

### **FORESTRY AND CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES DURING A WAR FOUGHT OVER LAND AND RESOURCES IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO**

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During the recent civil wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo (1996-1997 and 1998-2003) there was a parallel walk out of private companies from forestry, and international organisations from conservation. Furthermore, the semblance of state authority in national level institutions which existed in the eastern tier of the country before 1998, dissolved as militias splintered, terrorized towns and appropriated forest domains. Now, during a period that a beleaguered population hopes is post-conflict, reconstruction is slow, dependent on demilitarization and withdrawal of "personalised" foreign ambitions.

Throughout this entire period, there has been a continuous drain of minerals, logs and ivory from the forests of eastern DR Congo into neighbouring countries. The volume of this exodus of wealth is reaching tsunami proportions without any trickle back to an institution capable of improving the situation of local people or the future prospects of their children. Protected Areas are being stripped and legitimate industry shackled.

Northeastern DR Congo with three entirely forested protected areas (Okapi, Maiko and KahuziBiega) was disconnected from the capital and the western 2/3 of the country

during civil war. This is the area of highest biodiversity in DR Congo and includes the Albertine Rift with its versant towards the central Congo basin. In this whole area there is but a single Forestry enterprise, ENRA, with an operational concession that had legal status prior to the war and has continued to function throughout the war.

#### **Pre-War conservation**

During the decade preceding the war, the Government of DR Congo (then-Zaire) had greatly diminished its investment in its parks and reserves. These relied increasingly on international conservation funding; however, about the time the cold war ended and following violent student repression in southern DR Congo, multi-lateral and bi-lateral funding for conservation all but disappeared. International support for a failed regime dwindled: The European Union had made large investments both in Virunga National Park and in Salonga National Park. It withdrew from both. The World Bank was in the final stages of confirming Global Environment Facility funds (GEF) for conservation work in Maiko and Okapi parks. It too terminated project development. Although UNDP stepped in and drafted an alternative GEF document in 1996 at the very beginning of the conflict, this multi-million dollar initiative never became operational throughout the following seven war-pocked years.

The largest international conservation NGOs began to draw back as well, reducing their presence to a "wait and see" mode only in the most "visible" of the protected areas.

#### **Pre-war forestry**

In the latter half of the 1980s various forestry companies proposed concessions along

a major road being built by German and Chinese companies linking Kisangani to Bukavu. Construction on the road itself was abandoned when foreign aid withdrew, and the concessions were abandoned before they went beyond the early stages of negotiations.

On the other hand, around the major inland city of Kisangani, the most upstream port on the navigable section of the Congo River, many active forestry enterprises were fully active up to the outbreak of war. This was the source of the profitable Afrormosia, as well as a major area of exploitation of African mahogany and particularly limbali.

### **War and Conservation**

As the first waves of war ran over eastern DR Congo a few international conservation NGOs continued to support the protected areas but their expatriate representatives left the country. Usually the NGOs worked in a single protected area and had trained an important professional Congolese cadre. The first steps, therefore, consisted of re-establishing communication and salaries for national employees. These NGOs were able to respond because their sources of funds, although far more modest than those of the multi-lateral organisations came from less politically sensitive sources (private donors-USA who had tax breaks for charitable gifts, international zoos...) The only bilateral donor that continued to be involved was the German organisation, GTZ.

In all cases the determination to stick with a park through war was dependent on the decision and determination of certain committed individuals who then convinced their organisations.

A coalition of these NGOs, together with the national conservation institute, ICCN, approached UNESCO and the UN Foundation (UNF) for emergency support. A war-time grant for World Heritage Sites in danger was launched. Operational early in 2000, and disbursing funds through the still active NGOs, this was the most visible external donor. In actuality, however, several other non-private sources of funding were critical, also operating through NGOs. These included the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and U.S. Central African Regional Program for the Environment (CARPE) as well as continuing support from the German government (GTZ).

It was this combination of backing that enabled ICCN with its NGO partners to make any stand at all against militia-facilitated poaching and mining.

### **War and forest enterprise**

On several occasions Kisangani became the arena for prolonged and particularly brutal fighting. Pillaging was general and all enterprises, including forestry operations, were victimized. All foreign-owned and -run forestry enterprises shut their doors and let off their employees. Nor was there any market outlet from Kisangani after 1998 and the division of the country. The Congo River was closed to all traffic towards the Atlantic port and the only overland option to the east (Indian Ocean port) was a single road in such disrepair that, within DR Congo, throughout most of the war the main commerce was carried out by bicycle caravan. This is still the case, post-conflict.

The single legal concession that continued to operate, ENRA is located near the busy border town of Beni, where it also has a factory for conversion to parquet flooring,

crafted doors and carved furniture. The pre-war outlet to markets outside of Africa was the Kenyan port of Mombasa, but ENRA also served domestic markets. Even during the war there was an important local market as the riches of the Albertine Rift created a small but wealthy elite among Congolese and particularly foreign neighbours.

The price of non-worked wood, however, fell precipitously in the east; liboyo planks of 2" at the Ugandan border were sold at 175\$ m<sup>3</sup> whereas in the west of the country sale price was more than 300\$ m<sup>3</sup>. This happened through a flooding of the market. First, local authorities (collectivités), no longer receiving any revenue from the state, distributed forest-cutting rights liberally providing themselves with profit and their local population jobs cutting and carrying. These collectivité revenues were treated as personal, rarely funding such desperately needed public services as schools, hospitals or roads. Second, trucks loaded and accompanied by military exported wood without paying any taxes at all. They thereby profited at a much lower sale-rate. The result is a general unplanned depleting of accessible forest to produce only low-quality planks and unsawn logs.

Despite the anarchy of private forestry in eastern DR Congo, the biggest uncontrolled loss of forest is the result of population explosion and uncontrolled immigration of farmers. In a block of 22,000 ha of the ENRA concession, 13,000 ha were destroyed by illegal agricultural clearcuts leaving only 9000 ha for exploitation. This remaining area was itself invaded by farmers after a first forestry cut, making any attempt at sustainable forestry impossible. Aerial surveys over the region have led to the estimation of agricultural penetration into

the forest of about 1 km a year along a front of several tens of km.

### **Post-war**

Conservation and forestry have the same fundamental needs, unambiguous national laws concerning land tenure and resource rights and a state strong enough to enforce them. The Democratic Republic of Congo is working towards a revision of the pertinent laws; but the transition to a state able to enforce them will be long.

Until the state itself has not only the institutional structures in place but the ability to make them functional, there must be strong political will nationally and responsible international partnerships. For conservation, in the immediate and medium-term, a form of international sponsorship of the parks is essential. For forestry, guarantees to investors will have to be based on confidence in a functional partnership between the state and the international community.

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