



## Research Article

# From Militias to Minerals: The Economic and Security Effects of the Rwanda-DRC Peace Accord on Eastern Congo

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This paper examines the economic and security effects of the Rwanda-DRC Peace Accord to the conflict-stricken area of Eastern Congo. Nevertheless, the cycles of violence and illegal extraction of resources have become the order of the day in the region, despite the formal agreements that are meant to disarm militias and stabilize the situation in the mineral-rich regions. The study will be focused on evaluating whether the peace accord resulted in any significant decrease in militia activity and any gains in terms of mineral governance. It uses qualitative case study approach, which relies on interviews, policy reports and conflict mapping information to assess the post-accord developments in North and South Kivu. There are initial indications that although cross-border collaboration is now better and the number of militias demobilized, there are still formidable challenges in this regard that appear because of the ineffectiveness of institutions in implementing the goals and informal mining exploitation. The study is adding to peacebuilding and conflict economics literature and offers policy-relevant information on the sustainability of resources governance in the future and on the stability of the region of the Great Lakes region and further diplomatic work in the region.

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## Introduction

The war in Eastern Congo and specifically in the North and South Kivu provinces is one of the longest and complicated humanitarian crises in the Sub-Saharan region. The region has a history of violence that began with historical injustices, poor state institutions and rivalry on valuable mineral resources that has seen numerous state and non-state actors fighting over the resources. The role of Rwanda that was initially triggered by the security interests in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, has developed into a multi-level action involving the military involvement and the accusations of exploiting the resources (Stearns, 2011; Prunier, 2009). Regardless of the multiple peace efforts in the region, such as the latest Rwanda-DRC Peace Accord, insecurity and illegal activities of the mineral trade still sabotage the process of sustainable development and protection of civilians (UN Group of Experts, 2020).

The main issue that is considered in this work is the constant instability of Eastern Congo in spite of official peace treaties. The struggle to gain control and exploitation of the conflict minerals e.g., coltan, gold, and tin has contributed to the development of armed militias and reduced the efficiency of the state authority (Autesserre, 2010). This paper aims to challenge the reality of the tangible results of the peace accord with the following questions: How has the peace accord influenced the militia activity in East Congo? and What are the implications of peace accord on the mineral governance and economic development?

The most important are to review the economic changes of the accord, in particular, the formalization of mineral mining and trade, and the assessment of security changes, in particular, the demobilization of militias and the decrease of armed violence. These are objectives that are geared towards bridging a major knowledge gap in scholarly insights on the mechanisms of peacebuilding in resource endowed, conflict ridden environments.

This study has both an academic and practical importance. In academics, it has helped in the scholarship of peace and conflict by providing empirical analysis on the congruence of post-conflict governance and natural resource management. On the policy level, the results can be used to develop more specific interventions by the DRC government, local actors, and the international community to achieve sustainable peace and development in the Great Lakes region (International Crisis Group, 2022).

## Theoretical Frameworks and Conceptual Clarification.

The paper uses a multi-theoretical approach that is based on the Political Economy of Conflict, the Security Dilemma and Regional Security Complex Theory and the Resource Governance Theory in elucidating how armed violence, economic interests, and post-accord governance in Eastern Congo interacted.

The Political Economy of Conflict model provides a strong emphasis on the economic interest as a primary contributor and propagator of conflict. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) argue that the

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greed (an economic benefit) rather than the grievance (social or political injustice) causes civil wars in resource-rich countries. In Eastern Congo, the poor regulatory climate has seen armed gangs which in most cases have cross border affiliations exploit the poor regulatory environment to fund their activities by trading in the illegal mining of conflict minerals (Le Billon, 2001). The theory can be used in explaining why militia activity continues in spite of peace agreements in the situations when exploration of natural resources is still extremely profitable.

Security Dilemma and Regional Security Complex Theory is one way of analyzing how insecurity in one state (e.g., the DRC) will lead to behavior of preemptive or reactionary behavior by other states (e.g., Rwanda). Buzan and Waever (2003) have suggested that collectivism of perception of threats can occur in regions where the states are weak and security is interdependent which is to produce a localized logic of intervention and escalation. An example of this form of regional security that Rwanda has been engaged in is its frequent interference in Eastern Congo, which has been substantially explained by national security interests (International Crisis Group, 2010).

Lastly, Resource Governance Theory comes with a normative and institutional view, which is concerned on the impact of the natural resource management on peacebuilding and state legitimacy. Watts (2004) claims that the elite mismanagement or privatization of resource wealth may increase inequality and enhance discontent. The potential of the DRC government and regional stakeholders to institutionalize and control mineral mining during the post-accord period is essential in disrupting the under development and conflict cycle (OECD, 2018).

All these frameworks can provide a holistic picture of the process of Eastern Congo development as the overlap of militarized networks, economic motivation, and poor governance remains a challenge to the peace and security.

### Conceptual clarification

This paper is rooted in the clarity of concepts and depth of theory to examine the multiplex economic and security aspects to the Rwanda-DRC Peace Accord and its impact on Eastern Congo. Through the identification of key words and the application of the theoretical viewpoints, the research will seek to place the peace accord in the wider discourses on conflict transformation, post-conflict governance, and resource regulation.

A peace accord is a formal commitment between warring parties which are normally governments and armed forces aimed at stopping aggression and laying out ways through which lasting peace may be achieved (Darby & Mac Ginty, 2003). The Rwanda-DRC Peace Accord aims at demobilizing the militias, normalizing inter-country relations and allowing socio-economic recovery in Eastern Congo and specifically in the mineral-rich North and South Kivu provinces.

Security Sector Reform (SSR) involves the process of reforming the security apparatus of a state including the military, police, and intelligence services to become responsible, effective and governed by democratic standards (Bryden and Hanggi, 2005). In DRC, SSR plays an important role in prolonging the state power, civilian protection and the re-emerging of insurgents in post-accord settings.

Demobilization of militias is the formal process of disarmament of non-state military forces, dissolution of their command and re-integration of former fighters into civilian life (Muggah, 2005). Demobilization effectively minimizes chances of relapsing the conflict and tends to incorporate Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs that are designed to fit the conditions of the area. Such efforts have not been successful in Eastern Congo, where distrust has seen some

militias oppose reintegration or economic incentives have not worked or played in favor of reintegration or political interests of the region (Stearns, 2013).

Conflict minerals are natural resources including tin, tungsten, tantalum (3Ts) and gold whose mining and trade is used to finance armed struggle and human rights violation especially in volatile or war-affected regions (Global Witness, 2010). The possession of these minerals by different militia and regional actors in the Eastern Congo has lengthened violence and deteriorated the capacity of the state. The peace accord has provisions that are meant to control the movement of the minerals and the illegal trade that feeds the armed groups.

These major ideas, when matched to the theoretical frameworks, including the political economy of conflicts and resource governance structures, allow this study to offer an organized way to assess the post-accord reality of Eastern Congo.

### Literature Review

#### The historic background of the conflict.

The war in Eastern Congo is entrenched in both colonial histories of the region, ethnic division and fragmentation after the genocide. Rwandan genocide of 1994 not only destroyed Rwanda but also turned out to have ripple effects on Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) when Hutu militias and refugees fled across the border destabilizing local populations and triggering military interventions by the region (Prunier, 2009). The history of ethnic divisions among Hutu, Tutsi, and Congolese has determined the tendency of forming alliances, exclusion, and violence. The researchers have highlighted the fact that the inability to redress the root grievances together with the ineffectiveness of the Congolese state, generated a vacuum that was being used by the regional powers and militant groups (Autesserre, 2010; Stearns, 2011).

#### Militias and Resources Looting.

Militias in Eastern Congo are closely related to management of natural resources. With the help of the transnational companies and the neighboring countries, armed forces have built intricate networks to mine and sell valuable minerals including coltan, gold, and tin (Le Billon, 2001). This militarized resource economy has transformed mining areas into strategic bastions, with the proceeds of the same being used to sustain the conflict and subvert legitimate government (Global Witness, 2010). The recent literature indicates that militia leaders tend to transform into economic in-betweeners, dissolving the boundaries between warlords, politicians, and business elites (Raeymaekers, 2014).

#### Peace Accord in the Great Lakes.

In the Great Lakes, peace arrangements have been both positive and negative. Although such accords as the Lusaka (1999), Sun City (2002), and Goma (2008) processes have delivered provide temporary ceasefires and official DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration) promises, the implementation has often been tainted by elite bargaining, external interference and inability of the local ownership (International Crisis Group, 2010). The Rwanda-DRC Peace Accord is no exception to this larger trend whereby peace is largely negotiated on the high or elite levels but derailed by fragmented militias and unresolved political tensions (Bekoe, 2008). Researchers caution that in the absence of sustainable resource governance and inclusive reconciliation, peace agreements are bound to become circular agreements as opposed to being transformative (Nathan, 2005).

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provided below in academic style in line with APA 7th edition practices:

### Research Methodology

The research design which is used in this study is qualitative case study design which is suitable in studying complex sociopolitical phenomena in a real world situation. Considering the complexity of the conflict, peace agreements, and mineral control in Eastern Congo, a qualitative study can help to explore the views of the stakeholders, the reaction of the institutions to the conflict, and the development of relations during the whole time (Yin, 2018).

### Data Sources

The study utilizes the primary and secondary data to provide triangulation and depth of analysis.

Semi-structured interviews will be used to gather primary data with key informants, i.e. local community leaders, former combatants, NGO workers, security analysts working in the region, and government officials in Eastern Congo and Rwanda. Such interviews will offer a clue on the impacts of the peace accord on the behaviors of militants, security situations and control of mineral resources.

The secondary information will be obtained on the basis of trustworthy institutional reports, including those published by the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), Human Rights Watch, and by the regional peacebuilding agencies. Besides that, the analysis will be complemented by academic journal articles, policy briefs by think-tanks, and official DRC government and Rwandan government policy statements (OECD, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2022).

### Analytical Tools

Thematic analysis, conflict mapping, and comparative timeline analysis will form the basis of the analysis of the data. Thematic analysis will be used to determine the common patterns and stories in the interviews and texts (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The cartography of the conflict before and after the peace accord will be tracked using the conflict mapping of the territorial development of networks of presence of the militias and the exploitation of the mines. The history of key security events, DDR activities, and policy changes over the upcoming 7-10 years will also be monitored using the comparative timeline, which will be followed to trace the connection that can be made between the implementation of the peace accords and the results on the ground.

### Scope and Delimitations

Geographic targets of this paper are limited to North and South Kivu provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo, as they are of strategic significance both in the war and the mineral economy. The study will be investigated in the time frame of 2018-2025, when the last peace activities and the following changes in the relations in the region were observed. The study does not attempt to offer a universalized theory of all post-conflict environments but rather gives a detailed case analysis, which can be generalized. The constraints are the restricted access to the field, which is caused by security issues, and the possible bias in responding among the interviewees.

### History and Political Situation of the Rwanda-DRC Peace Accord.

#### Background and Pushes of the Accord.

The Rwanda-DRC Peace Accord was a reaction to the long-term crisis and humanitarian disaster in Eastern Congo and especially after the Second Congo War (1998-2003). This was the so-called Africa World War which was fought by various actors of the region, Rwanda being one of the most influential by advising

rebel groups in eastern DRC, allegedly to counter Hutu militias that had been related to 1994 Rwandan genocide (Prunier, 2009). But the long occupation of Rwanda in the Congolese land, and its participation in mineral mining relationships, contributed to tensions and distrust among the countries (Stearns, 2011). The mounting international pressure, the exhaustion of recurring patterns of violence, and the changes in political relationships in the Great Lakes region stimulated the search of a bilateral peace structure.

### Critical Provisions and Implementation Systems.

The agreement, which has not been popularized in a single extensive document, is a set of bilateral agreements and regional commitments to non-aggression towards each other, securing the borders, and destroying rebel infrastructure, especially the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), functioning on the territory of Congo (International Crisis Group, 2022). Such provisions are the sharing of intelligence, military actions that are coordinated, the repatriation of former combatants, and enhancing diplomatic relations between the city of Kinshasa and Kigali. The mechanisms of implementation have been through joint military commissions, regional verification teams and DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration) initiatives though with different levels of success and accountability (Boshoff, 2010).

### Engagement of Regional and International Actors.

In addition to Rwanda and DRC, regional institutions, including International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), and African Union (AU) have been facilitative in mediation and coordination, and international actors have facilitated enforcement and monitoring, including the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) (UN Security Council, 2020). The United Nations and donor governments have also made aid conditional and their involvement in peacekeeping on the adherence to the peace agreements and human rights commitments. The success of these attempts has however been hampered by the conflicting interests of regional powers, strength of armed networks and poor institutional capacity in both nations (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002).

### Another reason I oppose the Peace Accord is its Security Effects.

#### Weakening or Metamorphosis of Armed Groups.

The reduction and transformation of armed groups that were active in Eastern Congo was one of the main security issues of the Rwanda-DRC Peace Accord. Some success has been achieved in breaking up high-profile militia networks, including parts of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and the M23 movement, but most of the groups have divided into smaller and decentralized groups (Stearns and Vogel, 2015). These armed groups tend to rebirth or combine with new participants, retaining the local influence with extortion and metal-rich resources (International Crisis Group, 2020). Accordingly, although the accord perhaps destroyed some command structures, it did not result in total demilitarization.

### DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration) Effectiveness.

DDR programs are still not sufficiently implemented and under-funded. The reintegration efforts have often failed because they were not planned and there are no economic opportunities and the community is unwilling to accept ex-combatants (Muggah, 2005). A lot of ex-fighters resume projecting themselves by joining new militia groups or getting involved in crime economies. Also, the lack of effective vetting and psychosocial support activities has compromised the sustainability of DDR efforts in the long term. The low effectiveness of such programs

embodies the weaknesses of the state authority structure in general and the lack of the long-term international assistance.

#### **Modifications in Local Security Situation and Civile Safety.**

Even though there have been short-term rebounds in the security of certain areas after the accord, benefits have not lasted long. In North and South Kivu, civilians still reported the danger of armed militias, rogue security forces, as well as cross-border raids (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Mass displacement, sexual violence and target killings have been reported, hence civilian protection is still at risk. This failure of the state to project force or deliver any forms of justice has intensified the mistrust and dependence of the masses on local self-protection organizations, and hence, even makes it more difficult to do peacebuilding (Autesserre, 2010).

#### **International Security Cooperation and Problems.**

The peace agreement marked the start of a mutual military cooperation and intelligence transfer between Rwanda and the DRC. Practically, however, such co-operation has been characterized by suspicion, accusations of proxy warfare, and border conflicts periodically (UN Security Council, 2020). Although the two governments have reaffirmed their efforts towards the stability of the region, there are geopolitical undertones and the need to persist with the unfriendly stories which are impediments to the continued cooperation. Additionally, the relationship between Eastern Congo and the mineral economy has divergent goals that are championed by regional actors that complicate the realization of security pacts and enable armed networks to continue to exist.

#### **The Peace Accord has Economic Effects.**

##### **Mineral Resource Management after the Accord.**

One of the main economic policies adopted after the Rwanda-DRC Peace Accord was to develop increased dominion over the production and commerce of mineral in Eastern Congo. Although the government of Congolese and its allies attempted to increase control, by introducing certification systems, mining police forces, and regulatory changes, the outcomes have been uneven (OECD, 2018). Even though the agreement did create political space in which the policies partnership agreement and donor-funded governance projects could be conducted, much of the mining economy has stayed informal and dominated by the armed groups or politically influence elite (Le Billon, 2011). In other instances, state intervention has only served to displace the non-state actors in the extraction of mineral wealth without necessarily enhancing the transparency and the benefit-sharing processes.

##### **Artisanal Mining and Revenue Flows formalised.**

Another important goal of the post-accord economic recovery initiatives was the formalisation of the artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM). The International Tin Supply Chain Initiative (iTSCi) and the Regional Certification Mechanism at the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) were the programs aimed at controlling the flow of minerals and restricting the funding of the conflict (OECD, 2018). Although few efforts have been made to tag and certify some mining locations, there is still a lack of enforcement, and a number of miners are not subjected to the legal system because of excessive taxation, corruption, and the security risk (Seay, 2012). Therefore, even with the increased channels inside the formal channels they only facilitate a small percentage of mineral exports in Eastern Congo.

#### **Trends in the investment and engagement of the private sector.**

The peace accord had raised some optimism within the business community but in a very cautious manner that motivated the foreign and regional investors to show more interest

particularly in infrastructure and mining sectors. Nevertheless, the absence of stable governmental frameworks and security fluctuation have discouraged the continued involvement of the private sector (World Bank, 2020). Others that were launched in large-scale after the accord were postponed or dropped following the change of political situations and opposition by the local community. Although the incidences of public-private partnerships have been reported in isolated cases, the overall investment environment is still delicate since it is spoiled by legal uncertainties and systemic weaknesses.

#### **Effects on Local Lifestyles and Infrastructure.**

There have been uneconomic inequalities of the peace accord at the community level. Although better accessibility and cross-border trade programs have helped a few to diversify, most mining communities are still poor and lack access to the state infrastructure (Autesserre, 2010). Women and young people or the most vulnerable players in the post-conflict economy- still have limited rights to capital, land ownership and formal occupations. Peacebuilding programs, in other instances, have also served to reintroduce former combatants into the agricultural or trade sector, but the sustainability of such programs is doubtful based on the structural inequalities at the root of the matter (Seay, 2012).

#### **The Complexities and the Unintended Effects.**

Though there are formal provisions in the Rwanda-DRC Peace Accord, illicit trade of minerals has continued to go on, as it tends to transform in accordance with new regulatory restraints. The armed groups have evolved to de-centralize their activities, alliances with local officials, and taking advantage of the loopholes in the surveillance systems (Le Billon, 2011). It has been reported that smuggling networks remain strong in the certified areas, fueled by bribery, intimidation, and informal taxation programs (Global Witness, 2017). This has unintentionally led to tactical changes instead of demobilization of the peace accord and enabled the non-state actors to continue to enjoy economic and territorial control under other names.

Institutional fragility is an issue that still affects the Democratic Republic of Congo and it has prevented the country to implement the provisions of the accord. The ineffective state authority particularly in the eastern provinces has left a vacuum that is filled by parallel systems of governance that are characterised by armed actors and informal elites- weaken the formal rule of law (Englebert and Tull, 2013). The attempts to centralize the power are commonly opposed by the local power brokers, and the inability of the judiciary to hold them accountable is only aggravating the impunity and corruption in the mineral markets.

The economic recovery process after the accords has marginalized women with most being barred structurally to access land, credit, and secure jobs within the mining industry (Mazurana et al., 2013). Besides, reintegration of male ex-combatants with no similar support structures to that of female conflict survivors has strengthened gender hierarchies and has been another factor leading to re-traumatization of communities. In most places, women are confined to poorly paying and dangerous work in artisanal mines and informal trade where they have little access to protection or redress provisions.

Although the peace accord was aimed at deescalating the tensions in the region, it has also escalated geopolitical tensions especially in dominance of strategic mineral corridors. Rwanda and Uganda among other regional powers have remained influential in Eastern Congo or pretending that they are cooperating in security or economic relations (Stearns, 2011). This has made it difficult to achieve peacebuilding processes as there is a cross-cutting of interest of resources and unresolved historical

grievances and border issues. The resulting resource diplomacy has been more inclined to put elite negotiates above grassroots stability as a way of weakening the credibility of the peace process.

### Discussion of Key Findings

The conclusions of the given research indicate that even though the Rwanda-DRC Peace Accord yielded few benefits in terms of military and mineral-governance cooperation, its overall influence on the long-term stability in Eastern Congo has been limited by the systemic and political problems that have been lingering. Interestingly, the withdrawal of certain armed groups did not lead to a considerable decline of violence or the increase of the livelihood of the civilians. Rather, militias relocated or joined forces with state and non-state forces to maintain control of resource areas of interest (Stearns and Vogel, 2015). The symbolically significant DDR programs were implemented inconsistently, and this further curtailed the scope and validity of the peace dividends (Muggah, 2005).

This study supports dependence of the economic and security outcomes within the post-conflict environment. The mineral resources domination issue has been a key cause of the conflict and the laxity in regulating the artisanal and industrial mining has left the insurgents and the corrupt government officials with the avenue to make money out of insecurity (Le Billon, 2001). Formalized and monitored mining in certain zones saw small gains in security and taxation in the locality, which were frequently undermined by the practice of additional smuggling and rent-seeking (OECD, 2018). Accordingly, sustainable peace seems to be dependent not only on the military demobilization but also on the inclusive, transparent economic governance.

The peace accord is still on shaky grounds. Although the framework enabled a temporary bilateral cooperation between Rwanda and the DRC, the mistrust between the two countries and the regional interests, as well as disjointed implementation mechanisms, ensure its short-lived nature (International Crisis Group, 2020). International oversight and inclusion at the local level are also lacking, which makes the accord further weaker in terms of the institutional basis. The peace agreement will be another sham process that includes a few reforms in governance, justice, and equitable allocation of resources unless meaningful reforms are conducted on the agreement to alter the conflict dynamics.

The analogy of other African peace processes, including those in Sierra Leone and South Sudan, suggests some common solutions of partial implementation, elite bargains, and the exclusion of the voice of grassroots (Paris and Sisk, 2009). Similar to the Rwanda-DRC agreement, the cases highlight the risks of excessive dependence on the top-down diplomacy and the inadequate consideration of the local ownership and socio-economic re-integration. Still, the comparative effectiveness of DDR and institutional reform of Sierra Leone therefore presents a model because it has shown that the impact of sustained donor activity, significant involvement of civil society, and long-term investments in state capacity may enhance the sustainability of peace accords (Bangura, 2000).

### Conclusion and Recommendations

#### Summary of Major Findings

This paper has explored the economic and security implications of the Rwanda-DRC Peace Accord on Eastern Congo with reference to developments in the period between 2018 and 2025. The results of the findings indicate that whilst the accord did help in the normalization of diplomatic relations on a temporary basis and had helped to initiate resource governance efforts, it was not able to break any of the structural factors that caused conflict. Even after disarmament programs, armed groups are dynamic and

practice decentralized violence and illegal trade in minerals (Stearns and Vogel, 2015; Global Witness, 2017). Formalization of artisanal mining and the growth of interest of the private sector brought mixed outcomes because of corruption, insecurity, and weak institutions (OECD, 2018; Seay, 2012). Moreover, the implementation mechanisms of the accord did not pay much attention to the local livelihood issues, gender inequalities, and community-based reconciliation, which revealed the elite-biased orientation of the accord.

#### Recommendations

- i. To enhance institutional control over the mining operations, the Government of DRC must invest in anti-corruption institutions, transparent licensing, and judicial responsibility.
- ii. Give priority to the inclusion of the DDR programs that are integrated through the incorporation of psychosocial support, livelihood reintegration, and involvement of local community.
- iii. Decentralize development planning to indicate the distinct requirement of the provinces that are affected by the conflicts like North and South Kivu especially in the health, infrastructure, and education.
- iv. Rwanda Government ought to increase bilateral military and economic transparency with the DRC in order to create trust and diminish the belief about covert intervention.
- v. The government must ensure that the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of Rwandan refugees and former combatants is done through the government and international monitoring to ascertain the rights-based procedures.
- vi. Cooperation to conduct joint monitoring of the border, to minimize cross-border smuggling and militia financing.
- vii. Under the ICGLR framework, regional certification of conflict minerals should be increased by the regional bodies such as ICGLR, the AU and with the aid of third-party and technical assistance.
- viii. To strengthen the resilience of the grassroots, they ought to Invest in local peace infrastructures, which include, communities mediating institutions, women cooperatives, and cross-border dialogue forums.
- ix. Assure long-term donor commitment beyond the response to crises and is centered on institution-building, gender equality, and economic diversification in Eastern Congo.

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