



ERAIFT professor Theodore Trefon has just published a book about integrated management of DRC's natural resource management.

Congo's Environmental Paradox: Potential and Predation in a Land of Plenty, ZED Books: London.

<http://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/distributed/C/bo23368339.html>

Congo matters. It is land of plenty with the natural resources the world needs. No other country in Africa, and few countries worldwide, has such an impressive concentration and diversity of natural wealth. Congo has over 1,100 mineral substances and is home to the world's second largest tropical rainforest. Endowed with abundant arable land, its farmers could feed a billion people. More than half of Africa's water is located in this troubled nation, whose hydroelectric capacity could light up the entire continent. And Congo has oil too. But after a decade of robust growth driven by the extractive sectors, there is little evidence of social development.

Neither optimistic nor pessimistic this book intertwines three main threads of information: an overview of what we need to know about the natural resources themselves; analysis of the sectors through an institutional and political economy framework; and the challenges, pathways and opportunities for improved natural resource management.

The primary ambition of this book is to present up-to-date data and analysis of Congo's natural resource sectors. Congo's Environmental Paradox is essentially empirical and argues, sector by sector, that state-building initiatives cannot be successful without improved natural resource management. Efforts consequently need to be embedded in locally realistic and appropriate perspectives, including in the framework of the stalled decentralization process.

Part of my motivation for writing this book stems from frustration about mainstream discourse and analysis of Congo's natural resources. Most information tends to be sector specific and lacks historic depth. Articles, NGO reports and policy documents suffer from extreme fragmentation. The scholarly landscape about these resources is covered by vertical silos with few horizontal connections. The urgency in trying to come up with management solutions or policy recommendations also means that these writings usually lack historical depth.

The book therefore includes historical accounts about natural resource management because the trajectory of Congo's resource exploitation does not exist in an historical vacuum. The main focus, however, is the period since President Joseph Kabila came to power in 2001. Much has evolved in the area of resource use and management since then, despite many patterns of continuity.

Congo's Environmental Paradox adopts – and advocates for - an integrated approach in analysing the potential of Congo's natural resources. Integrated (sometimes used synonymously with holistic) refers to the interconnectedness of natural resources themselves, combined with governance practices, economic activities and the stakeholders involved – such as Congolese officials, farmers and miners, international institutions, Western multinationals, new commercial partners and actors in unofficial trade and trafficking networks. The book identifies relationships between all of these elements and highlights the lost opportunity costs of not pegging development policies to them.

The following examples support my argument of why an integrated approach is necessary. Efforts to improve the sustainable management of Congo's forests focus more often than not on the forest sector *sensu stricto*. This is necessary but not enough. Sustainable use of these forests can only be achieved by looking beyond the sector itself. Links need to be made between forests, water, energy and agriculture. Agriculture is a major driver of deforestation and consequently contributes to global climate change. Food insecurity in the DRC clearly stems from production and transportation weaknesses but there are other causes too. Artisanal mining is one example because it has tempted large numbers of farmers to trade their hoes and machetes for picks and shovels. Oil production undermines protected area management threatening Congo's amazing biodiversity.

The section on industrial mining draws attention to DRC's energy deficit, which is a serious obstacle to the creation of added economic value. While extraction of bulk ore is not particularly energy dependent, its transformation is. The central government wants the country to export value added products but processing by mining companies is not economically profitable with inadequate electricity supplies.

Dilapidated transportation infrastructure, like the energy deficit, is another cross-cutting problem with negative implications for each of the five sectors analysed. This pertains to difficulties in getting crops from field to market, timber from forest to sawmill or port, or minerals from mine to rail and road networks. The oil sector is not seriously handicapped by transport issues today because production takes place in the vicinity of the Atlantic coast. Nevertheless, a looming logistical problem faces upcoming oil production in eastern Congo: the pipeline question remains unresolved for national political concerns and regional rivalry. These are some of the other connections that are highlighted in an integrated way.

All of these sectors merit entire books in and of themselves but this one has the merit – for the first time – of pulling together this information in a single volume. It is intended primarily for people

interested in the Congo and in African environmental issues. But students wanting to learn about global climate change or hydropower politics, wildlife lovers fascinated by Congo's outstanding biodiversity, food security experts interested in fish farming, NGO campaigners tracking land deals or struggling to end the trade in conflict minerals, companies exploring investment opportunities and donors trying to think creatively about aid delivery strategies, as well as students of development more broadly, should all find some parts of this book conceptually useful and socially pertinent