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The power of defiance: Uniting communities against land grabbing in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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**The power of defiance: Uniting communities against land grabbing in the Democratic
Republic of Congo**

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Contents

Introduction.....	3
Literature Review.....	3
Land grabbing.....	3
Need for involved locals.....	5
Resistance to land grabbing	6
Overview.....	7
Theoretical Framework.....	8
Theoretical Expectations.....	10
Methodology.....	10
Results.....	20
Types of grabbing and actors involved.....	21
Impact on locals.....	23
Historical and political context.....	23
Role of state.....	24
Actors mobilising and forms of mobilisation.....	24
Successes and challenges of mobilisation.....	25
Level of mobilisation.....	26
Motivations for resistance.....	27
Alliances with other groups (local and international).....	27
Discussion.....	28
Conclusion.....	29
References.....	31

Appendix.....	40
List of abbreviations.....	40
Interview transcripts.....	41
Interview with Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya from CENADEP.....	41
Interview with Steward Muhindo from Lucha.....	59
Interview with Malembre Simplex Kambale from CONAPAC.....	74

1. Introduction

A recent assessment found that the six largest land concessions recently sold to foreign companies could total up to 11 million hectares in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (Peemans, 2014). This number might not be reduced soon considering the increasing global consumption of goods, the DRC's great abundance of natural resources, investors' greed for profits and the state's corruptive tendencies (Huggins, 2015). This trend of extensive purchase of land, usually by foreign governments or corporations has devastated local communities and their access to resources (Borras et al., 2012, Verweijen, 2017). In response to this dispossession of locals from their livelihoods, significant mobilisations emerged to fight against the mistreatment of communities.

This study focuses on "How does land grabbing in the Democratic Republic of Congo impact collective action and community resistance?". Exploring this topic is crucial because land grabbing significantly damages people's lives and the environment. Unfortunately, these conflicts are too often masked due to the lack of transparency. The objective of this research is to understand how land grabbing affects the capacity of communities to organise, take action and resist the efforts of powerful actors who exploit their resources. The hypothesis is that the dispossession of locals' land, resources, and customary systems is caused by land grabbing and that this dispossession pushes communities to resist and organise new forms of collective action. This might give some insights into the creation of policies and initiatives that strengthen community resilience and make it possible for them to practise sustainable natural resource management while being respected.

2. Literature review

Land grabbing poses a significant challenge in the resource-rich DRC, involving foreign investors and local elites acquiring land without community consent (Huggins, 2015). This practice leads to evictions and environmental harm. The literature explores land grabbing, emphasises the significance of community-driven resource management, and discusses land distribution and resistance in the DRC.

2.1. Land grabbing

Land grabbing occurs mostly in countries of the Global South; the phenomenon has been noticed across South America, Africa and Asia (Rocheleau, 2015). The recent explosion of

land grabbing can be explained by the trend of large-scale production and export of food and biofuels centred on (trans)national commercial land transactions and land speculation (Borras & Franco, 2012). The main actors are frequently governments, private companies, and individuals who speculate on vast arable land for agriculture, mining, and oil extraction. They usually dispossess locals of their commons. This can lead to evictions with little to no compensation (Borras et al., 2012; Daniel, 2012; Hules and Singh, 2017). Land grabbing can also take the shape of supposed nature conservation or even tourism as seen in the Virunga National Park in the DRC or the National Park in Chiapas, Mexico in which case it is called green grabbing (Hochleithner, 2017; Rocheleau, 2015). Land reforms that seek to privatise land and give formal titles to individual landholders clash with the historical customs and communal ownership of the country concerned.

In most of Africa, communities rather than individuals have historically owned land (Huggins, 2015; Peemans, 2014; Mudinga et al., 2014; Ibreck, 2015). The process of land grabbing, which is often promoted as an improvement to food security or an opportunity for local development often results in displacement, loss of ancestral livelihoods, and environmental degradation (Cotula, 2013; Huggins, 2015). Some authors even argue that land grabbing is a form of neo-colonialism. Agbebi and Virtanen (2017) argue that foreign investments from industrialised countries in Africa represent the exploitation of natural resources for foreign economic growth and results in asymmetrical power relations and unequal development between core and periphery (Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1982; Rocheleau, 2015; Toulemonde, 2021). Land grabbing exacerbates the legacies of colonial times, for instance, the newly centralised government power over land and laws encourages foreign investment at the expense of local governance (Cotula, 2013). Governments frequently enact laws and policies, such as reduced environmental regulations, simplified land acquisition procedures, and tax benefits, that are favourable to foreign investors. In their 2011 report *Rising global interest in farmland: can it yield sustainable and equitable benefits?*, the World Bank (WB) incorporates all of the different stakeholders and actors implicated in the practice (Deininger et al., 2011). The Bank's data unmistakably demonstrates that land grabs have primarily occurred in areas where buyers could take advantage of weak governments that had little ability to control the transaction or stop buyers from focusing on the poorest rural communities and displacing residents with non-traditional land titles from their land.

According to figures, between 2008 and 2011, significant land grabs amounted to between 30 and 60 million hectares, with 20 million hectares on African grounds (Brown,

2011; Baxter, 2010). The DRC is no exception to this trend and has historically experienced land grabbing. To collect resources like rubber and ivory, King Leopold II of Belgium founded the Congo Free State in 1885. This system of forced labour resulted in the deaths of millions of Congolese people, making it one of the worst cases of colonial exploitation in history. This until now has led to a “continuous dispossession of the peasant world” (Peemans, 2014, p. 4). Land grabbing significantly changes agrarian structures and traditional collective action of production in the concerned areas (Borras & Franco, 2012). Small farmers are displaced and sustainable farming systems are replaced by monocultures, and land becomes a commodity. There are dreadful impacts of land grabbing on the environment. Land grabbing can lead to large-scale deforestation for mining, agriculture and logging, soil degradation, water pollution, loss of biodiversity and exacerbate poverty and food insecurity in the region (Molinario et al., 2020). This is particularly concerning in the DRC as it hosts the second-largest tropical rainforest region in the world. The DRC has more available farmland than any other African country and could feed around two billion people but only 10% of that land is being used (*Agriculture*, 2018). This has great potential in a country which still experiences starvation and with a growing global food demand (Yang & He, 2021).

2.2. Need for involved locals

Involvement of locals through a bottom-down or context-specific approach in the management of commons such as air, water or habitable earth is crucial (McGinnis & Ostrom, 1992; Ostrom et al., 1999). Dell’Angelo et al. (2021) link the dispossession of commons to land grabbing and argue that such practices alter long-standing traditional systems of resource governance. This leads to the alienation of small farmers, traditional land users, and indigenous people from the resources and the land that support their production systems and identities and their very existence. Land grabbing illustrates a top-down approach where global food security or environmental preservation are decided remotely from the zone concerned through international laws, global governance or centralised governmental decisions (Hardin, 1998; Bodansky, 2012; Kaul, 2013). Such authors argue that decision-making should be made by professionals and international institutions as they offer better coordination in addressing large-scale, complex issues. However, this approach disregards other potential solutions since it does not account for cultural and socioeconomic factors that affect resource management. This strategy, according to Brando et al. (2019), might impair local autonomy and involvement. Bottom-up or context-specific approaches

prioritise the voices of affected communities in land grabbing situations (Huggins, 2015; Fairhead & Scoones, 2005; Peemans, 2014; Claeys, 2015; Rocheleau, 2015; Cotula, 2013). Scholars like Ostrom et al. (1999), McGinnis and Ostrom (1992), and Ostrom (2003) argue for community-based management, which adapts rules to local conditions and involves local users. Local expertise provides insights into ecosystem management and sustainable practices (Fairhead & Scoones, 2005). Participatory decision-making and equitable benefit distribution are integral to existing social norms (McGinnis & Ostrom, 1992). Involving locals through monitoring, sanctions, dispute resolution, and engaging with higher levels of authority facilitates effective management (McGinnis & Ostrom, 1992). Understanding regional requirements and circumstances is crucial for successful soil investments and conservation (Fairhead & Scoones, 2005).

2.3. Resistance to land grabbing

The term social resistance refers to collective action carried out by people or organisations to confront and reject institutions or power structures that they see as unfair or oppressive. People engage in social resistance when they believe their rights or interests are in danger and want to rebel against those in positions of authority (Tilly, 1978; Scott, 2008). Social resistance aims to bring about changes in the social, political, or economic spheres. Nevertheless, the specific context and objectives of the resistance will determine whether or not such efforts are successful. When it comes to reasons for resistance, Polanyi (1944) argues the environmental and labour exploitation by capitalism leads to the emergence of resistance. According to Foucault (1994), exploitation leads to resistance and power relations serve as the foundation for resistance. In Africa, colonial and now post-colonial powers are an example of exploitative power which first sparked emancipatory revolts for decolonisation and now provoked opposition against dynamics of livelihood deprivation. Subaltern groups are defined by Gramsci (1971) as those who resist due to their unique material and political circumstances, which are shaped by the hegemony of the elite. He contends that rather than being motivated by loyalty to a particular ideology, these groups' resistance is driven by material gain. In the context of land grabbing, people are motivated to resist as they are dispossessed of their livelihoods.

Safeguarding the commons from exploitation requires the involvement of social and local organisations and mobilizations (Villamayor-Tomas & García-López, 2018; Dell'Angelo et al., 2021). Local organisations, indigenous groups, and farmers are the primary actors

mobilising against land grabbing, often through official letters, petitions, protests, campaigns, or land occupation (Dell'Angelo et al., 2021). Alliances are formed with NGOs and IOs (Dell'Angelo et al., 2021). Evictions resulting from land grabbing weaken collective action and social networks (Peemans, 2014; Mudinga et al., 2014; Claeys, 2015). Despite challenges and resource constraints, community opposition has proven effective in some cases (Rocheleau, 2015; Hall et al., 2015; Ibreck, 2015). Success in resisting land grabs depends on factors such as external support from transnational agrarian movements, NGOs, or IOs, as well as the cohesion and organisation within the affected community (Borras & Franco, 2012; Rocheleau, 2015; Dell'Angelo et al., 2021; Ibreck, 2015). Access to impartial justice and legal resources is critical for pursuing legal challenges (Deininger et al., 2011).

The battles fought by those affected by displacement and property deprivation due to development are crucial in challenging the prevailing narrative of development as natural and inevitable (McMichael, 2010). In the case of the DRC, Congolese farmers and indigenous people actively resist land grabs and create their own solutions and initiatives, demonstrating their resilience (Peemans, 2014). Limited participation in nature conservation dialogues has led to resistance among locals who rely on natural resources for survival, leading to implicit resistance such as illicit agriculture, as observed in the Virunga National Park (Hochleithner, 2017).

2.4. Overview

More emphasis is needed on prioritising the needs of rural communities rather than simply seeking their approval for specific projects, in order to ensure the overall development initiatives in Africa are beneficial (Cotula, 2013). Limited data collection exists on resistance and networked organisations, with a focus on South America, Southeast Asia, and Eastern Africa, rather than the heavily affected DRC (Buchholz, 2022; Rocheleau, 2015; Dell'Angelo et al., 2021; Schneider, 2010; Adnan, 2013; Kenney-Lazar, 2018; Tafon & Saunders, 2019; Parra et al., 2020; Geenen, 2014). Non-agricultural land deals and the multifaceted impacts of land grabbing also receive insufficient attention (Yang & He, 2021). Further research is crucial to understand the complex dynamics and potential reversal of violent dispossession in land grabs (Borras et al., 2011).

3. Theoretical framework

Scholars such as Borras et al. (2011), Cotula (2013), Borras and Franco (2012), Hall et al. (2015) and Claeys (2015) have highlighted the link between land grabbing, collective action and community resistance. Local communities are forced to fight against exclusion, support inclusion and recognition, oppose land concentration and acquisition, and claim redistribution (Borras & Franco, 2013). To understand how land grabbing can spark resistance in the DRC, the Accumulation by Dispossession theory can be used. This framework is used in Obuene et al. (2021)'s article when examining land grabbing and resistance of indigenous landowners in Nigeria. Other theoretical frameworks could be applied to this area of study. Social movement theory can be used for example to research resistance in land conflicts (Norén-Nilsson & Bourdier, 2019). This theoretical approach emphasises the importance of collective action and mobilisation by groups to challenge existing power structures and drive social change (Tarrow & Tilly, 2007). However, it focuses on movements in general which are not sufficient to analyse the complex dynamics behind land grabbing. Postcolonial theory also fits into this analysis (Huggins, 2015). Postcolonial theory is a critical approach that analyses the historical and current power relations and structures of exploitation and imperialism in shaping contemporary social and economic relations (Fanon, 1961). Nonetheless, this theory mainly focuses on the problem rather than the reaction. Accumulation by Dispossession theory allows to grasp the link between land grabbing and resistance by showing that accumulation of capital is reliant on the dispossession of some. This critical approach can be valuable in analysing the structural dynamics that enable land grabbing, and how resistance movements can challenge these dynamics. By examining the exploitation perpetuated through land grabbing, this theory sheds light on the importance of resistance movements in promoting social justice and challenging dominant power structures (Harvey, 2004). This framework also helps theorise whether dispossession might lead to the failure of resistance or push the creation of new forms of possession, such as novel social ties, waves of protests due to the lack of alternatives or new ways of organising.

According to the Marxist geographer David Harvey (2004)'s theory of Accumulation by Dispossession, capitalism constantly centralises power and wealth by depriving vulnerable communities of their labour, resources, and land. Marginalised groups lose control over resources and means of subsistence as a result while capitalist companies and elites prosper financially and politically. Land grabbing is one of the many manifestations of the process (Obuene et al., 2021). It is especially important in developing nations. The concept criticises

neoliberal economic practices that make it easier for oppressed populations to be evicted for the sake of profit. Dispossession leads to injustice and exploitation, which inspires opposition such as demonstrations and organised action (Levien, 2013). Marginalised groups may band together to fight for the recognition of their land rights and stop land acquisitions. By claiming their autonomy and agency, these communities challenge the prevailing myths of economic success and expansion, which justify eviction. The accumulation by dispossession theory explains that marginalised communities fight back against displacement, dispossession and reclaim ownership of their land, resources, and labour (Harvey, 2004). According to this concept, peasants rebel because they are aware that their lands were acquired unfairly. Additionally, they are aware that by opposing the acquisition, their land might eventually be returned while negative outcomes, such as starvation, will result from a lack of resistance.

Land grabbing in the DRC involves powerful actors seizing land and natural resources without local communities' consent, leading to forced displacement and loss of livelihoods (Borras et al., 2008). This practice highlights the unequal power dynamics and negative impact on marginalised groups. Scholars such as Villamayor-Tomas and Garcia-López (2018) and De Angelis (2012) have examined grassroots movements and tensions between capital accumulation and resistance by common people and social movements. Understanding these perspectives helps grasp the impact of land grabbing on resistance in the DRC, revealing how marginalisation and dispossession hinder communities' ability to resist. Incorporating these viewpoints provides a more nuanced understanding of how land acquisition influences opposition in the DRC.

Resistance against land grabbing takes diverse forms, such as protests, legal actions, strikes, and acts of civil disobedience (Piven and Cloward, 2000). Polanyi (1944) conceptualises resistance as a means to protect labour, land, and natural resources from the detrimental effects of market forces. Land grabbing profoundly impacts these three elements, motivating people to resist and safeguard their land, labour rights, and environment (Peemans, 2014). According to Foucault (1994), resistance is an ongoing and pervasive activity closely intertwined with power dynamics in society. Land grabbing is deeply rooted in colonialist dynamics (Huggins, 2015). Applying Foucault's understanding of resistance highlights how even material struggles can contribute to broader battles. Gramsci (1971) defines resistance as the contestation of hegemonic cultural and ideological narratives. He emphasises the importance of forming alliances and coalitions among diverse social groups,

asserting that resistance encompasses cultural, economic, and political struggles rooted in the organic intellectual and cultural traditions of the people involved.

4. Theoretical expectations

The Accumulation by Dispossession theory can help understand how land grabbing in the DRC impacts collective action and community resistance. When looking at existing theories and literature, land grabbing in the Democratic Republic of Congo leads to a reorganisation of traditional collective action and resistance at a local community level (Peemans, 2014). The Accumulation by Dispossession theory shows that the dispossession of cultural identity, the livelihood of local farmers and communities and displacement provokes resistance by the affected communities (Obuene et al., 2021). This is because a lack of resistance eventually leads to food insecurity, loss of homes, livelihoods, cultural identity, destruction of natural ecosystems, exploitation of vulnerable and marginalised communities and many others (Hall et al., 2015). The ability of communities to organise and resist is undermined due to loss of land, displacement and marginalisation. Differences in cultural identity between communities can also be a barrier to the success of resistance (Cotula, 2013; Huggins, 2015). However, the common experience of land grabbing leads sometimes to new organisations and common agendas (Dell'Angelo et al., 2021). The coordination between locals highly depends on the presence of support and alliances with other groups, domestically and internationally as well as the level of cohesion within the community (Gramsci, 1971; Ibreck, 2015). This resistance expresses through protests, legal challenges, direct action to recapture land or more subtle resistance in daily life (Piven and Cloward, 2000). However, if there is poor coordination, no alliances with other groups and a dysfunctioning justice system resistance is made impossible by investors and a weak government (Deininger et al., 2011).

5. Methodology

Due to its abundant natural resources, which include minerals, timber, agricultural land, and an important amount of foreign investments, the DRC can be considered a typical case of land grabbing and resource extraction. A typical case refers to a representative example of a certain phenomenon that is investigated in-depth to gain insights into its nature, causes, and effects (Gerring, 2006). Because it is representative, the findings and method of this study can be applied to other cases that share the same characteristics. Since the colonial era, the country has been the target of enormous foreign investment and exploitation like many Global South countries (Peemans, 2014; Huggins, 2015; Borras et al., 2011). Since its

independence from colonialist Belgium rule, the DRC has experienced significant political instability and violence, including territorial and resource conflicts, civil wars, authoritarian rule and human rights abuse (Dagne, 2011). These elements make the DRC a useful case study for analysing how land grabbing affects group behaviour and community opposition. Like most countries that suffer land grabbing, the DRC has a weak state that makes it easier for foreign firms to settle (Rocheleau, 2015). Finally, the DRC has vibrant civil society and social movement groups that have been actively opposing land grabbing (Ibreck, 2015). This makes it an adequate setting for researching the dynamics of collective action and resistance in reaction to the dispossession phenomenon. Additionally, expanding the research on land grabbing in the DRC is crucial as it is the country with the most hectares bought in transnational deals since 2000 out of the low and middle-income countries (Buchholz, 2022). This poses great environmental and social concerns as it is the fifth country with the most tree coverage in the world, it has great wealth in natural resources but remains extremely poor (Dagne, 2011).

To explore how land grabbing impacts resistance and collective action, the qualitative methods of interviews and critical content analysis were used. Meanings, norms, values, motives, and purposes within the data sources were examined to discover underlying causes and mechanisms and provide a deep and nuanced understanding of land grabbing and resistance in the DRC (Halperin & Heath, 2020). They can capture the complex dynamics and multiple stakeholders implicated in this phenomenon. It can also enable us to discern what the prospects are for locals to regain a voice in the acquisition of land. The choice of interviews and critical content analysis allows a thorough investigation of the opinions and experiences of regional communities and other key players in the problem. It can show complexities that quantitative or secondary data sources might miss and gives participants a chance to share their experiences and perhaps have an impact on advocacy and policy activities. To shed light on the underlying dynamics of land grabbing in the DRC, critical content analysis can help analyse things within their context. The existing resistance, alliances, tactics and activity of the civil society in the DRC were researched through the two methods. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with actors of the DRC civil society who play a part in this resistance and critical content analysis was executed on the transcripts of these interviews and other secondary sources. This allowed triangulation of data and methods, therefore creating higher reliability of the findings. Through these two methods, how local communities are impacted by land grabbing, what was at stake for them, if they

decided to resist or not, in which way they did and whether it had some kind of success were researched.

The semi-structured interviews were made for exploratory purposes and to gain a better understanding of the Congolese experience of land grabbing from a civil society point of view as they allowed gathering information in an open-ended and flexible manner (Halperin & Heath, 2020). The selection criteria were focused on people and groups with expertise in civil society and the problem of land grabbing in the DRC. People and organisations were chosen because they had been engaged in activism or advocacy activities to address the issue. Finally, it was important to include people and groups that are actively involved in social justice and human rights in the area and are originally from the country so they could offer a thorough understanding of the political and social environment of the DRC. For the interviews, semi-structured conversations were led on the phone with the general director of the DRC-based NGO called National Center for Support to Development and Popular Participation (CENADEP). The second interview was conducted with the advocacy officer of CONAPAC which stands for National Confederation of Agricultural Producers of Congo. Finally, the last interview was done with a person from Lucha DRC-based grassroots movement. These interviews were semi-structured, which means that some of the questions were prepared and further questions were created during the conversation to explore aspects of the responses more deeply (Halperin & Heath, 2020). General questions such as *“What is the purpose of your organisation/movement?”*, *“Could you give me some examples of projects you are working on?”* were asked as an introductory topic. Later in the conversations, the research project was explained in more detail and questions regarding land grabbing were asked. Those included: *“In which ways would you say local people in the DRC are being impacted by land grabbing?”*, *“Is there any community resistance against this phenomenon, if yes what shape does it take?”*, *“In which way does your organisation/movement help this cause?”*, *“What kind of alliances are made between organisations or local groups?”*, *“How do you see possible solutions or future against this repression of locals?”*. Further questions were asked depending on the respondent’s answers and interests. This allowed a fluid and natural conversation which eventually provided more valid data by illuminating the meanings behind a subject’s experiences (Halperin & Heath, 2020). This also means that responses across interviewees were harder to compare but this was dealt with by categorising the results in themes. The variety of interviewees was limited due to geographical restrictions and the lack of online

presence of some resistant groups or local communities. This might be a limitation to the representability of the discourse brought by the organisation representatives as they do not have first-hand experience with the issue of land grabbing. They might have therefore shown an incomplete understanding of the gravity of locals' loss of livelihood and the vital need to resist. These interviews were conducted in French as it is the official language of the country. As a researcher, I am proficient in French which made communication and data collection easier and more nuanced. This adds another possible bias as answers needed to be translated which implied personal interpretations. I used translation tools to keep as unbiased as possible.

To deepen the information acquired during the interviews, critical content analysis was done. This enabled a larger sample size than what was possible through interviews and it also allowed access to subjects that may be difficult or impossible to obtain through direct personal contact. Content analysis is the "study of texts, words or images as data for the meaning they produce" (Crawley, 2021, p. 133). By using a critical perspective, such as critical discourse or postcolonialism theory, critical content analysis examines how texts reinforce or challenge prevailing narratives and portrayals of people. This involves analysing how texts support or challenge stereotypes, marginalise or elevate particular identities and groups of people. To do a successful critical content analysis, Beach et al. (2009) emphasised the significance of choosing and reading extensively within a critical theoretical framework. This way, the chosen texts' power dynamics and identity representations can be uncovered, along with their connections to the social, political, and historical context of the DRC. Reports from the Environmental Justice Atlas (EJA) about different conflicts regarding land and the interviews were analysed to distinguish the existing dynamics of resistance and collective action against land grabbing in the DRC. The EJA is the world's greatest database of environmental conflicts and mobilisations (Martinez-Alier et al., 2016). Each entry consistently provides an environmental conflict and associated social mobilisations and provides clear categories on conflicts, sector of the project, thorough details on the commodities at issue, pertinent actors and companies, the scope of resource mobilisations and level of violence, the groups pushing for more equitable and sustainable resource use, the types of mobilisation employed, the social, health, and economic impacts, as well as significant conflict outcomes. A total of fifteen cases are recorded around the DRC in this dataset. This platform is a work in progress and therefore not a perfect tool as it mostly records the most impactful and visible conflicts but it is the most complete database

available. The research findings were categorised into themes and recorded by meaningful sentences. To create a coding scheme (see table 1), an operationalisation was made from the conceptualisation of land grabbing and resistance. When looking at the process through which businesses or governments take possession of the land of local people with no consent, it is necessary to look at the types of grabbing, type of actors involved, impact on locals, historical and political context, the role of the state in facilitating or challenging land grabbing (Borras et al., 2008, Borras & Franco, 2013). These help determine the source and nature of the grab as well as its effect on people. On the other hand, resistance here is conceptualised as any kind of demonstrations, legal challenges, strikes, and acts of civil disobedience motivated by a material struggle which serves to fight against harmful effects of market forces on labour, land, natural resources and hegemonic or colonialist powers (Polanyi, 1944; Gramsci, 1971; Piven and Cloward, 2000; Peemans, 2014; Huggins, 2015). Resistance can be operationalised by the types of actors mobilising, the form of mobilisation, successes and challenges of this mobilisation, level of mobilisation, motivations for resistance, alliances with other groups local or international (Obuene et al., 2021; Manji, 2020; Borras & Franco, 2013). This way, resistance can be better understood in the way it rises, operates and what impacts it might have.

Table 1. Content analysis coding scheme

Hypothesis	Category	Indicator	Example
Land grabbing leads to the dispossession of locals.	Types of grabbing	Tourism, conservation, nuclear, waste management, industries, infrastructures, water management, biomass and land use, energy and climate, mining (Scheidel et al., 2020).	“Extraction of minerals and mining materials” (Environmental Justice Atlas (EJA), 2022).
	Type of actors involved	Multinational corporations, individual investors, governments,	“Sycohydro (Chinese company) - Assigned for the construction of

	and local elites (Deininger et al., 2011).	the dam, Sinohydro Corporation Limited(Chinese company), PowerChina Resources (PCR) (Chinese company)” (EJA, 2020b)
Impact on locals	Forced displacement, loss of livelihoods and traditional land use practices, food insecurity, environmental degradation, and social unrest (Deininger et al., 2011).	“So if [the locals] are nice, they get relocated, but when they're not nice it is done in all the brutality possible. They lose their land because of mining or oil exploitation.” (G. Pero Makawo Gemengya, interview, 10 May 2023)
Historical and political context	Colonialism, structural adjustment policies, civil conflict, weak governance and corruption, international trade and investment (Deininger et al., 2011; Peemans, 2014)	“However, due to the long history of armed conflict in eastern DRC, Virunga National Park is also known as the most violent and dangerous conservation project in the world” (EJA, 2020a)

	Role of the state in facilitating or challenging land grabbing	Provision of institutional and legal mechanisms that permit the transfer of land to significant investors or respect of land and human rights (Borras & Franco, 2013).	“But as I always say, it's the one who is supposed to solve the problem, even regulate the land grabbing sector, it's the Congolese state, the government.” (G. Pero Makawo Gemengya, interview, 10 May 2023)
Dispossession leads resistance and new collective action systems.	Types of actors mobilising	Self-organised groups (grassroots organisations, spontaneous groups), professionalised groups (scientists, NGOs...), institutionalised groups (unions, parties), vulnerable groups (indigenous groups, women collectives, artisanal miners, peasants, informal workers) (Scheidel et al., 2020).	“Mobilised groups: artisanal miners, indigenous or traditional communities, international organisations for environmental justice, local organisations for environmental justice, social movements, racially/ethnically discriminated groups.” (EJA, 2019b)
	Form of mobilisation	Non-violent protest and persuasion (petition, public campaigns, protests, activism...), non-cooperation (strikes,	“Forms of mobilisation: development of a network/collective action, development of

	boycotts...), non-violent intervention (lawsuit, land occupation...), potentially violent actions (property damage, sabotage, threat to use arms...) (Scheidel et al., 2020).	alternative proposals, engagement of national and international NGOs, media-based activism/alternative media, formal letters and petitions of grievance.” (EJA, 2019a)
Level of mobilisation	Latent (no visible organisation), low (some local organisation), medium (some mobilisation), high (widespread, mass mobilisation) (Scheidel et al., 2020).	“Intensity high: widespread, mass mobilisation, violence, arrests, etc.” (EJA, 2019a)
Motivations for resistance	Protection of livelihoods, preservation of cultural heritage, customary land rights and access to natural resources, opposition to exploitation by grabbers, justice for past abuses and injustices, environmental concerns (Borras & Franco, 2013).	“We have to reach a process that clarifies the status of these lands and how to manage them.” (S. Muhindo, interview, 8 May 2023)
Successes of the mobilisation	Strengthening of participation,	“The case of the mining code, a code

environmental improvements, project cancelled, negotiated alternative solutions, successful court decisions (Scheidel et al., 2020).

which has been worked on a lot. There has been much more input from civil society. We cannot say that we are one hundred percent happy, but at least eighty percent we are happy with the innovations, particularly in terms of localization processes, relocations, community participation” (G. Pero Makawo Gemengya, interview, 10 May 2023)

Challenges of the mobilisation

Failed court decisions, displacement and migration, criminalization of activists, violation against activists, assassinations (Scheidel et al., 2020).

“It is not always easy to have the means to support these local dynamics or to support the civil societies which do the work of defending interests.” (M. Simplex Kambale, interview, 14 May 2023)

Alliances with other groups	Visible alliances between actors and groups either locally or internationally (Dell'Angelo et al., 2021).	“With the support of Wallonie Bruxelles International, we are supporting two, two networks, the network of fish farmers and the network of stock breeders, to reduce and reduce poverty by supporting more women and young people for the implementation.” (G. Pero Makawo Gemengya, interview, 10 May 2023)
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It's important to acknowledge potential biases and limitations in the choice of interview subjects and content analysis. Interviews may not fully represent the general population and can be influenced by social desirability bias. My own attitudes and assumptions may also impact the content analysis, leading to a biased interpretation of the findings. However, despite these limitations, interviews and content analysis provide valuable insights into the resistance and collective action against land grabbing in the DRC. To minimise risks, a diverse range of interviewees from different backgrounds were selected, and reflectivity was maintained throughout the research process, considering my privileged position as a European student with limited firsthand experience. Transparency was prioritised in presenting the chosen methods and findings. Additionally, the triangulation of data sources from firsthand, second-hand, and literature sources effectively reduced the potential for bias.

6. Results

To research how land grabbing impact resistance and collective action interviews with three Congolese actors (see table 2, see appendix for full transcripts) and EJA reports were analysed. This way, land grabbing as dispossession of locals and resistance against this process were examined.

Table 2. Overview of interviewees

Organisation and type	Interviewee and position within organisation	Information about organisation
Centre National d'Appui au Développement et à la Participation Populaire or National Center for Support to Development and Popular Participation (CENADEP), NGO	Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya, general director	CENADEP advances development, democracy, and human rights by supporting marginalised populations, empowering local communities, and fostering good governance and transparency (<i>Quelques Réalisations – Cenadep</i> , n.d.; <i>Cenadep – Promotion Du Développement Participatif</i> , n.d.). CENADEP emphasises community development through participation. They work on a variety of topics, including farming, food security, resource management, conflict resolution, and environmental concerns. It has offices in seven DRC provinces and has been in operation for 23 years (G. Pero Makawo Gemengya, interview, 10 May 2023).
Confédération Nationale des Producteurs Agricoles du Congo or National Confederation	Malembre Simplex Kambale, advocacy and programs officer	CONAPAC serves as a union of agricultural producers and advocates for their interests, while also working towards the sustainable development of agriculture in the country (<i>2022 – CONAPAC-RDC</i> , n.d.). It is the largest and most representative organisation of the agricultural civil society in the DRC, representing over 800,000

of Agricultural Producers of Congo (CONAPAC), NGO		members through nineteen provincial federations of agricultural producers and specialised agricultural federations. CONAPAC DRC aims to promote sustainable family farming in the DRC (<i>CONAPAC-RDC</i> , n.d.).
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Lucha, also known as Lutte pour le Changement (Fight for Change), social movement	Steward Muhindo, activist	Lucha is a civil society organisation that was founded in 2012 by a group of young activists in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Their mission is to promote democracy, good governance, social justice, and human rights in their country through peaceful activism and civic engagement. Lucha is involved in various issues such as advocating for electoral reform, fighting corruption, promoting freedom of expression, and addressing human rights abuses. Despite facing challenges from the government and security forces, Lucha continues to be a strong voice for civil society across the DRC since 2012 (<i>La Lucha</i> , n.d.).
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6.1. Types of grabbing and actors involved

Various types of land grabbing can be categorised based on environmental conservation, water management, mining, fossil fuels, biomass, and land management (forestry, agriculture, fishery, livestock). Due to its abundant reserves of valuable resources like gold, cobalt, and copper, the DRC attracts numerous mining companies, accounting for eight out of the fifteen documented conflicts in the EJA.

A great number of actors implicated in the grabbing of land in the DRC can be recognised. The main actors in this process are companies and investors such as Perenco (Franco-British company) or SICOMINES (Chinese company). Most companies operating in

the DRC are foreign there are also national companies. The general director of CENADEP explains:

Generally, foreigners go through nationals. What we call figureheads you see is a man buying, but it's not him, it's just a figurehead. So if you want to dig deeper, you find that it is Lebanese, Chinese, Indians and Pakistanis. A lot more Asians have finally woken up and want to conquer at all costs. (G. Pero Makawo Gemengya, interview, 10 May 2023)

Other actors include the Congolese Government, the Minister of Land Affairs, state institutions like the Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation (ICCN), and politico-administrative authorities. These authorities have the responsibility for the formal management of lands (M. Simplex Kambale, interview, 14 May 2023). In the case of the Virunga National Park, the ICCN defines the protected area, prohibiting local communities from engaging in human activity (S. Muhindo, interview, 8 May 2023). Authorities in Kinshasa grant permits for research and exploitation to companies. The advocacy officer from CONAPAC says: “They behave like mercenaries because they have no interest, no cultural or emotional attachment to this space because they are civil servants of the central state” (M. Simplex Kambale, interview, 14 May 2023).

International and financial institutions also such as the WB, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and different development agencies support investment projects in the DRC. The WB for example supported a project in the River Basin which led to dreadful deforestation (EJA, 2016a). The IMF and WB are also implicated in the privatisation of several previously national mining industries which resulted in environmental degradation and human rights violations (EJA, 2019b).

Local elites such as customary chiefs can also be accomplices in this process. Because financial stakes are so high, it is common that self-interest pushes influential and respected figures to sell land and as Pero Makawo Gemengya explains “make that decision without informing their community” (Interview, 10 May 2023).

Finally, land grabbing practices have increased the presence of armed rebel groups. Conflicts and confusions over land ownership leave space for illegal control, exploitation of resources and labour exploitation (S. Muhindo, interview, 8 May 2023). In the case of Ulindi River, rebel group Raia Mubloki supplied rifles and thousands of dollars by the Kun Hou

Mining Company to secure their gold mines through physical violence and threats on the locals and artisanal miners (EJA, 2018).

6.2. Impact on locals

As seen in the fifteen cases of land conflict, land grabbing practices leads to displacement of local communities, human rights violations, violence, rape, extreme impoverishment of displaced communities, loss of traditional knowledge, practices and culture, soil, water pollution which leads to food insecurity, health issues and death. These are not isolated instances as all of the cases recorded by EJA show these effects to some extent. The scale of effect reached 35,000 people displaced by the water management project Inga 3 and 530 cases of malnutrition were recorded by the Shabunda Hospital in 2014 as a consequence of gold mines in the Ulindi River (EJA, 2018; 2020c).

The impact disproportionately affects rural, artisanal workers, indigenous people, with a particular emphasis on women (G. Pero Makawo Gemengya, interview, 10 May 2023). According to the director of CENDEP, women in rural areas are primarily engaged in agricultural work, which often constitutes their main economic activity (G. Pero Makawo Gemengya, interview, 10 May 2023). Indigenous people face marginalisation and stigmatisation despite being the original inhabitants of the DRC. Bantus, for instance, are denied their ancestral land rights and “often perceive themselves as sub-human” (G. Pero Makawo Gemengya, interview, 10 May 2023).

The exclusion of the dispossessed population is compounded by a lack of consultation and consent in land agreements. Decision-making occurs elsewhere, leading to suffering among communities and inadequate compensation. Although community consent is legally required, it is often disregarded or bypassed. Consultations, when they occur, are not always translated into Swahili, making them inaccessible to some locals, and insufficient time is provided (EJA, 2021b).

6.3. Historical and political context

Belgium's colonial time in the DRC is what started land grabs. The creation of Virunga National Park in 1925 disregarded local communities, resulting in unjust appropriation of land. This power imbalance perpetuates a form of "green colonialism" (S. Muhindo,

interview, 8 May 2023). The ongoing dispossession of land leaves local communities in a colonised state. In 2000, the European Commission funded militarised conservation efforts in the park under the guise of "rule of law" (EJA, 2020a). Similarly, Lokutu, Yaligimba, and Boteka communities were expropriated from their lands by a British company in 1911, an injustice that persists today.

The DRC, weakened by years of conflicts and poor governance, remains a host for such practices and the high financial stakes go hand in hand with corruption (S. Muhindo, interview, 8 May 2023). Because no economic alternative is available, communities are still highly dependent on their land for survival.

6.4. Role of state

In the majority of land grabbing cases, the Congolese state not only permits land acquisition but also actively supports numerous projects. Despite the legal requirement for community participation in the demarcation of protected areas, this obligation is disregarded, resulting in the communities bearing the consequences through the indifference of leaders, repression, and impunity (S. Muhindo, interview, 8 May 2023). According to CENADEP, it is the responsibility of the state to:

Provide better working conditions and social protection. The state is complicit and turns a blind eye. There is a legal framework, but agreements are made overnight without consulting civil society. The Congolese state is supposed to solve the problem and regulate the land grabbing sector. The state itself does not lack the means. There is just no such will. (G. Pero Makawo Gemengya, interview, 10 May 2023)

6.5. Actors mobilising and forms of mobilisation

Various actors oppose land grabbing: civil society, community organisations (including women's associations, CENADEP, CONAPAC, and local NGOs), grassroots movements like Lucha, land grab victims (rural communities, village organisations, farmers), local Environmental Justice Organizations (EJOs), artisanal miners, informal workers, local government/political parties, local scientists, indigenous people, and even armed groups. Additionally, international partners, sponsors, EJOs, and international organisations resist this process.

To fight against land grabbing these actors adopt different tactics. In the EJA reports, engagement of national and international NGOs is the most used form (eleven mentions). Public campaigns are also significantly used (six mentions), as well as street demonstrations and protests (five mentions) formal letters and petitions of grievance (five mentions), development of a network/collective action (four mentions), media activism, drafting of alternative reports, prosecutions, court cases, legal activism, property damage, threats to use weapons, blockade and boycotts.

In the interviews, CENADEP mentioned conducting awareness-raising marches with victims and women's organisations and submitting memoranda to the administration to address grievances. Additionally, the NGO facilitates support, training, and fairs for farmers and communities to exchange knowledge on agroecological techniques, fishing, community agriculture, and reforestation. Furthermore, CENADEP acts as a mediator in meetings with stakeholders to foster dialogue and negotiation (G. Pero Makawo Gemengya, interview, 10 May 2023).

Lucha as a social movement focuses on nonviolent grassroots mobilisations to raise awareness, demand rights, and advocate for change in the areas of peace, justice, democracy, and community empowerment. This includes demonstrations, advocacy, sit-ins, civil disobedience and meetings (S. Muhindo, interview, 8 May 2023).

Malebre Simplex Kambale from CONAPAC identifies three resistance mechanisms: traditional, where communities rely on cultural and social institutions and customary procedures; modern, involving political alliances, documented contracts, and initiatives like the Innovative Fund for Access to Land. With the aid of credit systems, this seeks to transfer large concessions to smaller producers. There are also projects focused on securing land rights through mapping of territories, communities and other agreements. There is also armed resistance, known as "the machete against documents," as a self-defence strategy (M. Simplex Kambale, interview, 14 May 2023).

6.6. Successes and challenges of mobilisation

Mobilisation in the DRC has achieved successes: discussing taboo topics, valuing local expertise, establishing permits and bylaws for community concessions, improving indigenous rights recognition, increasing community involvement, and promoting localization (G. Pero Makawo Gemengya, interview, 10 May 2023; M. Simplex Kambale, interview, 14 May

2023). Lucha contributed to establishing a peace-focused commission and used social media for advocacy and awareness. They also secured the release of member Delcasse Lukumbu, previously detained by ICCN. CONAPAC highlighted positive outcomes like participatory mapping, civil society growth, and better communication between chiefs and farmers for land transactions (M. Simplex Kambale, interview, 14 May 2023).

The mobilisations recorded by the EJA have led to the formalisation of illegal artisanal mining, some degree of compensation and the application of existing regulations. Community consultations and impact assessments of mining companies were also increased and a new mining code with provisions for community development projects and cooperative membership was approved in 2018, land demarcation efforts were made. Finally, the WB withdrew from a dam project and the company SOCO ceased oil explorations in the Virunga National Park.

Resistance encounters various challenges, as highlighted in the interviews. Limited resources and slow pace of change complicate efforts. Lack of political will and legal ambiguities result in rare immediate responses from authorities. Customary chiefs, while occasionally supportive, can hinder organisation due to corruption and hierarchical barriers. Repression and impunity pose significant obstacles. As Muhindo explained “Four of our comrades were killed in 11 years and three of them were killed during demonstrations. The police officers who killed them were identified but have not been punished” (Interview, 8 May 2023). The application of regulations remains a major challenge as civil society's legal advancements but changes are not always respected.

In the EJA reports lack of transparency and engagement is the challenge the most mentioned. Human rights abuses are the second most common, followed by corruption and repression. Violence, threat and health issues are also mentioned. Out of the fifteen cases, eleven of the conflicts are not considered as an environmental justice success meaning that environmental inequities, fostering sustainability, and treating all communities fairly and equally in environmental decision-making were not achieved. The four remaining cases are categorised as “not sure” when it comes to environmental justice success because some progress was attained but not sufficiently.

6.7. Level of mobilisation

The level of mobilisation in EJA conflicts in the DRC (see table 3) shows a clear will of actors to resist land dispossession. 40% of mobilisation recorded were widespread mass mobilisation which led to violence and arrests.

Table 3. Level of mobilisation for EJA cases

	Unknown	Latent (no visible organisation)	Low (some local organisation)	Medium (street demonstrations, visible mobilisation)	High (widespread, mass mobilisation, violence, arrests, etc.)
Number of cases	1	1	3	4	6

6.8. Motivations for resistance

Resistance seeks to amplify community voices and protect their rights, valuing local knowledge and traditional practices (S. Muhindo, interview, 8 May 2023). It advocates for better working conditions, social protection, and fair compensation for those affected by land grabs. Civil society plays a crucial role in raising awareness and holding authorities accountable (G. Pero Makawo Gemengya, interview, 10 May 2023). Legal revisions, such as land laws, mining codes, and agricultural laws, are pursued. Environmental concerns are prioritised for both short-term and long-term impacts on the population. The project of land ownership conversion aims to provide protection by converting small producers into landowners (M. Simplex Kambale, interview, 14 May 2023). Inclusion and participation of local communities in decision-making processes are emphasised to address the consequences faced by locals when decisions are made by those unaffected.

6.9. Alliances with other groups (local and international)

As seen earlier there are a multitude of different actors that resist land grabbing and these groups make alliances in order locally and internationally to increase their voice. Pero Makawo Gemengya from the CENADEP explains:

Cooperation is necessary, especially in the DRC. It's not an easy context, and we can't make these kinds of claims alone, otherwise, you lose your life. Some of our colleagues died just because they went solo. It's no longer a secret, civil society organisations in the DRC are not subsidised by the government. All the work we do today is with the contribution of the development partners or donors. The Congolese government knows this, that is why it does not subsidise because if you do not have the means you're going to fall silent. So the partners today? They help us increase our voice more and push things a little so that the authorities wake up. (G. Pero Makawo Gemengya, interview, 10 May 2023)

Various groups, including women's groups, indigenous groups, peasants' groups, and environmental advocates, unite in their concern about land grabbing due to its significant impact (S. Muhindo, interview, 8 May 2023). CENADEP collaborates with international groups such as SOLSOC Belgium and SSA Belgium, among others. The National Commission for Land Reforms serves as a platform for civil society groups, partners, donors, and other stakeholders to exchange ideas. Lucha leverages its partnerships with other groups and causes, both within and outside the DRC, to address issues related to land grabbing. For instance, the movement collaborates with Survival International to document abuses associated with land grabbing. Their strong network of activists across the country and access to media and communication in Goma facilitate amplifying the voices of people in rural areas (S. Muhindo, interview, 8 May 2023). CONAPAC acknowledges the valuable support and initiatives provided by international NGOs and coalitions formed among groups within the DRC.

Some of the existing alliances described in the EJA report include the International Union for Conservation of Nature (Switzerland), Greenpeace, Rights and Responsibility in Development, Friends of the Earth and several other EJOs such as the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa.

7. Discussion

This study explored the impact of land grabs on resistance and collective action in the DRC

using interviews and reports. Various actors, including international companies, institutions, the Congolese state, and rebel groups, participate in land grabbing. Dispossession dynamics stem from the country's colonialist past, leading to conflict and a weak state (Peemans, 2014). The state bears responsibility, with a lack of political will and acts of bribery facilitating land grabs. Although protective laws exist, their enforcement is often ineffective. Exclusion from decision-making processes leads to displacement, human rights violations, impoverishment, loss of traditional knowledge and culture, and pollution (Harvey, 2004). Mobilisation across groups and countries counters this trend, creating alliances for visibility and support (Obuene et al., 2021; Dell'Angelo et al., 2021). Resistance takes various forms such as NGO engagement, mapping, demonstrations, and legal activism. Even though there have been some wins for civil society (recognition of communities' rights, change of law, more participation), barriers and financial stakes slow progress. Most impacted communities are still not respected, emphasising the need for local participation, compensation, and prosecution of crimes against humanity. These findings help confirm the hypothesis that land grabbing in the DRC leads to a reorganisation of traditional collective action due to the dispossession of locals from their land, resources and traditional system. This causes resistance from the local communities and leads to new collective action systems through alliances within civil society for instance. This offers empirical evidence of what the step after dispossession can be with the right conditions of advocacy and alliance-making. However, there are some potential conflicts between the results of the interviews and the EJA reports. The interviewees seemed to be hopeful regarding the effect of mobilisation while the report qualified none of the conflicts as successful. This might be explained by some possible bias from the interviewees as they are close to the situation and might not have the holistic perspective needed to evaluate the impact. Furthermore, The sources chosen offer interesting insights into the dynamics of land grabbing and resistance but lack representativeness of the whole Congolese scene. However, the findings of the interviews emphasise points which are underdeveloped in the literature. These include the responsibility of local actors and the state in grabbing practices while external forces are often more in focus. The creation of a fund for landowners to buy land is also something worth investigating. Additionally, mapping and use of online platforms are not extensively researched due to their novelty. Also, the date of the EJA reports might be limited as a lot were already made 10 years ago and the situation might have evolved since then.

8. Conclusion

Land grabbing in the DRC, rooted in colonial history, adversely affects local communities, leading to loss of livelihoods, culture, autonomy, and security (Peemans, 2014). This study, using interviews and EJA reports, examined the impact of land grabbing on collective action and community resistance. Despite slight discrepancies between interviews and reports, all sources confirmed significant mobilisation against land grabbing in the DRC. Various actors, including peasants, indigenous people, women's groups, and artisanal miners, engage in resistance through demonstrations, legal challenges, and alliances with other groups. From the findings, the need for greater documentation of the conflicted zones and illegalities within the deals, developments of bottom-up approaches, better compensation for affected communities and possible funds to support locals was made obvious. The complicity of Congolese actors, including the state and local elites, in facilitating foreign exploitation was highlighted. The resistance aligns with the concept of Accumulation by Dispossession (Harvey, 2004).

The interviews offered rich and detailed data but they do challenge validity due to their personal bias towards the situation. However, because the interviewees were locals and themselves implicated in resistance at different levels, they gave great insights into the dynamics and different perspectives of insurrection and land grabbing. The EJA report brought more validity as they are highly documented and based on reliable sources. However, the lack of available data and lack of updates shows that their generalisability is also limited. Overall, the combination of both in addition to the literature allows a more general overview. To reduce the researcher bias of this study, my possible prejudices were made clear but this investigation should be made by someone from the country itself and has first-hand experience with the issue. This process is devastating in most of the Global South and must be better understood (Rocheleau, 2015). Because the DRC is a typical case, it means that the findings and methodology of this study could apply to other contexts to further research community resistance. This research also opens up possible future inquiries on the potential of technologies and widespread information in alliance-making, denouncing and documenting abuses. Customary and traditional systems should be better studied to grasp how resources can be managed durably and equally instead of aiming for one-fits-all approaches.

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Appendix:

List of abbreviations:

DRC: Democratic Republic of Congo

EJA: Environmental Justice Atlas

EJO: Environmental Justice Organisation

ICCN: Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation

IMF: International Monetary Fund

IO: International Organisation

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

WB: The World Bank

Interview transcripts:

Interview with Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya from CENADEP

Liz Bennett: [00:00:00]are you doing well?

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya:Yes, how are you?

Liz Bennett:yes very well, very well thank you very much for agreeing to do this interview. So you're suddenly the excuse me are you suddenly the general manager that's it

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya:I am the Director General of CENADEP.

Liz Bennett:Very well could you explain to me quickly, uh, what this organisation consists of?

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya:So, CENADEP is the National Center for Support to Development and Popular Participation, of course, is an organisation that brings together actors and actresses from civil society who work in the context of participatory community development. Finally,[00:01:00]okay and here are the communities through of course, the implementation of the program projects and entering into agriculture and food security.

natural resources, broad management in the management of natural resources and their impact on communities also work on issues of conflict management. Peaceful management of conflicts, of course, the question of the environment. And which today cross-cuts the issue of gender and that we support advocacy and community access to quality public service, a little in the sense that CENADEP

has been working for at least twenty-three years and we have offices across the country. We have seven offices in seven provinces of the DRC.

Liz Bennett:Okay, okay fine. Can you maybe give yourself some[00:02:00]examples of projects on which DENADEP has worked?

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya:So. So we start first with the current projects, the projects that are currently being implemented. Currently, we are in our Boma branch, we

support farmers and breeders precisely on agroecological techniques for the implementation or agroecological techniques, in particular with the financing of the SSA, you I do not know if you you are in France, you are in Belgium, you are in Belgium so you have SSA belgium between land.

And then I'm going to a consortium funding this project feed-good good food completely from one of the[00:03:00]communities of Farmers, peasants in the implementation of agro agro ecological techniques. Apart from that, we are supporting the breeders. in the, in the, in breeding techniques, in any case in modern breeding techniques, with the dimension of endogenous knowledge and here too within the framework of a project which was financed by a few projects which allows so that people can increase their standard of living through livestock farming.

And that, it's on the side in the provinces, in the other in the province that we call the province of Mai-Ndombe you pick me up well, It's good

Liz Bennett: Yes yes absolutely

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya: [00:04:00]in the province of Mai-Ndombe in Inongo, We work with the Bantu communities and the indigenous peoples who are commonly called the Pigmés. We work precisely on adaptation, on the fight against climate change through adaptation activities, fishing, community agriculture, reforestation and so on.

And here we had funding from the World Bank. and also two or three two years ago, to work with them with the financing which Swedish precisely on the accompaniment, always of the communities, very mainly the women, the women, the Pygmy women in the implementation of the activities, income generating activities, agriculture[00:05:00]community that will fight poverty. So in a province that we call, uh, the province of Kolwezi, the world city of cobalt.

There, we are supported with funding from SOLSOC Belgium. of the two organisations, there is an organisation of women, of women who work in the mines but who want to have other alternatives, in any case to abandon artisanal mining activities. they have decided to develop agriculture and today, we support precisely in this work, in this agricultural activity, today they have about twenty-three hectares. They plant the maize in the culture of

the[00:06:00]but. Manioc is and that's it, it's a women's association. There is another cooperative, the cooperative of artisanal diggers that we call ATRAM. This is an initiative that has been supported for several years by CENADEP precisely to allow craftsmen to make claims, to lead claims.

on their rights, on the violation of the rights or the claim, in any case of the rights of the artisanal diggers in the province of Lualaba precisely visit the world city of cobalt. So in Kinshasa, we support what we call communities and grassroots community organisations OCB, these are neighbourhood organisations.

Composed of women's organisations and then mixed organizations.[00:07:00]concerning feminist networks, much more a women's platform that supervises women leaders, women, neighbourhood leaders, who have political ambitions to participate precisely in the management of public affairs at the grassroots level, through advocacy etcetera.

On the one hand, there is the grouping together of the network of urban farmers and market gardeners, made up of at least one month, more than six thousand market gardeners and farmers, accompanying them precisely also in the implementation of their activities in particular. Uh, how is everything about their situation, how they can organise themselves, how they can carry out their activities, how they can change into who make up cooperative associations?

to maximise more[00:08:00]recipes. Because when you definitely know. Today, most farmers' organisations in the unions operate from the perspective of asbels. But it is not intended to make profits. We want to bring them into what we call the economy of social and solidarity economy enterprises.

But these are businesses but are community-oriented. Said that the profits are shady, don't go to individuals but to the community while part of the revenue should go to community actions and that's what we are getting into for years. But there is also another very important aspect, which is that of working in the fields, carrying out advocacy on everything that is how to improve the conditions of working workers.

in their organisation and wages and working conditions, the working environment, contract, any[00:09:00]that, but also to demand from the State more better working conditions and finally the social protection dimension in social protection. We have set up mutual health insurance for working-class neighbourhoods and to help communities, in any case the poorest, to access quality health care at a lower cost.

All right. That's it, that's in Kinshasa always always in Kinshasa. With the support of Wallonie Bruxelles International, we are supporting two, two networks, the network of fish farmers and the network of stock breeders, to reduce and reduce poverty by supporting more women and young people for the implementation. on this day of professional breeders and fish farmers, we accompany them to help them to be able to improve their living conditions while we are going to put in place[00:10:00]entrepreneurial techniques to professionalise and so on and finally in Mbandaka

there too, we support a peasant union that we call (unhearableprofadés?). It is a confederation of peasants. At the level of Mbandaka. of the equator precisely in the management, the implementation of their agricultural activities, modern agricultural techniques is also a man to capitalise the voices, the knowledge.

A project is a bit like that and also that there is conflict security, all natural resources, and peaceful management of conflicts between communities is there with Germans. Operationally, it's a bit of a way to pick up the work.

Liz Bennett:Okay that's very impressive. I'm yeah that's great and I wanted to know du[00:11:00]Suddenly, I'm writing a thesis right now on land grabbing.

So here I am. I wanted to know a little about you according to you, what uh in what way? Land grabbing puts peasants and local communities in precarious conditions and what kind of resistance is there against this phenomenon? At the community level, let's say.

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya:SO? So, when we talk about land grabbing in the Congolese context, we have to consider it at three levels. So first there is land grabbing. There, suddenly, we get along well. It is the grabbing of land, of communities. So there is a high level in the first level, it is linked to exploitation.[00:12:00]

mining, there are drillings, but I give a case (name of the city) Here you are the world city of cobalt. Even where there is a lot more concentration of minerals or even oil, in any case towards the coastal city of, we discover that in this, in this, in a given sector there are many important judgments of minerals .

The company that comes to Kinshasa obtains a research permit. They will do research after they realise that it is interesting to be able to exploit. They come, they get an operating permit in Kinshasa, they go there. The communities face the consequence, which is that the communities have to be relocated[00:13:00]decision is made elsewhere and the communities suffer.

They are told to listen, uh you have to leave first. It's true, it was in conditions to continue doing in more inhumane conditions but with much more advocacy is good

and more than precisely, it is these agreements, they are.

Liz Bennett:Do the communities know before the agreement is going to be made or just after?

We keep them informed. Behold, your land has been

sold

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya:generally, it's generally later that the decisions are taken elsewhere and the communities, whereas the law says that people must be consulted, so there is consultation first and that the municipalities must give their consent.

but generally it's stages that are completely skipped. We skip the stages and we feel the and the communities meet again one fine morning. good uh there[00:14:00]concession their land is and was to be used now for exploration or not for research so they have to be relocated, they have to be relocated so with everything there is generally we put them in conditions.

enough enough, enough deplorable. So if they're nice, we relocate them, they're definitely not nice. It's in all the brutality possible, so there's this aspect there. They lose because of mining

or oil exploitation, they lose land. Secondly, there is the monopolisation of companies for the exploitation, for example of wood, a forest concession.

So there are companies or individuals who buy concessions and large concessions. E forestry. And then after coming here come say listen here we have[00:15:00]got the permits. We obtained the contracts, obtained with the government, with the ministry, that belongs to us.

So you, the communities, it's no longer up to you to communities that have already been there for centuries. You tell them that it belongs to us more generally, these are large forests. Where they gather, they hunt. Sometimes, if there are rivers, fishing, there are fields. so you tell them it doesn't belong to you anymore.

So it's also a grab. but there is also the third level of monopolisation, it is precisely between individuals, between individuals. So there is a gentleman who wants this concession better, I don't know me in business or even if he wants to build a ranch I don't know what. There are all these women.

The peasant woman who has plots of land, a[00:16:00]hectare two hectares that they may have inherited from the plan and it is now the traditional chiefs who sell. In most cases it is the sale of traditional chiefs so they make decisions without informing theirs. Community. One good morning you see barricades and we hunt all these good ladies and then we say that it now belongs to a Chinese individual or I don't know who it is so really it's on three levels. There is the level of mining or oil exploitation, logging.

There are also for individuals and generally which are sold, with the complicity of traditional chiefs

and is it

Liz Bennett:that as a result, these investors are rather often foreign or does it also happen at the national level?

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya:good for most cases they are aliens, but there are also[00:17:00]nationals.

But generally, foreigners go through nationals. What we call figureheads you see is a man buying, but really it's not him, it's just a figurehead. so if you see uh, you want to dig deeper, there's a lot more and now there are more Lebanese Chinese, a lot more Asians who have finally woken up and want to conquer at all costs.

In any case, the markets are much more Asian, you have the Chinese, Indians and Pakistanis. Now it's

And

Liz Bennett:At the local level, is there a form of resistance against this or is it made completely impossible as a result of the fact that they are being driven out.

So, it's complicated to organise, I imagine

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya:we. No, there

a it's true that the communities themselves, it's difficult because you have to understand[00:18:00]in case the traditional leaders are complicit and there is a hierarchy in the community. you can't start. Why have women started to stand up against decisions made by traditional leaders?

There's still, it's mostly that I'm not talking about cities when I'm talking about pretty much in the middle of rural areas. This is where this hierarchy of respect for the leader is considered and it is difficult for communities to be able to wake up. But there are cases where traditional rulers also suffered.

The decision came from the lot, from Kinshasa in the province, from the politico-administrative authorities. So even the traditional chiefs suffer. So the happy medium is civil society. it is the one that makes the counterweight. But in most cases, it's really the work of civil society which does a bit of being able to denounce, so to raise awareness in its communities, to tell them but your rights have been violated, you will have to[00:19:00]claimed these rights there, you must hold the authorities to account so that we can see a little more clearly, but as you have understood enough if there is, these are quite

significant interests, it is millions, especially as far as oil and minerals are concerned, millions are involved. and it starts with the head from the top to the bottom.

It's really things where a single individual can't come up with being able to take the network apart. These are decisions that are taken at the highest level, but it's really quite complicated. But it is the counterweight of civil society that ensures that the question today is put on the table, even if the answers are not immediate.

But at least people are talking more openly than in years past when it was unsaid it was taboo subjects. it was at risk and peril when we[00:20:00]evoked but today nevertheless people speak about it.

No more than last week within the framework of a women's movement, which we are accompanying in the coastal town of Muanda, we realised that the Perenco company, which is there, is downright in the process of power.

These pipeline vehicles pass through the villages next to the houses. They sometimes build wells next to houses and the very fields of women and communities are damaged. and when you even see the compensation, the consideration for what is given but downright derisory, it's inhuman. You ask what world we are in and all that is high that we see as a claim but that falls on deaf ears because the decision comes from the top of the state until then many decrees and administrative decisions have been taken.

For[00:21:00]practically that gives more benefits, more community, and we organised a march there with the victims and other women's organisations who are there to go and file a memo e with the administration of the territory and that's the decision. a brand memorandum and yes, a march as part of a women's movement that we support.

They filed a memorandum from the administrative authority precisely to have its decisions reviewed. we said to ourselves, but we want fair and equitable compensation for the women whose lands have been grabbed. whose lands are damaged by pipelines, by machinery from the oil company. But when you look at someone who has lost a hectare of fields or twenty square metres,

we hardly give him money[00:22:00]which is not even worth a hundred dollars. Yeah, you give up wondering about something? At what moment? SO? These are things that are done and people suffer in their silence and civil society makes the counterpoint to denounce this kind of thing. But the decision does not come from civil society, it is up to the authorities to wake up.

Begin, follow. Unfortunately, we're not there yet.

Liz Bennett:suddenly. So is it a bit the process of the blow,

Is it perhaps the local organisation of resistance marches like that? And after you bring a request to the government like that? That's how it works?

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya:these are steps with

quite punchy messages, where there is a memorandum or with the claims that are filed with the competent authority. But that's to try to see, but apart from the steps, there are other strategies. so there are meetings[00:23:00]also a mediator, i.e. civil society, organises meetings with all the stakeholders. Unfortunately, sometimes they come, sometimes they don't come to exchange, tell them Here are the demands, here is what I think you should do. This is the part of the government or of the politico-administrative authorities, this is what you must do And this is how you must be. This is what we expect from you. and meetings like that, there are usually recommendations that are made. But as I always say, it's the one who is supposed to solve the problem, even regulate the land grabbing sector, it's the Congolese state, the government. But

YOU

Liz Bennett:Now, because it's also good, it's also through that. In fact, it's because the land laws, for example, are just not adequate, in fact, it leaves it is that it's a bit like a big open door for foreign investors.[00:24:00]

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya:yes it is true that there are certain ambiguities and there is certainly a certain silence in the law, but the law and in the process of revisions, that is precisely the demand.

Perhaps the cases provided for and the legal framework would allow certain points to be clarified. It's not just the border law, but there's also the agricultural law because these are very good laws, as I said, land grabbing has several dimensions. There is someone who has his field on the same concession.

There is oil, there are minerals. What comes before? But generally you are told that the mines that prevail all that the prevalence and on the merits, the land on the agriculture and on what has. So when they get paid, agriculture falls off the land. So we absolutely have to try to extract, there is all that, it's the legal framework[00:25:00]that must be reviewed. So there is the land law which is at stake in the file of the revisions, there is the agricultural law which also poses a lot of problems because there the investors come and they can take as many hectares as they want.

There is the law on the environment which has also come out a little balanced. requiring, for example, the agreement or free and informed consent of the communities. And so all of these are frameworks that are put in place, but beyond the legal framework. because beyond the legal framework there is the aspect of the application and the applicability in these frameworks notwithstanding, even if the cases exist, we take for example the case of the mining code, a code which has been much more worked .

There has been much more input from civil society. We cannot say that we are one hundred percent happy, but at least eighty percent we are happy with the innovations, particularly in terms of localization processes,[00:26:00]relocations, and community participation.

But at some point, we come up against a problem, which is that the application of this law is incompatible when there is a violation of rights by the Chinese, by companies. But there is the state which is complicated, there is the state which turns a blind eye. If the community is crying, civil society is crying, there is also the state which is crying. You think it's normal, he's the one who has the police who have the power to regulate things cries too.

So you understand, there is a deregulation so the plan there, Now, these are crocodile tears. You feel, you are an accomplice! And then to show that no, you sympathise with the misfortune of the communities, you pretend to cry so It's really all that. We can have a legal

framework, what happens overnight, agreements that are made without consulting civil society in the twentieth century of things.

you wake up one morning there is a government agreement with a Chinese company. but why don't you consult[00:27:00]nobody. you wake up one morning and we have granted logging permits to the Chinese or the French? It's not me. But who did you consult? does it follow the norms when these are contracts that are already in search of private interests of fairly significant financial interests and they undermine all the principles.

The law, they leave and we are there as a civil society to remind all the time of respect for the

Liz Bennett:law.

Okay and is this. So do you, as CENADEP suddenly, do you work with other civil society organisations? Therefore, in

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya:cooperation, yes. yes, absolutely. But in particular, it is necessary to understand the Congolese context

it's not an easy context, you know very well, it's not an easy context. no, we can't make these kinds of claims alone, but otherwise you lose your life or completely in it if it's not the government, but in any case the companies. There are some companies besides I don't know if you follow the media. There is one of our[00:28:00]colleagues, not from CENADEP but in the case of civil society being sued by Dan Gertel, you understand?

Because he made statements and now Dan Gertler has sued him, he is being sued here in the DRC so you understand that you are going solo it is exposing yourself, we are not going to live. Some of our colleagues died just because they went solo. Now, civil society has understood that it is necessary to unite. We are on several platforms, particularly on land issues.

There are commissions that we call the National Commission for Border Reforms in which there is civil society which participates, all the actors are there, the partners, the donors, in there and so on or precisely there are exchanges, to see how to develop the sector whether it is in other mining sectors and that they participate and moreover the CENADEP was at the

base much more of the initiatives today which have gained momentum in the country. So we are here

there you have always been in the oven and at the mill for[00:29:00]try to be able to pull, push things to do so that civil society can get more involved. You can't do this work alone or you're dead.

Liz Bennett:And are you also a man you told me about? A little funding. You also have foreign organisations.

Is this? In your opinion, that is also very. It is also necessary in the fight against land grabbing.

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya:Yes, but it's important, but today it's no longer a secret. Civil society organisations in the DRC are not subsidised by the government of any, any government except perhaps those who try to be aligned in the case of certain project programs of the ministries which receive a little means, but also mine.

But all the work we do today is with the contribution of the development partners of the donors. They are the ones who followed[00:30:00]power. I really take things in hand and claim and carry out all the actions that today make things happen. I think, the help today, from our international partners, from our international partners is more than has always been important Since twenty years.

Thirty years in any case which began to emerge in this country without the partners would have been very complicated and the Congolese government knowing this, that is why it does not subsidise because if you do not have the means, you're not going, you're going to shut up. So the partners today?

Here, he gives us a little more to help us increase our voice more. It is this support that helps you organise and even study and push things a little so that the authorities wake up

Liz Bennett: Agree and e but how then? Because I know that, for example, there is also the World Bank, which now had perhaps a little bit[00:31:00]changed sides.

But at the beginning, if I'm not mistaken, just support this phenomenon and basically use the land that was not used. How do we do a little bit? We draw the line a little between the external organisations that support us and the others who realise that there are major human rights violations and who really have something to do.

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya: Good. In any case, it must be understood that either the World Bank is the most. And it's true that in most cases there are more state services to try to regulate the framework. Whether in the real estate sector, we have to talk. Here, they accompany certain services. As I had just mentioned the national land reform committee, it is a CONREF.

It is[00:32:00]With the support of development partners. Because the state, Congolese itself, is not that it lacks the means. There is no such will there. He always asks for the money elsewhere, but all the money which is mobilised, which is e, which is embezzled. it can be used to accompany but he does not, so he prefers to reach out. And then hey, when you create structures precisely to support these reforms, he does.

But still these people, all these means that come from the World Bank or elsewhere, from other partners, things are still going on in the operations in the program and in the end there are no results. Finally people are a little in a vicious circle, but at least beyond that. There are still positive advances, especially on the land issue, with a bit of a putsch, what boosting, you have to call it civil society.

The process is slow, for lack of means, but it is progressing.[00:33:00]We can't start today, he's there, but he's still making a little progress. We understand that today there is no will to be able to dismantle things because there are too many things that are going on with President Kabila. When you know it, it has sold a lot of millions of its thousands of hectares to Chinese companies. These are things that dismantle everything. Things are not easy, so it's really a process. We can talk about grabbing market gardeners, for small farmers, but if we really have to go on a large scale we are talking about communities. That is to say that really a whole village, two or three villages which are threatened today with being excluded.

And that is, these are fairly important issues. But nevertheless, with (org) Belge, there are other partners. We accompany[00:34:00]today, pending the community's tax reform review, getting what they call permits or ed bylaws on what they call D E concessions.

forests, local communities in the concessions of the local communities it allows that which the communities entrusted through a ministerial decree, the right to be able to exploit and remain on this question as long as possible and not to allow that these concessions be transferred or sold.

And there are examples across the country that work very well, Ecuador, Aïn Homo or the communities are supported. There is even a legal framework in relation to that where these communities are accompanied to obtain for, to secure practically all their concessions linked to community concessions so that,[00:35:00]to put him in the shelter, precisely from apparently.

And so on,

Liz Bennett:I had a bit of a last question because I know that land grabbing is also happening a lot in South America, in a lot of countries, in Africa as well as in Asia. And I wanted to know. Do you also have links with the resistance in these countries? Do you have a kind of cohesion E

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya:we at CENADEP

no, but through certain partners, there is a partner who finances you here, who finances in Colombia much more in Colombia and e and elsewhere. But we with direct ties disagree maybe don't know

Liz Bennett:not the worst year okay but you also uh there you go, you talked a lot about women's rights so it's a little bit different.

Uh you also support the rights of the right peasants[00:36:00]women and suddenly, it's a little bit this cohesion of several of several identities that are in danger, which creates a little your strength, suddenly, is that it?

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya: Yes, because as you know, if we take all the women, the landscapes, in the rural areas, in the villages, it's the women who are there, it's practically the agricultural workforce, the work, a lot of women, it's practically the only activity that takes place in the villages and the fields is That's it, and we thought it was important to support these women precisely in order to claim their rights.

It's not just women, there are. Indigenous peoples are the first occupants of the DRC, so they suffer all kinds of stigma, marginalisation. So here are their[00:37:00]concessions, generally, they dwell in the forest, in remote places of the Bantus. He doesn't mingle with the Bantus, their forest and their environment, their habitat is threatened by all the forestry concessionaires, so it's also important to be able to support them. We did it for five years and also really helped them to be able to give them the floor who speaks and who claims their rights. There you go, so we worked in a consortium with organisations here in Kinshasa, indigenous peoples, because they created a big movement. It was also for this purpose. to be able to pool our actions to see how these communities can emphasise their voices and defend their interests. So it's a bit[00:38:00]elsewhere we really feel that it is really very very developed, but in the Congo it is still not only in relation to the Bantus but also in relation to themselves. So it's also working on their own view of themselves. So they often see themselves as sub-human and then you really have to try to really change their own perception of these issues.

And we have worked with them for a long time and more and more you feel that those from Kinshasa are already mixing with the population and those from rural areas. You really feel that from time to time, it starts to come, especially when we are indigenous peoples. We are a woman, we suffer from violence, violations of their rights as a total people also in their own environment, that, we know.

Liz Bennett: And yes, for sure, for sure. But then all of a sudden, I also know I was saying it to myself because you were talking earlier about the[00:39:00]sudden modernization of agriculture, but suddenly, that, that Is that precisely, it is perhaps for certain peasants? But do you also have a way to also protect a little bit the traditional ways of agriculture which are being a little completely disappeared in fact, by this need for agri-food industry and

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya: Yes, today is when I started talking about that . We call the valorization of androgenic knowledge,

knowledge, local knowledge so we realised that most modern knowledge, although very very important, very very important, has struggled to be domesticated. Here I explain to you that the agent is teaching them how to make modern crops, that's very good.

But usually it's always[00:40:00]as part of the program projects at the end of his projects you feel as if these achievements are disappearing. So the best way is to tell them you too for ages, since ancient times, there are things that you have inherited always do how to try to be able to be there and to be able to value but also perhaps redirect them differently for its best, No more than tomorrow Friday, there is precisely a big big, especially traditional. And so we are going to organise with colleagues, as part of a movement on a committee, the National Committee on Food Culture, Family Farming. It is also in this sense, how to make culture prevail, our endogenous knowledge, local knowledge and put them forward.

so that peasants in rural areas can find themselves not smelling a little too much. we don't let them know[00:41:00]that he does not control, that they find it difficult to be able to draw from. We also organise in one of our provinces, but local knowledge fairs, fairs, local knowledge and experiences on how people do for agriculture, with local techniques.

And we help them a bit with modern techniques which are important. That's kinda okay.

Liz Bennett: because yes, suddenly, it's also important to remember that it's safe, it's above all also it's perhaps, among other things, modern techniques that are brought by e by e external knowledge of the which are often the source of environmental problems in fact, because it's, it's often techniques that tend to impoverish the land and there is a lot of deforestation.

And all that, I imagine.

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya: Yeah, how do you manage to protect the earth[00:42:00]while having fairly good quality crops. It's uh here

Liz Bennett: bombs and suddenly uh, you said a festival soon, it's tomorrow!

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya:No, the preparatory meeting

Liz Bennett:Okay and e So suddenly, perhaps to finish Here what is your kind of your vision for the next few years?

Evo perhaps your hopes of What could change and what could have an effect precisely to be able to? Um, what could be done to improve the living conditions of these communities around the DRC.

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya:Well, the first thing I did was to have a government constituted and concerned about the communities. Really

It is the biggest problem of the DRC. So a concerned government[00:43:00]and that means a lot of things. That precisely implies my second vision second to the second concern, that of seeing later the communities live in a secure environment. and peaceful and which precisely, which is not precisely prey to monopolisation, a healthy environment, that is to say that there is respect for the environment but also uh, there you go, and there you go, peaceful without and there you go peaceful. It is also that, me, of the community conflicts between them too. because it has those who come from elsewhere. There are also communities between them which do not agree on certain things, which claim to be, which claim constitutions.

No, it doesn't belong to us. So for me what I want is the person who can regulate all this. It's the government, but also the communities themselves that want to live in the[00:44:00]peace and quiet.

Liz Bennett:good thank you very much. In any case, it was really very interesting.

I see the listen, thank you very much and then good luck for all these great projects

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya:And

Liz Bennett:uh

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya:sorry it is I who thank you for having thought of the Senate depends yes

Liz Bennett:if it is with great pleasure, thank you very much, thank you for everything in any case have a good day. And

Gabrielle Pero Makawo Gemengya:Goodbye. THANKS.

Interview with Steward Muhindo from Lucha

Steward: [00:00:00]Hello, can you hear me okay?

Liz:Hello Yes hello,

Steward:yes it's fine, it's fine

Liz:GOOD. And you

Steward:I'm doing well?

Liz:Yeah you hear me okay.

Steward:Yes, I want yes

Liz:yes perfect Yeah great Good already thank you very much for agreeing to do an interview. So there you have it, I'll explain it to you quickly. Uh here, I am in my last year of studies there and suddenly I am doing my thesis on the resistance against the map, the grabbing of land in the DRC and so here I am, I contacted Lucha.

Who told me to contact you ? Can you[00:01:00]tell me a bit about your position? E. So

Steward:my name is Steward Muhindo. I am a Lucha activist In Lucha we have a horizontal leadership so there are no hierarchical functions everyone is an activist

Liz:yes you know it So we suddenly Lucha was founded in two thousand and twelve.

If I am wrong

Steward:not yes. In two thousand and twelve in Goma, and over the years, the movement has spread to other cities in the country and even to Europe. In fact, in Europe, in the United States, and so far, we are in about fifty cities. Finally, when I say that it also includes village rest so it's about fifty in any case of[00:02:00]geographical areas with geographical entities where there are two people who claim to be Lucas and with whom we have contact.

So I'm in Goma now and I entered the site. How was it okay?

Liz: And can you talk to me a bit? What kind of actions does Lucha take and what kind of cause?

Steward: so the Lucha at the base, it is a movement which was born out of indignation in the face of more or less all the violence, which has social and armed violence, which is carried out against the civilian populations, but also against the indifference of those who have the public responsibility to bring about a solution.

So as such, we are, we are a lot of mobilising communities on their rights to raise awareness of their rights and how to claim them Practically.[00:03:00] We are also in peaceful mobilizations, against all types of abuse of power, whatever it is, abuse of power even decisions, decisions, decisions, dishonest or totally totally ineffective.

So we really are a movement. activists, who is in the action on the ground and who is the action on the ground and the action for us, it is this sensitization to try to make people demanding with the public authorities, but also the action in terms of that's activism for peace, for for justice and democracy in order to make leaders so goes types of actions, demonstrations.

It's sit-in, it's civil disobedience, it's here my whole business all day[00:04:00] Nonviolence. although we are not the people who are prey to violence and we think that we can print a new mode of action, demands through non-violence. Unfortunately, we are in a society which is so used to using force to make people hear it, and these are the challenges we have, as a movement, to endure, to have the impression of not being heard and, in some situations, having to endure repression.

In Eleven for example, we already have four of our comrades who were killed in eleven years and three of them were killed during the demonstrations? And killed by police officers who are well identified who have not subsequently been punished?

Liz: And no also e no impunity after dad of

Steward: yes, so very little[00:05:00] continues.

In any case for the four there is only for one for whom there was a prosecution and a sentence of life imprisonment, but the guard has not been in prison since October two thousand and twenty because they organised escape. He left so we have, we have been to prison each time and so far, for example, we have two comrades who are in prison in Goma to denounce the ineffectiveness of the state of siege.

It is a measure that they have put in place here to secure. So here it is, we are trying to imprint a non-violent struggle in a region. characterised by violence. We pay the price with the indifference of the leaders, repression and impunity.

Liz: So what? What is the really exact source in two thousand and twelve, who really launched?

What was an event[00:06:00]who was really the beginning, one might say of Lucha?

Steward: So an event. So what wasn't there at two thousand twelve, but ultimately the fight at two thousand sixteen? But yes, I know at least that here is the fight, the first demonstration that we had. It was the first of May two thousand and twelve and it was a bit difficult because it's the working day almost everywhere, whereas here we don't have any work.

So it was a bit to denounce the lack of work and the campaign was it (said in dialect) which means we're tired of the vilaca, it's exactly odd jobs like I'll take you, you make me a three-foot hole, I'll pay you two dollars. and people live off that, but the idea was to say we're tired of that as a fashion[00:07:00]of life.

We need real jobs and I know in any case maybe it is. So I know that here is who already had work upstream to organise, to talk to each other, to decide to launch a movement for But yes, but the first action, the Prime Minister took. But after that, there was obviously this water problem.

because, Goma, it's a city which is very close to the lakes, which has no water and And there was this countryside Goma nelougo? Who also was the first campaign that made Lucha beyond Goma. So here is,

Liz: And do you have struggles that have been precisely that have really had an impact, you would say on what was brought about for example, I don't know in the text of the law and so on that they are a bit your processes of Est what are you doing protests?

[00:08:00] What are the steps to bring back to scrolls for purposes?

Steward: Yes yes, yes, we had. We had struggles which in any case were battles that we waged and which ended up paying off. We remember if you follow the Congolese news, you certainly know it, it is in fact the It is one of the major actors who allowed that the president of the SIA, president Joseph Kabila, does not modify not the Constitution which requires him to leave after his two terms, and it is clear that he wanted to do so.

He tried to change the electoral law to two thousand. fifteen. Also opposed to two thousand and sixteen, he refused because his second term expires at two thousand and sixteen. He refused to organise elections. We were really one of the major players who fought for that. [00:09:00] He does not change the Constitution which organises the elections in which he will not stand again.

And that, he did well only with two inheritance zones and he ended up tweaking the results so that it was not the one who had been elected, who was also proclaimed Yes, it is something we managed at the hearing in No, but he's already gone two thousand and six. Elections were scheduled.

So he served his first term of 2006 at two thousand eleven, his second from two thousand eleven to two thousand sixteen to two thousand sixteen. He refused to organise elections to change the Constitution, we fought until he was forced to organise elections at two thousand and Eighteen in which he could not stand again.

and which were not won by the one who presented it like us. But after he was proclaimed as victor, it is not the who was who had [00:10:00] actually won the election. But hey, after that it's still a victory because for us it means that no president will dare to change the Constitution to claim to stay in power.

beyond the mandate. and that here is everyone who has, he knows that here is more face, go there too. Here is the little one. That's really a somewhat national or international fight for which we recognize our contribution. But there is also one here. There are small local struggles. that we are also trying to win.

There are illegal barriers in the Congo, it happens. Here soldiers wake up, place a barrier and everyone who passes pays him a little money. And that is abuse of power that we denounce, against which we fight and that we manage to eliminate with our different sections which are located in the different villages.

And in any case, there are little victories like That, if you like, I believe.[00:11:00]We made a document about our victories. in two thousand and twenty, I think, two thousand and twenty or twenty-one, I remember, but I can find the document where we try to explain about ten changes that we managed to bring about in a year.

And what was the starting situation? What did we do? And what is the current situation? So sometimes it's changes that are just momentary. So we come, we don't know the illegal barrier. and at the end of three months, it is still put. She was just changing places. But yes, maybe we won't succeed.

But yes, we are the example that we can try to obtain changes if we organise ourselves better and have a growing influence.

Liz:And uh so me I I I'm rather Uh I me I'm rather talking about land grabbing specifically is what your[00:12:00]organisation e fights against that or

Steward:yes, so the fight we waged against land grabbing, it was it was it was, it was, it was against.

It was in fact in Nyamilima, it is a village which is in the territory of Rutshuru and where the local populations and the ICCN it is the Congolese Institute for the conservation of nature are fighting over land. Because ICCN considers the land to belong to Virunga National Park is a protected area which means it cannot, so there is no human activity that needs to take place while part of this helps local communities see it as part of their customary land that should be

in use for the local community.[00:13:00]And there we have, we have. So it's I don't know exactly what to talk about land grabbing, but actually the idea was it was this boundary conflict everybody knows there's a part and everyone knows there is, but we don't know.

We do not agree on the limits because we, therefore, were actors who try to push for this clarification and above all which is the end of abuses against populations because for the ICCN , then they are eco-guards. They have guns that come and beat up those who disagree with them, they cut postures.

on these states, nor in conflict. And that's what we fought against so that, in fact, rather than committing abuses against people who farm on the land they believe belongs to them, we have to arrive at a process that clarifies , rather clarifies the[00:14:00]statues of these lands and how to manage them.

ok, so I'm not sure if it's a grab. That's if

Liz: Yes, I think so, absolutely. Finally, let's say it's a land grab, not maybe at the level of resources, but it's a little bit under the pretext of environmental conservation which is also totally not going up.

Because suddenly, there you go, these are lands that are in the goal it's chosen a little by other people than by the people who are on the lands themselves and who are over there finally on the area for decades and actually getting completely stripped of their rights without being consulted that often that yeah that's what inside your movement is what you have what kind of do you have actor is what he is, what there are peasants,[00:15:00]aboriginal groups do what kind of

Steward:so for us, it's how to say, it's really

they are peasants, so most of them are peasants, they are local people. Who is it, for whom the rights are threatened by this grabbing, for example in Nyamilima, it was for the most part people who had fields in those areas.

people who actually lived from agriculture in these areas. And so that's the movement, it's like a grassroots movement that's just trying to organise people to be able to claim their rights

when their rights are violated. So it's not too elitist,[00:16:00]it's just ordinary people and it's people who are affected by the problem, it's not really how it's not what determines whether people are indigenous or not.

But the evidence that it was people who had fields on this entity there, who were trying to ask that their culture not be destroyed and that their fields be returned to them,

Liz:Is it even possible to be able to organise at a very local level against these abuses? at the level of the Earth because I mean often, there are localizations, excuse me.

And then there are enormous pressures in fact from big companies. Is it even possible in fact to organise at the local level like that? Where is help needed from other organisations around the alliance? What do you think?

Steward:yes, then there is yes, it is not, it is[00:17:00]no, it's not easy to be able to get organised and above all, above all because this fight has been going on for years and Virunga Park is a park that is who and who has been there for one thousand nine hundred and twenty-five so there it is, so it's not easy to face such a stable institution like that one and maybe the difference, because we brought with the party, is the fact of having brought a movement in this fight.

The movement that was carried by the mass, by the victims themselves and not an individual. Because overall, that was it, it was at the beginning, it was movements around someone around a deputy, around an influential community leader. But when this leader is either corrupt or threatened to the point that he doesn't know, we don't know how to resist.

The movement is running out of steam and[00:18:00]the advantage with Lucha is the fact that, as I said, we have a movement that has horizontal leadership and we did it by choice. It's because we knew that if we have a person who is identified as responsible, he will be subject to all kinds of pressure, all kinds of attempts at corruption and if he ever gives in, it's all the movements that are on the ground and there, the fact that we made this movement there rather rather.

rather horizontal to more or less tried to mitigate these risks of pressure. But it existed because of one of our only deaths because even if we are a horizontal movement There are always people who, by their capacity, by their leadership, appear as the leaders and are one of them for example, at Nyamilima.

He was arrested, accused, falsely, because there was a look of who started. There are armed groups, there is a guard who was killed. and accused him of[00:19:00]having killed her. That's how he was brought. He was arrested, but interestingly, even when he was arrested, the movement did not falter locally.

Because yes, he did this aura without, with his charisma, with, with everything he has. But here it is, but there was still a movement that goes beyond Laurent. There was a movement that was driven by the needs of people at the local level. And yes, but so in the end, the comrade was the charges against him were dropped and and here are the things, trying to evolve in this brief, it is not easy and we for example the other thing that made that the movement at the level of Nyamilima, a rural area trying to have strength, it was because we were in Goma and we could follow the arrested comrades.

You can strengthen communication[00:20:00]with the media through Here we are, through social networks, here we are. So there was that. There was the fact that we could try to more or less strengthen the communication and advocacy of friends who are in rural areas because we are in a city that is a little more open.

And that, I think that was an important argument for them and that many organisations, personalities at the beginning did not have. So we had the advantage of not having identifiable engines. And secondly, we had the advantage of having a team of That's media communications that, outside of Nyamilima, the area where the protests are happening and maybe at the end of the call, we'll to be able to share the various communications, the various videos of[00:21:00]demonstrations that took around

Liz:from him.

And is that often your main tactic? As a result, these demonstrations rather you will say

Steward: or yes. Yes, these demonstrations, in any case, we think we have to demonstrate. That's Lucha, it's action, it's very militant. So we talk to people. You have a problem, you know it. Come on, we'll go to the people in charge to say that they have to find a solution for us.

And we do

Liz: have you also joined forces with other organisations, for example providing advocacy at the legal or governmental level or do you do this yourself?

Steward: So yes, there are organisations that have taken us to that side that make the link with the authorities[00:22:00]but it's actually a How to put it, it's like an island.

a report that we make when we ourselves are already able to mobilise on the ground. Because there is this problem there, there is a problem. For example, we know that there is a debate around seven o'clock, but that cannot be imposed in the national debate or even as such in the national debate, quite simply what is an actor who causes this .

And we are more or less. In any case, this actor who is trying to provoke and afterwards, the formal organisations that want to can can, can try to take the issue to a higher level. Moreover, on this question, we even had I would say the support of the international organisation which is called Survival it is not Survival international.

I'll try to see if I can find it. In all[00:23:00]cases, it's good, I believe it's something alive, but in one it's the living. You say yes but in English it's stronger than something like that actually trying to document these abuses. that are made against local communities in the name of nature conservation.

And they considered that we were in a situation like that. We had a strong interaction with them on these questions, on this fight. But yes, that remains the problem until today. I don't remember it being resolved. I just remember that because of the demonstrations, there is a commission, a mixed commission which is provincial, which was put in place and which tried to put in place a kind of destabilising facts so that[00:24:00]here it is so that we stop

cutting crops, so that we stop playing, to stop what prostheses what, in short, so that we create the conditions necessary for peace.

But unfortunately, what we wanted was a participatory delimitation of the park, it was never done unfortunately today during the war and the area is no longer occupied and we are in the hands of armed groups , which means that this position is completely abandoned.

But yes, we still managed to slip that And the fact connected to Goma, Yan Gomes did that. It is the provincial capital of North Kivu, so the people who are Nyamilima, this small village from which we could provide them with this communication support in terms of advocacy and maintain the flame of the fight at the local level.

[00:25:00]Here, it's this set that has changed the manufacturer a bit.

Liz:So what? It's interesting because suddenly, this kind of land grabbing process is actually happening all over the world. There are similar kinds of problems in South America, in Asia and in other African countries and so on.

And did you hear that there is also a lot of resistance? That is in other countries, in other parts of the world. Do you have links with his other e, these other organisations and his other movements?

Steward:So, as I told you, in fact, the issue of land grabbing was not as it was not a main front for our movement.

It's just that it happened by force of the circumstances that we try to tackle all types of problems.[00:26:00]but more or less, that's it, that's that that's so that wasn't our front and by But Nevertheless, as I said, and I'll try to se, that's the name of organisation is that one has established an account by reason of one's actions.

There is an International Survival organisation I believe I will find. I'll try to see if I find years and who contacted us and who asked us here's of who actually tried to document this issue through our struggle, Trying to put you on the same try to collaborate with them to carry our voice,

Liz: Because that's the kind of worry.

It is also often quite hidden. It's often quite put aside, we close our eyes and then it's as if it didn't happen. Here, it is important to document

Steward: Yes that's it. And especially, [00:27:00] above all, I don't know if this is the case everywhere, it's that finally, we have the impression that the environment, that's it, that's the subject of theirs, that it is not necessary.

So. So when you say that the park is invading us, it's as if you're saying that it's no longer worth protecting the environment. So there are a lot of people who are reluctant. The hundred in power, you approach, here you are talking. But we are here. We tried to explain to several people, including the Virunga park officials who finally approached us.

When they have, they feel that here. We told them we don't postpone because of the importance of environmental protection. This is also one of our priorities, but we think that it should not be done to the detriment of local populations and that's it. So it's not normal to say that we're going to keep this place for [00:28:00] humanity while next to this same place, there is someone who has not planted anything to eat.

So we have to find, but who We think it's like. It's like we're maintaining a kind of green colonialism through the park that's left and so that's it. There was this at the same time the fact that some approached us at the same time. The fact that it was a fight a little more against the cause that is at the forefront of the ecological cause and that meant that we were already employed.

Some are already trying to avoid us so as not to support a cause.

Liz: Yes, especially since it is enormously hypocritical. In fact, this kind of park, because next to it there is a lot of deforestation with the purpose of mass agriculture for minerals, is in fact next to it, who cares.

On the one hand, we deforest, we do, we do anything with the environment. And then [00:29:00] on the other hand, yes, if we have a park and we get rid of the communities that are in the area, that's fine, but it's not like that, it's just very hypocritical in fact. What, in

your opinion and the way you see it, is it more of a national problem at the level of the government in fact, which does not listen to the communities on the ground?

and a problem, a little bit of the laws that are in place basically, which leaves a little bit that leaves a big door open in fact the outside investments or is that really a rather a problem, a problem e which is out of the country, which is kind of here are some

Steward: Then the problem?

There are several levels. The first, I believe, is a historic level. Actually, [00:30:00] the park was created, as I told you in nineteen hundred, twenty-five. It continued to expand, so after there were other other expenses that were incorporated into the parks I believe in one thousand nine hundred and twenty-five.

They continued to incorporate stretches into them as they pleased. So that's the first problem when at the time, in 1925, the Congo was under colonisation by Belgium and it was the settlers who did that. So you imagine that these lands had officials?

There were two managers but these people couldn't have had more or less leverage in dealing with a negotiation. equal to equal with the settler because the settler was the settler and we were colonised, we were under men. So that, all of a sudden, is people who took the land because the land [00:31:00] belonged to them.

They said that this stretch is going to be the park and the new generation. It's true that he is not in question, but he says. But we can not. It is our land that was taken from us just in a cavalier manner. It wasn't agreed. So that is already a first false start in the creation of these protected areas.

Secondly, there is this lack of economic alternatives. Populations around the park live from agriculture while there is no public support, in particular to allow tools in the long term, technical support from agronomists in the long term tractors.

So people are farming where they just do it archaically. which means that there is no production and that the fields are ageing, ageing quickly and the desire to advance

towards[00:32:00]towards new lands is there, and the new lands is what they say and what says it is not while there is also this demographic increase.

So there are more and more people. There is less and less productive land and there is this desire to move towards there is no economic alternative, so I therefore think that there is that. It's a real problem. And the third problem, obviously, is a law enforcement problem because the law requires that the demarcation of protected areas be done in a participatory way with the communities.

But until then, it is the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature which is a public body which makes this delimitation and in most cases it is not without involving the community. And suddenly there is this worry of having been excluded which involves all things, all[00:33:00]kinds of abuse.

And as I told you in a region where there are many armed groups where people have no choice but to make themselves heard by force. we see several attacks that target the eco-guards and who are killed because at bottom, it is conflicts about subjects in fact of the earth. So if I can repeat myself, there is first of all this difficult context where the lands were taken by settlers from the colonised who had practically nothing to say and who could not say it to their difficult counterparts. So it was really sort of a relationship of settlers colonised. Secondly, there is the fact that there is no economic alternative around the locality. is that people live from agriculture. Off the fields they do[00:34:00]demographics, they need more land. There is always this need to be able to have new fields. and there you go, there is also this problem of respect for the laws which require that the delimitation of protected areas be participatory but which is still not and that creates a real imbalance in the fight

Liz:ok ok okay listen up is that

and so what are you, what struggles do you have right now and right now that you are fighting as the organisation, its movement?[00:35:00]

Steward:Yes, of course, but not limits not related to grabbing. As I have told you the entity where to lead this fight there, It is now tomorrow of an armed group which is called (I do not

understand) and many other groups, around so many, many of our comrades to the fruits of this entity .

And now, that makes it so, it's complicated. For

Liz:do something And how do you see that for the future? You see?

Steward:in the future, it will therefore depend once again on the balance of power. What we have managed to do is to set up a commission which calls for us to be more or less destabilised, to ensure that there are more arrests of demonstrators, people who protest, which is more destruction of cultures, therefore more or less of[00:36:00]stability.

but we have to move on to la la la, the durability of this stability. This, we think, just goes through participatory delimitation. And therefore, that is to say that we must continue to weigh in such a way that as soon as the security conditions are unique, this participatory delimitation takes place.

And when there is a limit, OK, we know that we can we can materialise it, put for example, and this is what is generally done, put electric wires to show the limit, but above all also to make ensure that the animals coming from the pasture, which do not come and destroy the cultures of the populations because that too is very frequent and it is a source of conflict between the two parties.

The fact credit is OK, it's not that there are elephants, there is everything. any animal. But these animals come out of there. They come to destroy[00:37:00]cultures and after returning to the parks, if you kill this animal you are here, you are arrested, you are put in prison. But in the meantime, there is no one to compensate you when your crops have been destroyed by this same animal, it's a bit of all that comes into play.

And we hope that these are two things that can have answers if ever there is this delimitation because otherwise, first we know where we pass, the element where we pass the limit and then we also do. We also know that he made sure to put electric barriers so that the animals no longer return to the populations.

Liz:Ok, you're listening, thank you, thank you very much. It was really very nice of you to answer my questions. it was uh yeah great, thank you very much

Steward:ok, thank you very much and if there is[00:38:00]any items you want from me small apps please feel free. I remember that I told you that here is a document on

Liz:about what information you have

Steward:on hits of two thousand and twenty and that maybe also publications on just having an idea on how the demonstrations

Liz:on the web would be great.

You can send me, that would be really great.

Steward:Alright, I'll try to find

Liz:Awesome! Great thanks a lot. Listen to great strength, confess then to the movement and thank you for taking the time. That's very kind, thank you very much. have a good day and good continuation. Thank you very much goodbye goodbye.

Interview with Malembre Simplex Kambale from CONAPAC

Malembre: [00:00:00]Besides, I'm at home, I make friends with my machine. Okay so mother home Really so okay

Liz:Ok, great, perfect. Good listen delighted with Finally I am very happy to speak to you. Yes suddenly e then the I had I had recovered your contact suddenly through the AC DC canapes that Yes yes yes And uh suddenly are you in charge of advocacy?

That's it? He told me

Malembre:I am in charge of advocacy and programs at CONAPAC,

Liz:Okay, okay And so what kind of then what kind of advocacy are you doing for this organisation?

Malembre:Maybe I should describe to you first roughly what we do[00:01:00]generally like that, you will find, you will find the context. The context of our work, where we don't have, is a national confederation of agricultural producers in the Congo. We are a fourth level organisation.

Therefore households at household level, POs, farmers' organisations at the grassroots level, in villages, towns, farmers' organisations unite to form unions at the territory level. And the unions organise themselves, unite to form what we call the federation at the level of the provinces.

and the provinces unite at the national level to form. Now the deal doesn't have that okay.[00:02:00]So it is for this reason that the plea to go to each level, at each level corresponds to a certain number of activities, for example at the level of POs. And that is production. at the level of the unions, it is the commercialization of agreement.

At the level of the federation, it is already the provincial level. It takes on a more pleading character. It's starting to change form, rent and representations, but for matters at the provincial level.

Liz: Hello yes yes you hear

Malembre: and so today the DRC has twenty-six provinces currently the twenty-six provinces and CONAPAC is present in[00:03:00]nineteen out of twenty-six provinces agree okay so like the level, the national level deals with advocacy issues. Questions that go beyond two or three provinces at once are already the level of gas.

This is already a question that affects, that concerns two or three provinces, three provinces. It becomes a question that we take to the national level. Okay, so we have, I have a number of themes. generally concerns almost all the provinces. Yes, and in there, for example, it's agricultural financing, access to credit and taxation.

That's a theme. Agricultural financing, access to credits and taxation, certain themes We have identified another[00:04:00]theme. Rural infrastructure. It is very common. On the way, the agricultural services, voices, warehouses, market, conservation infrastructure, storage of agricultural products, that becomes a theme of agreement.

So a third theme is what we call young women and inclusion and the theme that concerns us now with you, community rights and land security.

Liz: Yes, quite.

Malembre: So this theme is one of the biggest themes insofar as we work with small producers who have a problem of access to land.

but[00:05:00]also a problem of security, nobody of their rights, with all that is like a land grabbing phenomenon, with all that is like how shall I put it securitization phenomenon, one of the modes of use

and national politics. Governments that are more inclined to deal with large companies of large multi-transnational corporations to access land. All of this issue falls within the issue of land tenure security. Ok yes and there in there so at the national level, my job is that one okay.

So what is the orientation now? If I can say that we have several orientations in this[00:06:00]land approach, even if it is up to you to know now which one she would take or would be interested in because I can have developed mainly three or four in agreement. The first is the question of laws, i.e. we want to contribute to the establishment of laws that protect small producers, small farmers and family farmers in relation to securing their land.

It is a variant

The second is what I call what should be called the relationship between the smallholders, family farmers and other[00:07:00]stakeholders, including mainly state services. All right, the authorities which are in charge of the formal management of the lands, that is to say the, the ethics, the curators, the cadastres, the Minister of Land Affairs, all that is like formal official administrative authority, concerned with the management of the land.

And in this category, actors. There are also customary chiefs, customary chiefs. And here, in the DRC, it is the customary owners. There remain the chiefs of the customary communities. These people also constitute a Greater France insofar as most of the land in rural areas is managed by customary chiefs.

yeah then[00:08:00]in this same logic, we must put what we call the big landowners. The dealerships are what have closed, which have large dealerships that don't want to operate. And these kinds of people also sometimes deal with our smallholders. They also behave like customary chiefs, so they put their heads at the disposal of our small producers for what is called Maitreya.

I come in or something, something agrees to the right of rentals of things that look like that. Yes, so the other variant now, that's where we are developing a third element on which personally, I'm working on myself. I can say that I got my research done. Okay, it's the establishment of mechanisms[00:09:00]lasting security.

and conservation of rights in the countries of the Great Lakes, but in particular in the RTC, that is to say how to convert our small producers to landowner because the traditional mechanisms as they operate the operator can remain a tenant for more than a thousand years without ever owning it.

Okay so it is done , how shall I say it is perpetual independent of whoever has the land either the customary chiefs or the concessionaires, and in this logic, we have set up what we call[00:10:00]the observatory. We have an observatory of all the dynamics, of all the dynamics of grabbing, living use, land expropriation and so on of small producers.

so our country has that too, it's important as you may work on the BBC. Our country has several agro-ecological and demographic zones which determine the land realities of each good agreement, so for example the zones of the East This is called the big one which is Ituri.

These are already overcrowded, where there is a mild climate for survival and therefore fitness. There's a lot of pressure[00:11:00]Demographic is a trend, a rush by large farmers, which means that our small producers are exposed to this phenomenon of hoarding. See it more or less when I send you some documents that you will ask for, you will be able to, you will be able to use them in a peaceful way.

Okay, so if you take the designated areas, but that's the case in the South East, yes, it's more a conflict between small family producers. and the mining companies that hunt grab the land of our small producers for simple networks because they make a lot of money and they easily convince our administration that they are the ones who are more useful in agriculture[00:12:00]When you enter the forest area, reality changes.

no one is that big, because foresters generally don't need arable land. Open interest, they go to the forests. But then when they have devastated everything, sometimes our producers are tempted to go towards them. And there is confusion between forest law and land law.

usually on forest permits because they also have the land permit. So there is this struggle there between foresters and agriculturalists, farmers, yes. So if I can maybe describe those elements, that's how we animate. We are members of the National Commission for[00:13:00]land reform that has been in the DRC for two thousand and eleven.

And we just, we had just adopted the national land policy documents. But there too, there were a lot of shenanigans to integrate our concerns as an advocate representing family producers.

In short, here are roughly the contexts

we have, but you may well addictions as you have posed

Liz:issues. So I, myself, am rather looking for the resistance that is against this land grabbing. Here here I wanted uh I wanted to see a little what[00:14:00]so what kind of resistance in fact there exists at the local level and from the PS as finally as I understood all that happens at the local level and then after that it goes up and then after that can go up to pleas from the cover the state and so on.

But what kind of resistance is there locally?

Malembre:Yes, the local mechanism of resistance against land grabbing Well, I don't know and without thinking too much I'm going to mention them one by one, there is the mechanism that we can call the traditional mechanism. traditional, i.e. the use of customary practices to be able to defend oneself against hoarders.

And there,[00:15:00]the Congolese system being equivocal, how can it be said in good dualistic French? the formal systems and the customary system. The system, even if it has problems the local communities find much closer, is much more adapted culturally, socially, to their way of life.

which means that when there are rather conflicts, the communities prefer to refer to their chief or to their customs. It is a form of resistance against corporate grabs that may occur. unfortunately the customary chief. Currently there are some that have become as maybe, worse than the courts, but at least there are what are called the local courts and the local grave committee that are trying in rows to protect the communities in this way[00:16:00]there.

a second formula? Yes, something that can also be put in there in the general opinion, where the collective subconscious costs, this is what they call the social and cultural securing of the land. That is to say what is established When they buried my grandfather, they buried my grandfather on a hill and my great-grandfather.

The local custom is to say My grandfather is there, and has been buried. My great-grandfather is there, was buried there. This means that it is a form of security, to make

allowance for this form of validation[00:17:00]social? Yes, and that therefore, even for everyone, even to carry out the burial in a space, you must be validated by the community that your father deserves to be buried there, because the community recognizes that in the face of unfortunately belongs to you good lately.

custom is also losing its real values. People are starting to come in, even the mythical trees, the customary trees that were fair, that such space is already for such a community. That's another way of looking at it. But at least that, it constituted a form of resistance.

Third form. What can we say? The armed struggle? And[00:18:00]it was found that the communities end up in despair. In this way the community hopes for the resolution of land disputes. For peaceful resistance vis-à-vis their land aggressors, land grabbers ended up developing what they call armed groups and certain armed groups.

Many armed groups have been created as a result of this phenomenon of land grabbing mainly, either by supposed foreigners. who are not Congolese, or by big traders who have taken certificates, who have taken official documents without the consent of the communities.

And so the communities begin to create small resistance spontaneously.[00:19:00]Wanting to defend ourselves, which means that in some villages we have what is called the machete against documents. okay, the love, the machete of the community against the registration results or the document that was given by the administrative services and therefore this form of life of the self-defence in protections created some violence.

Yes, when doing Congolese mapping. of the presence or not of these strong how I can call it strong presence of armed groups. There, there is a clear correlation between the phenomenon of land disputes and this presence there. That's how the big ones who litori you are part of[00:20:00]Tanganyika.

These are provinces with a strong profession of armed groups, even if beyond that, there is also a motivation of contempt. We can't, it was first of all land protection claims. Cases like that, which are said to be traditional mechanisms, as I said. But there are also modern mechanisms.

They developed the des in What are the political alliances? Yes, while the deputies, for example, a deputy or candidate, can develop a more or less bellicose speech because it has to be said. or raising hopes and despairs vis-à-vis the communities for if ever[00:21:00]I was passing by, you're going to recover, vote, you're going to do, you're going to do here immediately or if we took the bet from you that you took an area.

You will recover as well. So the population begins to create alliances of this kind. We have seen young people, people who have been voted on the basis of a promise that they will recover a thousand hectares of the National Park. You are going to recover the concession from such gentlemen, you are going you are going, you are going that.

These are methods of claiming one's second element,

Liz:what's in it, because it's promises, but does it happen

Malembre:Really? Unfortunately, it always ends in clashes, because the gentleman there, created, he passes. and for you, it is legitimate. And sometimes they set up small group courses to go and devastate the fields[00:22:00]or to occupy the park to go and destroy.

And it ends in a form of violence, violence to separate a black hand that is positive and generally follows politicised. So that is also a variant. The second variant, the other third variant. The other variant is how I can do that, this contractualization with the chiefs, the landowners, nothing.

And dealers with small producers, ie? For the small producer to be able to protect himself, he asks for example for small papers from the customary chiefs[00:23:00]from concessionaires, proving that they are in good standing with regard to custom or land rental, which is not an ancient practice.

These are new practices. because we have entered a society of orality. Confidence in a man of writing no longer in a society of oral and confidence to diminish. People became almost dishonest right away. So we are moving towards a kind of documentation of the relationship with the land and the landowners, which is not bad on that side.

But here, there is a trap, it is that very often the customary chiefs or often say to set up mechanisms which are negotiated each campaign, each season.[00:24:00]So even there, it does not stabilise so much.

Finally, finally, there is what we call the various projects. how I can support the various projects, securing more and more. We see that there are many projects that have exploited this niche, which will open up the rapprochement of the different actors. Veranda creation knows.

This is called Veranda, the name for times of peace. land coordination committees for collective securitizations as part of mapping projects, mapping of community land. These are projects that are being developed, especially in the East and the framework of what they call[00:25:00]securing agreement.

Now he is developing what I just said. We are in the process of implementing a new logic. This is the conversion from vassal of exploiters to property. And it's called the bottom. Through a fund, the Innovative fund for access to land for the vulnerable and women and other vulnerable people make innovative access to land, Fiat innovative access to land for women and other vulnerable people.

There, a lot of people, this party, do a lot of analyses that sometimes the big concessionaires and the big landowners don't want to give up the land, even if the waters acquired in such a way[00:26:00]are dishonest. He does not want to leave two if not through agrarian reform. But when you see these different gentlemen, there are people for the most part who have a political force and a terrible armed force, so that to dare a reform, it would be created, another useless war.

rather what we can do, those of negotiating with these people in a positive way, to set up a fund which will allow that when a concessionaire wants to get rid of his concession instead of selling it to another, larger like him, who sells it to the smallest who are already on site.

but as a general rule they don't have the money to pay for large areas. This anger is blamed so we set up a credit[00:27:00]and get credit there when we pay the small producers, stay on this concession. But what we pay as royalty and capitalise as reimbursement, it's called a kind of what.

and so it's a new dynamic. We are in the process of putting things in place and that is one of the forms of resistance to Ah, c'est du bonheur!

Liz: And uh so can you talk a little bit about this documentation process for example mapping, is that what it is? Is it a process that is internal to the country where it comes from?

Often outside.

Malembre: No, it's a country level, unfortunately, it's not projects, projects, funded projects. For example, the biggest that we know for the moment, that I know as [00:28:00] as a major player in this field, is the Netherlands, the Netherlands which is the biggest.

Now there is Fida too, which is trying to get involved. the Netherlands through embassies. But they finance a lot of projects in consortium from the East, mainly with a lot of Dutch organisations called the network. Long live the rope! I have everyone there to realise so what?

This mapping allows it, done well in a participatory way, to conduct a kind of community recognition. [00:29:00] but which also goes towards the legitimization with the documents of the uses of agreement Are you islets?

Liz: What do you

Malembre: say? Not good, they are islands so it's not in a generalised way.

Liz: Yeah, because you think it's happening in the neck? Rather political in fact, it is the change must be made or that or is it possible to Finally, what is your opinion? A little bit of the solution winning in some certain ways to new cases. Do you think suddenly E, for example, has a very big role, for example leaving the door open to foreign investors.

Is it the state's role to close these doors?

Malembre: Good, [00:30:00] in principle people that another law. I tell you that when I make my diagnosis, our law is badly done or well, let's say well done in relation to investors. For what? Because the level of skills in relation to the area granted.

I would like to understand by the lowest the curators of real estate titles goes through the Minister of Land Affairs. No, wait, it's country first. The custodian of titles is the provincial governor. He is the national minister of land affairs. it's the parliament and it's the president.

So it's long[00:31:00]areas granted. And therefore an economic operator who needs a large area does not need to refer to the local level. because if he needs eight or ten and because that's the governor, he goes to see the governor and the governor has that competence there because it is no longer within the competence of the little curator beyond true thousand hectares.

I want to remember, he has to go to the business minister, okay. And if it's beyond that, he has to go see the President of the Republic. If we see that, he must go to Parliament. And that, among the elements that large-scale land grabbing must take place at the end of the leopold communities because the authority which grants the large areas is not local,

Liz:Of course,[00:32:00]is that suddenly, in your opinion of the solution, it is precisely something to pass participative which includes the, which includes the communities.

How is that possible?

Malembre:Yes, of course, that would be the best solution. And that's why we fought to overturn the whole approach and unfortunately the debates, the interests of each other to block the same our occupation that had been tabled and that had already been admitted.

in the basic document from the ministry to Parliament for adoption. Documents were fiddled with. We tore where we tore the power of customary chiefs in there We tore the limitation of areas per person, we tore the obligation to settle conflicts, to first go through a temple of reconciliation.[00:33:00]

They stopped a cow and they uprooted it. They tabled another document in Parliament. Unfortunately, therefore, the solution would have been for father issues to be settled locally by the communities. and instances locally accepted and legitimised by this community, Unfortunately, Here too, this is another trap that is in our law.

Registrars of real estate titles, i.e. those who manage the cadastres and who grant the documents, titles, certificates and others are appointed from who never ceased

Liz: Yes of course,

Malembre: and depended only on Kita, that

Liz: All right

Malembre: and so you can find a type from the far south of the [00:34:00] south of the south be conservative in the far north north north.

Our

where he knows neither customs nor local practices. And at the limit, he behaved like mercenaries because as soon as he goes to any proof at all, he will return to his village because there, he has no interest, no cultural or emotional attachment to this space,

because they are civil servants of the central state.

so it's traps like that that make a moment. The state or local communities are forced to develop resistance mechanisms to protect what little is left. Yes yeah

Liz: okay, okay and is what is what is what [00:35:00] honestly do you see? Uh how do you see a little bit of the future in fact for e for land rights, for local communities in the RTC.

Malembre: Good uh positive but at the same time yes

negative so that I'm still not positive. Yes it's not because a lot of people started with the nationals. through foreign companies and the government of other countries think that in the DRC there is still enough land that is not exploited and that therefore it is really essential.

And to keep this space wild while others need it. And that arouses [00:36:00] lusts. directly from our neighbouring countries, but also from large companies which need at the same time

the subsoil which is at the same time rich in minerals from the forests which are available in bobo and therefore also if we do not face the situation is not going to improve.

it must be, it is a form. The second element is that local managers, local managers, have put what we call speculation and hoarding and hoarding of land because of land speculation. So everyone is looking. of[00:37:00]just know that maybe, by then, the land will have value.

People are tempted to hoard, to acquire large areas, to hoard them so that speculating with twenty years, thirty years, there are some who even go as far as fifty years later,

so this phenomenon will not settle the land issue. soon a defeat era on the other hand when even better there is, there are glimmers of hope, it is glimmer of hope. The share of what we have called local security initiatives, good practices, good practices, for example, involves the collective securitization of community land.

it is for this experience of rapprochements. Customary chief[00:38:00]and family farmers. That's it, it's practical to sell or finance by credits. small producers to access land and accompany them to the administrations to obtain the documents. If these practices there would be mounted in a law so that it is valued as a legal practice.

And that's where the Court doesn't just have those lows. All these good experiences there must be integrated into a law because until today, they are practices. out of the norm out of the law and so if it can be seen it is in a national laws document wouldn't hurt.

Liz: Yeah, yeah, sure.

In effect,

Malembre:there's[00:39:00]also has what we call local land charters. Since the Congo is plural in the management of local land, it is necessary to commit local land charges which will be valued in the law and which will act as local land management law.

So these hopes, these elements tell us that perhaps one day there will be, there will be. There may be hope, but only if it is backed by real political will. and a major role for civil society to always bring the land issue to the negotiating table and to the priorities of leaders.

So political will and a strong civil society

Liz: alright Alright[00:40:00]

Malembre:the need to organise local communities. and village communities so that she is able to defend her rights. And this work must be done. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to have the means to support these local dynamics to support the civil societies which do the work of defending interests.

family farmers to defend their land.

Liz: Well, listen, it's finally, there are so many things we've talked to you about. It's already great what you me I,

Malembre:because you love such an important element. The charters, local land charter, yes. you are giving[00:41:00]also what we call land maps. Agreed, that release and to say good the cartography and allocation of lands.

All right, what comes down to what we call land use planning when we say that, it's a unitary I can't say. students in agriculture. It is a land reserved for breeding, it is a mining land, it is a forest land. But it's cartography, the cartography does not exist.

We thought that this could help protect the land of local communities and family producers,

Liz: Okay to really have an area for everything, a little bit that is respected, for example forests, that it is not just cut off while there are people[00:42:00]who say it's forests for hunting.

Suddenly things like that

Malembre:yes that's it indeed that's it.

Liz: Well listen, thank you, thank you very much. I'm really sorry but I'm going to have to go because I have an appointment in ten or fifteen minutes there, but e

Malembre: So yes, sorry. tomorrow I'm going to print the girl doing the ok. I am going to the office. Ok, I will print it, sign it for

Liz: send it super Yes yes, no, it's just because yes, it doesn't commit a lot, but it's fair.

That's just so I can use information from our interview in my writing. Well, it's just a formality from my university. So.

Malembre: yes so that we don't say that you found this evening. It's a fact sheet. No?

Liz: No but[00:43:00]let's say here, it's a consent form. Basically that's it.

But hey, thank you very much. In any case, it was really e. It really helped me a lot. It's super awesome.

Malembre: How many who are about to say something so that these

Liz: yes yes, it is sure that I spoke to. I've talked to quite a few people also talking about talking to someone about the PC assassination. I also went to talk to someone about a movement.

And it's true that it was really strong to have all these points of view, a little bit and that's it, yeah, there really is. It is sure that there is really a big problem.

Malembre: yes yes there is a problem there

Liz: yes yes listen a big thank you once more