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WAR & PEACE IN CONGO

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Technology will fix corruption!

Dear Editor,

In the January issue of your magazine, I had the chance to read an article about anti-corruption campaigns in India. I think a lot needs to be done in order to stamp out corruption from the country, but we should not forget that the so called anti-corruption campaigns have thier own agendas too. They seem to be hungry of media limelight and attention, and do not digest criticisms easily. Corruption needs something more than mass protests and ralliees. Without restructuring state mechanisms, the dream of eliminating corruption won't come true. Laws and moral education might be useful, but technology that ensures transparency is a must!

Madhavi, Pune-India



Failed states? By Which Measures?

Dear Editor,

I read the January issue of Global South Development Magazine with great interest. The cover story apprently was very interesting. However, there could have been a critical remark on the idea of failed states categorization. I am aware that war trodden, poor, non-

functioning states are labelled as failed states, but what about the states that export weapons and orchestrate vicious wars overseas? What about the states that are crazy in their consumer habits and responsible for permanently damaging the environment?

I think the world should have two categories of failed states. The first catagory is alaredy available, the second one should include states

that might be successful within their territories, but are largely responsible for making people's life measurable abroad. This would make them a little more responsible, if at all.
Suvi, Helsinki- Finland

(Dear readers, please send your comments, suggestions and quiriess by email at globalsouth@silcreation.org - Editor)

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In Laos, an entire school's student population rushes outside at the news and reception of new school supplies and personal hygiene accessories.



From left to right: Little girl in Non Kihow, Laos, plants herself on the classroom floor with her new notepad; cheeky primary school student in Phayong, Laos, during a nutrition lesson on making healthy food snacks; girl at a construction planning meeting in Lizarco, outside of Matagalpa, Nicaragua; bread feast after a Community Engagement Workshop in Santa Catarina, Guatemala. Photo courtesy: Pencils of Promise



Pencils of Promise is a New York-based NGO that aims to empower youth by building classrooms, schools, and sustainable education resources for communities without proper access to these basic elements. www.pencilsofpromise.org

PHILIPPINES: OMG! Eat-your-vegetables campaign

BANGKOK, March 2012

Celebrities are working with the Philippines government in a recently launched nationwide media campaign to lift the consumption of fresh produce and fight malnutrition among young people.

The name of the project, ‘Oh My Gulay!’ (OMG!) (‘oh my vegetables’ in the local Tagalog language) plays off the shorthand exclamation commonly interspersed in text messages sent via mobile phones - ‘OMG’ for ‘oh my god’ - and resonates widely in a country where more than one billion text messages are sent daily.

Local celebrities in dance, music and television are featured in print and on television, posing with their favourite vegetables.

“Role models are efficient for children, and targeting children is both boosting immediate consumption and initiating a mindset change about vegetables and fruits,” explained the founder of the campaign, Ed Angara, a parliamentarian from the capital region of Metro Manila.

“We want to make vegetables and fruits sexy - too many Filipinos prefer to buy meat rather than vegetables and fruits to complement their rice-based diet,” said Robert Holmer, regional director for East and Southeast Asia of the World Vegetable Centre (AVRDC), a Taiwan-headquartered NGO previously known as the Asian Vegetable Research Development Centre, which is supporting the campaign.

According to the most recent government national nutrition survey in 2008, chronic malnutrition (a shortage of intake of vitamins and nutrients) among children is directly related to the country’s low vegetable and fruit consumption.

An estimated 29 percent of children under five years old and 33 percent of children younger than 10 years were too short for their age groups, which is one

measurement of chronic malnutrition.

The Philippines’ produce consumption of 60kg per person per year in 2007 was one of the lowest in Asia, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

WHO recommends a daily intake of 400g of vegetables and fruits per person (150kg per year) to help prevent vitamin and mineral deficiencies as well as heart disease, some cancers, diabetes and obesity. An estimated 1.7 million (2.8 percent) of deaths every year worldwide are linked to insufficient vegetable and fruit consumption, according to the health agency.

The celebrity advocacy of OMG! follows a 2011 government programme to set up produce gardens in all 42,000 schools by providing tools, seeds and training.

“There is no space too little to farm. Space-friendly techniques allow communities and families to produce a lot, even on a tiny piece of concrete,” said Holmer. Container vegetable and fruit production - for example, growing a plant in a plastic water bottle - is widely used in cities throughout the Philippines and other countries.

“Vegetables and fruits can be more expensive than fish in the Philippines, and their prices fluctuate a lot,” said Sheila Aclo de Lima, a training officer with AVRDC. “Thanks to these [space-friendly] methods, underprivileged families can produce for themselves, and their vegetable and fruit consumption is resilient to weather and food crises.” Increasing produce consumption is key to reducing the malnutrition-related illnesses that affect some 200 million children worldwide according to the Paris-based French Agricultural Research for Development Centre (CIRAD). (News courtesy IRIN)



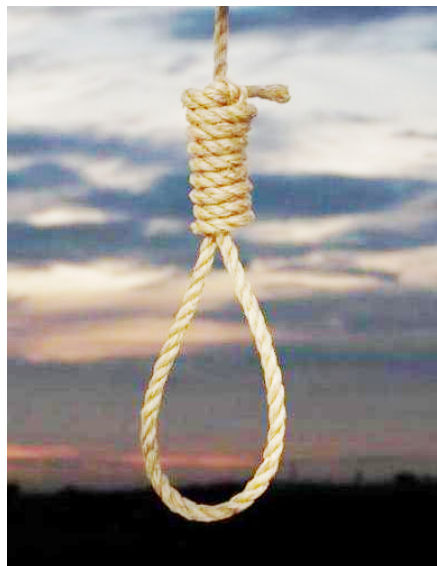
Aung San Suu Kyi enters Parliament!

YANGON, Myanmar- Aung San Suu Kyi, the democracy advocate silenced for two decades by Myanmar’s generals with house arrests and overturned elections, assumed a new role in her country’s political transition on 2 April 2012, winning a seat in Parliament to make the remarkable shift from dissident to lawmaker.



Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, a 1991 Nobel Peace laureate and the face of Myanmar’s democracy movement, will hold a public office for the first time. But despite her global prominence, she will be joining a Parliament that is still overwhelmingly controlled by the military-backed ruling party.

A nominally civilian government took power one year ago after years of oppressive military rule and introduced political changes it hoped would persuade Western nations to end economic sanctions. (with agencies)



Death penalty 2011: Alarming levels of executions

Amnesty International says executions rose by 78 per cent worldwide and by 50 per cent in the Middle East last year.

The number of executions around the world soared last year, with countries such as Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia resorting to the death penalty more often than in the past, rights group Amnesty International has said in a new report.

The group said on Tuesday that at least 676 people were executed in 20 countries in 2011 compared with 527 executions in 23 countries in 2010, a 78 per cent increase.

Executions in the Middle East rose by almost 50 per cent last year to 558, the group said.

Methods of execution used around the world included beheading, hanging, lethal injection and shooting. However, Amnesty said China executed more people than the rest of the world put together. Data on the death penalty in China is a state secret, and Amnesty International no longer publishes a figure for Chinese executions, but it said they were in the thousands. Salil Shetty, Amnesty's secretary-general, said that when Amnesty was launched in 1961 only nine countries had abolished the death penalty for all crimes, whereas last year only 20 countries carried out executions. "It's a very important success story," he

Number of executions around the world soared last year, with countries such as Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia resorting to the death penalty more often than in the past

China executed more people than the rest of the world put together

The United States was the only country in the Americas and the only member of the Group of Eight leading economies to execute prisoners in 2011, something Shetty described as "very shameful."

Belarus was the only country in Europe to carry out executions in 2011

told the Reuters news agency, adding that the downside was that "a few countries continue to practice it in large numbers."

At least 1,923 people are known to have been sentenced to death in 63 countries in 2011, down from 2,024 in 2010, Amnesty's report said. At least 18,750 people were under sentence of death worldwide at the end of 2011, including 8,300 in Pakistan, it said. After China, most executions last year were carried out in Iran, where at least 360 people were put to death compared with at least 252 in 2010, Saudi Arabia (at least 82 executions in 2011 compared with at least 27 in 2010), and Iraq (at least 68 executions compared with at least one), Amnesty said. They were followed by the United States, with 43 executions in 2011 down from 46 a year earlier, and Yemen, at least 41 executions in 2011 down from 62 officially reported in 2010.

The United States was the only country in the Americas and the only member of the Group of Eight leading economies to execute prisoners in 2011, something Shetty described as "very shameful."

Belarus was the only country in Europe to carry out executions in 2011 when it put two people to death. No executions were recorded in Japan last year, for the first time in 19 years. (Source Amnesty International and Agencies)

ISRAEL: Deportation looms for South Sudan migrants

TEL AVIV, March 2012 - Asylum-seekers from South Sudan living in Israel have until 31 March to return "home" or face deportation, but some have asked to stay, saying conditions are not yet conducive for their safe return.

According to Israeli Interior Minister Sabine Haddad, South Sudan nationals living in Israel will no longer be given protected status after the deadline. Until then, he added, they will be offered voluntary deportation and around US\$1,300.

But Natalina, a 46-year-old single mother of three who arrived in Israel six years ago after spending 12 years in Cairo, said she would find it difficult to leave. "I don't want to take [the children] back because I know their lives will change dramatically," she told IRIN. "I have no one in Sudan, I know no one there - no family, nothing. I haven't been there in 18 years, I am a single Mum and I cannot afford to pay for medical treatment and education in South Sudan."

Natalina, whose three children aged 7, 9 and 15 are enrolled in Israeli schools, said she and some 700 other South Sudanese asylum-seekers received notice from the Ministry of Interior three months ago, asking them to report for repatriation by 31 March 2012 or be declared illegal aliens in Israel.

"I do not wish to see my children suffer. We've had meetings with the Israeli government but they will not give us answers. If they decide to do this (send asylum-seekers back) by 31 March, I will disappear, I cannot go back," said Natalina, a prominent leader of the small community of South Sudanese in Israel.

The Israeli authorities, in a January letter circulated among the South Sudanese community, said the new state was safe.

"We are not asking to stay forever, but to be given enough time until the new state recovers somewhat," Simon, a South Sudanese community leader who left his country 17 years ago, explained. "I know of many repatriated community members who were forced to flee again to the north, to Kenya or Uganda. South Sudan is only seven months old and still a failed state." (Source IRIN)



Argentina: the Latin American pioneer in gender and sexual equality



BY **VICTORIA PEEL YATES**
In Argentina

For a country synonymous with a culture of machismo, gauchos (cowboys) and a dance deeply rooted in traditional male-female dominant-submissive roles, the tango, Argentina is surprisingly leading the way for gender and sexual equality in Latin America.

Amid the recent drama unfolding in the Argentinean political arena, namely the dispute with Britain over the Falklands/Malvinas (among other things), two bills have been quietly making their way through Congress, almost unnoticed. The first was passed on 14th March 2012, and marked a huge breakthrough for women's rights in Latin America. The bill legalised abortions for all victims of rape, a modification to an existing law that allowed abortion only if the rape victim was mentally disabled. The second bill is the 'Ley de Identidad de Géneros' (Gender Identity Law), which if passed will allow Argentinean citizens to change their name and gender on their national identity cards. If passed, it will reaffirm Argentina's status as the Latin American leader in gender and sexual

equality.

Argentina was the first (and to date the only) Latin American country to legalise gay marriage and adoptions, with a law that was passed in 2010, joining just a handful of countries that recognise gay marriage. It has some of the most progressive laws promoting gender and sexual rights in the entire region. In Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Paraguay and Venezuela there are no laws that recognise or grant rights to same sex couples. Brazil, Uruguay, Ecuador and Colombia have followed in Argentina's footsteps by passing laws that recognise and grant rights to same sex couples. However, despite strong lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) civil rights movements, homophobia is rife across the continent, even in those countries where same sex couples are recognised.

This is manifested in violent attacks and murders of LGBT people; the most extreme example is in Ecuador, where young women are sent to horrific "clinics" to be "cured" of being lesbians. High numbers of homophobic attacks and homicides have also been

reported in Chile and Brazil. Despite the growing acceptance for LGBT public officials in countries such as Colombia (where the appointment of Tatiana Pineros, a transgender woman, to head of Bogota's social welfare agency was received with little opposition from the public), others, such as Bolivia, do not even have laws in place to prevent discrimination based on sexuality. The continent seems to be divided, with conservative religious and political views clashing with supporters of LGBT civil rights.

"Argentina was the first (and to date the only) Latin American country to legalise gay marriage and adoptions, with a law that was passed in 2010, joining just a handful of countries that recognise gay marriage. It has some of the most progressive laws promoting gender and sexual rights in the entire region."



Two transgender partygoers pose for photos at the Gay Pride March in Buenos Aires. On the previous page the author's friends posing with a reveler at the Gay Pride March in Buenos Aires

This is no less true in Argentina. However, the difference in Argentina is that, despite the obstacles faced, LGBT civil rights are advancing, seemingly with support from the wider public. So why, despite the dominance of relatively progressive leftist governments dominating the Latin American political arena, is Argentina unique in its efforts to improve gender and sexual equality? The strong LGBT civil rights movement and high levels of urbanisation and education only go so far in explaining the phenomenon, since these are also found in other Latin American countries.

There are several possible factors that may contribute to Argentina's avant garde approach to gender and sexual equality. The first is that, despite being a predominantly Catholic country, attendance within the Catholic Church, at roughly 22%, is relatively low compared with its Latin American counterparts, as well as with the US. This is significant because the Catholic Church, in Argentina as elsewhere in Latin America, has been strongly opposed to the legalisation of gay marriage. Moreover, the Evangelical population, at just 2%, is tiny, compared to a growing number of followers in Mexico and Brazil and a huge following in the US. This means that despite fierce opposition to gay marriage, the Evangelical Church has very little influence.

A second key factor may be the separation of church and party; most countries in the region separate church and state, but this may not be enough. Strong opposition from Christian

parties has had a profound impact on preventing the passing of laws that would recognise gay marriage. This has most notably taken place in Chile, where the Christian Democrat party has blocked several bills to recognise same sex couples. In Argentina, such parties do not exist, limiting the power of the Church within Congress.

Another reason may be Argentina's high level of transnational legalism, referring to the ease with which Argentina imports international norms and adopts them domestically. While this is high throughout Latin America, Argentina is undoubtedly the regional leader (incidentally, the US has a very low level of transnational legalism). This means that proponents of LGBT civil rights have borrowed heavily from LGBT rights activists around the world, often replicating their arguments verbatim. This is not to say that the LGBT rights movement in Argentina lacks domestic resources. The agenda of the LGBT movement was cast as part of the country's broader agenda on behalf of feminism, gender, reproduction, health, and sexuality, which have been part of Argentina's legislative agenda for decades. They used innovative strategies, such as encouraging gay couples to request marriage licences, and when these requests are refused, to challenge the refusal on constitutional grounds. Popular support for the cause was probably also won due to the actions of the Church, whose polarizing rhetoric became increasingly and openly discriminatory towards the LGBT population.

Ultimately, the final say lies with President Fernandez, who took the risk of confronting the Church and passing the controversial law. There are a myriad of reasons that she may have chosen to do so, both domestic and foreign, ranging from further splitting an already fragmented opposition to advancing Argentina's position as the Latin American vanguard of gender and sexual rights.

It is impossible to pinpoint one reason that distinguishes Argentina from other countries in the region; many have similar histories of military dictatorships, and financial and political crises. But in Argentina, a particular set of socio-political factors seems to have combined to make it the regional leader in progressive social policies. The rest of the region may have some way to go, but it is likely that sooner or later they will follow suit.

Global hunger fight depends on better water use—says U.N. chief



The world will only be able to feed a rapidly growing population if it improves the use of water, the "most critical finite resource", the head of the United Nations said on the World Water Day.

"Unless we increase our capacity to use water wisely in agriculture, we will fail to end hunger and we will open the door to a range of other ills, including drought, famine and political instability," U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said in a statement.

Global food output must double from 2005-2007 levels in developing countries and rise 70 percent in developed nations to feed a world population expected to rise to 9 billion in 2050 from about 7 billion now, according to U.N. estimates.

While an average human drinks 2 to 4 litres of water every day, it takes 2,000 to 5,000 litres of water to produce one person's daily food, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reports. In many parts of the world, the pace of agricultural production growth has been slowing while water scarcity is increasing and climate change is exacerbating risk and unpredictability for farmers, especially poor ones, Ban said.

Two-thirds of the world's population could be living under water stressed conditions by 2025, the FAO said.

To ensure sustainable food and water security for everyone, the world must boost investments in people, infrastructure, production and education as well as improve water management, FAO's Director General Jose Graziano da Silva said. (By Svetlana Kovalyova for Alertnet)

WAR & PEACE

IN The

Democratic Republic of the Congo



The Democratic Republic of the Congo is not officially at war, but for decades the ordinary Congolese haven't experienced an essence of peace either. After years of bloodshed and devastation, the DRC is staggering towards normalcy, but after brief intervals the country finds itself rebound into violent conflicts again and again. This edition of *Global South Development Magazine* tries to analyse some of the issues that have been responsible for prolonging conflict and unrest in the DRC. The first section will give a historical timeline of the DRC followed by an account of our DRC correspondent from the field. This edition's interview section and the editor's column have been dedicated to the DRC issue as well.

The DRC: A historical Timeline

Congo gained independence from Belgium in 1960 but immediately fell into a state of chaos and disintegration. In 1965, Colonel Joseph Mobutu seized power through a coup quietly approved by the Western powers, and changed the country's name to Zaire and his own to Mobutu Sese Seko. Zaire became an important pawn in the Cold War as an African bastion of anti-communism. This helped Mobutu to hold his gigantic and ethnically divided country together. When

rebel movements threatened to overtake parts of the country in 1964 and in 1977–78, Western powers intervened with military support. Even during the last months of Mobutu's reign in 1997, France allegedly organized the hiring of foreign mercenaries in order to avoid the dictator's fall from power.

In the 1970s, Mobutu and his cronies seriously started to lay their hands on the country's wealth. In a process called 'Zairianization', key economic sectors were put under direct state control. Mobutu's kleptocratic regime was coupled with poor growth rates and a mounting public external debt. International donor pressure and the end of the Cold War finally forced Mobutu to abandon one-party rule in 1990. He also became more marginalized as the government in Kinshasa assumed some of his former powers. But Mobutu would make an unexpected comeback on the world scene.

The Rwanda Genocide and the War Against Mobutu: 1994–97

To understand the insurgency against Mobutu in 1996, it is necessary to recount earlier developments in neighboring Rwanda. Rwanda's two major ethnic groups, the Hutu and the Tutsi, had fought a smallscale civil war since 1990 when an army of Tutsi rebels (RPA), hosted and supported by Uganda, invaded the country. The dramatic turning point happened in 1994 when Rwanda's Hutu president Habyarimana was killed along with Burundi's president after their plane was shot down. Although it is still not clear who was responsible for this attack, extremist Hutu groups drew their own conclusions and soon started a systematic

genocide of the civilian Tutsi minority in Rwanda. According to some estimates, around 800,000 people were killed in a few months.

The RPA and its leader Major Colonel Paul Kagame managed to conquer Kigali and oust the Hutu government. Fearing Tutsi revenge, around 1.2 million Hutu, including some 40,000 of the militia responsible for the genocide, fled to the North and South Kivu provinces in neighboring Zaire. At this point, Mobutu saw an opportunity to regain the initiative. He agreed to host the refugees on Congolese soil and thereby became a partner to international aid organizations. The move also allowed him to regain some respectability, at least in the eyes of the French, who once again embraced him.

At the same time, Mobutu used the inflow of Hutu to instigate hostilities towards the Banyamulenge, a people of Tutsi origin who had lived in eastern Congo for generations. The parliament even decided that the Banyamulenge should lose their citizenship. In October 1996, the governor of South Kivu ordered the Banyamulenge to leave their homes within a few days. In desperation, they turned to their Tutsi cousins in Rwanda for help.

The new rulers in Rwanda had an even greater grievance on their hands. The Hutu militia used the refugee camps in Kivu as a base for attacks against the Tutsi-dominated regime in Rwanda. Helped by Mobutu, they became a serious threat to the new government's security. In September 1996, the RPA joined the Banyamulenge and attacked the Hutu refugee camps on Congolese soil.

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They were soon joined by several anti-Mobutu rebel groups and engaged in battles against government forces. Among the groups that joined the rebellion was a small one called PRP led by Laurent Kabila. Kabila belonged to Lumumba's socialist faction in the 1960s, but after Mobutu's consolidation of power, Kabila and his men withdrew to the South Kivu mountains where they formed something of a mini-state. Not much is known of his activities from then on, except that during long periods he made a living as a gold smuggler.

From late 1996 he suddenly appeared as the leader of the newly formed Alliance of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (ADFL). It was therefore suspected that Kabila was something of a puppet, at least initially – suspicions that were later confirmed in interviews with Rwanda's strongman Paul Kagame. The ADFL and their Tutsi comrades immediately remarkably successful. Mobutu's unpaid army, which he had kept weak and divided so that it would not pose a threat to himself, melted away as the Tutsi veterans approached. During their march westwards, some 200,000 Hutu refugees were allegedly killed, and conquered mines were looted.

The old Cold War allies Belgium and the United States declared that they would no longer come to Mobutu's rescue. Only France, frightened by the prospect of an English-speaking new regime, remained Mobutu's friend to the bitter end. On 17 May 1997, Kinshasa surrendered to Kabila's troops and the old dictator fled the country.

The Great African War: 1998–

Early in his presidency, Kabila showed signs of moving towards one-man rule. His control over state resources was highly personalized, and public enterprises were not managed in any long-term sense of the word but rather used to rapidly generate finances through indiscriminate concession granting. Corruption, patronage, and lack of accountability came to characterize Kabila's presidency, rather than the hoped for democracy and national development.

Kabila's alliance with Rwanda and Uganda was strong immediately following his rise to power. His government contained many Tutsi (both Rwandan and Congolese) and Banyamulenge in top political and military positions. This placed a strain on Kabila's legitimacy, as most Congolese regarded them as foreign occupiers,

which in turn led Kabila to marginalize the Tutsi and Banyamulenge members of his administration. A more plausible explanation for this action could be that Kabila, perhaps inspired by the actions of Mobutu before him, was desirous of keeping the financial gain from Congo's resources for himself. Whatever the explanation, Kabila dismissed a Rwandan military officer of Tutsi ethnicity as chief of staff for the Congolese armed forces in July 1998. He then went one step further, sending the commander and his Tutsi Rwandan comrades-in arms back to Rwanda on 27 July 1998. This move was an apparent attempt to pre-empt a coup, and was a direct cause of the rebellions that took place in both Goma and Kinshasa six days later.

After the failure of these rebellions, troops from Rwanda and Uganda entered Congo in August 1998. Both countries stated security reasons for the deployment. The crisis escalated when Rwandan troops, with some support from Uganda, attempted to seize Kinshasa. At this point, Zimbabwe and Angola intervened on behalf of the Kabila government, saving it from collapse. Namibia, Chad, and Sudan would later join Kabila's allies, although Chad and Sudan withdrew relatively early.

Angola entered the war in Congo primarily for security reasons; UNITA rebels had been using Congo to launch attacks on Angola. Namibia had no immediate security concerns, but rather supported Kabila based on a decision by President Nujoma, which was mostly symbolic in nature. Zimbabwe does not share a border with Congo, and did not face any security threats. The reasons for its involvement seem to be related to investments made in Congo by the government and Zimbabwean businesses.

Economic gain appears to have been a powerful motivator in this war, and there is a general consensus that Rwanda's and Uganda's armies quickly began to shift their attention to commercial enterprise and exploitation. The gains from these activities were used to enrich the governments involved, finance the continuation of the war, and pay individual soldiers.

The plunder of Congo's natural resources took place in two phases. The first involved the wholesale looting of existing stockpiles and took place in the occupied regions of Congo during the first year of the second war. The second phase involved systematic extraction and

export of natural resources. This phase involved both foreign and Congolese actors. Both phases were greatly facilitated by the strong transportation networks put in place during the first war.

Economic data collected by the UN illustrate the trends in mineral exports in Uganda and Rwanda for the years 1994 to 2000 and the trends in mineral production in Rwanda for the years 1995 to 2000. Uganda had no reported coltan or niobium production after 1995, while exports increased steadily between 1997 and 1999. Finally, neither Uganda nor Rwanda has any known diamond production.

In the case of Zimbabwe, however, there is evidence of extensive commercial activity in the form of joint ventures and mining concessions. Natural resource extraction, particularly mineral extraction, fuelled the continuation of the conflict in Congo.

Rwanda's military benefited directly from the war in various ways. The most significant of these has been the extraction of coltan, the price of which rose phenomenally between late 1999 and late 2000. The UN estimates that the Rwandan military could have been selling coltan for as much as \$20 million per month. This allowed Rwanda to continue its presence in Congo, protecting individuals and companies who provided minerals. In some cases, the Rwandan army went so far as to attack rebel groups in order to appropriate their coltan supplies. While the Ugandan government was not directly involved in the extraction of natural resources, it did not take action against military and businessmen who participated in this activity.

However, several events have improved the chances of ending the conflict in Congo. The first is Joseph Kabila's rise to power after the assassination of his father in early 2001. The younger Kabila seems to have shown interest in finding a solution to the conflict and reinstating democracy in Congo. Agreements focusing on the transition of the Congolese government towards democracy have been signed, and foreign troops have withdrawn from Congolese soil. However, optimism must be tempered given the persistent fighting between rebel groups in the northeastern part of Congo. This has led the UN to adopt Resolution 1493, which authorizes the deployment of UN peacekeepers. (Timeline text source: Congo: The Prize of Predation by Ola Olsson & Heather Congdon Forse)



Official language: French(official), Lingala,Kingwana,Kikongo, Tshiluba
Ethnic groups: Over 200 ethnic groups,the majority are Bantu; the four largest tribes – Mongo, Luba, Kongo (all Bantu), and the Mangbetu-Azande (Hamitic) make up about 45 % of the population.

Religion: Roman Catholic 50%, Protestant 20%, Kimbanguist 10%, Muslim 10%, other (includes syncretic sects and indigenous beliefs) 10%

Human Development Index: 0.286; rank 187 out of 187 (last)

EDUCATION

-Literacy 67.2% (male 80%, female 54.1%)

ROLE OF WOMEN

-Widespread rape and other forms of sexual violence, often by government security officials

-Almost no representation in government

CHILDREN

-Child soldiers recruited by LRA (Ugandan), FDLR (Rwandan), and FARDC (Congolese)

-28.2% under age of 5 are underweight

-Low quality education limits future

FREEDOM

-Abuses by armed groups

-Unlawful killings

-High number of internally displaced people and refugees

-Torture and other ill-treatment

-Prevalence of death penalty

-Poor administration of justice

ECONOMY

-GDP per capita: \$300 (2011 est.)

-Much economic activity still occurs in the informal sector, and is not reflected in GDP data

-Mining is the source of most export income

-An uncertain legal framework, corruption, and a lack of transparency in government policy are long-term problems for the mining sector and for the economy as a whole

ENVIRONMENT

-Deforestation (overuse of wood for fuel)

-Increases in urban population

-Issues in protection of wildlife

-air pollution from vehicles and water pollution from sewage

Untamed jungles, breathtaking nature, and abundant mineral resources aren't all that make up this fierce 'heart of darkness'. Whether for its six name changes in the course of a little more than a century, its important role in African relations, or its "God-forsaken wilderness" described by Joseph Conrad, we have all heard of this African giant in one way or another.

Pre-colonial Congo was well known for its iron and copper technology, but was heavily disrupted by slave trading in its Eastern regions around the 16th century. By the time King Leopold II of Belgium officially claimed 'Congo Free State' at the 1885 Conference of Berlin, he had a clear idea about how much he would gain due to the region's mineral wealth, and was ready to exploit the local people at all costs. He established intricate infrastructure projects and a high-yielding rubber industry, whose high output quotas he managed to maintain by threatening the local population with brutal displays of limb chopping. Many died due to extensive exploitation and disease, but the King's actions were soon met by international protests and led to the handing over of power to the Belgian government in 1908. The situation in the newly named 'Belgian Congo' improved greatly, but despite its social and economic advancements, the region's people still suffered under the patronizing eye of the white man.

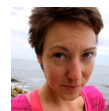
In 1960, the parliament implemented by the Belgian government was for the first time overtaken by the growing nationalist movement led by Patrice Lumumba, known as the Mouvement National Congolais. He was appointed Prime Minister next to Joseph Kasavubu as the elected President. The 'République de Congo' achieved its independence soon thereafter, and it was then that most of the left over Europeans fled the country, leaving empty administrative and military positions for

the Congolese to fill with their own people.

However, a crisis developed that same year between the two leaders, when Kasavubu kicked Lumumba out of office. The appointed chief of staff of the new army, Joseph Mobutu, used the moment of tension and the financial support from the U.S. and Belgium to stage a coup in 1965, under the pretext of wanting to maintain order. He renamed the nation 'Democratic Republic of the Congo', and later, in 1971, to 'Republic of Zaire', where he became famous for the relative stability he created and his promotion of African nationalism in renaming the cities and rivers. However, he was also known for his extensive violation of human rights and corruption, which was aided by receiving financial support from the U.S. government for his opposition to communism in the heat of the Cold War.

Inner tensions bubbled up and ended up forcing Mobutu out of the country in 1997, after he failed to reform his corrupt policies, and the country took back its name of 'Democratic Republic of the Congo'. At the same time, the Rwandan conflict spilled over to its big neighbour, with Rwandan and Ugandan militia joining the unsuccessful local rebels in their overthrow of Mobutu. This strong coalition of armies was led by Laurence-Désiré Kabila, who, after their successful coup, hoped the foreign armies would leave due to his suspicion of their true intentions. They, however, began to fight their former ally. The conflict transformed into a large-scale war involving nine African nations, 5.4 million deaths, and five years of horrific scale violence dubbed as the 'African world war'. Due to efforts of the international community, the conflict 'officially' ended in 2003, but government instability, conflict, and human rights abuses continue to this day, resulting in one of the worst humanitarian catastrophes ever seen.

DRC Diary: A reflection from the field!



By EMILY LYNCH

Emily Cavan Lynch, Global South Development Magazine's country correspondent for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, also works for an international relief organization as a public health consultant. In this article Emily shares her everyday experience in the DR Congo and presents a holistic picture of a war-torn society that is struggling to overcome decades long trauma of bloodshed and killings, yet finds it caught up in new forms of unrest and conflict everyday.



Since 2009 Eastern Congo has gained a certain reputation. Through the well-intentioned efforts of caring individuals, the relief of organizations searching for a convenient way to define the muddle of armed groups and ongoing conflict, and the perpetual funder's need to be able to measure progress, Congo is these days known to most in the developed world as the "rape capital of the world." Last spring the American Journal of Public Health dropped the media bomb that the number of rapes per day in Congo had been grossly underestimated and was 26 times higher than a previous UN report had estimated, with at least 1,152 women raped every day (equal to 48 per hour).

This phrase and associated imagery has been the inspiration behind international advocacy and fund-raising efforts, documentaries and news features, the allocation of monies for bilateral donors, and the program strategies thus dictated to any number of NGOs funded by them.

Yet it is an identity neither chosen (nor in most cases even known) by the majority of people implicated in its reach. It has also become something that certain organizations have grown to detest, watching it grow from one important voice in the dialogue to an overfed red herring of the system, distracting, in their view, the

conversation from one that ought to be focused on a much broader scope of needs and causing, in some cases, far more harm than good (offer a woman who lives on less than \$1 a day \$60, or a \$100 sewing machine, to testify that she was raped and see what you do for the perceived credibility of anyone else who has been raped).

The history and instability of Eastern Congo is generally framed as impossibly complicated; and in the need to address it, international actors are caught unprepared.

The donors of the current system of international aid are not think-tanks, philosophers or academics. They are program managers, lobbyists, bureaucrats and politicians with constituencies. They need a hat stand. They need a hook. They need it to be a sound clip, for goodness sake.

Stretched taught between the last civil war and something currently resembling stability, Eastern Congo is a funder's dilemma.

In the system of international aid, implementers usually specialize in one of two categories: humanitarian organizations are called for when tsunamis wipe out an entire coastline, when 120,000 people flow into a refugee camp built for 40,000, when hospitals overflow with people starving or wounded, and when cholera floods

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into an already devastated country after a 50 year absence. Development organizations, on the other hand, come in when people are no longer fleeing for their lives, when schools are again open and kids can be given uniforms and books, when there is some sort of government or civil society framework to enable foreign organizations to do their work, and when their teams are not being hijacked, their bases are not being stormed by armed men, and there are no longer deadly skirmishes between armed groups.

Unfortunately, political resolutions do not always filter down to daily reality, and in this changeable world a resolution today does not dictate peace tomorrow. Eastern Congo is no longer considered to be in a state war. Rather, it has been in a state of low-to-moderate level conflict and instability, with a handful of villages pillaged every month, consistent waves of hundreds to thousands of people fleeing into 'the bush' out of fear of attack, regular targeted killings or skirmishes between armed groups, and one or two incidents of mass rapes (and yes, ongoing and pervasive sexual violence) every half year or so.

These two categories of organizations have entirely different cultures, rules, capacities, funding limitations and paradigms. They may partner with each other, and though they are often indistinguishable by those not working in the sector, they are in no way interchangeable, without inviting disastrous implications (see: Haiti after the earthquake or Indonesia after the tsunami).

Following the political end to the most recent large-scale conflict in DRC in 2009, the world of international aid (e.g. the funders) decided that it was time to transition from an emergency intervention to a framework of long-term development, feeling that Congo was close enough to a kind of peace that the priority could change from flying in food rations and UN helicopters to supporting school fees, funding economic development programs and sorting out whatever residual trauma remained through piece-meal psychosocial programs.

Unfortunately, political resolutions do not always filter down to daily reality, and in this changeable world a resolution today does not dictate peace tomorrow. Eastern Congo is no longer considered to be in a state of full-out war. Rather, it has been in a state of low-to-moderate level conflict and instability, with a handful of villages pillaged every month, consistent waves of hundreds to thousands of people fleeing into 'the bush' out of fear of attack, regular targeted killings or skirmishes between armed groups, and one or two incidents of mass rapes (and yes, ongoing and pervasive sexual violence) every half year or so.

With informed analysis and an ear to the ground, there is a certain amount of predictability. Where there are schools, most are still open. Some branches of the government function a bit. Most of the time you are not hijacked on the road. Outbreaks of preventable epidemics remain inexcusably frequent but people are used to their cyclical nature and take them in some amount of stride, keening for and burying their dead out of sight of most who can help, and out of mind of most who should be held accountable.

who suffers the most?

The other day I conducted a focus group with representatives from various ethnic groups in North Kivu. We started off with an exercise about perceptions called "quick thinking," where I asked them to tell me the first words that popped into their head when I mentioned several

phrases, beginning with "general population." People said: beneficiary, displaced, sick or ill, vulnerable, victim. Then I asked for their associations with the word 'incivique,' which means something like "criminal" or "civil disturber". They responded quickly: immoral, delinquent, rapist, assassin, bandit. The first group of words are those with which we associate sympathy and empathy; we usually want to help the vulnerable. The second group of words are about actions and are framed in terms of blame and contradiction to a norm, encouraging the feeling that whereas the first group deserves our sympathy and help, the second group can be ostracized and blamed. After the exercise I raised these points and asked the group, but does this mean that the "inciviques" are not part of the population? Because of the diversified nature of the conflict in this region they most definitely are, and everyone immediately pointed that out, laughing as they did so at the obvious contradiction.

However it was a good reminder (and intended as such) that what we call someone influences how we feel towards them, and how we feel towards someone influences how we act, how far we go to help them and how much we do to hurt them.

In the Kivu region of Congo – where the majority of the conflict and instability is concentrated – it is in these names and underlying associations that we get lost. There are so many armed groups and their alliances, histories and loyalties so complicated that in general conversation we just call them this, "armed groups," rather than trying to name them all. What we actually mean can range from members of the official Congolese army to a successful shopkeeper in some village who gives guns to a group of 19 year olds and tells them to rob a truck on its way to market.

One of the hindrances of the traditional vocabulary of war is that we talk about civilians and soldiers or armed actors as if they are clearly separated groups. The distinction is important (and considered a very useful thing) in terms of international humanitarian law; it allows the international community to agree on (and, more importantly, have a basis for prosecution based on) principles such as that of limiting collateral damage, meaning that a military strategy should avoid implicating civilians (e.g. if you must attack a village as part of an offensive strategy, you should not rape, pillage and murder civilians as well, but rather

concentrate on the destruction of military targets or armed actors).

As a humanitarian it is hard for me to accept that even this kind of dialogue is ultimately encouraging broad-scale respect of human rights but of course I can acknowledge that, within a limited viewpoint, the intention is there.

And yet, even with this benefit of the doubt, how do you apply such a precise framework to the definition of conflict in much of the modern world? In Eastern DRC, in addition to formal armies, you have a grassroots patchwork of what started as well-organized community militias who are not separate from the communities in which they live. They are not just “integrated,” in the common parlance; they are from the community. And perhaps they originally organized themselves according to ethnicity or place of origin or mother tongue, so now all who share that definition (whether bearing arms or not) are implicated by the consequences of their actions.

A community who “hosts” (whether or not they have ever been asked for their consent or opinion to do so) an opposition group is thus often considered a collaborator and may be free game for an attack. So in this way the armed groups ping-pong over the net of the population, moving into and out of a community and then taking turns attacking the community for hosting the opposition group.

Of course it is true that in some places in the region people are living in relative stability. I do not say comfort or health, though this is of course also true in some areas, but stability. This means, first of all, that they can get to their fields when they need to in order to plant and to cultivate crops, and that they are able to stay in one place long enough to harvest them.

Much of Congo is covered with lush, fertile, productive land; there is no reason that anyone should go without food in this country, no reason that there should be stunting and micronutrient deficiencies and malnutrition common enough that you can walk through a village and point out all the children suffering from it.

This is not a given condition of life; this is a direct result of the choices made by those in power. Why should there be food insecurity in this region of Congo? For the same reason that people are dying from diseases like measles, malaria and upper respiratory infections. For the same reason that maternal and infant mortality in DRC is among the highest in the world: lack of access, lack of basic healthcare, lack of investment in



things that benefit the population, like infrastructure.

The instability in Eastern Congo affects everyone. Access to crops ensures the link to a fundamental level of caloric intake and nutrition that is snapped like sugarcane the moment people feel forced to flee their villages. Even for places stable enough to harvest, the presence and passage of armed groups often means ongoing forced labor, unjust detention or bribery, frequent violence, and pillaging of goods and food. It may be that the armed conflict involves the participation of much of the general population (when there is no clear leader, how can there be confidence in the scattered leaders around?), but it also demands the suffering of nearly the entire population.

So who suffers the most? It is easy to say that it is children, women and the elderly. Yet in a landscape where fear is endemic, suffering is also endemic; trying to live with a mentality where violence, hatred and domination are the only understood forms of survival is no way to live at all.

Ongoing conflicts and future prospects

Around the time of the presidential elections in November, rumors of crackling instability in DRC flew around the world. The end of all hesitant peace was predicted; civil war said to be right around the corner.

At that time I was part of a rural vaccination campaign in the southern province of the country and during the week leading up to the vote itself a small team of us were progressing slowly up

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One surprising benefit to a country with such high levels of instability and under-development is that you do see, in precarious measure, a slight protective effect on the ecosystem.

Congo's burden is its wealth; its wealth is its burden.

In its purgatorial state – not at war, yet hardly at peace – the non-profit world still leans towards a humanitarian inclination; few others are willing to, or have the capacity to deal with the still frequent reality of armed robberies and violent attacks on their houses, vehicles and projects.

This is not a poor country; it is a country where a very few people in power refuse to direct the wealth of the country to those who by their birthright own it.



the lower Congo river in boats, vaccinating hundreds of children during the day in churches and shaded courtyards and camping each night in the mud yards of tiny health centers.

That week we also shared the river with puttering boats transporting voting boxes, election officials and the same gentian violet dye that we used to mark the pinkie fingers of all of the children who had been vaccinated already. Exhausted in my tent at night I had multiple confused dreams about putting used needles into the ballot boxes instead of election papers, and of accusations of fraud by election observers accusing us of marking the fingers of babies who were not even eligible for school, let alone for voting.

In the end, the elections passed by with a sort of peace truce, if not actually a set of comprehensive results. Since that time the international community has mumbled and grumbled and even published various official objections to dissociate themselves from what everyone generally now agrees was, at best, an inadequate electoral process.

But for a time afterwards it felt that if Congo did not have the 100% democracy that the Western observers were looking for, it might at least have avoided disintegrating again into civil chaos. And for those who live here, that was not an inconsequential result.

Unfortunately, in Eastern Congo at least, that feeling has now been replaced with a sense of apprehension. The elections provided a possibility that things might change; the disputes of the results maintained that sense of hope, leading some to think that perhaps, with all the international criticism the old political status quo might change; perhaps the politicians would put on new

hats, and step up to the plates of their promises.

But, in truth, none of these hopes have materialized.

Traveling throughout North and South Kivu these days you get the most profound sense – not that it is being used as a proxy battlefield for competing interests (as might be presumed from the press) but rather that it has been largely abandoned. Controlled, oppressed, stifled and forgotten. In the North, baboons play on the roofs of the abandoned buildings at what used to be the entrance and stopover to Virunga National Park. Guards still lift the gate for vehicles to pass through but now, as you drive past them and wave, it is not with the expectation of seeing mountain gorillas; it is instead with worry about seeing armed guerillas.

But these sentiments have all been negative. What else of Congo these days? One surprising benefit to a country with such high levels of instability and under-development is that you do see, in precarious measure, a slight protective effect on the ecosystem. Of course you also see total destruction of ecosystems but at least where there are no roads, the accompanying human chaos is also limited. Caught in mud up to our hubcaps one day, I bent down to the shock of grasses that our guide had just cut through with his machete. In this random spot on a hillside in South Kivu, and without even searching, I saw more than ten insects crawling about and I heard a cacophony of others. Crunching, munching, crawling. It was an astonishing experience.

Role of international players

Congo's burden is its wealth; its wealth is its burden. I live on the Rwandan

/Congoese border, on the shores of the limnic Lake Kivu, in Goma, a town that grew on the substrate of the Rwandan genocide as passageway for tens of thousands of refugees. Settled at the base of a still-active volcano, Goma is now a dusty base for NGOs, UN deployments, miners and business people profiting from cross-border trade, as well as an ongoing mixture of floating expatriates who fit no clear category.

In its purgatorial state – not at war, yet hardly at peace - the non-profit world still leans towards a humanitarian inclination; few others are willing to, or have the capacity to deal with the still frequent reality of armed robberies and violent attacks on their houses, vehicles and projects. There is a sprinkling of smaller development NGOs as well who have tried to break into a range of longer-term goals. But donors are trigger shy. Who wants to invest in a place where any day the city might be threatened by rebel groups, the smoldering volcano might rumble over again as it did in 2002, or the methane-floored lake might erupt, with earthquakes and mythical tsunamis?

Surrounding the aid community are the various branches of the UN, with MONUSCO (the so-called peace-keeping mission in DRC) lumbering or hovering by at all times in Goma, and throughout the region. They have a staff photographer who takes beautiful photographs, run a radio station known for decent journalistic standards and otherwise maintain a mission whose silence speaks loudly to those in search of transparency. They are a “peace-keeping” mission but what peace, in fact, are they keeping? And whose peace? They are questions for which I do not, but I imagine that someone does, have the answer.

What is interesting about being in DRC at this time in history is that civil groups (students, representative of grassroots NGOs, women's groups) have also begun to ask why, when the aid community has now been here for decades, and the UN semi-occupies their towns, the situation is still so bad for the population.

This questioning may take the form of threats to NGOs for what are seen as biased recruitment practices, or demonstrations against the aid community in general. I work for an NGO, so this kind of response is perhaps professionally concerning but I find it personally fascinating, and cannot quite avoid a sense of pride when I see it. In the last 25-30 years, where have been the voices of these “beneficiaries” (or, as a friend of a friend once called them, these

“right-holders”) in the system of international aid? To whom is the aid community accountable? If we have been acting in the place of the government then why should the population not begin to ask us to be more accountable as a government? If we did not want the role, then why did we take it? And can we reject it now, while still wanting to maintain our invested presence?

What is primarily fascinating to me is that in this region of Congo the government has been for so long so ineffective and seemingly uninterested in providing its most basic match to the social contract that the international community has felt obligated to invest in the long-term. It has saved lives, certainly; for all extents and purposes the people of Congo seem to be an expendable resource for their government.

In fact, the longer you stay in the country the more unbelievable it becomes that people here are living in abject poverty.

This is not a poor country; it is a country where a very few people in power refuse to direct the wealth of the country to those who by their birthright own it.

In Eastern DRC the aid community has been present for decades, during which time the government has been largely absent (in terms of providing anything for the people) and international actors have been invited in for their own benefit. The aid community's investment in this area of the world has begun to strike those who live here as shallow. Those of us in the aid community like to distinguish between ourselves and the UN forces. But for the population I do not believe there is any such clear distinction. In spite of whatever efforts, most people are still living without employment, without access to basic healthcare, without access to education and with an unreasonably high level of insecurity that often enough turns to terror and fleeing.

Today, as I write this, we received news of a new group of 20,000 people displaced in the south because of attacks on their towns and villages, and another 3-5,000 displaced across the border in the north, as well as various villages pillaged and emptied in the center of the country. These numbers are difficult to care about. Perhaps that sounds cold but is it not true for most of us, much of the time? Life is complicated and busy; what does it mean that 20,000 people were displaced? They were not killed, or drowned, or burned, or dying from car crashes. They just had to move.



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We are often trained, in the West, to view poverty and the suffering of people living in conditions of conflict as very sad and inevitable things.

In our garden on the edge of Lake Kivu, the morning sun distributes itself as if committed to a black and white spectrum: the qualities of brightness and saturation (flower stalks between the lava rock walls, grass blades rolling into the ripples on the shimmering and oceanic surface of the lake) somehow carry more meaning than the color. The color is so saturated (fuchsia, orange, white-green new leaves) that it almost outdoes itself, and leaves room in the mind only for form.

Congo is a riot of color, and the color so cinematic, and so real, that there is rarely a struggle to define its quality, or to pin down a moment in its transience, and so somewhere in the experience of these extremes the mind becomes oddly free to see what is otherwise so often disguised by beauty.

Form. Depth. Movement.

Today we will leave the city of Goma to go 3-4 hours north to one of our projects, driving straight towards towering Nyirongongo. Yesterday I watched the steam trail of this hulking volcano pouring to the west, only 10km from the city and for once free from haze or clouds. As we drive north we will see other volcanoes – baby ones, grandfather ones – one long chain of seismic gasps in the earth’s surface.

We are like Pompeii; our human history ripe for repetition.

The helicopters have begun again. It is a measure throughout the world, or at least throughout the UN-occupied world, that the number of helicopters you hear corresponds directly to the state of security of the country. Here, the helicopters and the planes and the armored vehicles and the egg-carton UN trucks with their legions of homesick soldiers are omni-present and have begun to multiply like bacteria in a petri dish: exponential, overnight. We wish they wouldn’t. We know that peacekeeping is only useful when there is war-making. We know that carrying guns makes things worse, even when you hope to make things better.

I spent more than two years living in Rwanda. And although Rwanda is a world and culture of its own, returning to Congo last September still felt like coming home; the film-set quality of central African light, the forehead knob greetings, the petites aubergines: these were things I knew, and had already grown to love.

But Congo, or at least the region of the Kivus, where I now live, is already loved by too many. Last night I heard someone try to explain the “way it all

works” to a new expat. He tossed his hands around, trying to illustrate the mess of armed groups and economic power players - mining and technological and pharmaceutical companies - the way they are all subsidiaries of the other, who is loyalist to, and who is enemy of whom, what Rwanda wants, what the government wants, what China and Europe want, and also how to recognize the heart of a soldier by the shape of his nose. It is the pride of the foreigner here to be able to recite these things; but their reports are given with such gusto that it makes me wonder how genuinely we would want to remove the cause of such excellent entertainment.

What is it, this quality of stability, that allows us to live our lives? We speak about instability as the root cause of so much suffering in eastern Congo, assuming or stating, that what we would wish for the country is for it to be stable and the people to have this thing, stability, otherwise defined as: constancy, steadiness, firmness, fixity, permanence.

But stability is not a goal in and of itself; it is a consequence.

Yesterday we drove through a town that seemed like a town. It was not deserted or pillaged; it was full of normal life. Market women called out greetings to passer-bys, or sat with sleepy eyes next to piles of avocados. Men repaired motorcycles next to shops. Children gossiped in school uniforms. Life seemed calm and, yes, stable.

Just north of this town in the past month several thousands of people have run from their homes across the border to Uganda, seeking refuge. Life in war is like this; alternately calm and terrifying and, often, simply surreal.

Driving through North Kivu yesterday it occurred to me to remind myself that I am living in a country at war. We prefer now – and it is probably officially classified this way – to say that the Kivus are in a state of ongoing instability and conflict. Ok, fine. Then what, I wonder, is war?

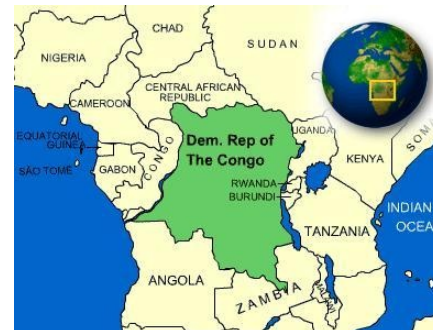
Something well-defined? One group versus another? The groups internationally powerful and the cause considered admirable?

Or is “war” simply a definition that is useful for clarifying when and how and where another government is obligated to break the autonomy of a nation state and intervene, on an international level?

But what autonomy, I ask? Our worlds and our economies are inter-linked. Our minerals and our natural resources cross all borders. Our human

suffering does as well.

We are often trained, in the West, to view poverty and the suffering of people living in conditions of conflict as very sad and inevitable things. I certainly grew up thinking this: how sad that there are poor people who cannot eat and are caught in war; we must take them food, we must bring them to a place of peace.



I did not grow up thinking, “it is my responsibility to research the pharmaceutical and technological countries that make the items I want to buy because it is the market demand for their products that is continuing this conflict a million human-paradigm years away.”

I did not grow up thinking, “nobody in Congo should actually be living in poverty and the fact that they are is not a fatalistic sad fact of life. No. The fact that they are is a direct result of our (and I speak of the world) choices.”

It is not an oversight of Mother Nature that people in Congo are living in poverty and dying of preventable diseases and violence; it is our ongoing investment in political and economic systems whose implementation, if not intent, is criminal: criminal because we are making specific choices that allow these systems to continue, and we are passing off the costs to those who cannot object.

This is an abuse of power, and no matter how diffused we render the responsibility, no matter how well we hide the links between death on the ground and a product in the store, no matter how many millions of dollars we spend on conciliatory peacekeeping and micro-economic development efforts, we are still in the wrong. Quite simply. We are in the wrong.

Human history is always ripe for repetition, true, but we are the ones choosing what it is that we will repeat. *(Photos used in the article: source UN, under creative commons license. Emily can be reached by email at emilycavan@gmail.com and follow her DRC experience on her blog www.emilycavan.blogspot.com)*



A dream for DR Congo

Laurette Kaniki-Muley left her homeland, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in 1994 as an 11-year old kid. Amid political unrest and myriads of conflicts sprouting in the DRC, her father decided to leave the country with his two daughters and settled in Germany. While growing up in a foreign land, Laurette, kept herself acquainted with the situation back home getting updates through her friends and relatives, but also extensively following the international media. After finishing her high school, she decided to study international social work so that the degree could be used in helping her native land.

Now in her final year of her degree in international social work, she has visited the DR Congo twice in recent years and, once her degree is finished, plans to go back in order to permanently work there. People like Laurette, with their skills, dedication and passion, are emblems of hope for the war trodden DR Congo.

GSDM's Editor-in-Chief Manoj Kr Bhusal recently caught up with her and talked about her future plans, experiences and got a diasporic reflection on the recent situation in eastern DRC. An excerpt:

When did you leave the DRC and why?

We left somewhere in 1994. My father used to be a member of the known opposition party UDPS – Union pour la Democratie et le Progès Social (Union for Democracy and Social Progress). The same opposition party whose Leader Etienne Tshisekedi Wa Mulumba claims to have won the last presidential elections last November 2011 in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Till 1996 the Democratic Republic of Congo was controlled by a dictator named Mobutu Sese Seko Nkuku Ngbendu wa Za Banga. He had been president for more than 30 years. Our lives were in danger so we left.

How often do you visit the DRC?

Do you have your relatives there?

I came to Germany when I was 11. And I was 23 the first time I returned to the DR Congo. The issues with stay permission here in Germany made it impossible for us to go to the DR Congo as we would have wanted to. My first time of going to the DR Congo was in 2006, then again in 2010 and this year 2012 I will be going again. I have precious relatives and dear friends there.

When it comes to the DR Congo, journalists and development workers say that there is no full-fledge war going on, but there is no peace either. What is exactling happening there?

The DR Congo is going through a post electoral conflict. On the 28th of November last year there was a presidential election in the country. The whole election period was a tough one. Fights between different groups of people supporting the one side and groups supporting the other side of the parties were rife. There were three candidates who had a real winning possibility. Mr Etienne Tshisekedi Wa Mulumba (who is a historical Opposition leader of the party UDPS), Joseph Kabila Kabange (who has been president since the assassination of Laurent Desirée Kabila, his father) and Vital Kamehre (who was the former president of the National Assembly and the president of the UNC party). Different organisations were present to observe the election procedures in different parts of the country. The observers were national as well as international. Their observations were summarized in reports and made public. And in those reports, the observers mentioned that a lot of irregularities had happened during the elections.

Ever since the results of the elections were made public and Mr Joseph Kabila Kabange was declared winner, there has been a lot of protest from the opposition and also from the Diaspora. The historical opposition represented by Mr Tshisekedi has refused to accept the

results given by the CENI and Mr Tshisekedi has proclaimed himself president even though the Supreme Court in the capital Kinshasa has declared Kabila as the official president.

Tshisekedi has been put under house arrest. Still today, he cannot go out except the government or the president allows.

The legislative elections also took place and were as troublesome as the presidential but still the country has new deputies who have been recognized by the Supreme Court and have been called to start their work in the National Assembly. Tshisekedi has forbidden all opposition members to be part of the National Assembly but not all of them have agreed and they have accepted to work in the National Assembly.

Opposition leader

Tshisekedi has been put under house arrest. Still today, he cannot go out except the government or the president allows.

Till now there are still different groups of militia and rebels going around devastating and destroying villages, destroying human lives in many ways and forcing villagers to leave their homes and migrate elsewhere. Those militia groups are not only from the DRC, but some of them also come from the neighbouring countries like Uganda, Rwanda or Burundi.

Frequent conflicts in the eastern part of the country have received significant media attention lately. What is happening there?

I don't know if we can call it a war but the eastern part of the DRC is affected by war conditions. Till now there are still different groups of militia and rebels going around devastating and destroying villages, destroying human lives in many ways and forcing villagers to leave their homes and migrate elsewhere. Those militia groups are not only from the DRC, but some of them also come from the neighbouring countries like Uganda, Rwanda or Burundi. This is the situation till today. Many different organisations try to help those people but some of those organisations are the big cities and not in the villages directly so its complicated and very challenging. Till now.

What means to be a young woman in a DRC village at the moment?

I do not have my own firsthand experience of living in a DRC village, but the only thing I can say is that it depends on where the village is situated. If it is somewhere where those rebels are moving, it is very dangerous. The rebels use women to satisfy their sexual lust. They rape and kill them anyhow, young and old they don't care. Women suffer from many things, the trauma of being brutally raped by so many different rebels, some of them have different kind of sicknesses and diseases and they transmit it to the women. Lots of women get pregnant afterwards and they are rejected by their communities and family members. Many of them do not have the chance of getting professional therapeutic help and many also die from



the sicknesses, the pains, the lack of serious medical support.

How does it differ to be a woman in Europe and in the DRC?

In so many ways. It is important to know that even inside the DR Congo it is not the same. In some regions women are very much independent and in other regions a woman depends fully on her husband or her family.

I am a Congolese. Born in Kinshasa, the capital of the DR Congo, lived my sweetest and most wonderful childhood there. Was taught about some important values of life which I kept and will always do and share with those I meet on my path, like respect, family, sharing, enjoying, laughing, responsibility, men and women, their roles and their duties, how to deal with the death of loved ones and many more.

The main difference I can recall is that when I was a child, in the DRC, I had to learn how to take care of the household and the children in the family. I grew up in Germany. I spent this very important stage of my life (11 to 23) in Europe. Till I was 19, my sister and I lived only with our father as our mother was not in Germany. For us, our father was the man and the woman at the same time. The new environment changed so we tried to adapt to it as good as we could. Our father used to do everything our mother or women do in the DR Congo. He cooked for us, I was 11 and my sister was 6. He washed our clothes, cleaned the house, went shopping and everything and he taught us also how to cook and take care of the house. We helped him as good as we could. Because of the role he took, my picture of a man and a woman got another dimension.

Whenever I am in the DR Congo I see that there is still this notion about women being responsible for the house and the children and their husband first before anything, before work especially. Even if she is working, because many women work in the DR Congo, she has to see that her children and her husband are well taken care of.

Till today some men can forbid their

women to further their education or to work, especially when the man himself is working. If a woman lives alone, her reputation in most cases is bad, even if it is not true. A woman is not supposed to live all by herself without a man, if she does she can be labelled as a prostitute, meaning a woman that does not respect herself and chooses to live her life anyhow. But a man or a young man can have an apartment of his own and it wouldn't be a problem at all. He is called responsible because he has started learning of how to be independent and responsible. Women are not expected to leave their family's house until they get married. This is the conception and mentality of a large number of the Congolese society in the DR Congo till today.

But let me tell you one of the biggest differences or challenge for me because I am an independent woman. There is this unwritten law in the DR Congo that says that the true value of a woman is only in her husband's house. No matter who she is in the society. In Germany or in Europe I learned that I have rights. As a child, as a young girl, as a woman. I became very independent. I focused more on my education than getting married and giving birth. And since I had most of my educational time here, I learned more about questioning and reflecting things and issues about myself and the society I find myself in and stuff like that, so I don't just say Yes to everything my Congolese culture offers me and this is a reality I confront everytime I am there.

Are you planning to go back to DRC after your studies? If so, why?

Yes I will be going back to the DR Congo. Why? That's simple, first of all there is no place on earth where I feel more comfortable and at home than in the DR Congo. This is not to say that I do not like Germany or Europe but the DR Congo is my mother and my father, it is the love of my life. I have no power over life and death but it is one of my innermost heart desires and a prayer to be able to live, work and die there.

I see myself to be a bridge that connects people. A bridge that contributes to more understanding and sharing between my two most important cultures, the Congolese and the German or western culture. I carry so much of Germany inside of me it would be a pity not sharing it with the Congolese in the DR Congo. I want to work with that in the DR Congo, though, I will always stay in contact with Germany in different ways.

Blood Minerals of Eastern DRC

People say that mineral greed is not restricted only among the neighboring countries, even the UN peacekeepers who were sent there to bring order and peace seem to be eying the country's minerals.



By INNOCENT KAZEMBE

Mugunga I and II and Bulengo camps of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photo: UN Multimedia

When it comes to the DRC, people easily think of vast mineral reserves, ongoing conflict and perpetual misery. For this edition of Global South Development Magazine, I interviewed a few people in the eastern part of the country where a number of violent conflicts are going on for years.

People said that the eastern part of the Congo has a lot of gold and other minerals, not as much as in Katanga, but enough to attract greedy foreign eyes. According to the locals, the trend is that militia groups from Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi come in and kill the innocent people in order to claim small parts of the land which has gold and other minerals. Reportedly, the militia groups claim that the minerals belong to them as well.

People say that mineral greed is not restricted only among the neighboring countries, even the UN peacekeepers who were sent there to bring order and peace seem to be eying the country's precious minerals.

One person I talked to said that the people couldn't understand why the Congolese government cannot move in and stabilize the eastern part because in other parts of the same country there is no war at all.

People of the DR Congo do mine the minerals but very little ends in their own pockets be it money or the minerals.

The instability in the nearby countries seem to have affected the eastern DRC. People say that the rebels from neighboring countries enter the DR Congo, confiscate food and grains, rape their women and kill children, and as there is no meaningful presence of the government, people have nobody to turn to, they are helpless.

The conflict has greatly affected human development in the region. There are no proper schools and health centres, and because the region has been unstable for such a long time that there is no aspiration for development left. People say that wars are like seasons, they come and go within short period of time, within months.

One of the people I talked to told me that especially around 1995-96, as it was the time Laurent Kabila was overthrowing the dictator Mobutu, the soldiers from Rwanda and Uganda were helping Kabila. They entered the country in the name of help and peace, but upto now they claim their ownership. The other woman told me that life is so uncertain in their area because you are not sure if tomorrow there will be peace or then you might be attacked and instantly dead. In addition, she said that she hasn't enrolled her 2 children into school simply because she is not sure if they will even last a week in that school, so the children are involved in mining already at the age of 9 and 13.

she hasn't enrolled her 2 children into school simply because she is not sure if they will even last a week in that school, so the children are involved in mining already at the age of 9 and 13

Who are the mineral buyers?

I asked the people that who were buying minerals from the area and how did the pricing mechanism worked. They said that there are 'big bosses' who get the biggest share, come and live nearby the mining areas. These guys take the minerals into Uganda where you find the 'unnamed' people with much money to buy from them, and the locals say, 'from there who knows what happens next.'

So this is what happens in eastern DRC everyday. The locals are forced to mine for petty sums, even very young people, some of them ex-child soldiers, have to mine consistently in the militia's presence. The mined minerals are transported into Uganda where big mineral transactions take place under the roofs of big Western companies and their influence. Ultimately, the Congolese gold, cobalt and diamond hit the American and European markets, whereas, the ordinary people in eastern Congo are living in misery, terror, destitution and powerlessness.

Doctor in your pocket – the new era of mobile health!

In recent years, the field of mobile health, or mHealth, has exploded. The power of cell phones and other mobile devices is being harnessed to improve health delivery systems worldwide.

In Malawi, community health workers (CHWs) have been using text messages to improve drug adherence among HIV-positive patients. The messages remind patients of their appointments and allow experts to collect information during disease outbreaks.



By KAITLYN PHILLIPS & ZACK WETTSTEIN
Text and photos

What can a cell phone do? It makes it possible to call your mom from half way across the world; to check your email while standing in line at the grocery store; and to snap a picture and instantaneously let your cyber following know what you are up to. But did you also know that cell phones can record and share life-saving medical information to and from rural areas in the developing world? Indeed, add this to the list of what a cell phone can do.

In recent years, the field of mobile health, or mHealth, has exploded. The power of cell phones and other mobile devices is being harnessed to improve health delivery systems worldwide. We wonder if Martin Cooper (credited with inventing the cell phone) could have ever dreamed that it would one day be used to increase access to health services amongst hard to reach populations; that it would lower the costs of basic health services; that it would improve our abilities to diagnose, track, and treat diseases; and that it would increase access to health information among health workers and the general population?¹ Who ever could have dreamed that with now over 4.6 billion phones in use worldwide, the opportunity for this technology to help

solve global health care problems would be so high?

Where is mHealth now?

Numerous mobile health efforts in the United States have focused on facilitating doctor-patient interaction outside the exam room. New opportunities have opened up to help improve patient education and behavior change by, quite literally, delivering essential information directly into people's hands. For example, the Text4baby program provides free health-related information to expecting mothers via text messages throughout her pregnancy and first year of the child's life². But mHealth extends beyond supplementing existing health systems in high-resourced areas. Most recently, mHealth initiatives are being used in settings where health delivery systems are significantly lacking or virtually non-existent.

Mobile health solutions in under-resourced areas are hot topics and have been tested by a vast number of pilot projects in recent years. In Malawi, community health workers (CHWs) have been using text messages to improve drug adherence among HIV-positive patients. The messages remind



A trainer teaching a community health worker how to use the phone

patients of their appointments and allow experts to collect information during disease outbreaks³. CHWs in Karachi, Pakistan are using cell phones to improve the treatment of childhood pneumonia, the greatest killer of children under five.

The cell phones provide an avenue of instant communication between the CHWs and local health centers,

Feature | Health

allowing for early detection and treatment of sick children in the communities, helping avoid potentially deadly complications⁴.

Finally, a potentially disastrous cholera outbreak was avoided during a religious festival in 2001 in Prayag, India with the help of mobile tools⁵. CHWs present at the event isolated the sick festival participants when they received the results of the lab tests via the mobile telephony system, preventing the disease from spreading. Crises averted.

Nicaragua and mHealth

In Nicaragua, the fruit of mHealth opportunity is ripe for the picking. As the second-poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Nicaragua is home to some of the highest rates of cervical cancer, chronic kidney disease, and childhood pneumonia in the region. Already efforts have been undertaken to tackle some of these challenges via mobile tools.

For instance, during the most recent H1N1 influenza and dengue fever outbreaks in 2009, PATH, an NGO that seeks to improve access to essential technologies for health, and the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health (MINSa) developed a text message communication system. This system collected up-to-the-minute information

from hospitals and clinics around Managua. In turn, this limited wait times and improved delivery of care during the epidemics.

Most recently, PATH and CARE International have begun working with MINSa to improve communication of medical emergencies in rural areas surrounding Matagalpa. This region has the highest rates of maternal and child mortality in Nicaragua. Imagine, if you will, a once expectant mother is now dangerously close to losing the life of her unborn child. She is isolated in a rural village and there is insufficient access to the necessary health care. PATH and CARE are working to establish communication through cell phones for emergencies exactly like this one. Instead of traveling three hours into town to receive help, a CHW can use a cell phone to call an ambulance within seconds.

Most recently, Catholic Relief Services and the Sustainable Sciences Institute have partnered with MINSa in Matagalpa to reduce the risks associated with complicated pregnancies. They plan on doing this by addressing gender norms that limit autonomy and prevent women from practicing healthy behaviors or seeking and receiving life-

saving care at the time of birth. The overall idea is to target behavior change amongst the men who have expectant partners, attempting to override a machismo mentality that puts soon-to-be mother at risk. The CHWs in these communities negotiate a behavior change plan with the men, such as committing to cut firewood and carry water thus reducing the burden on the women, using cell phones to track and follow-up with the men and their families. The hope is that the cell phone application used by the CHWs can help improve the information flow and cost effectiveness of the outreach efforts.

These examples are only the tip of the iceberg—in Nicaragua and the developing world in general, mHealth solutions offer a chance to improve health care in the most challenging of settings.

¹Anta, Rafael, Shireen El-Wahab, and Antonino Giuffrida. Mobile Health: The Potential for Mobile Telephony to Bring Health Care to the Majority. Inter-American Development Bank, 2009.

²National Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition
³Mahmud, Nadim, Joce Rodriguez, and Josh Nesbit. "A Text Message-based Intervention to Bridge the Healthcare Communication Gap in the Rural Developing World." *Technology and Health Care* 18.2 (2010): 137-144

⁴Marcus, A. et al. "Using NFC-Enabled Mobile Phones for Public Health in Developing Countries." First International Workshop on Near Field Communication, 2009.

⁵Ayyagari, A. et al. "Use of Telemedicine in Evading Cholera Outbreak in Mahakumbh Mela, Prayag, UP, India: An Encouraging Experience." *Telemedicine Journal and e-Health* 9.1 (2003): 89-94.

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Mutually Beneficial Impacts of International Volunteers in Latin America

"While the volunteers can and very often do have a positive impact on the community and people with whom they are working, I consistently have observed and believe that the bulk of the impact is gained by international volunteers themselves, as the seed of learning is planted within them during the experience"



BY ANNIE BACON

Text and photos

From mid-west youth groups traveling to El Salvador to build a church and feed hungry children to the rustic agro-eco backpack-carrying tourist traveling to the mountains of Northern Nicaragua to help harvest coffee, international volunteers have increasingly been traveling to Central America on service-oriented trips even since the 1980's. There are dozens if not hundreds of organizations offering volunteer opportunities in the region today.

While the volunteers can and very often do have a positive impact on the community and people with whom they are working, I consistently have observed and believe that the bulk of the impact is gained by international volunteers themselves, as the seed of learning is planted within them during the experience. They are the ones who return with an eye-opening, often life-changing experience, that can inspire them to work towards social justice, international conflict resolution, or simply become more civically engaged in their local, national or international communities. I have worked with sixteen year olds who return to Nicaragua or El Salvador year after year, until they graduate from college, and find a job abroad with service organizations. Or, with adults, who, struck by the experience of living for ten days with relatively so little compared to

their life in the US, have returned, retired, and completely changed the focus of their lives from one of material accumulation to one of philanthropy and art.

I don't mean to under-value the contributions of the volunteers and international NGO's with whom they are working. Often, as a result of the service trip, schools are built, houses constructed, water systems established, solar panels installed, and the infrastructure of entire communities transformed. However, arguably this all could also be accomplished with the financial donations from those same volunteers, without actually traveling to participate in the project.

After all of my experience working with international volunteers, I have come to realize that there are a few key principles that are important to keep in mind if the impact on the community with whom the volunteer works is to remain positive, empowering, and mutually beneficial.

The Help Concept - One of the most important areas that I believe a volunteer needs to examine and reflect upon before traveling to work in another country, is the idea that "I'm going to help". Even the most well-intentioned volunteers at times have displayed a belief that they are helping those who cannot help themselves. Often this is the case because it's the only context

one can fit the experience into, and because they genuinely believe that other people have it all backwards, wrong and need someone to show them the error of their ways.

Whatever the reason for this attitude, I strongly recommend that it be reflected on and when appropriate, adjusted. Not only can it be paternalistic, but also it can easily become ineffective and disempowering to a community's own development. Although ideas from the outside can be helpful, they should be incorporated into a dialogue and they should always come after one has spent time in, listened to, and ideally become invested in a community. Traveling somewhere to work or volunteer for ten days, and pronouncing statements of how to do something better, without humility, listening, and observing first can be presumptuous at best and insulting and damaging at worst.

I am reminded of a quote from an Australian Aboriginal woman, who Jim Wallis writes about in his book, *The Soul of Politics*. I refer to this often when orienting new volunteers. She said: "If you are coming to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up in mine, then let us work together." Whether from a secular or spiritual point of view, the important message is that both party's needs can and should be fulfilled by

Voluntarism | Latin America

by working together.

Time and Investment - Second, the importance of spending time in a community, being with people and listening, listening, listening, is paramount to any successful collaborative project. It is always surprising how much more can be learned by just spending time, going about the daily chores in a community, before you realize how much more to the picture there is than what first meets the eye.

Confronting Privilege - Third, in order for the volunteer to truly connect to community members, to move past the barriers of material differences, and to really work side by side, it's important to recognize and confront their own privilege. The fact that most (but not all) international volunteers are coming from middle class, wage earning, families, perhaps with a house, cars, access to education, etc. sets us apart materially from the majority of the people with whom we work. If the volunteer gets hurt, bit by a spider, breaks a leg, gets too uncomfortable, or any other emergency, he/she can often be back in the US within 24 hours; back to a house with a carpet, heater, cupboards full of food, etc. This difference and privilege is important to remember and to own when seeking to build peer based relationships.

Part of confronting privilege is also learning about the long history of wars, inequalities, and imperialism that often exists between the countries sending the volunteers and those receiving them. People to people solidarity, if it translates into civic engagement can actually help change these relationships and create more mutually beneficial partnerships for sustainability and peace.

Keeping these things in mind with an attitude of humility will help the volunteer navigate their desire to control and stay open to the experience, allowing them to more fully absorb and immerse themselves in their surroundings and allowing for the partner community with whom they work to also be empowered from the

experience.

Considering Impact on a Community - It's also very important to examine the impact international volunteers have on communities, from the community's perspective. While I cannot speak first hand, what I have observed is that a spirit of collaboration and solidarity is always welcome, and where this exists, there can be mutual success for all parties involved. The first time I told community members from Las Minas, El Salvador in 1999 that volunteers were going to be coming from the US, and paying money to come to work with them to build the school, and how much it cost, they thought I was lying. They asked me, why would anyone leave the US, with all the comfort that you have there, and come to work in the hot Salvadoran sun, to sweat, eat beans, get bitten by mosquitos, and be here? But after six months of laying bricks, mixing concrete, tying rebar, playing soccer, organizing welcoming and goodbye parties, and receiving and hosting over 150 volunteers, the community of Las Minas was left with much more than a new 6-classroom school; Friendships had been formed, stories had been shared and prejudices had been changed.

True success can occur when people from different countries, different cultures, work side by side on the same project, but not necessarily in the way we may think it does. A deep connection between people can be achieved that can become the seed for more questions about privilege, history, life, culture, customs. Deeply personal relationships take precedence over past and present affects of government and business practices and policies. Shovels mix concrete together, people carry water up from the river side by side, pass bricks, and are engrossed in the immediate task at hand of building a school together. Food, laughter, and stories are shared, and no one's agenda is dominating, except to see the school built and a teacher and students in a classroom. To gauge whether the impact is greater for the volunteer



Local community member youth speaking with foreign volunteer during school construction



Nicaraguan community members working with foreign volunteers to construct school wall

"the importance of spending time in a community, being with people and listening, listening, listening, is paramount to any successful collaborative project"

"Part of confronting privilege is also learning about the long history of wars, inequalities, and imperialism that often exists between the countries sending the volunteers and those receiving them"



Nicaraguan community members and foreign volunteers retrieving well water for construction project

or the community members with whom the volunteer works is difficult, but I think it suffices to say that often the benefit is mutual, perhaps even benefiting the international volunteer slightly more.

US Peace Corps in The Northern Triangle – A shift from development to militarisation?



By IOULIA FENTON

The “Northern Triangle” Central American countries of El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala have taken a serious bashing in the media, policy and travel arenas of late. According to an October 2011 report by the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development, El Salvador is more dangerous than Iraq. The rate of killing in El Salvador and Guatemala now exceeds that of their respective civil wars, said the Economist. Whilst the German Foreign Affairs office warns its citizens to stay away from Honduras because of the risk of theft, violence and murder.

This kind of press is not altogether unwarranted, given that all three countries did make it into the top 10 murder rates map of the world and, in the April edition of the Christian Science Monitor, the region was dubbed “the deadliest zone in the world outside of active war zones”.

These reports mirror the intelligence gathered by other nations and have understandably made people nervous. When Carlos Torres took over as the regional director of US Peace Corps, a \$440mn annual operation that places US volunteers in developing countries, the US congress at Washington DC put it to him bluntly: “What are we doing in the Northern Triangle?”

Carlos Torres was promoted to the Regional Director post after his role as one of the original members of the assessment team that conducted an organization-wide Comprehensive Agency Assessment following 20/20’s public shaming of the Peace Corps. The American broadcaster, ABC, ran an expose of the inadequacies in Peace Corps safety procedures and institutional cover ups; blaming such incompetence for the death of PCV Kate Puzey in Benin, Africa, in March 2009. Eventually, the report put out by the assessment team led President Obama to sign into law the Kate Puzey Peace



Corps Volunteer Protection Act on 21st of November 2011 that promises “to protect Peace Corps whistleblowers and improve the treatment of victims of violence and sexual assault”.

Although, in reality, serious incidences involving sexual assault and physical violence are actually fairly rare, they do happen. In fact, the Peace Corps’ decision to pull out of Honduras and the subsequent freezing and withdrawal of operation in the other two triangle countries were possibly triggered by an incident involving PCV Lauren Robert, 27, although Peace Corps denies this connection. On December 3rd, Ms. Robert was caught in a cross fire and shot in the leg during a bus robbery in the crime-saturated Honduran city of San Pedro Sula. Three weeks later, on December 21st, the announcements of pending reviews and their immediate consequences came: first in Honduras, then for Guatemala and El Salvador.

As things stand, all of Honduras’ volunteers have been evacuated and new groups are not being lined up in a hurry. In Guatemala and El Salvador, the actions have been a little less drastic. In March of 2011 and February 2012 in both El Salvador and Guatemala, respectively, Peace Corp assessment teams conducted an analysis of the risk facing PCVs. The results of these assessments are still pending, however, new groups of volunteers are not being invited to serve in either country. Meanwhile, large numbers of PCVs have been asked to take an early Close of Service and those remaining

are being consolidated into ‘safe’ areas, whilst the central teams review travel, hiring and other policies that affect the safety and security of the volunteers.

So what does all this mean at the US foreign policy level?

The truth is, the US has been pretty quite in the region in the last two decades. Perhaps its tail is still between its legs, since the public light has been shone on its immoral, illegal and sometimes despicable covert regime change actions during the armed conflicts in the region. Perhaps it is simply because it has little more to gain from the already exploited countries. Or perhaps the US has been too busy in other parts of the world, whilst dealing with its own economic crisis.

But the fact that drug related crime and violence is spilling out of control and forcing floods of illegal migrants across the Mexican border hits a little closer to home. “The reason Central America is on the US radar at all is because of the violence levels”, says Vicki Gass, Senior Associate for Rights and Development of the Washington Office of Latin America (WOLA).

“The Obama administration, as much as it is paying attention to Latin America at all, is concerned with the violence in Central America in particular”, she continues. “It is trying to be allies with the Funis government, it tried to boost Pepe Lobo, but the conditions are beyond the US’ control”.

This is why most of the regional initiatives have been focused on the military and security action. In 2010, Central America became an add-on to the Mérida initiative, originally enacted to set aside funds for military training, equipment and intelligence to help battle drugs and violence in Mexico. Eventually, this assistance was then spun off into the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), an entity of its own.

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So is there a direct connection between scaling up regional militaristic forces and the decision to all but withdraw Peace Corps from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador? None of the policy experts I spoke to, both from left and right factions, thought it was quite so simple. Kevin Casas-Zamora of The Brookings Institution, for example, sees it as a rational reaction to an objectively dangerous situation.

However, others postulate indirect links. The US is on some level trying to build relations with the region, but these are not directed at development. For Laura Carlsen, Director of the Mexico City-based Americas Policy Program of the Center for International Policy, it is precisely because the focus of US foreign policy has been on militarisation and securitisation and not development that the Peace Corps would even be considered for withdrawal. There is simply no room for peace and development. The loss of Peace Corps from the region is, thus, “sadly symbolic”.

It is clear that the drug and violence problem will not be solved by militarisation. As GSDM discussed at length in the January 2012 issue, it takes serious, peaceful development efforts to build functional states and democracy, with education taking centre stage.

The US drug policy of supply side crackdowns and increasing border securitization with its neighbours is not working at home or abroad. Earlier this year, Taylor Dibbert, a returned PCV and a political observer, commented that “pulling Peace Corps volunteers out of violent Central American countries is an inappropriate policy response to a much larger, more complex dilemma. It is disaster mitigation”.

He was referring particularly to the fact that the violence is not a one-sided problem caused by incompetent developing country governments unable to get their drug problems under control. “Something else is irrefutable”, he wrote, “if Washington refuses to pay more attention to Central American violence, continues to view US drug policy as a matter of criminality (as opposed to public health) and promotes what is at best an incoherent strategy as it relates to security in the Western Hemisphere, the effects of such a “strategy” will be devastating and will take, at least, decades to overcome”.

When it comes to the volunteers, no one summed up the apparent hypocrisy of the situation better than Elisabeth Reed, a Guatemala based PCV working on educational projects:

“Part of me recognizes the dangers - I am putting my life at risk by serving in Guatemala in the border region”, she wrote in her reactionary blog post, “Yet part of me instantly feels indignant as this thought passes. I am a college graduate who willingly accepted these risks to serve my country, my fellow humans and to learn about the realities of the world I live in. What is more tragic, then: a premature death that befalls a Peace Corps volunteer who willingly serves and has carte blanche to leave at any time, or an 18-year old kid who joined the Army because he couldn't pay for college, cannot leave his service honorably if he chooses, and gets killed in Afghanistan? One is justified because our country willingly accepts the sacrifice of a life dedicated towards the paradoxical killing of others in the name of safety and peace, and not the other for dedicating their life to peacefully improving the lives of others in the name of creating a world without conflict to begin with?”

Morocco to raise solidarity tax to help poor



RABAT, April 2012 - Morocco's government has agreed to amendments from parliament to widen the imposition of a new tax on firms to help it develop poor areas and help quash grumbling discontent over social inequalities, officials said.

Plans for the so-called solidarity fund tax were announced in the midst of mass protests last year in Morocco that were inspired by the Arab Spring revolts.

Proceeds from the new tax will help raise 2 billion dirhams (\$235 million) for a social solidarity fund to develop poor areas in a country that has one of the widest wealth inequalities in the region and where protesters still take to the streets over poverty, joblessness and corruption.

The fund is also expected to pave the way for a reform of food and energy subsidies - which even the government says benefit mostly those who need them the least.

The 2012 budget now provides for the imposition in 2012 of a tax equal to 1.5 percent of the net profit for firms that make between 50 million and 100 million dirhams in net annual gains, Finance Ministry and parliament officials said.

Firms with annual net profits above 100 million dirhams will be subject to a 2.5 percent tax on their net profit in 2012, they added. The government also agreed to raise tax on beer and spirits in 2012 by 12.5 and 43 percent respectively, the first increase since 2010, the officials said.

Official data shows that 24 percent of Morocco's near-34 million population lives in poverty. (By Souhail Karam/Reuters)

Bangladesh's fight to restore childhood sight

By TITHE FARHANA & DAVID MEAGHER
In Bangladesh

Some 40,000 children are blind in Bangladesh, 13,000 have cataracts, a treatable condition, with remarkable success rates results from a simply performed operation.



A blind child plays with sand. Photo: the Children's Trust

Imagine a heavy mist, a white blanket with the sun hazily shining through, you wave your hand just in from your eyes, only a shadow appears, in the thick fog, faint ghostly silhouettes move back and forth in the distance. You have cataracts or this is how it is for thousands of children in Bangladesh with this form of blindness. Some 40,000 children are blind in Bangladesh, 13,000 have cataracts, a treatable condition, with remarkable success rates results from a simply performed operation. The impact on children's lives is truly amazing. For the first time they are able to see a rich tapestry of colours with vibrancy that they have never witnessed before. Children consigned to a life of poverty and misery now have hope. They will have a life in front of them that offers opportunity of education, work and be able to contribute fully in family life.

Elimination of avoidable blindness Thousands of children in Bangladesh are unnecessarily blind but now local communities are playing their part in preventing the disease through a community self-help programme and restoring the sight of the nation's offspring. The Child Sight Foundation (CSF) is a response to VISION 2020's global initiative working towards 'the elimination of avoidable blindness, a joint programme of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB)' A group of ophthalmologists, eye care workers, social workers, led by Dr M A Muhit, Consultant in Childhood blindness and

disability, University of London formed the organisation to work nationally covering the most isolated communities as well as major cities like Mymensingh and Dhaka.

Congenital cataracts are a major cause of blindness from birth, and yet, parents know very little about that the disease is treatable. Resigned to having a child blind and a drain on the household income, fathers have run away leaving the family to fend for themselves.

Blind from birth

Blind from birth, children know no difference when growing up with a condition they accept as normal as they have never experienced what it is like to see. The parents often know no difference either. Many impoverished and uneducated Bangladeshi parents believe that blindness is incurable, believing it is a curse from God when they discover a child is blind, or it is simply bad luck. Some parents think it is a condition that the child will grow out of, others like Ameena Begum reconciles her son Mamum's blindness by saying it is from God as sign that she needs to repent from her sins.

Blindness in children often remains undetected until the age of two or three. Blind babies go unchecked and then when parents realise their child is not normal, immense sadness sets in which leads to a feeling of great shame. The parents make their blind child stay home so they won't be bullied and be made fun of. Parents fear the gossip that their unfortunate child inevitably brings.

Worst of all teachers say they can't teach blind children and are not allowed in the classroom. Sufferers with impaired vision are kept away from vital education. Blind children are deprived of social skills and are unable to build strategies to help them overcome barriers to communication. And in some parents' eyes, unable to see, blind children are useless in the house as they can't help with the family chores. Blind children suffer abuse from resentful family members, are neglected and find their way onto the streets as orphans. Parents unable to find enough money to look after them, force their children out onto the streets to join the army of child beggars. However every cloud has a silver lining, KIM is changing all this. No, KIM this is not the name of a philanthropist concerned for the wellbeing of others, it is a friendly acronym for the 'Key Informant Method' (KIM). The altruism comes from the local community. These are respected members of society, friends and relatives willing to give their time to help the disabled. Local people mobilized into action to help their fellow citizens. The Key Informant Method is not a new concept, having been used by the medical profession but here it is unique as KIM hasn't been used before in the world of Ophthalmology. Pioneered, by Dr Muhit, KIM is responsible for multitudes of child being diagnosed with an eye condition, many of them treatable and to date thousands of children lacking in vision have their sight restored.

Unpaid Volunteers join the fight

KIM volunteers are identified by their local knowledge. These are upstanding villagers who are known by their community, able to obtain 'inside information' knowing who of their neighbours are harbouring blind children behind closed doors, too embarrassed for their child to be part of village life. KIM workers are unpaid, and come from a cross section of society; some are government workers, and others from NGOs already working in the area, the informers are made up of social workers, community leaders, Imams, school teachers, college students and the regions journalists.

In each of the 64 districts of Bangladesh a field worker is appointed to co-ordinate the volunteer informants. A CSF day's training is attended where Key Informants (KIs) assemble to learn how to recognise the symptoms of blindness. At the end of the training they are able to ascertain, in most cases, if a child has cataracts and refer the information to their district field officer who in turn will refer the sufferer for treatment. At the end of the training KIs are able to measure the vision of school children using the simple test of holding up their fingers and asking a child to count how many from a set distance of 6 metres. The key informer will be able to detect other ailments as well as identifying cataracts.

The Key informant Method is a massive advancement in detecting eye problems in Bangladesh because it relies on the natural propensity for people to 'gossip. KIs are encouraged to spread their existence by word of mouth, information passes from person to person that there is a clinic being held in the area and where it is. The news gets round that the Key Informants are visiting areas to examine children's eyes. Following a day's training by CSF and sacrificing three to four weeks of their time KIs are able to penetrate the remotest areas. Field officers are able to draw up long lists of children suspected of being blind, followed up by specialised treatment by eye doctors and surgeons. To date 800 field workers have been trained. KIM has proved so successful it has now been adopted in China, Korea and the Philippines.

Testimony to KIM's success

Azim Uddin, a simple labourer, is testimony to the KIM's success, talking about his son, he says, 'I didn't know anything about cataracts, I noticed that he looked white when he was 2 years of age, but I thought he would grow out of

it, and as he grew up his sight got worse, he couldn't even see the blackboard.' He heard through the village school teacher, who was trained as a KI by CSF, that there was going to be an eye screening camp in a nearby region, a doctor examined his eyes and it was discovered that he Nazim was suffering from bilateral congenital cataracts, in other words he had cataracts in both eyes since he was born. Nazim was subsequently operated on and has since returned to school. Subsequent to KIM's success, ambitious claims eliminating preventable child blindness in Bangladesh have been made.

Still work to do as babies continue to be born blind.

In Dr Muhit's own words 'Using this innovative approach has resulted in one of the largest outreach projects to children with impaired vision to date. KIs can recruit large numbers of children quickly, from the community'. Dr Muhit in a presentation went on to say that it was expected that 'all children will be identified and cataract blindness will be eliminated'. The causes of congenital blindness are not fully understood which means that there will always be new cases. Each year another 2000 cataract children are born. CSF identified over 10,000 cataracts in young people and babies, have operated an enormous backlog generated by a mammoth list of sufferers and completing a marathon 20,000 surgical tasks. KIM has made this possible.

Paediatricians are trained to recognise cataracts in babies, but there are always some children that fall through the net. 'There is a need to be vigilant,' Mr. Muhit says, 'by building the capacity of local volunteers, health workers and medics in detection and referral of childhood cataract in very young children and also by supporting hospitals to operate on them on-going programs are needed to identify those children and operate on them so that a new 'backlog' of childhood cataract blindness is not created again'.

By 2020 avoidable blindness to be wiped out

In line with Vision 2020, WHO and IAPB, the goal for Bangladesh is to wipe out avoidable blindness by the year 2020. The Ministry for Health, national and international NGOs and professional organisations and social groups are working together to achieve the target. The Vision 2020 web site states 'Vision 2020 seeks to ensure the best possible

Congenital cataracts are a major cause of blindness from birth, and yet, parents know very little about that the disease is treatable.

Many impoverished and uneducated Bangladeshi parents believe that blindness is incurable, believing it is a curse from God when they discover a child is blind, or it is simply bad luck.

'Using this innovative approach has resulted in one of the largest outreach projects to children with impaired vision to date'

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vision for all people, thereby improving their quality of life. This goal should be achieved through the establishment of a sustainable, comprehensive eye-care system as an integral part of every national health system.' CSF has contributed enormously to Vision 2020 and its fight to give everyone possible the right to sight.

Note: Dr. Mahut is also the Honorary Executive Director of CSF and the Child Sight Foundation in established in 2007.

Improving women's participation: A challenge for Nepal



By NARAYAN BHATTA



If we forget about the painful miserable destruction caused by the armed conflict, the other side of the Maoist movement is that it contributed a lot to make people aware of their rights and strengths.

Nepal, as a land of ancient Hindu civilization has the history of a good social status and proper participation of women as major stakeholders, mainly during the very ancient 'Vedic' period, (150-500 B.C.) Hindu religious and philosophical books, such as the Vedas, the Bhagwat Gita and many other have clearly explained this. Many other Western travelers and writers have also noticed that frequently.

The due respect and equality among the male and female was seen even during the Anglo-Nepalese war of 1814-1816 AD. Protection of the sovereignty of the nation had become possible with a remarkable contribution of women.

Afterwards, the Nepali society shifted to patriarchy and exclusion and discrimination to women started in their worst forms. Misinterpretations and false explanation of religious statements increased along with deprivation of education and lack of opportunities and property rights to women. That continued for centuries, almost around from the 13th century to late 18th/early 19th century. Hindu monarchical kingship of the modern age made it even more problematic with various discriminatory state policies against women.

Even though, as a silver lining on the dark cloud, some effort was made by the rulers against extreme discrimination

and exclusion of women in Nepal. One of the very remarkable reforms was carried out by the Rana prime-minister Chandra Shamsar by abolishing the Sati system (a practice of immolating women when their husbands die) in 1920 and slavery in 1924. These were the very early days of intensive debate and discussion going on in British-India about implementing inclusive social policies. B. R. Ambedkar's commendable initiation and movement on this made both British rulers in India and almost a British protectorate Rana government in Nepal to introduce a number of other such reforms in both Nepal and India.

The new constitution introduced after the restoration of democracy in 1990 granted the right to property and divorce along with many other inclusive reforms. However, there were still many direct and indirect discrimination and exclusionary practices prevalent in practice. Access to education was still very rare for women. Right to property was never implemented. Child marriages, polygamy and the dowry system were prevalent as usual. The condition of the women belonging to so called Dalit families and remote villages was even more miserable. All in all, discriminative and exclusionary cultural and religious practices against women were still going on.

Then Nepal faced a decade long armed revolution led by 'Communist party of Nepal-Maoists(CPN-Maoists)', mainly raising the same issues and demanding more equality, social justice and proportionate inclusive participation of all ethnic groups, languages, religion and gender in all state mechanisms. If we forget about the painful miserable destruction caused by the armed conflict, the other side of the Maoist movement is that it contributed a lot to make people aware of their rights and strengths. Participation of women in local decision making increased. The involvement of female cadres and gorillas in Maoist 'rebellion fighters' made the national army obliged to accept and recruit female soldiers in their troops.

The new interim constitution written after the April Revolution of 2006 transformed the nation into a federal democratic republic. The constitution has reserved 33% seats for women in every sector of the state, including the Constitution Assembly, the cabinet and so forth.

With more than 90 ethnic and caste groups, Nepal is deeply hierarchical. Despite the abolition of formal hierarchies in 1963 and an affirmation of equality of different groups before the law in the new Interim Constitution, discrimination based on ethnicity, gender and caste persists.

The notion that progress is restricted by caste, ethnicity and religious affiliation is prevalent in the academic and public debate in Nepal.

Severe violation of basic human rights of thousands of Nepali women working as domestic workers in the Gulf Countries, including Israel, has been another challenging problem for Nepal.

The notion that progress is restricted by caste, ethnicity and religious affiliation is prevalent in the academic and public debate in Nepal.

Many poor and vulnerable people specially women and low cast people and ethnic minorities are always either excluded from the mainstream politics or underestimated and ignored in many cases. Lack of access to opportunities especially to education and employment, as well as lack of participation in decision making has been the core reason for increasing exclusion. Ownership to capital resources, mainly to the land, is another debated and very complex issue in the field of inclusive social policies.

Nevertheless, different surveys have shown that gradual social change is going on, though discriminatory and exclusionary practices based on ethnicity, caste, religion and regional prevalence still do exist. People in the southern plain (having roots in India), and people from the far-west and upper Himalayan region are deprived of their rights and welfare services offered by the state. Religious minorities such as the Muslims and Dalits (so called untouchables) are the most underprivileged. The ever debated most challenging problem of landlessness among agricultural workers that includes majority of women is not yet solved.



Where are the changes then? Primarily, the ongoing political (structural and policy) changes have contributed to promote progressive social changes. Unlike before, now, citizenship is issued after a mother's testimony or on the basis of her citizenship.

In the recent years there have been changes towards inclusive policies such as positive discrimination and reserved quotas in almost all fields including in the parliament, education structures, the judiciary and the bureaucracy.

Women's participation in the judicial system and the civil service is still negligible. Inclusive proportionate participation of all ethnic groups and Dalits is not yet a reality in practice.

On the other hand, Nepali women suffer more in the Middle East than in their own country. Severe violation of basic human rights of thousands of Nepali women working as domestic workers in the Gulf Countries, including Israel, has been another challenging problem for Nepal. As a new form of slavery they are seen as a commodity to be sold in different ways. Sexual harassment, obligation to work more than agreed working hours, low payment, deprivation of right to information are major challenges they face everyday. The government has failed to address these issues with better regulation of the so called 'man power companies' in Nepal and by establishing strong diplomatic relation and effective trade and labor agreement with the involved parties.

Nepal's case once again proves that just constitutional and policy arrangements are not enough to ensure a better reality. Perhaps reforms in bureaucracy and awareness campaigns are needed against discriminatory practices deeply rooted in culture and in the social system. Self centeredness and luxurious romanticism among a few high class educated women and within some indigenous groups is also a matter of worry. Last but not the least, like in many other developing countries, Nepal's journey to ensuring women's participation should start with poverty reduction, specially among women.

Sexual violence forcing girls out of school

PORT MORESBY, April 2012 - In the Pacific nation of Papua New Guinea (PNG) sexual violence against young girls, and the shame and stigma that follows, is forcing many out of school and others into early marriage.

A recent study by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), one of the country's main providers of medical and psychological assistance to survivors of family and sexual violence, showed that from 2008 to 2011, a significant proportion of patients who received treatment as a result of violence were children, some under the age of five.

In the rural settlement of Tari, 31 percent of those who reported violence were between five and 12 years old. In Lae, the second biggest city after the capital, Port Moresby, 26 percent were between the ages of 13 and 17.

Almost half of those reporting sexual violence in Lae from January 2008 to June 2010 - some 520 people - were under 18 years old. In Tari, 248 were minors, said Patrick Almeida, MSF's medical coordinator.

"In both places, in over 70 percent of the cases, the perpetrators were known by the survivors," he added.

"It's really bad," said Ume Wainetti, head of the NGO, Family Sexual Violence Action Centre (FSVAC), based in Port Moresby.

Young girls are already disadvantaged when it comes to education, and the threat of rape and sexual abuse aggravates these inequalities. As it is, parents generally hesitate to send their daughters to school because they will just get married and have babies. Boys will carry on the family name and continue to work," Wainetti said.

The remote locations of schools have even greater implication for girls, noted UNICEF. "Some kids have to walk for hours to get to school and the journey on the way to school makes them vulnerable to attack, especially for girls," said Joseph Logha, Department of Education assistant secretary. "The experience of sexual violence definitely affects a girl's education in terms of being able to stay in school and school performance," said Ruth Kauffman, MSF project coordinator at a Family Support Centre in Lae. (Source: IRIN)

A kidney for an iPad!

Five people in southern China have been charged with intentional injury in the case of a Chinese teenager who sold a kidney so he could buy an iPhone and an iPad, the government-run Xinhua News Agency has said.



The five included a surgeon who removed a kidney from a 17-year-old boy in April last year. The boy, identified only by his surname Wang, now suffers from renal deficiency, Xinhua quoted prosecutors in Chenzhou city, Hunan province, as saying on Friday.

According to the Xinhua account, one of the defendants paid an estimated \$35,000 to arrange the transplant. He paid Wang approximately \$3,500 and split the rest with the surgeon, the three other defendants and other medical staff.

The teen was from Anhui, one of China's poorest provinces, where inhabitants frequently leave to find work and a better life elsewhere. He bought an iPhone and iPad, and when asked by his mother where he got the money, admitted selling a kidney.

Apple products are hugely popular in China, but are priced beyond the reach of many Chinese. Apple's ubiquitous smartphone - iPhone - starts at \$633, while iPads begin at \$474.

Wang was recruited from an online chatroom and is now suffering from kidney failure and is in deteriorating health, the Xinhua news agency said.

Value of OECD aid drops for first time in 15 years

the guardian



Despite an increase in cash terms, aid from the world's richest countries was worth less in 2011 as inflation reduced the purchasing power of their currencies.

Aid from the world's richest countries was worth 3% less last year compared with 2010, as inflation ate away at what their currencies could buy. Disregarding years of exceptional debt relief, this was the first drop since 1997, taking inflation into account, according to figures from the OECD club of rich countries.

In 2011, aid from the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD came to \$133.5bn, or 0.31% of their combined gross national income (GNI). In absolute numbers this was more than the 2010 figure of \$128.5bn – the year net official development assistance (ODA) reached its peak. However, adjusted for inflation and weaker currencies, last year's figure actually represents a 2.7% drop. This does not necessarily mean governments have cut their aid budgets, but that the money is worth less because of inflation.

Thailand has moved in a positive health policy direction. As of April 1st 2012, eligible citizens will be entitled for free, unconditional emergency care in hospitals, reported the Bangkok Post on the 14th March. Free emergency treatment will be offered to all patients listed under the civil services medical benefits scheme (CSMBS), social security scheme (SSS), and universal healthcare coverage (UC).

Famous Hollywood actor **George Clooney** was arrested for civil disobedience when demonstrating in front of Sudan's Embassy in Washington, reported the Washington Post on March 16th. The actor, an avid activist, was attempting to bring attention to the humanitarian crisis facing the border region of Sudan and South Sudan. He was later released.

Honduras took the spotlight after the Camayagua prison fire killed over 380 inmates in February, reported the internet based news provider Honduras News. The incident is but the latest of the series of negative press facing the country. In October 2011 it was revealed as one of the most murderous places on the planet by the UN's first global homicide report and November saw the evacuation of all US Peace Corps volunteers, leaving behind vital development projects.

The entire world of media had reported in some way on the **KONY 2012** campaign started by the NGO Invisible Children. The campaign video went viral and in a matter of days scored over 75mn views early in March. It's aim is to convince the US government to commit troops and other support to the Ugandan Military in order to capture the rebel leader Joseph Kony who has over the last 25 years abducted over 30,000 children into sexual and military slavery. It was not all good news, however, as the video prompted outrage in Uganda, as Kony has not been heard from for six years, was no longer in Uganda and could possibly already dead, reported the Huffington Post. One YouTube video accuses the whole campaign of being a false pretence to involve US military in a country that has recently discovered oil fields said to rival those of Saudi Arabia.

Guatemala made national history and set a real precedent in March when an ex military man was convicted for the murder of 201 people in the village of Dos Erres during the country's 36 year long Civil War that ended in mid-nineties. Pedro Pimentel Rios, 54, was jailed for 6000 years, reported World News On-line.

Kony 2012 activist group releases new video

BBC

US activist group Invisible Children has released a sequel to its video highlighting the activities of Ugandan rebel leader Joseph Kony. The first 30-minute film attracted some 100 million views online, but was criticised for simplifying the issue.

The follow-up has been made without input from the group's co-founder, who suffered a mental breakdown following publicity generated by the film.

The film-makers pledged to include more context in the latest video.

The first film profiled Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army, a militia operating in several African countries

which has kidnapped thousands of children, forcing girls to become sex slaves and boys to fight as child soldiers.

Some criticised the video for oversimplifying a complex issue. Uganda's Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi said that the video wrongly gave the impression that the country was still at war.

Titled Kony 2012: Beyond Famous, the new release begins with the huge media reaction to the initial release, highlighting the mainstream media coverage the video gained across the US. But it quickly switches focus to Africa, with more voices from Uganda than were featured in the emotive first release.

When Things Fall Apart



By MANOJ BHUSAL

When we were working on the cover story on the DR Congo for this edition of Global South Development Magazine, we came across an internet post that said: ‘A few African countries are doing really good, many of them still do have conflicts and their own issues, but the DR Congo is a bit different. Here, things, really, have fallen apart.’

By now we have finished the cover piece, the magazine is being designed for final publication, during these recent few days I managed to talk with a number of people who are familiar with the DR Congo, went through many articles and internet posts, read reports of NGOs and relief organizations, and my one sentence summary would be similar to the above mentioned internet post, ‘yes, in the DR Congo, things have really fallen apart.’

When you read about the DR Congo, you instantly get two images circling around your mind. The first image is of imagination, of possibility that tells that with all its potential and natural wealth, a country like the DR Congo should have been the most prosperous nation on the planet, while the second image is of reality, the bitter, desperate reality, that gives you a gruesome image of the country, where life expectancy of its people is mere 48 years, the average income of its citizens \$300 a year and the country is consistently at the bottom of UN human development index (187th out of 187) with 71% of its population living below the poverty line.

The obvious question arises, what are the reasons that have made the DR Congo the poorest nation on the planet. Has the country been cursed by nature with no natural resources and possibilities of economic development?

The answer is quite the opposite. As our GSDM correspondent for the DR Congo, Emily Lynch, who also works as a health consultant for the relief organization Doctors Without Borders, writes in her feature, ‘Congo's burden is its wealth; its wealth is its burden.’

The DR Congo has almost everything that a country needs for a sound economic development. The country covers 2,344,858 square km of land in the centre of Africa, making it the 12th largest country in the world, roughly the size of Western Europe. Given the size of the country, its population of 70 million is not excessively high either. Most importantly, the DR Congo has vast reserves of the natural resources that the world needs. It has cobalt, copper and gold mines, it has diamond ores and other precious gems, the most notable fact being that the country has 70% of the globe's coltan reserve, something that is vital for mobile phone production.

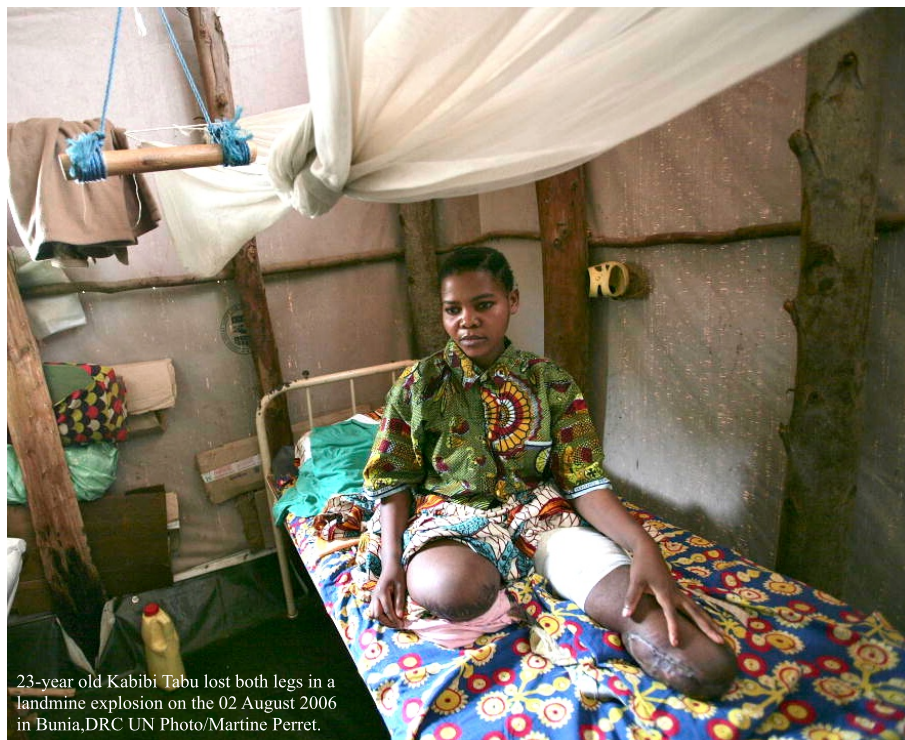
Home to the world's second biggest rainforest, DR Congo is immensely rich in renewable energy sources as well. With 13% of the world's hydropower potential, experts say, vast and networked rivers of the country could power the entire African continent. Then again there is this bitter reality: at the moment just 9% of the DR Congo population has access to electricity.

The same goes with agriculture. Emily Lynch from the DR Congo writes, ‘much of Congo is covered with lush, fertile, productive land; there is no reason that anyone should go without food in this country, no reason that there should be stunting and micronutrient deficiencies and malnutrition common enough that you can walk through a village and point out all the children suffering from it.’



An internally displaced girl in the DR Congo. Photo: UN Multimedia

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23-year old Kabibi Tabu lost both legs in a landmine explosion on the 02 August 2006 in Bunia, DRC UN Photo/Martine Perret.

After Mobutu's departure, the country entered into series of other political conflicts that took 5.4 million lives between August 1998 and April 2007. It wasn't a single conflict or a power struggle. There were wars within wars, conflicts within conflicts, involving armies of at least 7 nations, fighting and shedding blood in the Congolese soil.

Historically the DR Congo has gone through a lot. By 1877, the Congo was occupied by the forces of Belgium's King Leopold II. For the brutal king, killings and massacres were like child's play. While extracting huge quantities of rubber from the country, he made violence a basic tool for everyday affairs in the Congolese society. The country got independence in 1960, but another dark period instantly began when Patrice Lumumba, only 35, the country's first prime minister and a popular independence leader was deposed, imprisoned and killed only after twelve weeks in power. Later it became clear that Lumumba's assassination was carried out with the assistance of Belgium, for which the Belgian government officially apologized in 2002.

From 1965 to 1997, the country was ruthlessly governed by Joseph-Desire Mobutu, who not only renamed the country as Zaire, but got a new stylish name for himself. He had to be called Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga, someone who is all powerful, goes from conquest to conquest and his legacy is nothing, but flames of fire. After Mobutu's departure, the country entered into series of other political conflicts that took 5.4 million lives between August 1998 and April 2007. It wasn't a single conflict or a power struggle. There were wars within wars, conflicts within conflicts, involving armies of at least 7 nations, fighting and shedding blood in the Congolese soil.

Western stance on the DR Congo issue has been quite a paradoxical one. As long as the minerals were coming out of the country, nobody showed any concerns about serious human rights violations carried out during Mobutu's dictatorship and even afterwards. France even supported the dictator till his last moments. The rest of the Western countries took Belgian reference when it came to the DR Congo, and Belgium's historical involvement in the country hasn't spared many happy stories to share.

Even now things haven't changed so much though a number of peace deals have been signed in recent years. Many instances show that foreign mineral companies have, time and again, been responsible for fuelling instability in the region. In 2004, the Australian company Anvil Mining was found to be providing logistical support for a military siege when the Congolese troops carried out a mass murder and looting in the town of Kilwa. Forget about private corporations, even the UN peacekeepers were linked to a gold smuggling enterprise with local militias in Ituri in 2005, and a UN internal report concluded in 2004 that its troops were involved in sexual abuse and exploitation of women and girls in the region.

Players and perpetrators have changed overtime, but it is always Congolese people who pay the price when there is conflict and instability in the region. Recent media reports show

that violent clashes, killings, rapes and robberies are still going on in the eastern part of the country. According to a UN report, some 14,200 rape cases were registered in South Kivu alone between 2005 and 2007.

The DR Congo example clearly shows that mere availability of resources is not enough for development, instead, how resources are used and who uses them is a crucial issue. For decades, foreign hands have just messed up many things in the DR Congo and virtually robbed the country, it's now time that the people of DR Congo decide their fate themselves and use their mineral resources wisely for the benefit of all Congolese people. There is no doubt that if the DR Congo is to be stable, the recently-elected parliament and the new government should make smart decisions in order to change the ways how mineral, oil and forest resources are managed. The young and newly reelected President, Joseph Kabila, said to be shy but smart and reform oriented politician, should ensure the constitutional right of Congolese to fairly benefit from their natural wealth, and stopping mineral trade in conflict stricken areas of eastern Kivu provinces would give a lot of respite to the locals in the region.

Things do have fallen apart in the DR Congo, but there is still an opportunity to assemble the things up and move towards a new direction of development, peace and prosperity. And for that a strong political will and sheer determination is a must. (Editor can be reached at manoj.bhusal@silcreation.org)



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