agricultural production. However, the growth of energy crops has raised concerns due to their high consumption of conventional fuels, fertilizers and pesticides, their impacts on ecosystems and their competition for arable land with food crops. Low-input species such as *Jatropha curcas*, a perennial, inedible crop well adapted to semiarid regions, has received much interest as a new alternative for biofuel production, minimizing adverse effects on the environment and food supply. Here, we used life-cycle assessment to quantify the benefits of *J. curcas* biofuel production in West Africa in terms of greenhouse gas emissions and fossil energy use, compared with fossil diesel fuel and other biofuels. Biodiesel from *J. curcas* has a much higher performance than current biofuels, relative to oil-derived diesel fuels. Under West Africa conditions, *J. curcas* biodiesel allows a 72% saving in greenhouse gas emissions compared with conventional diesel fuel, and its energy yield (the ratio of biodiesel energy output to fossil energy input) is 4.7. *J. curcas* production studied is eco-compatible for the impacts under consideration and fits into the context of sustainable development.

*Keywords:* agronomy, biodiesel, energy, greenhouse gas, *Jatropha*, life cycle assessment

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## Introduction

Sustainable energy production and supply are strategic objectives for developed as well as developing countries. The energy sector plays a crucial role in attaining the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (Short, 2002), and the sustainability of modern economics is based in part on the capacity of countries to ensure their energy supplies (IEA, 2008). This is especially true for the transport sector, which consumes 30% of the world energy production, 99% of which is petrol-based (EIA, 2007). Transport contributes 21% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Watson *et al.*, 1996). As a consequence of this heavy reliance on fossil fuels, world

oil reserves are undergoing depletion at an unprecedented rate, resulting in a similar increase in atmospheric GHG concentrations. The recent oil crises and growing public awareness of the global energy issue have prompted the consideration of alternative, renewable sources of energy. This explains the vogue for liquid biofuels and the ambitious incorporation targets set by a number of countries (Fulton *et al.*, 2004; Kojima & Johnson, 2005). Current biofuels are actually based on traditional food crops such as maize, rapeseed or sunflower. A wide range of energy and GHG budgets has been reported for them, although they are generally favourable compared with conventional fossil fuels like gasoline and diesel (Hill *et al.*, 2006). However, these types of feedstock raise concerns because their cultivation are fuel-, fertilizer- and pesticide-intensive, with significant impacts on ecosystems. More recently, their

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role as competitors to food use and thus in the increase in food prices has been pinpointed (Sourie *et al.*, 2005; von Braun, 2007). The use of *Jatropha curcas* (Jatropha), an inedible crop able to adapt to marginal soils and semiarid climates, appears a promising alternative for the production of biodiesel in tropical and subtropical regions. Native to Central America, Jatropha is a small tree in the *Euphorbiaceae* family now found in all the tropical and subtropical zones (30°N; 35°S) (Jongschaap *et al.*, 2007). It produces inedible seeds containing between 28% and 38% oil (Kaushik *et al.*, 2007), which may be transformed into Jatropha methyl ester (JME), a good quality biodiesel (Vaitilingom & Liennard, 1997). Although Jatropha grows naturally in Africa, its cultivation on an industrial scale is a recent venture for which little reliable scientific data exists either for management or environmental assessment. At present, the main agro-environmental impact studies on this in Africa are largely qualitative, and concern the East African countries such as Kenya (Achten *et al.*, 2007) and Tanzania (Eijck & Romijn, 2007). More quantitative studies based on the life cycle assessment (LCA) methodology have recently been published to evaluate the GHG and energy balance of Jatropha oil or biodiesel compared with conventional fossil diesel, in India (Reinhardt *et al.*, 2007) and Thailand (Prueksakorn & Gheewala, 2008), but their results may not be extrapolated to West Africa due to important differences in pedoclimatic and growing conditions.

Here, we set out to evaluate the environmental impacts of biodiesel from Jatropha in West Africa, compared with conventional fuel or other biofuel types, in terms of GHG emissions and use of nonrenewable resources. We applied the LCA methodology to an actual field situation, using detailed data from a Jatropha experimental agronomic research station in Mali, observations of Jatropha smallholder farming on Ivory Coast, and literature data.

## Materials and methods

### *Historical background of Jatropha*

Jatropha, a native of Central America (USDA, 2007), was introduced in the Cape Verde islands by Portuguese sailors in the 16th century, then into Guinea Bissau from where it spread across Africa and Asia (Heller, 1996). Its natural habitat is arid and semiarid zones (Makkar, 2007), but it is also found in damp tropical regions such as Guatemala (where annual rainfall may exceed 4000 mm), North Vietnam and Thailand.

Jatropha grows as a bush of up to 6 m high, with a life span of up to 50 years (Henning, 2007). It belongs to the *Euphorbiaceae* family, which reproduces sexually or

vegetatively (cuttings, micropropagation) and produces dark brown fruits. The fruit contains seeds that make up 53% to 62% of its dry weight (Cuhna Da Silveira, 1934). When pressed, the seeds produce an oil that is traditionally used for soap making, and cake that is returned to the fields as organic fertilizers. Neither the Jatropha oil nor the cake are edible due to the toxic and antinutritional substances they contain such as phorbol esters (Gübitz *et al.*, 1999) and curcine, which is a strong purgative (Chachage, 2003). The phorbols themselves do not induce tumours but promote tumour growth following exposure to a subcarcinogenic dose of a carcinogen. They can thus be designated as cocarcinogens (Goel *et al.*, 2007).

The first tests of using Jatropha oil as a fuel date from the beginning of world war II. Interest was rekindled by the two oil crises, prompting CIRAD to launch a programme for using vegetable oils in engines, in particular Jatropha oil (Vaitilingom & Liennard, 1997).

Jatropha is also often used in the tropics as an animal repelling hedge plant and also against erosion (Heller, 1996). In Madagascar, a program financed by KfW (Banking German group) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fish is currently testing the potential of Jatropha plantations in five sites to prevent soil erosion and fires.

In recent years, Jatropha has also been promoted to reduce the dependence on fossil fuels in Africa. In Western Africa, the Senegal government launched an ambitious program on Jatropha production (with a 321 000 ha target). In 2004, Mali set up a national program for the conversion of Jatropha to energy, and an electrification project based on Jatropha oil is currently under examination. In Burkina Faso, several Jatropha plantations for biofuel production were set up supported by the national union for the promotion of Jatropha. In Kenya, the Kenya Biodiesel Association was created in 2008 to promote the production of JME in the country and a regulation was proposed to allow a 3% blending of biodiesel in conventional diesel fuel (Kalua, 2008).

Nevertheless, the industrial production of Jatropha is fairly recent: to date, almost 900 000 ha have been established: 765 000 ha in Asia, 120 000 ha in Africa and 20 000 ha in Latin America (Renner, 2008). The projected development of Jatropha production is 5 million ha for 2010 and 13 million ha for 2015 (Renner, 2008).

### *Biodiesel production from Jatropha in Ivory Coast*

We focused our analysis on a Jatropha biodiesel chain in Ivory Coast, a West African country with high potential for Jatropha production. We combined data from actual smallholder plantations in Ivory Coast and from both smallholder and experimental plantations in neigh-

bouring Mali, in the absence of such detailed data for Ivory Coast. The Mali *Jatropha* plantations were established in 2006, 2007 and 2008 by a local farmers' association and the agronomic experiments by the Centre de coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement (CIRAD) – (*Centre for International Cooperation on Developmental Agronomic Research*) and the AgroGeneration company. The Ivory Coast *Jatropha* smallholder plantations date from 2007 to 2008.

Ivory Coast extends from the Atlantic Ocean in the south to Ghana in the east, Burkina Faso and Mali in the north, and Guinea and Liberia in the west. In terms of climate and vegetation, there are two distinct zones. South of the 8th parallel, a subequatorial zone with high temperatures and humidity, above 2000 mm of annual rainfall, and four seasons, all favouring high forest growth rates. In the north of the country, there is a two-season tropical climate, savannahs with less and less trees, and average annual rainfall of about 1000 mm. The rainy season lasts from around June to October. In Mali, the experimental station is located in 'Teriya Bugu', where the annual rainfall averaged 748 mm between 2000 and 2007.

The production of *Jatropha* in Ivory Coast only started recently and there is no real organized structure at present. However, there are large plantation developments especially in the Ferkessédougou-Korogho zone where 1500 ha were planted in 2007, and at least 2000 more in 2008. These plantations, replacing former cotton fields, were established by smallholders grouping together in cooperatives. The abandonment of cotton growing positions *Jatropha* as a substitute for this crop, and explains its potential interest to local farmers. The structure of the first *Jatropha* plantations is in some ways similar to West African smallholder cotton cultivation.

This current, rudimentary development forms the basis for this study to evaluate the agro-environmental impact of the production of *Jatropha*-based biofuels. It may be considered as a model from which the probable development of *Jatropha* may be scaled-up, as follows. The agricultural production takes place 560 km north of Abidjan in the Ferkessédougou-Korogho zone, and it follows the semi-intensive cotton-growing model in which local farmers are grouped in supervised cooperatives. The latter provide agricultural inputs in the form of credit on the season's harvest, each smallholder, farming between 1 and 10 ha of *Jatropha*. Following harvest and dehulling, the seeds are sun-dried before truck transport to Ferkessédougou where they are cold pressed. This pressing close to the production area is justified because adequate facilities already exist there and are underutilized due to the cotton crisis. Secondly, there is a significant great potential for local use of the

*Jatropha* oil, in particular as fuel for stationary engines. The crude vegetable oil (CVO) is taken by railway to the seaport of Abidjan and shipped to France where it is transesterified into JME. Transesterification is a chemical reaction between a mole of a triglyceride and three moles of methyl alcohol to form a mole of glycerol and three moles of fatty acids methyl ester (biodiesel).

This model is based on transesterification in France because at the time of writing, the industrial capacities in the Ivory Coast and West Africa are very limited. In addition, the tax laws and regulations covering use of biofuels are still not clearly defined in West Africa whereas in Europe the market is the incentive, clear and structured. Later, when the legal framework has been set up, the biodiesel can be produced and used by the local market.

#### *Management of Jatropha*

The management data were obtained from the 'Teriya Bugu' experimental station in Mali. Two 5-ha experimental fields were selected with contrasting soil conditions. The first site (13°13.42N 5°29.5W) has been cultivated for 30 years, while the second site (13°12.974N 5°30.045W) is on marginal land that had not been cultivated for the past 50 years. Each site comprised two blocks with 24 trial plots (24 m × 24 m in size), and all agronomic treatments were duplicated. Since the management of *Jatropha* has not been optimized yet, four influential parameters were varied and tested: variety, fertilizer rate, plantation density and plant size.

*Jatropha* seedlings were assumed to be grown in trough nurseries, which are more adapted to local conditions and more accessible to farmers than those based on pots. The nursery troughs were 10 m × 1 m in size and 0.2 m in depth, and contained 1000 plants. Since the plantation density  $i$  the field is 1111 plants ha<sup>-1</sup>, 1222 nursery plants are needed per hectare because there is a 10% loss after transplantation. The substrate a mixture of 70% topsoil, 30% sand and a ternary fertilizer (N-P-K: 16-26-12). The average water requirements are 0.2 L plant<sup>-1</sup> day<sup>-1</sup> for the 45 days in the nursery. The seeds are coated and soaked in fungicide before sowing, and may be sprayed with insecticide in case of attack during the nursery period.

Before digging the holes, the ground is cleared and staked out. A plantation density of 1111 plants ha<sup>-1</sup> was found optimal for the pedoclimatic conditions of the Ferkessédougou-Korogho zone, which influences the growth and architecture of the plants. The holes are dug during the dry season which means that transplantation can take place right at the beginning of the rainy season (Table 1). Ternary fertilizer is applied into the holes during the planting out to avoid rapid

**Table 1** Cropping system for the *Jatropha* over the first plantation year

Operations	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Ground preparation			→									
Making holes				→	→	→						
Transplanting						→						
Fertilizer application						→	→					
Replacing dead plants							→					
Hand weeding							→	→	→			
Phytosanitary treatment							→	→	→	→		

**Table 2** Cropping system for the *Jatropha* from the second plantation year on

Operations	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Fertilizer application		→										
Hand weeding						→	→					
Phytosanitary treatment						→	→	→				
Pruning							→	→	→	→		
Harvesting (from year 4)								→	→	→	→	→

leaching of the nutrients with the rain, and the plants are pruned for the first time 7–8 months after planting. Ternary fertilizer is applied during the first 3 years (Table 2), with the following rates: 100 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> in the first year, 150 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> in the second year and 200 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> in the third. In the fourth year, 248 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> of ternary fertilizer and 201 kg ha<sup>-1</sup> of ammonitrate are applied. These inputs compensate the estimated removal of NPK nutrients in fruits (Achten *et al.*, 2008). From the fifth year on, *Jatropha* oilcake (3.75% N; 0.9% P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>6</sub>; 1.1% K<sub>2</sub>O, (Ghosh *et al.*, 2007) is applied as an organic fertilizer. This sequence allows to maintain soil fertility while improving the level of soil organic matter. Thus, from the fourth year on, the quantities of mineral elements supplied via the pulp, shells and oilcake returns are equivalent to those taken up by the plants. The plants are sprayed with two chemical insecticides (carbofuran and lambda cyhalothrine) and one fungicide (copper oxychloride) each year between June and September. Weeding is done in wintertime, mechanically between the rows and manually between plants on the same row. There is no harvesting for the first 3 years because the plants are heavily pruned to achieve an optimal architecture for seed production.

In the literature, yield data are highly variable for *Jatropha*. They may be as low as 2–3 tonnes dry seeds ha<sup>-1</sup> in the semiarid zones and marginal lands (Heller, 1996; Tewari, 2007), and reach 5 tonnes dry seeds ha<sup>-1</sup> in good soil with an annual rainfall from 900 to 1200 mm (Foidl *et al.*, 1996; Francis *et al.*, 2005; Tewari, 2007). In

Mali, Henning (1995) reported yields of 3 tonnes ha<sup>-1</sup> with a 1020 mm annual rainfall. In Paraguay, yields average 4 tonnes ha<sup>-1</sup> a 1370 mm annual rainfall (Achten *et al.*, 2008). Jongschaap *et al.* (2007) estimate a potential yield between 1.5 and 7.8 tonnes ha<sup>-1</sup>. In this study, we assumed yields equivalent to those reported in Nicaragua where the rainfall and planting density are similar to Ferkessédougou-Korogho (1200 mm, 1111 plants ha<sup>-1</sup>). The yields recorded on experimental fields in Nicaragua range between 3.5 and 5.0 tonnes ha<sup>-1</sup> after the establishment phase (Achten *et al.*, 2008). Thus, we assumed a medium yield of 4 tonnes dry seeds ha<sup>-1</sup> tonnes here.

Harvesting takes place from mid-July to mid-November, and we assumed each worker to pick an average of 83 kg of dry fruits (or 50 kg of dry seeds) per day. This rate varies strongly according to the density and yields of plantations. A value of 3 kg of grain fresh matter per hour was reported on *Jatropha* hedges Tanzania (Henning, 1995). For a plantation, the same author estimates an output of 2 kg dry seeds per hour (R. K. Henning, 2007, personal communication), while the Biomasa project in Nicaragua reports outputs of 18 kg fruit dry matter per hour for the 'best pickers' (Sucher, 1999). Our estimate is thus in the mid-range of the above values.

### LCA

LCA is an environmental analysis methodology, as defined by a set of ISO norms (ISO 14040–14044, 2006). It studies the potential environmental impacts

throughout the product life cycle, from the extraction of raw materials to the production, end use and disposal or recycling of the product. It may be used to calculate range of environmental impact categories, among which GHG emissions and their contribution to global warming, altogether with the use of nonrenewable resources (such as fossil hydrocarbons).

It comprises four steps:

- The definition of the objectives and scope of the study,
- The life-cycle inventory,
- The characterization of impacts,
- The interpretation.

#### *Goal and scope, system boundaries*

The main objective of this LCA is to compare the greenhouse gas emissions and nonrenewable energy consumption of the *Jatropha* biodiesel with those of conventional diesel fuel. The LCA results will also allow the environmental impacts of this biodiesel production to be further improved.

The function of the system is thus to supply biodiesel to road vehicles. As a consequence, the functional unit of the LCA (quantifying the unit function fulfilled by biodiesel) is the 1 MJ of JME or conventional gasoline lower heating value.

System boundaries include all the processes necessary to deliver the system's function (Jolliet *et al.*, 2005). For this LCA, we used the 'well to tank' scheme, i.e. from agricultural production to biodiesel storage. Thus, the combustion of the end-product in the vehicle is not included in our analysis. However, an estimation of GHG emissions assuming a complete combustion of the fuels, based on their carbon content is included. Only pure biodiesel is considered here. Although the study does not take into account CO<sub>2</sub> fixation during plant growth (through photosynthesis), it is compensated for by assuming that the CO<sub>2</sub> released from the combustion of biodiesel does not contribute to the greenhouse effect.

In terms of system boundaries, land use change (LUC) is presently one of the major problems in the assessment of energy crops. It may be direct (replacing a forest by farmland for biofuels) or indirect (when an energy crop displaces a food crop which in turn displaces a grassland or a forest). The results of these LUCs is a rapid and strong oxidation of soil organic carbon (SOC), causing the GHG emissions balance of the bioenergy chain to become negative several decades (Fargione *et al.*, 2008). Conversely, the production of energy crops on marginal soils or soils with low organic matter content can favour carbon sequestration and significantly improve the bio-

fuels' environmental balance (Reinhardt *et al.*, 2007). This LUC approach is only recent and has still not been taken into account in the main LCA's for biofuels (Reinhardt *et al.*, 2007). Although the impact of LUC has not been specifically evaluated in this LCA, because the *Jatropha* plantations studied have been made on old cotton fields (annual plants), it is probable that there has been a large quantity of carbon stocked in the soil and in the above-ground parts of the *Jatropha* (Ogunwole *et al.*, 2008) as the plant grew. This carbon stocking in *Jatropha* croplands will be greater than that of a cotton crop, and taking it into account would further improve its environmental balance. The carbon content of above- and below-ground parts of cotton crops may be estimated as follows: the overall accumulation of C in above-ground parts totals 1400 kg C ha<sup>-1</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup>, of which 630 kg C ha<sup>-1</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup> in stems (for grain cotton) and 140 kg C ha<sup>-1</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup> in roots (M. Cretenet, unpublished results from, CIRAD). Only the roots are returned to the soil, since cotton is managed as an annual crop to reduce the potential of disease and pest transmission from one growing season to the next (Martin & Deguine, 1997). Cotton stalks are harvested or, most often, burnt. Hence, the soil C input rate from cotton crops is limited to 140 kg C ha<sup>-1</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup> from their roots.

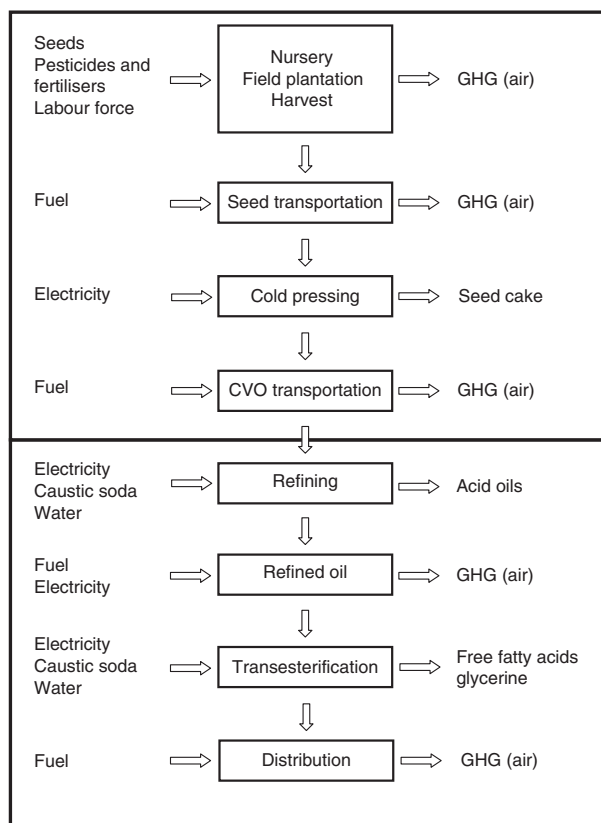
In contrast, soils under *Jatropha* were reported to accumulate 3140 kg C ha<sup>-1</sup> over the first 3.5 years of plantation (Reinhardt *et al.*, 2007), corresponding to an average of sequestration rate of 900 kg C ha<sup>-1</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup>. This additional sink was not considered in our baseline LCA, but its potential effect is dealt with in the discussion section.

Several scenarios have been envisaged for this LCA. The baseline (reference) scenario corresponds to the above-described chain, and the yield of *Jatropha* was set at 4 tonnes dry seeds ha<sup>-1</sup>. The method of energetic allocation was used for the following coproducts: glycerin and free fatty acids (FFA).

In scenario A, the yields were varied between 3 and 5 tonnes dry seeds ha<sup>-1</sup>.

Scenario B involved a truck transport of the oil from Ferkessédougou to the seaport of Abidjan, while scenario C took the energy needs of the farm labour into account.

The latter allowed the adaptation of LCA to the context of Africa, where farming is more labour-intensive and involves far less machinery than in developed countries. The energy needs for labour was approximated by their daily total food intake and, even if the farmer has others activity. The energy intake was set at 2300 kcal, the mean average for adults in sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2003). Energy use for the transportation of farmers to the plantations was disregarded, since it involves mostly walking. In scenario D, pure *Jatropha* oil was directly used in stationary engines.



**Fig. 1** Process tree system for the production of biodiesel from *Jatropha* grown by smallholders in Ivory Coast. For each elementary process (centre), the chart shows the inputs (left) and outputs (right), studied in this LCA. LCA, life cycle assessment.

### Life cycle inventory

This part consists of quantifying the various input/output flows of energy, matter or contaminants through the system, as sketched out on the process tree system (Fig. 1).

This inventory was based on the agricultural data obtained from the *Jatropha* experiments in Mali, supplemented with field data from *Jatropha* plantations in the Ivory Coast, and literature sources (see Appendix A).

The GHG emission and extraction factors (for non-renewable resources) were taken from the Ecoinvent database (Frischknecht *et al.*, 2007), by selecting the unit process closest to our conditions in terms of geographical validity. Emission factors are coefficients converting unit inputs (e.g., 1 kg of fertilizer N) into life-cycle GHG emissions incurred by the use of this input, while extraction factors express the fossil energy use of the same unit input.

### Evaluation of environmental impacts

Here, we focused on the GHG emissions ( $\text{CO}_2$ ,  $\text{CH}_4$ ,  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$ ) and the use of nonrenewable resources, corre-

sponding to the climate change and energy consumption impact categories. Other types of environmental impacts exist for LCA's (such as eutrophication and acidification), but they are beyond the scope of this study.

The emissions of  $\text{CO}_2$ ,  $\text{CH}_4$  and  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  were converted to  $\text{CO}_2$  equivalents using the 100-year global warming potentials (GWP) from the latest IPCC assessment report (Forster *et al.*, 2007): the GWP of  $\text{CH}_4$  and  $\text{N}_2\text{O}$  were 25 and 298, respectively. Energy consumption is given in MJ of nonrenewable energy.

In addition to their average values, the Ecoinvent database provides minimum and maximum values for emission factors, making it possible to assess the resulting uncertainty on life-cycle GHG emissions. This is not the case for the extraction factors, for which only average values are available. For inputs, alternative scenarios were set up to estimate the sensitivity of the results relative to their settings.

## Results

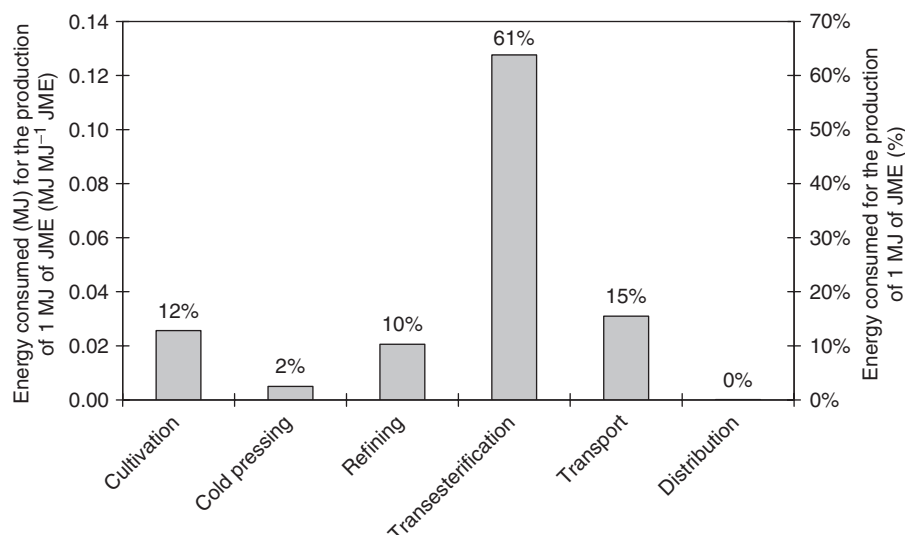
### Energy and GHG balance

Biofuel production requires direct (electricity, fuels, natural gas) and indirect (manufacturing of agricultural inputs, methanol ...) energy consumption. Figure 2 shows the amounts of energy consumed at the level of each elementary process for the production of 1 MJ of JME. The energy expense is 0.21 MJ, which translates as an energy yield of 4.7. Thus, for each MJ of fossil fuel consumed to produce JME, 4.7 MJ of JME energy content are produced.

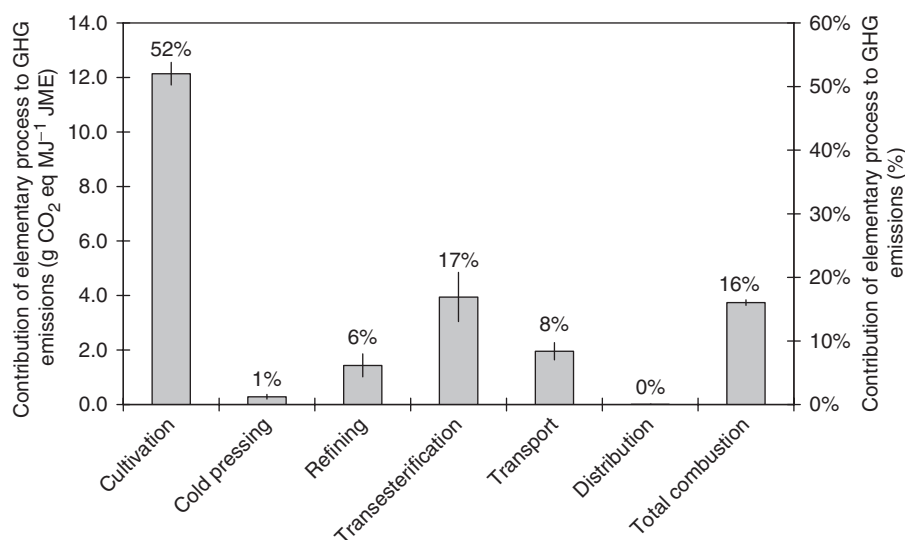
The actual *Jatropha* cultivation phase only represents 12% of total energy consumption (Fig. 2) and uses less energy than the transport steps (of seeds, oilcake and unrefined *Jatropha* oil), with a 15% share. The transesterification process is the main energy consumer, requiring 61% of the life-cycle energy needs.

The breakdown of GHG emissions across the various elementary processes was as follows: *Jatropha* cultivation accounted for 52% of the overall emissions, while the shares of the transesterification and final combustion steps were 17% and 16%, respectively (Fig. 3).

Large shares (93%) of the emissions occurring during the agricultural step are due to fertilizers. In spite of the sparing use of pesticides, the latter are responsible for 2.4% of the total GHG emissions and almost 6.8% of the energy consumption. This relatively high share of energy consumption by pesticides, is in part down to the high amount of energy necessary to manufacture them. The transesterification is the most energy demanding stage with more than 61% of the total consumption, and this is because of the large volume of methanol (Fig. 4) used in the process (1130 kg of CVO



**Fig. 2** Energy consumed (MJ) by an elementary process for the production of one MJ of JME. This figure shows the amounts of energy consumed per elementary process (actual values and relative values). JME, Jatropha methyl ester.



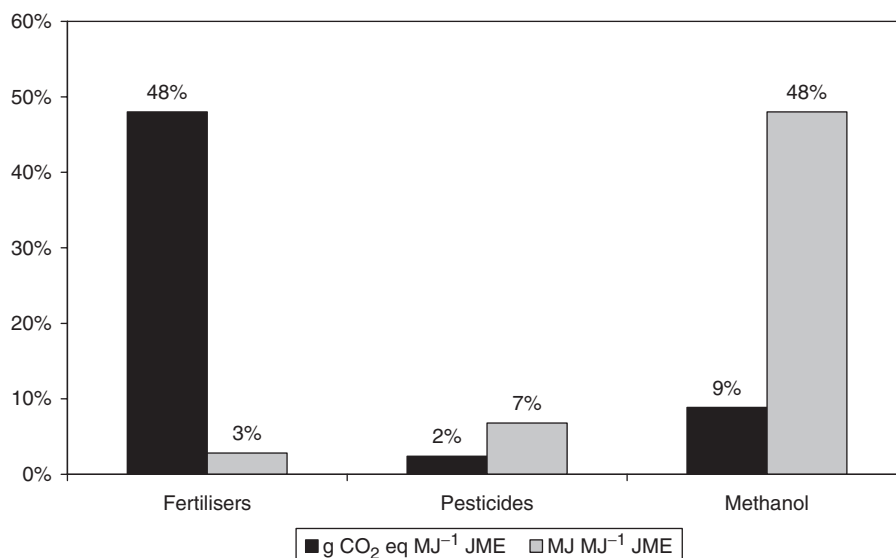
**Fig. 3** Contributions of the elementary processes to GHG emissions. Those shown are the GHG emissions (g CO<sub>2</sub> eq actual values and relative values) for each process during the production of one MJ of JME. The error bars correspond to the uncertainty on GHG emissions. JME, Jatropha methyl ester.

and 112 kg of methanol are required to produce 1 tonne of JME). Besides methanol, transesterification requires phosphoric acid (0.8 kg), sulphuric acid (0.5 kg), caustic soda (18 kg), water (154 kg), natural gas (968 MJ) and electricity (22 kWh) to produce 1 tonne of JME. Co-products are issued during transesterification process: glycerin (70 kg tonne<sup>-1</sup> of JME) and FFA, 77.2 kg tonne<sup>-1</sup> of JME). These two coproducts can be promoted by combustion in hot water tank.

The stages which emit the highest amounts of GHG's are not the most energy demanding and the converse is also true, thus it is necessary to optimize both the fertilizer use and the transesterification in order to reduce the energy consumption and the GHG emissions of the production.

Transport accounts for 15% of the total energy consumption linked to JME production, of which 53% comes from the transport of the Jatropha oil by boat





**Fig. 4** GHG emissions and energy consumption linked to fertiliser use, methanol, and pesticides during the production of one MJ of JME. JME, Jatropha methyl ester.

**Table 3** Percentage differences between results for alternative scenarios and the reference scenario

	Reference	Yield 3 tonnes (%)	Yield 5 tonnes (%)	Transport by truck (%)	Labour force (%)	Jatropha oil (%)
gCO <sub>2</sub> eq/MJ	24	17	-10	8	0	-45
% reduction CO <sub>2</sub> eq	72	-7	4	-3	0	18
MJ/10 MJ JME	2.11	4	-2	14	29	-82
Energy yield	4.7	-4	2	-12	-27	452

The energy yield is the ratio of one MJ of JME to the amount of energy (MJ) consumed to produce it. The relative values of the alternative scenarios are calculated using the following formula:  $X\% = (\text{Value of alternative scenario} - \text{Value of reference scenario}) / \text{Value of reference scenario}$ .

MJ/10 MJ JME is the quantity of fossil energy consumed to produce 10 MJ of JME.

JME, Jatropha methyl ester.

from the port of Abidjan to France (6528 km), and 22% comes from the initial journey by rail from Ferkessédougou to Abidjan (564 km). This intercontinental oil transport is slightly unfavourable on the overall energy balance sheet and GHG of the biodiesel. Indeed, local transformation of the oil into JME would achieve an energy yield of 5.2 compared with 4.7 for the reference scenario, i.e. an improvement of more than 10%, reducing at the same time the GHG emissions by 2% over the corresponding reference value.

Overall, the production and combustion of a MJ of JME emits 23.5 gCO<sub>2</sub>eq, whereas the corresponding emissions of 1 MJ of conventional diesel fuel emit 83.8 gCO<sub>2</sub>eq (EC, 2008). Thus, the production of this Jatropha biodiesel under our conditions allows a 72% reduction in GHG emissions compared with conventional diesel fuel.

#### Alternative scenarios

Various scenarios with alternative sets of parameters were implemented to test the robustness of our LCA results to our baseline hypotheses. In scenario A, the Jatropha yields were varied between 3 and 5 tonnes dry seed ha<sup>-1</sup>. The lower yield bound increased GHG emissions by 17% and energy consumption by 4%, whereas the higher yield reduced the GHG emissions and the energy consumption by 10% and 2%, respectively (Table 3, Fig. 5). These results may be explained by the fact that the energy consumptions and GHG emissions for growing Jatropha do not vary with seed yield (Jatropha management is fixed irrespective of final yield). As the final quantity of JME produced per ha of Jatropha plantation is directly correlated to the seed yield, the energy balance

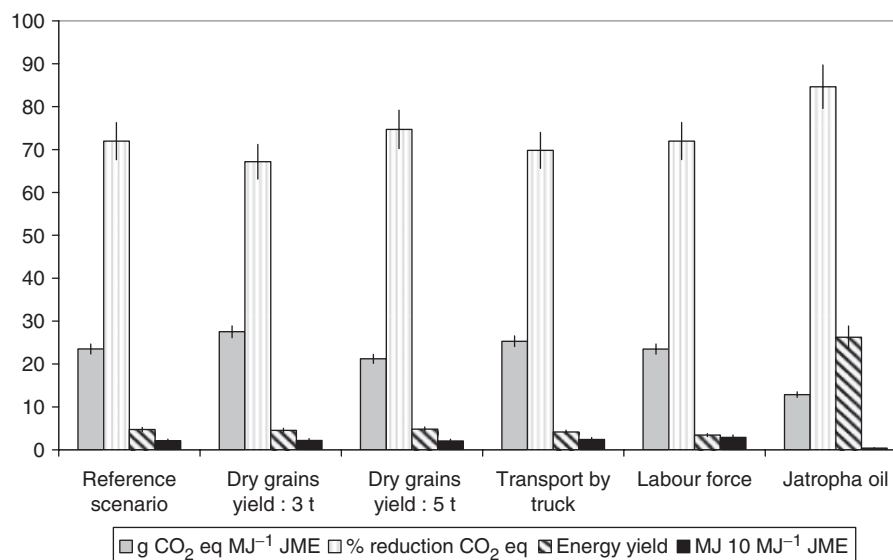


Fig. 5 Energy and greenhouse gas balances for the five scenarios studied in this LCA. The error bars correspond to the uncertainty on GHG emissions. LCA, life cycle assessment.

and GHG emissions of JME improve as the yield increases.

In the reference scenario, Jatropha oil is transported by freight train over 564 km from Ferkessédougou to Abidjan. Using trucks instead increased the GHG emissions and energy needs by 8% and 14%, respectively. This increase is mainly due to the lower load capacity of trucks compared with freight trains, resulting in higher GHG emissions and energy consumption per tonne kilometre transported.

Unlike European energy crops, the Jatropha production model studied is not motorized, and uses a large labour force. Very few LCA's take into account this labour force (Hill *et al.*, 2006). Here, we assessed its impact by including the daily energy ration of workers in our system. The labour force increased the energy consumption needed to produce 1 MJ of JME by 29%, which is significant.

Lastly, pure vegetable oil from Jatropha may be directly sold on local markets and used as fuel for motor-driven pumps and mills, and rural electrification. Such a direct usage reduced the GHG emissions by 45% and the energy consumption by 82% relative to the reference scenario. The fact that energy and GHG reductions do not follow the same pattern is due to the fact that these indicators are driven by two distinct subsystems (Fig. 1): the upstream cultivation step predominates the GHG emissions on the one hand, and the downstream industrial transformation (especially the transesterification process) determines energy consumption. Direct use of the oil does not change the GHG emissions from Jatropha cultivation, but reduces

to a large extent energy consumption because the transesterification step is unnecessary.

Across the various scenarios, the energy yield varied from 3.7 to 26.4, and the percentage reduction in GHG emissions compared with conventional diesels from 67% to 84%.

## Discussion

### *Sensitivity of LCA to system parameters*

The yield hypotheses had a significant impact on the GHG and energy balances of Jatropha biodiesel. An increase of 1 tonne seeds ha<sup>-1</sup> resulted in a 10% reduction in fossil energy use compared with the baseline value of 4 tonnes ha<sup>-1</sup>. It thus appears critical to pursue field experiments and extension to obtain realistic, large-scale estimates of Jatropha yields.

Transporting Jatropha by truck instead of freight train had a similar impact as Jatropha yield, and it highlights the benefits of using existing, high-efficiency infrastructures.

Unlike energy crops in northern countries, Jatropha production in Ferkessédougou is not motorized, and requires substantial manpower. This has a large potential for creating value and employment for the local populations. Taking this labour force into account in an LCA study is rather unusual, however, because of its importance in the production of Jatropha, we estimated its effect using a worker's average daily ration. Including the labour force had a very significant impact, since it reduced the energy yield by 27% (Table 3).

The end-use of Jatropha oil had the most impacts on its overall energy and GHG intensities. Local use as fuel for fueling pumps, mills or small-scale power production increased the energy yield from 4.7 to 26.4 compared with the baseline JME end-use, and increased GHG savings (compared with conventional diesel) from 72% to 85%. Given that 92% of the population in sub-Saharan Africa do not have yet access to electricity (Davidson *et al.*, 2008), and that human energy remains the only energy source available in certain rural areas, locally use of Jatropha oil may help providing an access to basic energy services. However, technically, the direct use of CVO as a fuel requires a modification or adaptation of the engines.

Regarding LUC impacts, we assumed that Jatropha was grown on former cotton fields and that it was neutral in terms of SOC content. As shown in section 2.4, Jatropha may sequester about  $750 \text{ kg C ha}^{-1} \text{ yr}^{-1}$  compared with cotton crops, which is significant in terms of SOC dynamics. Taking into account this additional soil C sink made possible by growing Jatropha would dramatically reduce the life-cycle GHG emissions and actually turn this pathway into a net sink of GHG (of  $2270 \text{ kg CO}_2 \text{ eq ha}^{-1}$  or  $44 \text{ g CO}_2 \text{ eq MJ}^{-1}$  JME). These results illustrate the robust opportunities and the high potential of Jatropha to attract carbon credits from the Clean Development Mechanism market (Achten *et al.*, 2008) especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. In the context of the CDM, that region's current share in the project pipeline is only 1.4% – only 53 out of 3902 projects – or nine times smaller than its global share in GHG emissions, including emissions from land use and LUC (De Gouvello *et al.*, 2008).

#### Comparison with other LCAs and biofuels

Comparing the LCA results of biofuels is delicate because specific characteristics may vary widely across studies, such as feedstock type, production region, cropping systems used and crop yields, transport distances and energy sources. Some of these factors always

exert a major effect on LCA results, together with LCA hypotheses (system boundaries and functional unit) (Farrell *et al.*, 2006).

Our results for Jatropha biodiesel may be compared with LCA studies carried out in India (Reinhardt *et al.*, 2007) and Thailand (Prueksakornand & Gheewala, 2008). The former focused on JME production in the Bhavnagar region of India, and is characterized by saline and eroded, marginal soils. The term marginal soils is used to characterize zones with pedoclimatic conditions unsuitable for conventional crops (in particular for food production). This study uses system expansion for all coproducts, and the Jatropha production is motorized and requires irrigation for the first 3 years. This implies a high consumption of fuel and irrigation water. (Reinhardt *et al.*, 2007), and results in a much lower performance. The energy yield was only 1.8, compared with 4.7 in our baseline scenario, and the GHG savings compared to fossil diesel were only marginal (11%), i.e. six times lower than our baseline (Table 4).

Although it is proven that Jatropha grows on marginal soils (Spaan *et al.*, 2004), the commercial viability of oil production on these soils is still unproven (Francis *et al.*, 2005). The comparison of two types of large scale Jatropha productions (for biofuels) clearly shows that such a project on marginal soils generally translates into, on the one hand an increase in production costs linked to investments for irrigation and ground preparation, and on the other, lower seed yields (and oil yields). These drawbacks translate not only into lower energy yields and less reduction in GHG percentages but also lower economic profitability.

For Jatropha grown on regular soil across 20 provinces in Thailand, Prueksakornand & Gheewala (2008) report higher energy yields, ranging from 1.93 to 11.98 with an average value of 6.03. This is similar to our results in terms of range and average (4.7), although the plantations were much more machinery- and input-intensive. However, their results were very sensitive to the end-use of coproducts.

**Table 4** Comparisons between the LCA of Heidelberg IFEU and that of AEDR/AgroGeneration/CIRAD

	Plants $\text{ha}^{-1}$	kg N $\text{ha}^{-1}$	kg P $\text{ha}^{-1}$	kg K $\text{ha}^{-1}$	Dry seed yield $\text{tonnes ha}^{-1}$	tonnes CVO $\text{ha}^{-1}$	tonnes JME $\text{ha}^{-1}$	Energy yield	MJ/MJ JME	$\text{CO}_2 \text{ eq/}$ MJ JME	% reduction of GHG
AEDR/CIRAD/ AgroGeneration (Jatropha)	1111	108	25	30	4	1.2	1.05	4.7	0.2	23.5	72
IFEU Heidelberg (Jatropha)	1667	48	19	53	1.4	0.4	0.36	1.8	0.6	74.5	11

LCA, life cycle assessment; JME, Jatropha methyl ester.

Lastly, the performance of *Jatropha* was far superior to current, temperate first-generation biofuels, whose energy GHG savings compared with fossil equivalents typically vary from 20% to 50% (Quirrin *et al.*, 2006).

#### *Barriers to Jatropha development*

Our results evidenced the significant benefits provided by *Jatropha* in West Africa regarding energy and GHG savings. However, further development of this species for bioenergy purposes raise a range of technical and non-technical barriers, as underlined by Openshaw (2000).

First, the fact that *Jatropha* is not edible cannot imply that it does not compete with food crops since it may compete for land, unless if grown on marginal land unsuitable for food crops. In our case, *Jatropha* was considered here as an alternative to cotton crops, whose value has considerably dropped in the last few years. Because these crops are no longer profitable, many cotton growers have abandoned them and may be interested in alternative crops, among which *Jatropha* may be a good candidate. There is thus no direct competition with food crops as such, since *Jatropha* would displace a nonfood crop and provide an opportunity for diversification and complementary incomes. Still, direct LUC may occur should the price of cotton go up again and stimulate the growth of cotton crops, which would make it necessary to find new arable land for *Jatropha*. This would dramatically affect the GHG balance of *Jatropha* oil, in the same way (but opposite) as the inclusion of C sequestration rate compared with cotton crops.

The interest of West African farmers, in particular smallholders, will be ultimately determined by the profits they may expect from *Jatropha*. However, the yields are still quite uncertain, and farmers might be reluctant to grow *Jatropha* if it does not meet their expectations (Foidl & Eder, 1997). If *Jatropha* was to be developed in commercial plantation, as was envisaged here, its management should be further investigated and optimized, in particular regarding the concern raised by Openshaw (2000) on the nutrient exports by the plants.

The harvest of *Jatropha* is labour-intensive, so farmers will have to be flexible and optimize their work schedule to accommodate *Jatropha* in their farm organization. The production of biodiesel also requires specific technical skills, in particular for the storage and drying of seeds which are crucial steps to obtain a vegetable oil of sufficient grade for esterification. Another critical characteristic of *Jatropha* is that its oil is not edible, and the long-term side effects of skin contact with the phorbol esters contained in the grains have not been fully investigated yet.

Some cobenefits of *Jatropha* have been proven, such as protection against soil erosion (Openshaw, 2000).

However, the commonly held view that the toxicity of *Jatropha* prevents damages by insects, but it is simply not proven. *Jatropha* itself may be attacked by such pests (Grimm & Maes, 1997), which lowers its yield and may incur additional pesticide costs. *Jatropha* is also a host plant for the cassava virus.

#### **Conclusion**

In principle, *Jatropha* has a significant agronomic, environmental and economic potential. Our LCA based on detailed field study on *Jatropha* cultivation and transformation in West Africa show that, regardless of the technical variants, biodiesel production based on *Jatropha* presents higher fossil energy and GHG savings than most current biofuels when it is used as a substitute for conventional diesel fuel. This is still the case when *Jatropha* oil is transported to Europe for transformation into biodiesel. Thus, *Jatropha* biodiesel has a strong potential to contribute to climate change mitigation and increased energy independence. The cultivation of *Jatropha* appeared as a critical stage in the biodiesel life cycle, along with the LUC pattern. The good performance of *Jatropha*, compared with previous work on other continents, may be mainly explained by the perennial nature of the crop and by the decentralised, nonmotorized and low-input production system. However, this assessment should be completed regarding potential local impacts linked to the cultivation phases (eutrophication, ecotoxicity ...), which have not been covered in this LCA.

Finally, in addition to its more favourable environmental impacts, *Jatropha* cultivation participates in the diversification of agricultural productions in West Africa, and better still, it constitutes a new, interesting production sector for creating jobs and income for the producers. Whatever happens, this new *Jatropha* production drive must be soundly managed, in order to achieve synergies with the local food crops.

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**Appendix A****Table A1** The main sources of data used in the LCA

Data	Sources	Dates
Choice of nursery	Mali experiments	2007–2008
Crop field density	Mali experiments	2007–2008
	Observation in the field, Ivory Coast	2008
Labour force	Bibliographical study	Henning, (2007)
	Mali experiments	2006–2008
Seed yield	Mali experiments	2006–2008
	Bibliographical study	Reinhardt <i>et al.</i> (2007)
Fertilizers	Mali experiments	2008
Pesticides	Mali experiments	2008
Definition of technical itineraries for cultivation	Mali experiments	2006–2008
	Observations in the field, Ivory Coast	2008
Jatropha oil analyses	CIRAD/AgroGeneration	2008
Jatropha cake analyses	CIRAD/AgroGeneration	2008
Industrial data	Factory builders	2008
Emission and extraction factors	Ecoinvent database	Frischknecht <i>et al.</i> (2007)
Impact factors	IPCC	Forster <i>et al.</i> (2007)

For chemicals, the emission and extraction factors refer to the pure active substance.  
LCA, life cycle assessment.