



USIPEACE BRIEFING

BEYOND EMERGENCY RESPONSES IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: Regional Solutions for a Regional Conflict

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INTRODUCTION

Building peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) troubled regions requires sustained intervention by a wide range of stakeholders to address aspects of the regional political economy that perpetrate cross-border abuse of the country's abundant resources. Violent competition for control of mineral resources, particularly in northeastern DRC, has involved regular forces as well as militia from the subregion and contributed to a flourishing war economy, many years after the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement in 1999.

Securing and maintaining peace in the DRC will require two innovations: first, a greater focus on regional players and dynamics; and second, a shift from ad hoc humanitarian approaches to a more comprehensive effort that addresses trade-offs inherent in the regional war economy. Such an initiative must reach beyond short-term humanitarianism, must reflect regional priorities, and ensure that political leaders address the overlooked political economy of the conflict. This paper summarizes the main conclusions and recommendations at a conference of scholars and policy makers from the subregion held in Burundi in June 2009.¹ It examines options for sustainable regional solutions and outlines policy recommendations for a broad range of stakeholders.

BACKGROUND

A recent development points to the viability of collaborative solutions to the problems facing the Great Lakes region, as well as the challenges, these countries continue to face. In December 2008, the DRC and Rwandan governments reached an agreement that allowed the Rwandan Defence Forces (RDF) into the North Kivu province to flush out the Hutu rebel militia, the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda or Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR). Although the results have been mixed, this deal improved relations between the countries, while also creating momentum for a settlement with the Tutsi militia, the National Congress for the Defence of the People or Congrès national pour la défense du peuple

¹ This USIPeace Briefing summarizes conclusions and recommendations from conference entitled: "The Great Lakes Region: Beyond Emergency Responses," co-hosted by USIP, the Institute of Critical International Studies at Emory University, the University of Burundi, and the Carnegie Foundation of New York from June 4-5 2009. The conference brought together leading scholars and policymakers from the subregion. The keynote address was delivered by Alan Doss, the special representative of the United Nations Secretary General to the DRC.

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(CNDP).² On the other hand, the continuing cross-border dimensions of the conflict highlight the need for greater regional collaboration if lasting peace is to be attained. For example, neighboring Uganda has continued to clash with the Lord's Resistance Army in northeastern DRC, while the Kinshasa government has accused Angola of pilfering oil from Congolese territory.³

Violent conflict in the DRC has had particularly dire consequences for the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu (the Kivus), where every day 1,500 people die, 1,650 people are displaced, and numerous women and girls are sexually assaulted.⁴ The international community has responded by providing \$2 billion per year toward humanitarian and peacekeeping efforts in the DRC; however, less than one percent of that financial assistance has been directed toward derailing the economic drivers of the violence.⁵ The illicit mineral trade has sustained armed combatants, undermined peace efforts, and further weakened the country's already shaky social, political and economic institutions. While the international community has increased the number of peacekeepers and financial assistance over the years, lasting peace and sustainable human security continue to elude this troubled region. This is partly because consistent, sustained and collaborative initiatives have not been adopted to address the subregion's complex war economy.

RESOURCE MISMANAGEMENT AND THE WAR ECONOMY

Armed combatants and some mining companies have exploited innocent Congolese and wrested control of the country's immense mineral wealth – particularly in the Kivus. Groups like the FDLR, the Mai Mai, CNDP and other armed forces apparently sustain their operations by trading lucrative minerals, such as coltan, cassiterite (tin ore), diamonds, and gold, as well as from exacting bribes and “taxes.”

For example, smuggled tin ores leave the DRC undocumented and untaxed, depriving the country of much needed public funds. The stolen minerals are transported to ports in Kenya and

² Economist Intelligence Unit, “The Democratic Republic of Congo: Country Report,” The Economist, June 2009.

³ Ibid.

⁴ International Rescue Committee, “Mortality in the Democratic Republic of Congo: An Ongoing Crisis”. International Rescue Committee, January 2008.

⁵ Prendergast, John and Noel Atama, “Eastern Congo: An Action Plan to End the World's Deadliest War,” Enough, July 16, 2009. www.enoughproject.org/publications/eastern-congo-action-plan-end-worlds-deadliest-war

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Tanzania before being shipped to smelting and processing companies in Asia.⁶ These metals are then manufactured as part of electronic devices, such as cell phones and video games, before entering the international marketplace. Since there are no binding international agreements to regulate trade in “conflict minerals,” (such as the Kimberly Process for ‘blood diamonds’), armed combatants continue to exploit these minerals with impunity. Growing global demand in the electronics industry has inadvertently intensified violent competition for tin ores from this subregion.⁷

But how are DRC’s precious minerals raided with impunity? The apparent inability of the Congolese government to provide effective governance in these areas, the inadequate and seldom enforced international regulations and huge profits from this trade constitute a formidable trifecta. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons facilitate impunity and hinder the implementation of effective strategies to alter incentive structures in the DRC’s war economy. Since 1990, the use of small arms has destroyed more lives in the Great Lakes region of Africa (Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi and the DRC) than anywhere else in the world.⁸

It is not all bad news. There are a few examples of how viable subregional trade could promote peace and sustainability. The Nande traders of the Butembo community in the North Kivu province are one such example where local communities have changed the incentive structures so that the local economy encourages peace, not violence. The ethnically homogeneous Nande community has managed to self-govern a secure and relatively prosperous community amidst lucrative mineral wealth by establishing cohesive social networks, also ensuring that profits from the minerals benefit local residents. Unlike other mineral rich communities far from the capital, Butembo has prospered from a flourishing gold trade by enforcing communal accountability and linking the business sector with the provision of social services. They have thus far been able to avoid the worst of the conflict and ensure that trade in natural resources benefits the entire community.

⁶ The Enough Project Team with the Grassroots Reconciliation Group, “A Comprehensive Approach to Congo’s Conflict Minerals,” Enough, April 24, 2009. www.enoughproject.org/publications/comprehensive-approach-conflict-minerals-strategy-paper

⁷ Lezhnev, Sasha and John Prendergast, “Electronic Companies and Consumers Can Help Stop Congolese Bloodshed,” July 29, 2009. www.huffingtonpost.com/john-prendergast/electronics-companies-and_b_247372.html

⁸ Mulegwa Zihindula, “Small Arms and Light Weapons Proliferating in Africa,” Global Ministries, August 21, 2000. http://gbgm-umc.org/global_news/full_article.cfm?articleid=4542

REGIONAL SOLUTIONS

To the extent that the underlying causes and drivers of the DRC conflict are regional, solutions must involve its neighbors. Viable economic activity and effective governance are at the core of such solutions, which must go beyond ad hoc responses to emergency situations to more targeted and sustained interventions that strengthen positive subregional relationships. Such interventions should be both welfare-enhancing and peace-promoting. These sentiments were echoed by participants at the June 2009 conference (see footnote 1). They discussed a number of strategies to encourage lasting solutions to this crisis by focusing on regional initiatives that involve good governance, cultural sensitivity and legitimate subregional trade.

Promoting Legitimate Trade

Conference participants stressed the need to legitimize the mineral trade in the subregion. They highlighted the importance of providing incentives for armed combatants to give up their weapons and engage in formal trade, while also compensating those who risk losing more than they might gain from remaining in the illicit trade of minerals. In December 2008, retired U.S. Ambassador Herman Cohen proposed an economic common market, encompassing the DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.⁹ In his view, the free movement of people, a fairer distribution of resources and free trade through formal channels would benefit the entire subregion. Cohen's idea presumes that legitimate economic opportunities in a safer, steadier marketplace would provide a viable alternative to the dangerous lifestyle of rebels and militia. Legitimizing regional trade, the participants argued, would be critical in curbing the illicit mining trade which fuels violence and unrest.

Fostering Regional Complementarity

The economy of the Great Lakes region is largely extractive and outward-oriented. This has reduced the attractiveness of subregional trade, which could increase interdependence and reduce the propensity for violent conflict. Conference participants called for more regional "complementarity" in order to strengthen economic linkages and create incentives for bolstering regional security. Participants argued that copper from the DRC could be transported to smelting plants in Zambia before leaving the ports of Kenya and Tanzania for the international market. Although they noted that these developments would require reliable supply chains and

⁹ Herman Cohen, "Can Africa Trade its Way to Peace?" *The New York Times*, December 15, 2008. www.nytimes.com/2008/12/16/opinion/16cohen.html.

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complex logistics, they opined that fostering regional complementarity is a step in the right direction.

Reactivating the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries (CEPGL)

Created in 1976 as an economic partnership including the DRC, Burundi and Rwanda, the CEPGL was initially charged with fostering cooperation in political, economic and social aspects of society. Unfortunately, the CEPGL process was derailed before it could ever materialize. A revitalized CEPGL would integrate regional armed forces under one command, lay the foundation for police and judicial cooperation and harmonize economic policies/regulation. Some participants believed that the CEPGL could provide the framework for a viable regional common market. Others warned that attempts at regional collaboration via the CEPGL would be undermined by fragile governance in member states and the recent history of conflict and climate of mistrust. Moreover, even if a regional community were successfully established, it would have to compete for attention and resources with a number of existing subregional and regional organizations. They also highlighted the growing influence of nonregional partners (like China) that could make efforts to forge regional consensus more difficult.

Ensuring Culturally Sensitive Regional Cooperation

Other participants stressed the value of culturally sensitive regional cooperation. This idea has particular resonance in the DRC, which has approximately 250 ethnic groups and 700 local languages and dialects. Some argued that the example of the Nande demonstrates how traditional structures that underpin all Congolese communities could provide a framework for welfare-enhancing economic progress and lasting peace. In their view, the common Swahili culture could serve as the foundation for interregional understanding and cooperation. Others countered by stating that the common Swahili culture that lost its relevance as a result of colonialism and that the ethnically homogeneous Nande had not been confronted with the same ethnic tensions of other regions that are more ethnically diverse. There was, however, some consensus that a lot can be achieved through education and sensitization.

ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations Mission to the DRC (MONUC) plays a central role in the establishment of peace and stability. From providing security to coordinating activities of other branches of the U.N. (i.e., the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Food Programme), MONUC is also instrumental in shaping the development agenda of the DRC. While MONUC

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has recently shifted even more focus onto the Kivu provinces, the mission might eventually place more emphasis on shoring up areas with budding economies to bolster overall economic performance of the state.

Alan Doss, the special representative of the U.N. Secretary General in the DRC, warned that the mission is overstretched and remains shorthanded on peacekeepers and resources, despite being the largest U.N. peacekeeping mission in the world with 17,000 troops.¹⁰ In November 2008, the U.N. Security Council authorized an additional 3,085 peacekeepers to the DRC, but these troops are yet to be identified or deployed.¹¹ Without additional human and financial resources, MONUC will remain incapable of stabilizing the deteriorating situation in the DRC.

Stabilizing the subregion would require more than peacekeepers. Doss emphasized the importance of security sector reform, including the army and police. As he explained, “without effective and accountable military and police, the security and stability of the state will always be at risk.” He concluded that even joint efforts between MONUC and Congolese security forces would require additional support and coordination at the regional level.

CONCLUSIONS

Creative regional initiatives are required to solve the enduring and complex crisis in and around the DRC. These initiatives must focus on the political economy of resource extraction if any meaningful or lasting impact is to be made. Efforts to sanction bad behavior and promote legitimate trade should involve inter-government collaboration in the subregion, as well as support from international partners over the longer term. Prioritizing peacebuilding efforts would include the establishment of regional frameworks to improve transparency in the mining sector, the adoption of international standards for accountability and recognition of the role of education and sensitization among all actors. For this to take place, a more robust security arrangement must be put in place to bolster MONUC.

¹⁰ In comparison, Sierra Leone (a country only 3 percent the size of the DRC) had as many as 17,350 peacekeepers deployed in its immediate post-conflict phase.

¹¹ United Nations Security Council, “UNSC Resolution 1843 (2008),” United Nations, November 20, 2008. www.securitycouncilreport.org/site/c.gIKWLeMTIsG/b.5263109/k.FF5C/July_2009brDemocratic_Republic_of_the_Congo.htm

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Promote the legal trade of minerals:* Intraregional trade arrangements and policy harmonization would help provide incentives for increased trade via formal channels. This would be accomplished by reducing costs and weakening the relationship between mineral trade and violent conflict in the subregion. Cross-border transparency initiatives and welfare-enhancing bilateral agreements are steps in this direction.
- *Remove barriers to private sector activity:* Moving beyond short-term humanitarianism in the DRC requires a vibrant private sector. The DRC needs to reduce exorbitant business costs facing its private sector.¹² The fractured and inefficient tax system should be reformed, anticorruption measures put in place, infrastructure and services upgraded, and a sustainable pro-growth regulatory framework established.
- *Enforce measures for tracing the source of minerals:* Since consumers drive the demand for most of the minerals that continue to fuel violent conflict in the DRC, they could play a pivotal role in helping clean up this trade. An international initiative to verify the source of ‘conflict minerals’ can serve as a powerful deterrent. The strength of public opinion and shareholders’ voices would be helpful in ensuring compliance at all stages of the supply chain.
- *Implement an effective decentralization program:* The DRC government should fully implement an effective decentralization program that would empower provincial administrations to govern effectively. This should help reduce weak governance, unpredictability in hundreds of kilometers away from the capital --- such as the Kivu provinces. Regional stakeholders should support the decentralization process, as mandated in the constitution of the third republic in 2005-2006, but hindered by a lack of political will.
- *Refocus international attention on sustainable outcomes:* Recognizing the link between sustainable development and lasting peace, more attention should be paid to aid effectiveness in the DRC. Foreign assistance should be coordinated in such a manner that all key priorities are funded and international funding streams are consistent with

¹² The World Bank, “Doing Business 2009.” www.doingbusiness.org/ExploreEconomies/?economyid=48.

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long term development priorities in the country. Equal attention should be paid to bolstering security (via MONUC, supported by a viable regional force) and sustainable economic progress (via more transparent trade, employment creation and strategic investments in physical and human capital).

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