



Development pathways for the DRC to 2050

Introduction

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Introduction

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo) is the second largest country in Africa after Algeria in terms of territory and the third most populous country in Africa after Nigeria and Ethiopia. It has a surface area of 2.3 million km² and a population of more than 85 million.[1] The country is particularly known for its abundant and diverse mineral resources, extensive navigable waterways, vast hydroelectric potential and its arable land estimated at 80 million hectares. It possesses about 50% of the global reserves of cobalt, 25% of the world's diamond reserves and large reserves of coltan.[2]

With these immense and enviable natural resources, one would expect the DR Congo to be among the richest economies and even one of the locomotives of economic growth in Africa. However, the reality is quite different. The country is a classic case of what is called the 'paradox of plenty'. Indeed, the DR Congo ranks near the bottom in various human and economic development indicators.

It was unable to fulfil any of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015[3] and remains a low-income country with one of the lowest GDP per capita in the world. More than 70% of the population lives in extreme poverty and the country ranks 179th of 189 countries on the Human Development Index. [4] For most of its recent history, the country has been plagued by persistent political instability, violent conflict involving foreign and local armed groups, and poor governance.

Even though the DR Congo is portrayed as a post-conflict country, considerable parts of the country and millions of Congolese are still coping with violent conflict daily, including large parts of North Kivu, South Kivu, Ituri, Haut-Uele and Tanganyika provinces. Consequently, the country continues to face an acute and complex humanitarian crisis.

According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the DR Congo is currently home to five million internally displaced people, the largest in Africa. It also hosts 538 000 refugees from neighbouring countries and has the second largest number of people in acute food insecurity in the world with 15.6 million people affected while 4.7 million people suffer from acute malnutrition.[5]

In sum, the DR Congo faces numerous development challenges. There are, however, reasons to expect a better future. The first peaceful transfer of power in the country's history offers hope for national and regional stability — a key condition for inclusive sustained growth and development.

The new president, Félix Tshisekedi, has promised major reforms and policies to transform the country's image of poverty, conflicts and diseases into a flourishing economy and a conducive place for investment. In his speech during the 'Makutano Forum' that took place in September 2019 in Kinshasa, President Tshisekedi promised to set the country on a path of sustained economic growth. He pointed out that, 'DRC has for a long time been termed as a giant with clay feet, however, the country is now standing and ready to move forward.'[6]

This report first presents the likely human and economic development prospects of the DR Congo to 2050 on its current trajectory. The analysis of the Current Path is followed by a set of complementary scenario interventions that explore the impact of sectoral improvements on the future of the country that may help the authorities to achieve their long-term development targets.

The report uses the International Futures (IFs) forecasting platform (see Box 1) to compare progress with three main country groups (global low-income, Africa low-income and sub-Saharan Africa). The DR Congo is excluded from these groups.

Box 1: Tool for forecasting: The International Futures (IFs) modelling platform

The IFs modelling platform is a global long-term forecasting tool that integrates various development systems, including demography, economy, education, health, agriculture, environment, energy, infrastructure, technology and governance. It blends different modelling techniques to form a series of relationships based on academic literature to generate its forecasts.

IFs uses historical data from 1960 (where available) to identify trends and produce a 'Current Path' scenario from 2015 (the current base year). The Current Path is a dynamic scenario representing current policy choices and technological advancements and assumes no significant shocks or catastrophes. However, it moves beyond a linear extrapolation of past and current trends by leveraging our available knowledge about how systems interact to produce a dynamic forecast.

The data series within IFs comes from a range of international sources like the World Bank, World Health Organization (WHO) and various UN bodies like the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF). The model is an open-source tool and can be downloaded for free at www.pardee.du.edu.

This project uses IFs version 7.63 for its analysis.

Note that all gross domestic product (GDP) and GDP per capita figures in this report are in 2017 constant US\$.

Endnotes

1. The demographic figures in the DRC are not very solid; the last census was organised in 1984.
2. The Sentry, Country briefs: [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), July 2015
3. Nations Unies, Commission Economique pour l'Afrique, [Profile de pays: République démocratique du Congo 2017](#), Addis Ababa: NU.CEA, 2018-03
4. The score of the DRC on human development index, which measures the 'basic achievement levels in human development such as knowledge and understanding, a long and healthy life, and an acceptable standard of living', experienced only a marginal increase from 0.37 in 1990 to 0.45 in 2018. For more details, see [Human Development Report 2019](#).
5. OCHA, Aperçu des besoins humanitaires, [République démocratique du Congo](#), Cycle de programme humanitaire 2020, 2019
6. Edith Mutethya, [DR Congo aims for economic growth](#), China Daily, 12 September 2019

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Dr Kouassi Yeboua is a senior researcher in African Futures and Innovation programme in Pretoria. He recently served as lead author on ISS studies on the long-term development prospects of the DR Congo, the Horn of Africa, Nigeria and Malawi. Kouassi has published on various issues relating to foreign direct investment in Africa and is interested in development economics, macroeconomics, international economics, and economic modelling. He has a PhD in Economics.

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