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If They Just Weren't So Rich!

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If They Just Weren't So Rich!

Abstract

The deadliest war on earth-as it is called-in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) will only end when the country's richness fades or is kept under surveillance. Human rights and peace might have a chance if Congo's lucrative diamond, gold or coltan mines were under shared control by non-profit agencies or international organizations with the intention to spread the mines' benefits and wealth among the Congolese people. Wishful thinking? Most likely it is, but what other alternative is there? The country's extraordinary wealth in natural resources is the main reason for the immense corruption, the extermination of entire villages, the constant ethnic cleansing from all sides and the rape of women, men and children regardless of their age. This multilevel conflict has been ongoing for decades if not centuries and is very complex as Adam Hochschild described in his article.

Keywords

Human rights, Democratic Republic of Congo, War, Natural resources, Economics, United Nations (UN), Politics

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If They Just Weren't So Rich!

by Anja Mihr

The deadliest war on earth-as it is called-in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) will only end when the country's richness fades or is kept under surveillance. Human rights and peace might have a chance if Congo's lucrative diamond, gold or coltan mines were under shared control by non-profit agencies or international organizations with the intention to spread the mines' benefits and wealth among the Congolese people. Wishful thinking? Most likely it is, but what other alternative is there? The country's extraordinary wealth in natural resources is the main reason for the immense corruption, the extermination of entire villages, the constant ethnic cleansing from all sides and the rape of women, men and children regardless of their age. This multilevel conflict has been ongoing for decades if not centuries and is very complex as Adam Hochschild described in his article.

To that effect, this conflict area shares a common denominator with other complex humanitarian emergencies: the exploitation of the countries' natural resources. In this fragile state the benefits from mining are the main and only income for the warlords, as well as for Congo's corrupt and almost failed government and international companies alike. Companies, particularly in the industrial world, benefit from the "cheap" resource market without any serious control and protection mechanism. Without the coltan or gold from Congo, through whatever corrupt or illegal channels, many high-tech computer and communication products would be less affordable to us. The UNs and [MONUC](#) missions and efforts to control and to pacify one of the richest and most violent areas in the world will be useless if its root causes are not tackled.

So the question is no longer how much more we shed light on the detestable atrocities and human rights violations in the DRC; but how to stop the vicious circle of violence and corruption in which the people and the country are deeply involved? And how much more would the Congolese government and citizens benefit if the natural resource market were under shared control and surveillance? How much cheaper would it be for the international community if they would invest less in UN missions, refugee camps or warfare and more in awareness raising and sustainable projects of self governance, rule of law and fairer trade? Providing alternatives for young men and women to make their living (. and survive!) outside the "war and trafficking industry" would be prioritized if the political elite in Kinshasa were seriously interested in it. The political elite ought to have-but have not so far-the greatest interest in the wellbeing of the country's multi-ethnic war torn society. The countries wealth could be shared by more than a few Congolese. This would undermine corruption and illegal trafficking and would even reduce the number of the worst war criminals being tried at the [International Criminal Court \(ICC\)](#) in The Hague.

We know that the responsibility of the international community and its possibilities are limited. The political will and main decisions have to come from Kinshasa; NGOs, UN agencies or the European Union can help to provide techniques, mechanism, money and training. They can empower private actors and even encourage farmers, villagers, small businessmen and victim groups that consider themselves as part of a slowly growing civil society. They can train lawyers, judges, policemen and officers. But the Congolese political, economic and warlord elite have to do most of the work through diplomacy, compromises and pacts. What may motivate them is the

awareness that they can be victims of the same crimes and atrocities tomorrow that they commit against others today-losing their benefits and power. They also fear the possibility of international charges against them. Therefore a different and all inclusive diplomacy-track has to be found to solve this dilemma. And whether one likes it or not, apart from reformist and civil society actors, warlords also have to be included in any dialogue and regime change, in order to break the vicious circle of violence and greed for more money and power. Equal inclusion, participation, reconciliation and awareness could be a way to do it.

Furthermore, Congo is a country with a significant growth in mobile and telecommunication. People seek information and education. NGOs, victims' groups and international agencies use communication media to built networks, disseminate information, ideas, and start dialogues-beyond war barriers. This might be a supportive tool to empower people to break the vicious circle of violence and exploitation-however, it can work if there is serious political will to protect people on all sides.

Anja Mihr is appointed Associate Professor at the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (SIM), University of Utrecht, Netherlands. In her latest research she is focusing on Transitional Justice, Reconciliation, Human Rights and Democratization. She was Visiting Professor for Human Rights at Peking University Law School in China and worked for the Raoul Wallenberg Research Institute on Human Rights, Lund University. From 2006-2008 she was the European Program Director for the European Master Degree in Human Rights and Democratization at the European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights in Venice, Italy. She has been a researcher and lecturer at universities in Germany, USA, Spain, Finland and Armenia and published widely on the international human rights regime, human rights education, democratization and reconciliation: www.anjamihr.com.