

once communities are confident of their formal ownership of a CF, they could exert pressure for the forest to be used mostly for income-generation (cash crop production, timber sales, NTFP and bushmeat export) in a manner that might compromise its biodiversity conservation function or would require a liberal re-interpretation of the phrase “on a non-commercial basis” from a CF’s legal definition. Also, CFs could become highly politicised if they end up playing a large role in changing the governance and balance-of-power landscape in Liberia.

References and further reading on request from jamison.suter@fauna-flora.org

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THE CAUSES OF VIOLENT CONFLICTS IN FOREST REGIONS

By Jean-Richard Mutombo

For several decades, armed conflicts have menaced stability and natural resources in a number of African countries. Each African country has been torn apart by different armed conflicts. In this context it is difficult to establish a uniform model that explains the causes and consequences of what is referred to as ‘the new wars’. We will speak of the conflicts in the Democratic Republic

of Congo, a country where the forest constitutes the ‘second lung of the world’, after the Amazon. The causes of this conflict include:

1 The unequal allocation of lands (in the neighbouring countries)

Land problems are severe in Congo’s small neighboring countries, most notably in Rwanda and Burundi. Due to this, these two states wage a merciless war against the Republic of Congo. They do so under the pretexes of protecting the Rwandan speakers and hunting down those responsible for the genocide. These neighbours cross the Congolese border in order to take control of pastures and arable lands. Armed conflicts arise between native populations and the intruders in the eastern regions of the country; areas which are celebrated for their diversity.

2 Other, well known causes

These deal with the illegal extraction of raw materials (COLTAN and diamonds); instability, acuteness of poverty and its consequences: housing and food supply crises, and the weakening of local power.

The impacts of armed conflicts and post-conflict situations on the forest-dwellers

General consequences of armed conflict are the following: disruption of democracy, economic activities, agricultural production and trade; increased dependence on natural resources; a plethora of circulating weapons, massive population movements, raised taxes, drop in financing.....

The negative impacts of the conflicts on the environment are:

- Invasion of protected areas and the destruction of habitats,

- Illegal exploitation of resources is exacerbated,
- Interest in conservation among authorities declines, as new priorities are set,
- Conservation officials are threatened,
- Pollution of certain areas corresponds to the influx in population and
- There is an erosion of biodiversity.

The consequences of conflicts and post-conflict situations on conservation are:

- Interruption of field activities,
- Reduction in capacities,
- Stagnation in policy making and execution and
- Reduction in support from donors

Forestry and conservation activities during conflict and post-conflict situations

It is frequently held that conservation activities do not represent a priority during periods of conflict. However, when one takes into account that the livelihoods of the people are directly dependent on natural resources, the environment must be considered.

It is then necessary to:

- Try to maintain a presence throughout the conflict (monitoring),
- Provide access to information concerning biodiversity to all governmental agencies and NGOs working in the region,
- Try to pursue funding for conservation projects,
- Encourage training of high-level professional staff, since frequently they are affected by the conflicts,
- Maintain good means of communication,
- Try to keep a neutral position,

- Make an effort to work with other sectors (for example, the humanitarian sector) and
- After the conflict, be ready to resume working as soon as possible.

Ways to reduce violent conflicts in forest regions

Each case of violent conflict is unique. However, one must bear in mind that in order to prevent conflicts and maintain peace, it is necessary to consider the following issues:

- Communicate with, inform, and involve all parties at all levels,
- Study and take into greater account the traditional systems for resolving conflicts, and integrate them into conservation practices,
- Integrate conservation activities with those of other sectors,
- Adopt, and assure the compliance of, the holistic approaches that take into account the needs of the population,
- Encourage negotiation and conflict resolution, and
- Increase political involvement in conservation.

During the post-conflict period, it is necessary to put in place environmentally sound governance strategies. It is, however, difficult to raise awareness among the public and policy-makers to place the environment on the list of priorities.

The second obstacle to overcome involves the relatively marginalized position that the environment occupies in state affairs. Environmental Ministries hold very little power.

Finally, it is useful to emphasize the problem of reconciling western and African perceptions on natural resource management. Conservation, even on a very subjective basis, is essential to many westerners. Economic development is more important to most African policy makers. A balance between these two objectives, unfortunately, is not readily found. However if this balance and the balance between territorial integrity, involvement of the authorities and partnership with the population are not attained, natural resources will be exhausted. In turn, this rich heritage will not benefit the local population, nor will it provide the fruits of development or better environmental management.

The war in the Democratic Republic of Congo has resulted in the institution of a structure for controlling protected areas. It is called the Network of Protected Areas of Central Africa. It guards against military actions within parks and other protected areas. As many Congolese as foreigners are involved. World heritage areas and areas of local interest are being saved from the numerous consequences of the war that are listed above.

This network will continue to reflect on ways of creating other protected areas, in order to reach the objective of 15% of the national territory of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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WHY ARMED CONFLICT PERSISTS IN THE KIVU REGION OF THE CONGO (DRC)

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During the last three decades, the history of sub-Saharan Africa has been filled with armed conflicts. Among the most notable are the wars that tore apart Angola, Mozambique, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Chad, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Sudan, and most recently Ivory Coast. By around 1999, twenty African countries were being subjected to open fighting, either sporadic or continuous. Few of these conflicts actually set one country against another as happened in the case of Ethiopia and Eritrea. Most of these wars were internal even though, for a number, they eventually drew in neighbouring states. That is the case of the Rwandan civil war that caused two million refugees to flee across borders and for the conflicts in DR Congo to which seven other countries contributed troops and arms.

Political reasons, such as ideology, power disputes, leadership vacuum; or socio-economic reasons, e.g. religion, ethnicity, access to natural resources, include all the most fundamental reasons driving the sub-Saharan unrest. Since 1996, DRC has been at war. If the first battles, making up the so-called "war of liberation", were part of an expedition to chase out the autocratic regime of Mobutu Sese Seko, this is no explanation for the subsequent bloody battles that started in August 1998. The opposition is far too bitter and recalcitrant.