

Congo in crisis

WORLDVIEW



As the environmental and humanitarian situation continues to worsen in Central Africa, *TerraGreen* brings you the second in a series of reports from the Democratic Republic of Congo. *Georgianne Nienaber** reports.



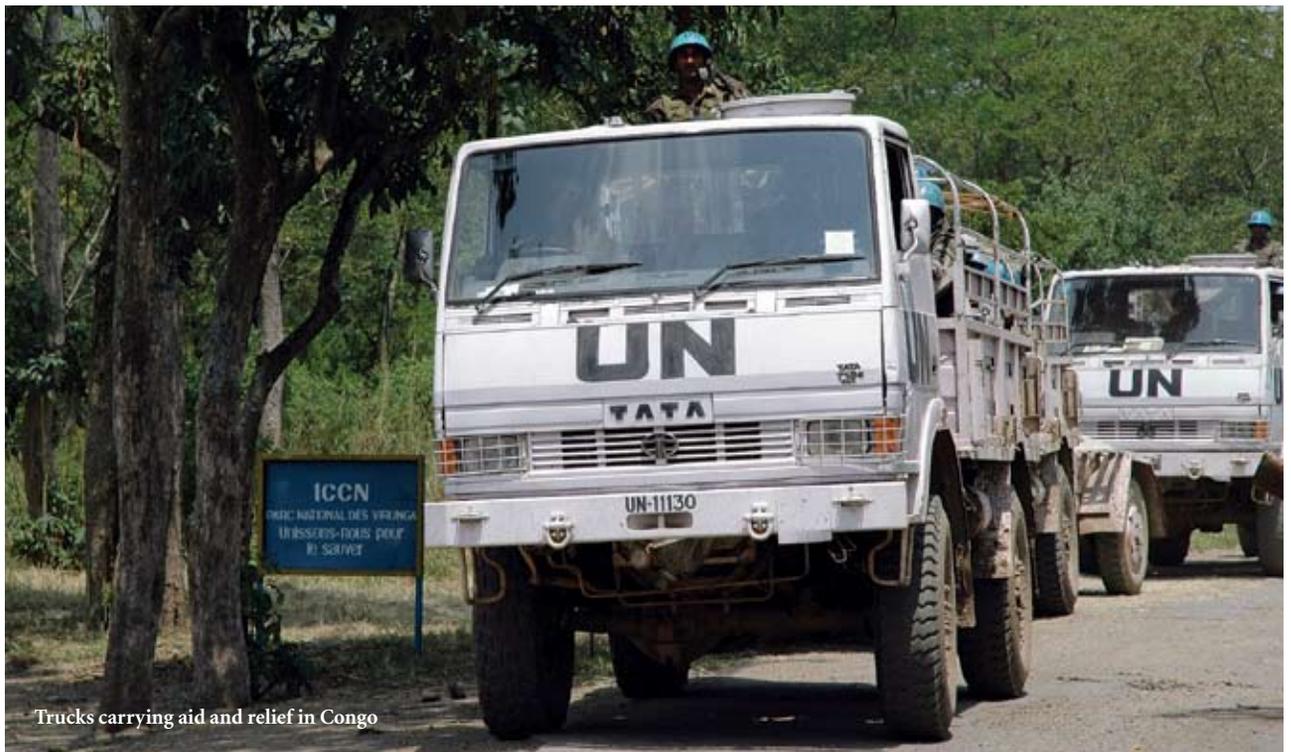
Publicly available USAID (US Agency for International Development) documents maintain that per capita income for Africans has remained on an average at less than \$1 per day. This is a stunning figure; given the reality that Africa has the natural resources and human potential to build a wealthy continent. Poverty in Africa has remained stubbornly high due to a seemingly endless cycle and history of colonial rule, armed conflict, and continued multi-national exploitation of resources. Nowhere does this scenario play out in more dramatic fashion than the conflict plagued DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo). The mission of USAID revolves around advancing US interests in the world and providing relief to distressed populations. The money trail leads directly to and flows through competing NGOs, which often exhibited a stunning lack of transparency. Thus the question arises: is the failure of Congo to keep step with the world a result of improper allocation of private monetary resources, governmental and NGO corruption, or a combination of all three?

World Bank indicators for DRC report a population of 55 million with an average annual income of less than \$120. The World Bank also reports that infrastructure

Congo River at Inga, the electrical transmission line snakes 1700 kilometres into the killing fields of the rich Katanga mining district. The original \$250-million project topped out at over \$1.3 billion due to cost overruns and graft during the Joseph Mobutu regime. The environmental costs borne by the equatorial rain forest that stood in the way of the project are incalculable. Meanwhile, even after the project, over 90% of the Congolese population still does not have access to any additional power.

There is no doubt that NGOs working in the region are also coming under increased pressure to maintain transparency. The recent fiscal collapse of the WFT (Wildlife Fund Thailand), one of the country's most well-known conservation organizations, prompted Bangkok's independent newspaper, *The Nation*, to write: 'Too many NGOs in this country are being run by autocratic activists who do not feel the need to be accountable to anyone. This is not a good sign.'

The USAID Budget summary for DRC during 2004-06 for health, 'peace building' (democracy), livelihoods, basic education, and conflict resolution is a substantial \$1.1 billion. While it is impossible to deconstruct the disposition and



Trucks carrying aid and relief in Congo

is 'non-existent', that is, no major paved roads link the various regions of the country, and there is no electricity in villages outside the main cities. 'The production of electricity contributes merely 1% to the country's GDP. But, Congo's hydroelectric potential is extraordinary,' says the World Bank.

During the 1970s, Congolese and foreign investors, principally from the United States, invested heavily in the Inga-Shaba hydroelectric facility, which today operates at only a small fraction of its capacity. From the mouth of the mighty

funneling of the money, there are a few markers and warnings that have surfaced.

In an evaluation of USAID funding to CARPE (Central African Regional Program for the Environment), the Weidemann Consortium said: '[There is] too strong of a linking of funds to geographic areas without adequately linking them to existing governance regimes. This led several observers to characterize landscape grants as 'pork' for the conservation movement with minimal CARPE ownership by national governments.'

The terms 'pork' and 'pork barrel' refer to government excesses in spending that benefit the constituents of a politician or some private entity. The term originated on US slave plantations where the slaves were given the dregs of slaughtered pigs. Thus, are claims made by conservation NGOs real or mere public relations? They all claim community partnerships and sustainable development, but what is the situation on the ground in Central Africa?

For instance, how much money is spent on elite conferences for career specialists from the US and Europe—money that is included in the NGO budgets, but never reaches the people and countries targeted for foreign aid? In response to a US Congressional inquiry of September

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results for the Congolese people are not encouraging at all.

There were 4500 cases of sexual violence against women and children in the first six months of 2007 in South Kivu province alone. According to Prof. Yakin Ertürk, Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Human Rights Council on Violence against Women, 'the situation in the Kivu Province is the worst crisis he has ever encountered.' Prof. Ertürk denounced the situation at a press conference in Kinshasa on 27 July 2007.

His testimony speaks volumes: 'Women are brutally gang-raped, often in front of their families and communities. In numerous cases, male relatives are forced at gun-point to rape their own daughters, mothers, or



Rising levels of poverty have blown the facade



2006, USAID, one of the NGOs working in Central Africa, outlined some expenditure. In 2005, 3909 USAID personnel were sent to 1479 events; in 2006, 1513 officials attended 1029 events.

For all the money pumped into the Congolese projects, for all of the glossy brochures produced by environmental organizations, the luxury conferences, the cocktail parties, the National Press Club luncheons, the celebrity endorsements, for all the new entities, organizations, and alliances continually being created to ostensibly address the crucial issues of poverty, displacement, and violence against women and children—the

sisters. Frequently women are shot or stabbed in their genital organs, after they are raped. Women, who survived months of enslavement, told me that their tormentors had forced them to eat even excrements or the human flesh of murdered relatives.'

Conferences may be viewed as an indirect squandering of allocations for humanitarian and environmental relief, but what about specific earmarks—the real pork in the pork barrel? In April 2005, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York announced a \$3.3 million settlement and judgement against the firm, Engender Health,



which had contracted with USAID since 1988. USAID had provided \$312 million in funding to this one agency to provide family planning on a global basis, 'voluntary' surgical contraception services, and 'other' long-term reproductive health services.

The original agreement for Engender Health was to provide financial assistance to foreign governments, non-profit entities, and private physicians to deliver family planning services directly to individuals. A Department of Justice investigation discovered that Engender Health did not perform on some of the contracts and rather than returning the unused funds to USAID, used the funds for 'purposes other than the provision of services.'

While denying any wrongdoing in the settlement agreement, Engender Health agreed to pay the \$3.3

1000 people die in Congo each day. The environment is decaying. But the misuse of money continues.



million fine, and then signed an oversight contract with USAID, called the 'Organizational Integrity Agreement.' Engender Health stipulated that it would fund an independent monitor to oversee compliance with future programme requirements.

Engender Health is still very much in business after paying a fine which amounted to the cost of doing business.

Meanwhile, 1000 people a day die in DRC, the environment is in shambles, and the money continues to be funnelled down the rabbit hole. Somewhat akin to Alice in Wonderland. The White Queen: 'Can you do addition? What is one and one?'

Alice: 'I do not know. I lost count.'

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