



Transcript Q&A

What Next for the Democratic Republic of the Congo?

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Knox Chitiyo:

Two fascinating, slightly different takes on the Congo, but interlinked. If I can perhaps just draw them together briefly, I think what's been raised here is that potentially we're on the cusp of a transformative change in the Congo but if it is indeed to be positive transformation then there are some very important lessons which need to be learned so we're not just continually repeating history.

Question 1:

We've had this discussion with both Anneke and Ben many times before and in a way I'm surprised about your long list of problems. I'm missing one problem in your list and that's the Congolese government. That is the responsibility of the Congolese government to solve the problems of the Congolese, to solve the problems of the army, to solve problems of the chain of command and stop the army rampaging through the country, not only in eastern DRC. I somehow have the impression that everybody seems to accept these are irresponsible rapists, looters and murderers and that's something we cannot change. You blame everybody else: the international community, the United Nations, Rwanda and several warlords.

What I seem to miss in your analysis is a perspective on the DRC saying that this kind of internal turmoil, internal warfare has actually more or less happened in the last 60 years. It hasn't been resolved. There has never been a kind of national dialogue with the project: 'we want to live together, we accept that there are minorities with rights, we stop warfare'. In my view, I think this is actually to be put at the doorstep of the Congolese government. Could you please say something to that?

Question 2:

Thanks for the presentations, both of them. I've heard them before also and my comments go in the same vein as [the previous one]. I do think there is a responsibility for the international human rights movement to be more careful in what it's saying about the DRC's state. Essentially, from our studies and research, what is revealed by the DRC is a classic case of a failure to build the state.

If I were to take your 10 lessons, I'd probably just turn them exactly around, if there was any prioritization intended, so that we start from the kinds of persistent attacks on the peoples of the east and the failure of the state to

rebuild its security regime. It seems to me that we have an apparatus of international sanctions against states when they don't protect their populations. We see that in the critical stance taken towards Syria, the intervention in Libya, but in DRC it's really business as usual. The donors have their programmes ongoing and the Congolese politicians profess good governance, adhesion to good governance. I know you don't give that a lot of stock but this is at the heart of the problem there.

Last month there were two full page advertisements in the *Financial Times* bought by the DRC government advertising what a wonderful place it is to invest. What I think is problematic is the normalization of a state of insecurity, a state whose armed forces are rapacious. I disagree with you Ben that we see a qualitative shift. M23 may go down today but we'll see a re-emergence over time of people organizing themselves in the east as long as that state is not reconstructed. So I would like to hear more about that, thanks.

Anneke Van Woudenberg:

I agree with both of you. It was my point number eight, which I perhaps should have elaborated on a bit more, which is this lack of good governance and the weakness of the Congolese state. Fixing eastern Congo requires dealing with some of these rebel groups, requires dealing with the influence of Rwanda and absolutely requires dealing with the Congolese government. It's been interesting to watch that also over the past 15 years, the attempts on occasion to tackle some governance issues and how frequently that has failed, as much by the Congolese as by the international community.

Just a few anecdotes that for me have kind of summed that up. I found fascinating how in the year, in the lead-up to the Congolese elections – the most recent Congolese elections of 2012 – how there was such a desire by international diplomats to have influence over President Joseph Kabila. There became this kind of constant refrain in Kinshasa about who has spoken to the president, because the president was quite reticent to speak to the international community. So there was very little ability to influence him, it was felt at the time. My how things change. When President Kabila faces a crisis and needs the international community, all of a sudden the doors to the president's office were wide open and he was very keen to engage. But when it was issues about internal Congolese government politics, about corruption, about reform of the army, about reform of the electoral commission, the door to the international community was firmly shut, and there were far too many

diplomats in the international community willing to accept that in my opinion. It became this kind of constant game in Kinshasa.

I think in some ways that's why there is now an opportunity to not just focus on the crisis in the east, but because the Congolese needs the international community and SADC and the region more than it ever has, now is the time to also say that comes with other conditions, and that has got to include reform of the electoral commission, opening up of political space, ensuring that parliament is able to do its job, starting to demand security sector reform and a number of those other things. The list is very long in that regard.

I'm too quite pessimistic about the future of Congo in part because of the governance issues. I agree with you that this continues to be a pretty classic failed state and we haven't come out of that yet. In part, that's why its neighbours can so easily manipulate events across the border and that is something that needs to stop. I don't yet see much hope for that. I was deeply disappointed by the last elections and the fact the international community allowed such flawed and corrupt elections to stand.

Ben Shepherd:

Yes, I mean I completely agree with both of you in terms of the responsibility of the Congolese government. My only remark on that is that we often talk about Congo as a failed state; it certainly is, but it is also the embodiment of a remarkably stable system. The patrimonial system seems to define quite a lot of how Congolese politics work, and how the state behaves, and how individuals within the system behave. Even if they want to change things, the pressures acting on people don't allow it.

It's an open question and I don't have any answers at all. How external actors, particularly donors, can engage with trying to shift the axis of a very deep-rooted political system is really hard. I don't know if there is much conversation in the development community or elsewhere about how that might be done or should it even be attempted. I completely agree with you; clearly the problem is a failure of the Congolese state, the failure of the army, normalization of violence, as you say, all sorts of vicious circles around traumatization and rearmament. I don't have a solution to that.

To your point – yes, there will be another rebellion even if M23 dies away. Again, I completely agree and I should have been clearer. My point was that, not that we'll see the end of armed groups operating in the DRC, but simply

that that single strand of the Rwandan-linked rebel movements going back to the AFDL seem to me unlikely to continue in the same form.

That's important to me for two reasons: one, simply that for anything that bubbles up in its place won't have the same power as the CNDP certainly had and the RCD and the M23 had for a while. So it might be more amenable to being dealt with by peacekeeping troops or by the effective bits of the Congolese army that there are. It might just be a smaller-scale problem.

Second, it links back to this bigger question about politics. If Rwandan-backed rebel movements are taken out of the picture then it takes away a very easy excuse for the Congolese government, which has turned everything back to its neighbours, particularly Rwanda, and uses this easy anti-Tutsi nationalism to build political constituencies. I think it's one of the really interesting mistakes that was made around the M23, that rather than weakening Kabila's position it probably strengthened it, because it gives him a very easy card to play in terms of this exclusionary vision of what Congolese nationality should be and is – defined against its neighbours rather than by a positive sense of commitment to the community. Taking that sort of continual irritant out of the system I think potentially might allow a little bit of space, as you were saying, for a constructive national dialogue that tries to articulate a different idea of what the Congolese state could be.

So it is symbolically important in that sense, and politically important. But I completely agree, yes of course there will be upsurges of violence bubbling up all over because there is no control over the territory.

Question 3:

You might say when the Congo was created by the Belgians and the UN came in, it was in the same kind of way. I haven't followed all the details and I'm just getting back to see what's happening now but I'm really interested, and that's what I wanted to ask you, about the emphasis on the eastern Congo. In the 1960s it was Katanga and Kasai, it was not Kivu at all, and I wondered what the reason for that is? I mean, is it the existence of Rwanda? Is it the new minerals that have been discovered? Is it an emphasis that we from the outside are putting on the Congo because this seems where there is a dynamic crisis? Are there lots of things happening in other areas that we're not paying so much attention to?

And just one thing that I would like to add: in the 1960s it was Patrice Lumumba who tried to solve the government by appealing to the Congolese

over their heads, all the local things that were going on, but it was the same case that there was no infrastructure. I think that's the problem in the Congo: how do you construct an infrastructure which can support a proper political solution?

Question 4:

I actually have two small questions. One relates to the fact that, as you already mentioned, our focus so far has been mainly on the east. So what the international community has been doing is tackling – tackling symptoms instead of what is structurally wrong suggests governance issues in Kinshasa. What is the role that you see, for instance, for the UK government: can more conditionality of aid and increased diplomatic pressure, according to you, assist in tackling these more root causes of governance?

Secondly, Anneke you said that MONUSCO politically has been hollowed out, and I absolutely agree with that, but do you think there is still a role for MONUSCO to play politically due to their reputation at this moment? Thank you.

Anneke Van Woudenberg:

Yeah, it is interesting of course in the 1960s, it was completely Katanga and this question of Katangan independence. More recently, since the 1990s and since the Rwandan genocide, I think that has been one of the key changing features. The east of the country has been much more problematic. And of course you've got to remember one of the differences now is that since the fall of Mobutu those in power in Kinshasa have come from Katanga. So the Kinshasa–Katanga link is very strong and is often called the rule of the Katangese. It is now the turn of the Katangese to rule and that has really been going on since Laurent-Désiré Kabila took power in Kinshasa in 1997. That has meant that those tricky Katangan politics versus the central state have been somewhat subdued.

I don't think we should, anyone who has followed the Congo in the past couple of months – let's not assume that Katanga is stable. Southern Katanga, the copper-cobalt belts are semi-stable, but there remain huge issues in the centre and in the north of Katanga. There has been a resurgence of violence in what has often been called the 'triangle of death' which is a triangle between three different – let's just call it a triangle – in the centre of Katanga run by a very vicious warlord known as Gédéon [Kyungu Mutanga], who

created huge violence there about five or six years ago, was arrested, brought to trial and found guilty for war crimes. He and his wife – the first time a woman in Congo was tried and found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity – he escaped from prison about a year ago, year and a half ago, and has restarted the violence in central Katanga. Today we're focusing on the east but there are these pockets of quite serious violence and problems that continue and one is in Katanga.

I won't tackle the root causes question; I'll maybe throw that one over to Ben. What I did just want to say about the role of the UN – and can MONUSCO still do anything, considering its reputation has been so hammered time after time after time? I'm still a believer in the UN. Overall, I still think their role has still been positive. I would hate to see what Congo would be like today if we hadn't had the UN and some of the good work that they have done. But that doesn't mean all of it has been good, far from it. So I think the role of the UN and the international community and what that embodies remains of crucial importance to the future of the Congo.

I agree with Ben on this; it does need to do that jointly with the region. There is hope with the involvement of SADC and the ICGLR, the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region. That provides me with some hope, but I think we need to see the UN beefed up politically again and with strong political leadership. I've really seen that go downhill over the past few years. Sure it's easy for me to blame the SRSGs (Special Representatives of the Secretary-General) and I think we have had less strong politically engaged heads of MONUC [now MONUSCO], especially the past two. The current one, Roger Meece, and the one before him, Alan Doss, were not strong political leaders and we see the impact of that.

I talk about the hollowing out of the political section, but anyone who has been to Congo or has followed Congo may recall that at one point in time the United Nations peacekeeping mission had an extremely strong political division, probably of about 60–70 members of staff – I'm not sure I've got the numbers exactly right – who were very engaged, astute, kept contacts across the political spectrum in Congo. It did a very important job behind the scenes, especially in the 2006 elections and in the lead-up to that. Following that it was hollowed out and I think today there are probably less than 20 individuals in the political affairs division. I mean that's a very practical thing but I've really seen the political influence of MONUSCO deteriorate. That's a problem.

Ben Shepherd:

Thanks. Very quickly on why the focus on the east – it *has* been the epicentre of the violence. My sense is that we will probably be talking more about Katanga in the news very soon. I'm not an expert on Katangan politics. I completely agree with Anneke that it's not stable. For me it's where the game is played. It's where Kinshasa looks and it's the cake that Congolese politics is about carving up. I agree to some extent that the focus on the east can be distracting and harmful. There's an enormous number of issues that are ongoing that don't get any attention at all. So yes, very briefly, I agree.

Infrastructure: clearly an absolutely massive issue. We would need a spend of \$5 billion annually, 75 per cent of government budgets for 20–30 years to get the country up to a basic level of infrastructure and more than \$1 billion a year just on maintenance. It's not going to happen, at least not very soon. So it does leave an enormous challenge. The whole decentralization argument that we haven't really talked about is going to have to be part of the solution, one would imagine, much more local solutions. But it cuts right against the grain of the centralizing tendencies of the elite in Kinshasa. So it's another huge issue.

The question about: do we just treat the symptoms and not the causes? Yes, absolutely, we do, I think. A vast number of reasons, I think we haven't engaged systematically in trying to bring about or encourage systemic change. I think it makes people very nervous. The international community has never really worked out where it is going, post-CIAT (International Committee in Support of the Transition), post-transition. It had a very clear role, [then] overnight had no role at all. Could the international community, if it was genuinely unified and gained some traction, begin to move some of these fundamentals? Possibly, I don't know. If it involved the Chinese, if it involved the region then yes, people would probably listen. Do you think there is a role for UK conditionality? Probably not at all, no. It's a drop in the ocean of the money swimming around the DRC.

I think there is a specific role for support on things like elections. Again, not something that we've talked a lot about today. The elections haven't happened and they're unlikely to happen this year. Local elections were due in 2005 so that makes it eight years past time. I think some specific focus from the development community on some of these things that could strategically try – at least encourage a little bit of local accountability, via elections for instance.

Last point on MONUSCO and its political role: yes, I agree it's not had a politically activist leadership. Part of the problem is this post-CIAT relationship

with the Congolese government. I think the system has been very scared in general about being seen as an opponent to government and eventually being told to leave and all the negative consequences that would bring. I think the space for the SRSGs to act in a political way is pretty limited, but it does leave the international engagement with the DRC a bit rudderless. It's suffered from not having a lead donor, which is why the implications of the region and SADC, be it very nascent, might be a positive thing.

Knox Chitiyo:

Ladies and gentlemen the clock is ticking, both for the Congo and here in this room. I would have loved to have had more questions and comments but time doesn't allow. I think we've had two very stimulating presentations and some very interesting questions as well on the Congo. So I'd very much like to thank our two speakers, Anneke and Ben. I think really we all hope – the Congo as we've heard is poised between a positive transformative change and perhaps a return back to the cycle of crisis.

I think we all, in this room and in the world, really hope that it is a positive change. Certainly for myself as someone who comes from a country very near to the Congo, we really do want things to move forward for the Congo. We really don't like hearing the Congo being referred to as failed state, failed state, failed state; we need to end that cycle. I think all our best wishes are there for the Congo and as Anneke has pointed out certain things need to be done and put in place. So we look forward to hearing more about that in a future time. With that I'd like to thank you all and thank our speakers.