

Co-operation on addressing pillaging of natural resources in DRC

The DR Congo is one of the richest countries in the world in terms of natural resources. It is rich in diamonds, gold, copper etc. Yet the majority of its population lives in misery. The country is one of the lowest ranking on the Human Development index. How to change this paradox? On the 18th and 19th of April 2006 representatives from the media and other civil society organisations in the DRC met in Lubumbashi to discuss possibilities for co-operation. This meeting was a follow-up from a conference in Brussels in November 2005, organised by Fatal Transactions on: “Natural resources in the DRC: source of conflict, or key to development?”. One of the recommendations of this conference was that media and other civil society organisations should seek co-operation to investigate and address the issue.

During the meeting, representatives from DRC’s Natural Resource Network presented recent developments and publications, such as the Fatal Transactions report ‘The State versus the people’, detailing the role of members of the transitional government and the World Bank in the pillaging of the natural resources of Katanga.

Joseph Bobia, of the NGO CENADEP and co-ordinator of the network explained the need for co-operation by stating that “the local community has to profit from the natural resources. In order to reach this it is necessary to inform them on the realities around mining and forestry in DRC, and who profits from these activities”. The participants concluded that it therefore is necessary for the Congolese media to participate more actively in monitoring resource extraction, be a watchdog instead of simply covering press conferences where reports are issued. On the other hand, the workshop also called for the need for civil society to assist the media more actively by delivering concise information, and not expect community radio journalists to read through long technical reports.

The discussion was also put more in the perspective of the upcoming elections in the DRC by Tshvis Tshivuadi of Journaliste en Danger (JED) explaining that the ‘the situation around the exploitation of natural resources concerns everyone. It plays a important role in politics and in the economic development of the country.’ This is clearly shown in the Fatal Transactions report, as well as in the in the report of the independent parliamentary ‘Lutundula’ commission, named after its chair, examining mining contracts signed during the war in the late nineties. Many of the persons and networks named in these reports are yet running for a position in the national or provincial government in the upcoming elections. As a result, the participants urged the Congolese voter in the final declaration of the meeting not to vote for anyone involved in pillaging the DRC’s natural resources.

The representatives from Human Rights NGOs, environmental groups, trade unions, community radios and other media also discussed several ways to increase collaboration. It was decided to launch an ‘ Observatory’ of media and other civil society groups that will together monitor the behaviour of the mining and forestry industry on a local level. An online database on natural resources is to be established, containing information on national and international companies and individuals implicated in the extraction of and trade of minerals and timber. Civil society organisations should also receive media training, and a network of investigative journalists covering these issues should be established, which also includes training of these journalists.

The workshop ended with a well-attended press conference, where the final declaration was presented. Considering the sensitivity of the issue-criticising the mining industry in Katanga-the event went surprisingly peaceful. Discussions were open and free, many detailed questions were asked, referring to the journalists' own experience with the disastrous consequences of mining in their communities.

With the elections taking place in a few months, and huge interests at stake, now is the time to act. The population has a right to know what happens with their countries' wealth. Hopefully this very fruitful meeting has launched a series of joint activities of media and other civil society groups in the DRC.

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Downloads:

- [The State versus the people: governance, mining and the transitional regime in the DRC](#)
 - [Lutundula report](#)
 - [Final declaration Brussels conference](#), 24 Nov 2005
 - [Final Declaration atelier Lumumbashi](#) 19 avril 2006
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- <http://www.fataltransactions.org>