

Zyanya Hernandez  
Ankeny Centennial High School  
Ankeny, IA  
Democratic Republic of the Congo, Factor 14: Conflict Resolution

### **Democratic Republic of the Congo: Solving Conflict to Improve Food Security.**

Humankind is always looking for improvement; looking for better life quality, for justice, equality, and a state of well-being. Dr. Norman Borlaug, the father of the Green Revolution, once said: "Without food, man can live at most but a few weeks; without it, all other components of social justice are meaningless". There are approximately seven billion people in the world today. This is a high population rate for the planet and each of every one of them needs to be nourished. Sadly, there are 842 million undernourished people, 98 percent of them live outside of high-income countries. There are multiple factors that contribute to world hunger but in this paper the reader will obtain information focused on how conflict affects food security. Internal and external conflict in a country disrupts food production through physical destruction of crops and livestock, harvests and food reserves. It prevents and discourages farming and therefore agriculture. It also interferes in food exchange. As a result, farm capital is destroyed, the males of the community are taken away from their work and families to fight in the war, suppressing income earning occupations and affecting the community. Not only that, but since conflict caused the country to have low income there is not enough money to pay for safe infrastructure and the land mines litter agricultural land, kill and injure people and keep them from farming for years. The impact of conflict on food security is of great importance because assets are destroyed, people are killed, populations are displaced, the environment is damaged, and health, education, and social services are shattered affecting negatively the entire country.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is a perfect example to represent this factor since it has multiple problems and all of them are caused by the same issue; conflict in the country. Since 2001, the country has been recovering from a series of conflicts that broke out in the 1990s and the effects of an economic and social slump. Established as a Belgian colony in 1908, the then-Republic of the Congo gained its independence in 1960, but its early years consisted in political and social instability. Fighting continues in the eastern parts of the country, destroying infrastructure, causing physical and psychological damage to civilians, and creating human rights violations on a mass scale. Rape is being used as a weapon of war, and large-scale plunder and murder are also occurring as part of efforts to displace people on resource-rich land. This vast, fertile, mineral-rich land has tremendous potential for agricultural and economic growth but this is dwarfed by many development challenges. Having only recently emerged from a brutal civil war, the resurgence of violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a total disaster. The conflict cost 5 million lives, and the country has not found peace since. The DRC remains a fragile country with tremendous needs in terms of reconstruction, economic growth, and governance. The security situation is improving but remains tense, particularly in the eastern provinces. Peace building and economic recovery efforts are being carried out in a challenging social context.

This social context can be better understood regarding DRC's daily life. Nearly two-thirds of people live in rural areas, in villages scattered across the country. Certain indigenous people, such as the 'pygmy' Mbuti and Efe groups, still live a nomadic lifestyle in the forests, hunting wild animals, fishing and gathering plants, fruits and fungi. These groups also trade with local farmers on the edges of the forest. Around 40 million people depend on farming for their livelihoods ("Food & Daily Life"). In rural areas the concept of the nuclear family does not apply in much of the country. Marriages are arranged by the family members, a bride price is settled between the two families and the groom must pay for it. This tradition foreshadows women's place in society. They do not have a say on their destiny, an arranged marriage is what awaits for them in their future; based on this fact it is very obvious that there is no

gender equality in their society. The traditional Congolese family includes many relatives, such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, and nieces. The family is responsible for sick, handicapped, and elderly members. Any care that is needed is distributed throughout the entire family system. The average woman bears ten children. The infant mortality rate is high, and for this reason women tend to bear many children. Their diet is vegetarian since meat is very expensive. Bananas, pineapples, taro, peanuts, manioc, cassava, rice, and bread are what they have as a meal. In 1996, life expectancy was forty-nine years for men and fifty-three years for women. AIDS affected 100,000 residents in 1997 (“Countries and their Cultures”). The civil war and the financial crisis have hindered anti-AIDS programs and worsened public health. Sixty percent of the people have access to safe water and immunization, but only 9 percent have access to sanitary services (“Countries and Cultures”). Not only public health is in bad condition, education levels are low as well. The civil war had had a negative impact on sciences and education of DRC. The school life expectancy is ten years; most of the times young boys are sent to war and girls need to help at home and farming; this prevents them from staying in school for a longer period of time.

Poverty and food insecurity in DRC is of common occurrence. After peace was declared in 2003, the UN reported that up to 1,200 people-a-day were dying from malnutrition and preventable diseases (“New Agriculturist”). Prior to the latest civil disturbances in the North and South Kivu regions in the east of the country, life expectancy for adults was just 42 years and two-thirds of the population was malnourished. The conflict caused by war in the country is a major barrier to improving agricultural productivity, earning a living wage with their employment, and gaining access to food markets and adequate nutrition. Conflict makes this country one of the world’s worst and most protracted humanitarian emergencies (“*UNICEF HUMANITARIAN ACTION FOR CHILDREN*”). Their food security is affected because their food source is based on their farming and the Congolese cannot proceed to do this since the rivers and fields are sometimes battlefields. Not only that, but targeted sexual violence and mass rape continue to terrify and severely harm women and girls. Children and youths are routinely forced into armed groups not allowing the community to have enough males remaining to do the farming work. The families have many members in them and there is not enough food for everyone.

Despite being an agricultural exporter prior to independence in 1960, farming in DRC has been through long periods of decline. Currently, the sector is growing at two percent per year, but this is slower than the increase in population. There is land to grow more food. But land has to be used effectively. During any fighting, fields and rivers became dangerous places. Livestock populations have suffered significantly since the civil war, when many farms were looted and the animals stolen (“Country Profile - Democratic Republic of Congo”). As an important source of dietary protein, consumption and sale of wild animals, including some primates, is widespread. This has been fueled partly by poor living conditions and the rise in the number of internally-displaced people (IDPs) fleeing regional conflicts. The country hosts over one million IDPs, and recent tensions have uprooted raising fears of a looming humanitarian disaster. With the Congo River and four of the continent’s Great Lakes on its eastern border, DRC’s fisheries sector holds great potential. But the fledgling industry also suffered during the war, when many fish farmers abandoned their ponds.

Concerning business, many farmers have struggled to gain access to credit and there has been a prolonged lack of both public and private investment in agriculture, as well as in the country’s energy and transport infrastructure. The use of micro finance is an option that could help solve this problem or at least improve the situation. Microfinance is a general term to describe financial services to low-income individuals or to those who do not have access to typical banking services. It could be a possible solution since it is the supply of loans, savings, and other basic financial services to the poor. Through the use of Micro-finance institutions, it could be possible to serve the farmers in this country. The problem with this is that banks

don't usually lend money to people that don't have financial assets already but there are some that do such as Grameen Bank in Bangladesh or Bancosol in Bolivia.

Speaking about infrastructure, many roads in both rural and urban areas have fallen into disrepair and energy provision in the countryside is extremely limited. Despite a wealth of underexploited forests, fisheries and farmland, it is likely that conflict, inadequate government support for farming and ongoing instability will ensure that this potential remains untapped ("Country Profile - Democratic Republic of Congo"). Without security and stability, foreign investment will continue to be hampered and the infrastructure projects will not exist. These factors, combined with the destabilizing effects of war, have contributed to widespread hunger.

DRC has greater potential than many of its African neighbors to lift its population out of extreme poverty thanks to its natural resources. But its agriculture sector needs wholesale reform with the support of the government and the private sector. Before any of this can be achieved, however, the country must first find peace because it is the internal and external conflicts of the country that are stopping it to succeed.

To begin with the possible solutions to the already mentioned struggles of the country, it is necessary to have in mind that conflict throughout the country makes delivering humanitarian aid extremely challenging for reasons of security and physical access to communities in need. Despite that, there are solutions that are already in process of improving life in Congo that need to keep happening in order to make a difference for this country. The UN's current mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, called MONUC, is entering its thirteenth year. MONUC is the UN's largest and longest-lasting mission to date. It is mandated to protect civilians and also help in the reconstruction of the country. With 18,000 people, MONUC is spread thinly across northeastern Congo and is largely unable to halt attacks. UNICEF for example, provides therapeutic foods along with equipment and essential drugs for the treatment of 122,000 severe acutely malnourished children. In addition, equipment and drugs will be provided for programmes reaching 340,000 moderately malnourished children; food for the supplementary feeding programmes is provided by the World Food Programme of the United Nations ("*Humanitarian Action for Children: Building Resilience*").

Another issue for the Democratic Republic of Congo is that it has always been plagued by regional conflict and a deadly scramble for its vast natural resources. In fact, greed for Congo's natural resources has been a principal driver of atrocities and conflict throughout Congo's tortured history. In eastern Congo today, mineral resources are responsible for financing multiple armed groups, many of whom use mass rape as a deliberate strategy to intimidate and control local populations, thereby securing control of mines, trading routes, and other strategic areas. Mining in the region is quaintly termed 'artisanal' which means shovels, tunnels and ladders with low capital investment. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, approximately 26,000 civilians are killed annually or injured by land mines ("CONFLICT: A CAUSE AND EFFECT OF HUNGER"). An internal problem is the lack of security inside of the mines and an external issue is that the product is interfered when exporting it by neighbor countries creating more conflict. It is necessary to set up adequate security and governance to guarantee that ores are genuinely free from interference when exported for smelting. In addition to finding companies willing to purchase the conflict-free product, there needs to be cooperation between the governments of DRC and Rwanda to provide security and stability. A spark of hope for conflict-free mining in DRC came in 2012 when the Solutions for Hope project started producing verified conflict-free tantalum from a cooperative in Northern Katanga province. The mine then produced regular shipments and is viewed as the role model for establishing a secure supply of conflict-free minerals from the region. Another solution that has already started to solve this problem is The Conflict-Free Campus Initiative, started by the Enough Project, is a national campaign to build support for conflict-free electronics. Students and schools have immense power because they are consumers of computers, lab equipment, and

other electronic products. With this kind of actions it is possible to stop financing war in eastern Congo. This means that change begins with consumers.

Another attempt to solve DRC's problems came recently on 29 January 2015 when the army of the DRC, supported by MONUSCO and the FIB, officially declared the start of operations and launched a military campaign against the FDLR ("The Crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo."). Even though it seems ironic to solve conflict with conflict, there seems to be no other way to even enter the country but to ask for military help; the conditions are just too dangerous to send unarmed volunteers in service. The military forces would help by giving the volunteers an opportunity to access the country by protecting them from the danger caused by conflicts. While this development is encouraging, it is still too early to determine the effectiveness of the initiative. Challenges have already emerged, as the UN threatened to pull their support should the Congolese government refuse to replace two military commanders accused of previous human rights violations; the government has refused to comply. Despite the complications, this possible solution should be considered since it offers a way to enter the country safely.

DR Congo is one of the poorest countries on earth. The country ranks second to last on the Human Development Index (186 out of 187 countries), and its per capita income, which stood at \$220 in 2012, is among the lowest in the world. Its cycle of conflict has left faltering infrastructure, disrupted trade, and distorted markets, leaving millions of its inhabitants in desperate poverty. After reading the examples above, it is clear that the country has many problems but problems should be seen as areas of opportunity, and this country has plenty of those. The situation is not hopeless; it is necessary to aim to boost farm production, promote good governance and teach business skills. To rebuild economic relationships between communities torn apart by violence. To engage DR Congo, Rwanda and Uganda in projects that promote mutually beneficial economic gains across social, ethnic and geographic divides. Tensions among all three countries have undermined regional stability. The international community must incentivize collaboration and dialogue in the Great Lakes Region at all levels — community, provincial, national and regional. The international community must help ensure that a more equitable proportion of revenues from eastern Congo's abundant natural resources is retained locally. ("Congo Needs a Long-term Solution"). Resources from diamonds, gold, coltan and other minerals should fund investment in conflict-affected communities, improving access to water, education services and agriculture support. These efforts will alleviate poverty and suffering and, by reducing fighting over limited resources, strengthen incentives for peace.

More than 6 million people have died in the world's bloodiest conflict since World War II, caused by political violence, conflict over valuable resources, and fighting from genocide in neighbor country Rwanda. What are we going to do about this? Transformation of development and relief efforts requires new policies and programs. And even though these solutions will take time to accomplish and it will not be an easy task, with the collaboration and ideas from organizations like The World Food Programme of the USAID, who has focused on promoting food security and peace in the Greater Horn of Africa, The U.K. Department for International Development (DfID) who has put emphasis on assuring secure livelihoods in both development assistance and conflict aid, The World Institute for Development Economics Research of the UN University who has conducted extensive research on the causes of famine and conflict ("CONFLICT: A CAUSE AND EFFECT OF HUNGER"). and the list keeps going with programs with the same goal, an improvement with this developing country can be obtained. It is of main importance that people become aware that genocides did not stop after World War II. It keeps happening today and something needs to take place in order to make a difference. Improvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo is possible. The ideal world would live in peace but that is not the reality of today and as Dr. Norman Borlaug said, "You can't build a peaceful world on empty stomachs and human misery". Feeding seven billion people is the greatest challenge for humankind. Starting by focusing on developing

countries' areas of opportunity would lead to a better planet as a whole. Improving the food security for the Congolese would impact not only DRC but its neighbors as well; It would make a difference in their lives, in their country, and therefore in our world.

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