

One of the biggest problems facing a post-election Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) will be the issue of natural resource management. The continual exploitation and lack of effective management has led to the perpetuation of ongoing conflict and instability throughout the country, but most notably in the Eastern provinces. It is feared that without international recognition and domestic pressure to curb the ongoing exploitation, the DRC's future will be one that is trapped in a vicious cycle of human rights abuses and conflict.

The link between natural resources and conflict was recognized by the United Nations, and in 1998 they sent a panel of experts to the Eastern provinces to document the abuses. Despite their reports compiled over four years, which clearly documented cases of human rights violations, the United Nations has to date failed to pass a resolution condemning these actions or urging for their reversal. Recently, the International Court of Justice conducted its own inquiry into the state of natural resource management, and found that the government of Uganda was effectively exploiting the DRC's resources in violation of international law, and contributing to human rights abuses during the process of exploitation. Despite negligible domestic production of gold (the main exploited natural resource) Uganda exported an estimated \$60 million of gold in a single year. Gathered statistics from the Ugandan government revealed that they produced less than 1% of what they were exporting – which led to serious investigations by various NGOs.

These investigations were able to trace the exploited gold to markets in Europe and the Americas. One country of note was Switzerland where traders were buying directly from Uganda and claiming that the trade was lawful. When presented with the facts, however, the Swiss buyers promptly stopped importing “Ugandan” gold. Nonetheless, the market is such that the gold export simply switched to a different country and currently much of the exploited gold from the DRC goes to Dubai.

While these practices should be addressed, it is more crucial to look at the manner in which natural resource control has been manipulated and used by warlords and governments as a means to sustain violent conflict. For instance, in the late nineties in the district of Ituri it was discovered that the ability of the warlords to continue their violent actions was supported and financed by the exploitation of gold from the area. This example is indicative of a wider trend throughout Congo whereby armed groups are fighting for control of resources for material gain and the financing of continued armed conflict.

Two types of mining are occurring in the DRC: artisanal mining and industrial mining. Artisanal mining is not inherently bad, in that it provides jobs, but some of these miners are forced to work by the barrel of a gun and receive little to no compensation for their work. Industrial mining is not bad in and of itself either, and undoubtedly the DRC needs concessions and investment if it is to become a major economic player in Africa. However, industries are continuously making agreements with the government which do not benefit the Congolese people, and there have been numerous cases where the mining industry has contracted individuals who have abused their workers and international trade agreements.

As we start to see a reduction in power of the warlords (and this is indeed beginning to happen) we also see that they are being replaced with elite trading networks run by the Congolese army. Security sector reform, especially with regard to professional military conduct and human rights, must be advanced by the Congolese government and international community. The Congolese made a concerted effort to document what was occurring when they compiled the Lutundula Commission. This report reviewed the current issues involving inequitable and exploitative industrial contracts, human rights abuses, and ongoing conflicts associated with natural resource exploitation. This report, however, disappeared and was never debated in the Congolese parliament nor have the recommendations made in it been applied.

Despite the precarious nature of the situation, the new elections and government have the opportunity to set a new agenda in for natural resource management. There are some that believe that a governance compact should be signed and that rules and conditions be established for investment and mining concession. The international community, including the United Nations, must take the endemic effects natural resource exploitation has had on human rights seriously and make concerted efforts to curb the illicit exchange of exploited material. Another serious concern is the lack of infrastructure and prospects for the success of the mining sector in the future without a concerted effort to revamp the means of exportation.

All of these concerns are noteworthy and a proper responses to them are necessary. The international community and the post-election government in the DRC will have to effectively deal with the issue of resource management if it would like to see overall stability and peace in the DRC.