

Conflict Resources

Objectives

- To examine the nature of conflict.
- To explore how the illegal exploitation of natural resources has fuelled the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

You will need:

- Copies of the case study: 'The illegal exploitation of natural resources and war in Democratic Republic of Congo' (one copy for each group).
- Copies of the Key Players sheets (one copy for each group).

Time required: 45 mins

Instructions:

- Split the class into groups of four or five students and ask them to read the case study and notes on Key Players.
- Using the information provided ask each group to discuss the following questions:
 - What is the nature of the problem and what are the underlying issues?
 - Identify which parties are responsible for the problem, and analyse the extent of their responsibility, explaining why some might be said to be more responsible than others.
 - Decide which measures could be taken in the short-term and the long-term to resolve the problem.
- In order to explore the nature of conflict each group should now feedback to the whole class their answers to the previous questions.
- Finally, the whole class should evaluate the likely success of their suggested solutions.

Why is the **natural wealth** of **African countries** often used to **feed wars** and **not people**?



Key Players

Human Rights Watch

The lure of gold has fuelled massive human rights atrocities in the north eastern region of the DRC. A spokesperson for this group says:

“Corporations should ensure their activities support peace and respect for human rights in volatile areas such as north eastern DCR, not work against them. Local warlords use natural resources to support their bloody activities. Any support for such groups, whether direct or indirect should not continue”.

In correspondence with Human Rights Watch, a leading gold mining company, part of the international mining conglomerate, stated there was no working or other relationship with the FNI, a nationalist armed group of warlords, but it said , it had made ‘certain payments in the past to the FNI’ including one in January 2005 that was made under ‘protest and duress.’ They said also that any contact with the FNI leadership was ‘unavoidable.’

Human Rights Watch say the company should have waited until it could work in Mongbwalu without having to interact with abusive warlords. The Congo desperately needs business investment to help rebuild the country, but that such business engagement must not provide any support to armed groups responsible for crimes against humanity.

The problems documented are not unique to Congo, nor to one international company. Rules governing corporate behaviour must be forced, otherwise they are meaningless.

In 2003 a group of United Nations experts adopted a set of draft ‘Human Rights Business Standards’, known as the UN Norms, which signalled a growing consensus on the need for standards on corporate responsibility, but they have not been widely implemented by companies.

“Efforts to make peace in Congo risk failure unless the issue of the natural resource exploitation and its link to human rights abuses are put at the top of the agenda. Congolese citizens deserve to benefit from their gold resources, not be cursed by them”.

The international community has also failed to tackle the link between resource exploitation and conflict in Congo, choosing to ignore previous UN reports that highlighted the issue.

The local people

Thousands of people in the Mongbwalu mining town were murdered during fighting between two armed groups who were fighting for control of this rich mining area. One villager said:

“We are cursed because of our gold. All we do is suffer. There is no benefit to us.”

In addition, the FNI soldiers go every morning to the villages and take the young people away and force them to work in the mines. If the authorities intervene they are beaten, so the villagers have no choice but to go along with it. The villagers also have to pay taxes to the FNI, and if they don’t they are tortured or killed. The Government seems powerless to do anything about these atrocities.

It becomes a question of survival and the local people are forced to do anything they can in order to keep their lives. Many flee to other countries.

Key Players

International Gold Mining Company

They provided financial and logistical support, which in turn resulted in political benefits to the FNI and its leaders. However, they said any contact with the FNI leadership was unavoidable (see above in Human Rights section).

This international mining company began preparations for gold exploration activities in Mongbwalu in 2003. They won the rights for a vast gold concession in 1996 but hampered by the ongoing war postponed activities until a peace agreement was signed and a transitional government was established in Kinshasa. However, the central government failed to establish control of Ituri and the areas around Mongbwalu remained in the hands of the FNI armed group.

From 1-3 June 2005 this International Company is co-chairing the Africa Economic Summit in Cape Town aimed at promoting business investment and engaging business as a catalyst for change in Africa.

The company's Vice President says: *"The company has made preparations to commence exploration and drilling on the Kimin prospect in the Ituri region of the DCRwhilst it is obviously a tough environment right now we are looking forward to the opportunity to fully explore the properties we have in the Congo, believing that we now have access to potentially exciting growth prospects in Central Africa."*

FNI- a nationalist armed rebel group

A group of local warlords responsible for the ethnic slaughter, torture and rape of local people. They have developed links with the International Mining Conglomerate which enabled them (the FNI) to access the gold-rich mining site around the town of Mongbwalu. These local warlords use natural resources to support their bloody activities. They buy arms and weapons with the gold. The Mining Company on hearing about this said that they had no 'working or other relationship with the FNI' but that it had made payments to them in the past and that some sort of relationship with the leadership of the group was 'unavoidable'. However, the Human Rights Watch also documented meetings between the company and the armed group leaders. The FNI leader said that the government would never intervene at Mongbwalu as he was the one who gave the International Company permission to come. *"I am the boss of Mongbwalu. If I want to chase them (the Government) away, I will."*

The leader of the FNI now has power in the mining regions because of the gold he controls and the presence of the International Mining Company.

'Artisanal' Miners

Millions of dollars worth of gold is smuggled out of Congo each year, some of it destined for Europe, mostly for the purchase of arms and weapons. A gold trader admits that he does this as it is the only way he can make money.

"It is about my own survival and that of my family. If sometimes I cannot get the gold out of the country, I am forced to go poaching and hunting for game meat and ivory in the National Wildlife Parks. This is the only way we can survive. The Government are powerless to stop us."