



Development pathways for the DRC to 2050

Background

Kouassi Yeboua

Last updated 29 June 2022

Background

The history of the DR Congo, since its independence, has been characterised by recurrent conflicts and political instability, poor governance and ineffective economic policies. Almost immediately after the country gained independence in 1960, it experienced social and political upheavals. The army mutinied one week after independence and the provinces of Kasai and Katanga, respectively rich in diamond and copper, attempted to secede in the following weeks.[1] Eventually, United Nations and Congolese government forces managed to reconquer Kasai (in December 1961) and Katanga (in January 1963).

The first republic, between 1960 and 1965, was marked by armed conflicts that claimed the lives of nearly two million Congolese and ended in a military coup led by Colonel Joseph-Désiré Mobutu on 24 November 1965. Mobutu declared himself president for five years and was elected as such but without opposition in 1970.[2]

Amongst many measures, Mobutu rolled back the imposition of a federal state as set out in the 1964 Luluabourg Constitution that had divided the country into 21 provinces. Henceforth, the country was divided into nine provinces with limited provincial autonomy. The impetus towards greater regional autonomy did not disappear, however. In 1982, the parliament embarked on a series of reforms, including administrative decentralisation but the legal text was never implemented. Mobutu was eventually forced from power in 1997 having effectively mismanaged his country for more than three decades.[3]

Efforts at economic reform on the back of high copper prices did see a brief period of economic expansion between 1967 and 1973 that came to an abrupt end with the two oil crises (1973 and 1979) and the fall in the price of copper (1975). The impact of the 1973 oil crisis was exacerbated by the introduction of Mobutu's Zairianisation policy in 1973 (a form of indigenisation of the economy) that was followed by the radicalisation policy which saw an increase in the role of the state in the economy.

These policies along with poor public financial management and wanton corruption led to hyperinflation, mounting debt, capital flight, increased poverty, and low agricultural production, among other problems.[4] By 1975, the country could no longer service its debt and requested the assistance of the IMF to extricate it from its economic crisis.

From 1983 to 1989, the DR Congo partnered with the IMF and the World Bank in a structural adjustment programme that contributed to economic recovery. However, with the return of a more favourable external environment, the government ceased its efforts at policy and governance reforms only to again experience a marked deterioration in its financial performance.[5]

The end of the Cold War in 1989 effectively robbed the DR Congo of its strategic importance and coincided with a drawn-out political transition, hyperinflation, currency depreciation and the increasing use of the United States dollar in the economy. The weak state and the impact of the Rwandan genocide of 1994 that saw some 1.2 million Rwandese Hutus flee to the eastern part of the country, set the stage for the start of the 1996/97 war.

By 1996, the DR Congo faced a crisis while Mobutu's international support had almost completely vanished.[6] Successive efforts by the IMF and the World Bank to provide support had also come to naught.

In May 1997, Mobutu was driven from power by the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL), a coalition of rebel groups backed by Rwanda and Uganda. Laurent-Désiré Kabila proclaimed himself president and changed

the name of the country from Zaïre to the DR Congo. He inherited a dysfunctional country and attempted to carry out limited economic and financial reforms, notably a monetary reform that instituted a new currency, the Franc Congolais. He also reduced the decentralised entities (provinces) to four.

However, his fall-out with his old supporters led to a second war — often called the Great African War or the African World War — in August 1998 that involved a number of neighbouring states. The conflict was eventually brought to an end with the signing of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement in July 1999 between the DR Congo, Angola, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda and Zimbabwe and the establishment of the United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC).

MONUC's initial mandate was to observe the ceasefire and the disengagement of state and non-state armed forces but its mandate was substantially expanded over time. According to some studies, the war claimed the lives of millions of people, a large part of which were children under the age of five.[7]

In 2001, President Laurent-Désiré Kabila was assassinated and succeeded by his son, Joseph Kabila Kabange. The result was a re-engagement with the international community, allowing MONUC to deploy across the country. In 2002, talks among Congolese actors led to the signing of a peace agreement — the *Accord Global et Inclusif*. This paved the way for the 2003 Transition Constitution, three years of transition, and the holding of the first free and fair elections in the country in 2006, which Joseph Kabila won.

The Accord and the Transition Constitution tasked the Senate with the drafting of the new Constitution that benefited from the work of a constituent assembly, provincial consultations and the input of foreign and Congolese legal experts. The subsequent (and still current) Constitution was adopted in December 2005 by popular referendum and promulgated by President Kabila in February 2006 against a backdrop of ongoing political and security crises. The subsequent 2008 organic law on the territorial-administrative organisation of the state set out the structure of provinces, decentralised territorial entities and deconcentrated territorial entities.

However, little has come of these intentions. The central government failed to meet the 2010 deadline for the establishment of the 26 provinces envisioned in the Constitution, only completing that task five years later.[8]

In the meanwhile, in 2010, MONUC became the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), now acting in support of an elected government. Joseph Kabila was re-elected in the 2011 presidential election although the event was marred by accusations of corruption and fraud.

Subsequent ambiguity about whether or not Kabila intended to stand for a third term — from which he was constitutionally barred — coupled with a two-year delay in holding the elections, sparked sustained and widespread protests and created significant instability. Following pressure from continental, regional and international actors, Kabila announced, in mid-2018, that he would not stand again and national and provincial elections were eventually held in December 2018. The election results were heavily disputed by the opposition and civil society.

According to domestic election observers, opposition leader Martin Fayulu won the presidential contest. President Félix Tshisekedi's arrival in power is widely perceived as the result of a political deal struck by outgoing President Kabila, whose party lost but who maintains a significant grip on power as a result of a substantial majority in parliament.

Tshisekedi's *Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social* (UDPS), Kabila's *Front Commun pour le Congo* (FCC), and Tshisekedi's running mate, Vital Kamerhe's *Union pour la Nation Congolaise* (UNC) now govern the country through a rickety coalition government but which might soon change with the recent shift in power that has come with the ouster of the speaker of its parliament — a perceived Kabila loyalist.

Endnotes

1. World Bank, Democratic Republic of Congo, Systematic Country Diagnostic, Report No. 112733-ZR, 2018.
2. World Bank, Democratic Republic of Congo, Systematic Country Diagnostic, Report No. 112733-ZR, 2018.
3. DP Zongwe, Decentralization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Autonomy Arrangements in the World, March 2019, 9, DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.20028.08321.
4. DR Congo, [Agence nationale pour la promotion des investissements](#), 2020
5. B Akitoby and M Cinyabuguma, Sources of Growth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: A Cointegration Approach, IMF Working Paper WP/04/114, July 2004, 5–7.
6. G Prunier, Africa's World War: Congo, the Rwandan Genocide, and the Making of a Continental Catastrophe, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
7. World Bank, Democratic Republic of Congo, Systematic Country Diagnostic, Report No. 112733-ZR, 2018.
8. The breakdown of the Katanga province into several smaller provinces also aimed at stripping the former Katanga governor and then-presidential hopeful Moise Katumbi of a potential electoral base. DP Zongwe, Decentralization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Autonomy Arrangements in the World, March 2019, 10–14, DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.20028.08321.

Donors and sponsors



Reuse our work

- All visualizations, data, and text produced by African Futures are completely open access under the [Creative Commons BY license](#). You have the permission to use, distribute, and reproduce these in any medium, provided the source and authors are credited.
- The data produced by third parties and made available by African Futures is subject to the license terms from the original third-party authors. We will always indicate the original source of the data in our documentation, so you should always check the license of any such third-party data before use and redistribution.
- All of our charts [can be embedded](#) in any site.

Cite this research

Kouassi Yeboua (2024) Development pathways for the DRC to 2050. Published online at futures.issafrica.org. Retrieved from <https://futures.issafrica.org/special-reports/country/drc/> [Online Resource] Updated 29 June 2022.

About the authors

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.

About African Futures & Innovation

Scenarios and forecasting can help Africa identify and respond to opportunities and threats. The work of the African Futures & Innovation (AFI) program at the Institute for Security Studies aims to understand and address a widening gap between indices of wellbeing in Africa and elsewhere in the world. The AFI helps stakeholders understand likely future developments. Research findings and their policy implications are widely disseminated, often in collaboration with in-country partners. Forecasting tools inspire debate and provide insights into possible trajectories that inform planning, prioritisation and effective resource allocation. Africa's future depends on today's choices and actions by governments and their non-governmental and international partners. The AFI provides empirical data that informs short- and medium-term decisions with long-term implications. The AFI enhances Africa's capacity to prepare for and respond to future challenges. The program is headed by Dr Jakkie Cilliers.