

Matthew Jones
Pekin Community Schools
Packwood, IA
Democratic Republic of the Congo, Factor 17: Good Governance

The Government's Effect in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Imagine living in a country where your life expectancy is only 48.7 years old. Here in the United States, we don't really think about that. Teenagers are accustomed to their parents just starting to become gray at that age. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, teenagers are lucky to still have their parents at that age. This country scores a Human Development Index ranking the country at 186th (Shah. Web). The HDI is an index used to measure and show the development of a country by linking factors such as life expectancy, educational fulfillment, and income (Human. Web). This ranking places the country as the second to last least developed country, barely beating Niger (Human. Web). With a land area of 905,354 square miles, it is the 12th largest country in the world. It also has a massive population growth rate at 2.54% per year (Shah). With a population of 75,507,308 people, it is the 17th most populated country. Almost half of the country's population is under the age of 15. Of that very vast population, only 46% of people have access to safe water (Democratic. Web). The country itself has had a very rough history that contributes to many set backs in development.

In 1908, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was first established as a Belgian colony. They then gained their independence in the year 1960, but suffered during its early years with political and social uncertainty. Early disagreements between former President Kasavubu and Prime Minister Lumumba led to a lack of strong leadership and decision making (Central. Web). In September of 1960, Kasavubu fired Lumumba. He was arrested and put into prison where he was killed in 1961. Colonel Joseph Mobutu led a military assault in March 1965 and overthrew Kasavubu, naming himself president in November of that same year (Democratic. Web).

Mobutu strove to kill the religious influence the people had by outlawing religious teaching, ending the celebration of Christmas, and changing all the region names that were Christian to African names. Mobutu then changed his own name to Mobutu Sese Seko which means "the all-powerful warrior, who because of his endurance and inflexible will to win, will go from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake" (Central. Web). He also changed the name of the country to Zaire. He kept control of the country for 32 years via many fixed elections, along with military force and brutality. After the country had been weakened by a brutal civil war and the First Congo War led by Rwanda, in May 1997, the Mobutu reign was brought to an end. Laurent Kabila took over and changed the country's name to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In August 1998, Kabila's rule was challenged again by Rwanda. In January 2001, Kabila was assassinated. Joseph Kabila, his son, became the country's head of state. In October 2002, Kabila mediated an agreement to withdraw Rwanda's military from the country. In July 2003, a new transitional government was put in place and had a very successful set of elections. After a rebirth of conflict in 2009, the government signed a peace treaty with the National Congress of the People, a rebel group. The treaty lasted until 2012, forming the M23 rebel group. The group is the cause of much disturbance and unrest in the country. Starting in February 2013, there have been on going talk of peace treaties between the government and the M23 group (Central. Web). In November that year, the M23 group signed a peace treaty and said they were ready to find a political solution to the country's problems (Democratic. Web).

The majority of people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo live in rural areas, with under 40% of the 70 million citizens living in urban areas (WB. Web). They have a strong family base, living in villages with a typical family size of 4-5 children (Life). Their diet contains mostly fruits such as bananas, mangoes, and oranges. Along with fruits, many other carbohydrates such as corn, beans, rice,

cassava, and peanuts primarily make up a typical diet. Their diets are usually low in protein, but sometimes include bushmeat (wild game), grubs, fish, or caterpillars. Cassava, a staple food, is a root vegetable frequently made into a paste and served with other foods (DR Congo. Web).

Many factors negatively impact the education system in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the country's constitution, education is supposed to be provided in free primary schools, but a miniscule education budget and poor management of funds cause parents to pay for children's education at many schools. There is a major shortage of trained teachers. Between the years of 2005 and 2009 attendance in schools plummeted with only 2/3 of youth attending primary school. Of these students, over 1/4 do not finish primary school. Less than one third of all students complete their secondary education, resulting in high illiteracy rates. Only 67% of adults and 65% of 15-20 years olds are literate (DR Congo. Web.).

The healthcare system of the Democratic Republic of Congo disintegrated in the midst of the country's numerous conflicts and rebellions. Currently there is about one doctor and five nurses for every 10,000 people. Hospitals and health facilities are poorly staffed with few supplies. Doctors did not receive a wage from the government for many years, so many left government employment and started private practices or worked for foreign relief agencies to provide healthcare support. Quality healthcare is sorely needed. In the year 2009 alone, over 6.7 million people were diagnosed with malaria. Children are frequently victims of malaria with 40% of child mortality caused by this disease. HIV/AIDS are also rampant with an estimated half a million people in this country alone infected (DR Congo). Lack of infrastructure complicates the accessibility of healthcare as well.

Farming involves basically growing enough food for families to survive with agriculture bringing in 50% of the gross domestic product and employing 60% of the work force. The gross national income per capita is disturbingly low at \$230 for the year of 2012. Crops grown for export include coffee, sugarcane, palm oil, rubber, tea, cocoa, quinine, cassava, plantains, peanuts, root crops, wood products, and fruit (Central. Web). Though there is an abundance of fertile land which is cultivable, most of it is not used for crop production or pasture. (Smoes).

There are so many barriers that contribute to the struggle this country faces every day with food insecurity. Concerns include poor farming methods, lack of conservation practices, poor transportation, and a lack of storage. It also is difficult to get workers in the field and to increase the number of farmers because of the booming mining operation. With more and more people going to work in the mines, it takes so many people away from the farm therefore decreasing the amount of product produced (Country. Web). When the land that the farmers are using fails to produce the expected crop, farmers move out to use land used by the logging industry or opened up for the use of infrastructure projects. This causes more and more of the rainforest to be cut down. Another obstacle the farmers must tackle is the shortage of secure land tenures. This shortage keeps farmers and their families from being able to stay in one place and make permanent advancements in agricultural practices (Country. Web). Traditional farming methods are used by the majority of farmers, leaving them vulnerable to climate, market, and geologic changes (Smoes). In the 1970s and 1980s, the agriculture industry flourished. Since then though, there has been a decline. Farmers cannot get their products to cities because of a lack of infrastructure. This has led to subsistence farming in most regions of the country. Subsistence farming is growing enough food for yourself or your family (Smoes).

By definition, good governance is “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development.” (from the World Bank’s 1992 report “Governance and Development”). Good government is “predictable, open, and enlightened policy” with an executive branch which is responsible and ethical. This organization also identified four major pillars to judge good governance. They are:

1. Accountability-including a publicly accountable system for reviewing finances

2. Transparency-the public knowledge of government decisions
3. Rule of law - a publicly known framework of legal rules
4. Participation - communities and groups should be able to participate in making and reviewing policies (Executive. Web).

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the effects of a corrupt government on its citizens are staggering and everywhere. The adoption of the elements of good governance will be instrumental in reversing prior trends and negative, corrupt practices of the past.

The lack of good governance in the country has obviously had a negative affect. Things seem to be improving, slowly but steadily with occasional setbacks. In 2011, inflation in the country was at 15.4%. In 2012, inflation dropped to 6.4%. The central banking system also cut their interest rates from 21% to 6% by the end of 2012. Because of these drastic declines, more families are able to purchase goods because prices have declined. In a report released by the World Bank, the Democratic Republic of the Congo dropped one rank because of problems relating to the spread energy availability such as electricity, protecting investors, paying taxes, enforcing contracts, and trade access across borders via roads. It is also reported however, that progress has been made in regards to obtaining construction permits, registering property, and resolving violence and conflict (Congo. Web).

Good governance is affected by a few large issues. By sheer size, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is one of the largest countries in Africa. It has 80 million hectares of available farmland. Due to government decisions and conflicts, only 10% of the land actually gets used (DR Congo. Web). If the government can continue improving, they need to end the conflicts and make better use of the available land. Of all the African countries, they have the best chance to make improvements because of the land available for the government to work with. Another issue is the growing population. With the population growing at 2.54% a year, the government has more and more people to keep in uniform. With a stronger government system, free of conflict, and more access to safe water, the people will be able to do their jobs more effectively and more efficiently.

The economy grew 7.2% in 2012. Much of this is due to world mineral prices and the mining industry. Public works showed growth as evidenced by construction and improved roads. Agriculture has grown and is currently about 40% of the gross domestic product. Coffee is the largest crop, followed by logs and sawn wood. Some highways have been upgraded. Government support for small farmers has improved due to a new government initiative for agriculture starting in 2012. This has come in the form of tractors, fertilizer, and improved seeds. Other assistance to farmers will include \$23 million to benefit crops, fisheries, animal production, and road maintenance. Another improvement in the lives of farmers will be better access to drinking water (Congo. Web).

During Asia's green revolution, Asian countries used 20% of their budget to help boost agriculture productivity. That money helped fund new technologies and practices that has helped the country get back onto the right track in agriculture. African countries, on the other hand, spend only 5-10% of their budgets on agriculture. African leaders are, for lack of a better term, dropping the ball. They had made a commitment to spend at least 10% or more of the countries' budgets on agriculture production. This is a major factor contributing to the number of malnourished and starving people in the country. Currently, African countries spend more money on their militaries than on their agriculture industry. If African countries were to cut back on the money they spend for the military and boost the money into the agriculture industry, they could improve the practices and technology needed to feed their ever- growing population (New. Web).

Along with support for rural areas, support is needed in the urbanization of the country. Support is coming in the form of the Rockefeller Foundation's "resilient cities" initiative. Research has shown that by the year 2050, Africa will be 60% urban. Cities are becoming more and more important with 80% of

the world's products produced and consumed there. The first step in the initiative is to provide technical assistance and support to help in boosting resilience throughout the city. Rockefeller describes building resilience as "making people, communities and systems better prepared to withstand catastrophic events – both natural and man-made – and able to bounce back more quickly and emerge stronger..."

"And building resilience is critical to protecting the poorest and most vulnerable among us, those who typically live in the most easily impacted areas and who are least likely to have savings stashed away or insurance to protect them in case of disaster (Africa)."

More jobs with better pay are needed. In the country, 82% of the workers are underemployed. This means they are not compensated properly for the tasks they perform, even though they may have training that qualifies them for a higher level of pay. Still, 70% of African youth live on less than two dollars a day (News. Web). This must change. With more jobs and better pay combined with the lowering of inflation rates, families will be able to purchase more goods such as safe water and food that are essential to life. Farming families will then be able to also invest in improved technologies and practices that are fundamental to be more efficient in production therefore strengthening yields and income.

The World Bank has approved a project called the DRC Eastern Recovery Project. It is funded by a \$79 million grant from the World Bank Group. The project is focused on rebuilding social infrastructure. They plan on achieving this daunting feat by building schools, training teachers, making more safe water access points, and building more bridges to assist in transportation. The project is expected to help some 310 communities. It also will produce many short-term jobs for citizens mainly dealing with the construction of the new bridges. Because of the strong agriculture potential of the country, funding will also help build more sustainable farming by strong support for value chains. A value chain is a chain of activities that help increase the value of a product (WB. Web).

"Eastern DRC is home to some of the world's most vulnerable people; people who have suffered as long-running conflict has wrecked their livelihoods, damaged infrastructure, halted public services, and destroyed the social fabric," "We have responded to this challenge of recovery very quickly, as it is central to our mission of eliminating extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity, and I expect that we will see results by April this year." said Eustache Ouayoro, World Bank Country Director for the DRC.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is a land rich in resources and potential. What has been lacking is reputable leadership focused on helping its people meet their basic needs. The scarcity of food and lack of access to safe drinking water has kept the citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo from rising above the status of working poor. Two-thirds of the overall population is malnourished (Country. Web). Four out of ten children have stunted growth due to vitamin deficiencies (DR Congo. Web). For generations, the focus of the government has not been on improving agricultural production. Tegegnetwork Gettu, director of the United Nations Development Project's African bureau says, "Africa is not fated to starve. That is an affront to both its dignity and its potential. Africa must stop begging for food. Had the African governments over the last 30 years met their people's aspirations, this report would not be necessary. One quarter of the people in sub-Saharan Africa would not be undernourished, and one third of African children would not be stunted." Gettu also notes that "Africa has the knowledge, the technology, and the means to end hunger and insecurity" (New. Web). The government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo currently seems to be putting more positive programs to work in order to improve the lives of its citizens. Sustaining this trend will be the challenge facing future generations of Congolese.

Bibliography

"Africa Focuses on Building Resilient Cities." *AllAfrica.com*. N.p., 6 May 2014. Web. 17 July 2014.

Central Intelligence Agency. Central Intelligence Agency, 1 Mar. 2014. Web. 3 Mar. 2014.

"Congo, Democratic Republic." *African Economic Outlook*. African Development Bank Group, 9 June 2013. Web.

"Country Profile - Democratic Republic of Congo." *New Agriculturalist*. New Ag, n.d. Web. 3 Mar. 2014.

"Democratic Republic of the Congo." *World Vision*. World Vision, n.d. Web. 2 Mar. 2014.

"DR Congo." *Our Africa*. SOS Children's Villages, n.d. Web. 23 Feb. 2014.

Executive Board. "Good Governance: An Overview." N.p., 8-9 Sept. 1999. Web. 3 Mar. 2014.

"Human Development Reports." *Human Development Index (HDI)*. United Nations Development Programme, 2013. Web. 3 Mar. 2014.

"Life in Congo." *Life in Congo*. Paul Carson Medical Program, n.d. Web. 1 Mar. 2014.

"News Focus: Democratic Republic of Congo." *UN News Center*. United Nations, 1 Mar. 2014. Web. 5 Mar. 2014.

Shah, Anup. "The Democratic Republic of Congo." *Global Issues*. Global Issues, 21 Aug. 2010. Web. 24 Feb. 2014.

Smoes, Tanguy. "Agricultural Development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo." *Global Growing*. Global Growing, n.d. Web. 3 Mar. 2014.

"WB to Help Conflict-Affected Communities in Eastern DRC Find Livelihoods, Rebuild Infrastructure." *The World Bank*. The World Bank, 27 Feb. 2014. Web. 2 Mar. 2014.