

Environment and Climate Change Policy Brief for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)



Photo from Google Earth

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Executive Summary

This *Environment and Climate Change Policy Brief* has been developed in parallel with a *Gap Analysis* (separate document) to assist the Embassy of Sweden in Kinshasa and Sida in preparing for a new development cooperation strategy for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The purpose of the Policy Brief is to provide support to the Embassy of Sweden in Kinshasa in the process of identifying key environment and climate change challenges and opportunities and describe how they link to multi-dimensional poverty aspects in DRC, and to support identification of a potential role for Swedish development cooperation. Jointly, the Policy Brief and Gap Analysis will provide input to the upcoming work on a strategy proposal for DRC. The assignment was conducted as a desk-study during three weeks in February-April 2020.

The DRC is exceptionally well endowed with natural resources including large tropical forests, water resources, various minerals, and rich biological and ecosystem diversity. The natural resources offer huge potential for poverty reduction, power production and green economic growth. However, the DRC is currently subject to a range of environmental challenges including inadequate WASH, deforestation, natural resource depletion, waste and pollution. DRC is also vulnerable to climate change, which is expected to exacerbate many of the other challenges. These environmental challenges are often interrelated and mutually reinforcing, and have negative impacts on health, food security, productivity, and long-term sustainable development.

A majority of the Congolese population, particularly those living in poverty, are directly depending on environmental resources for their livelihood, and access to land, forests, water, energy, etc., constitutes important safety nets. When access to the environmental resources is insecure or low, the people living in poverty risk losing their health, livelihood opportunities, as well as the sources of food and shelter.

DRC is struggling with very low environmental health indicators (particularly diarrhoea, malaria and asthma). Women, children and elders are disproportionately affected. Other challenges include very low agricultural productivity and food insecurity/malnutrition, local floods and droughts, high levels of pollution (e.g. mercury), and low or no access to electricity. These deprivations are, as is commonly the case, most serious for people living in poverty, both in rural areas and in densely populated areas (e.g. urban slum and IDP camps) as they have few livelihood options. Exposure to pollution is in particular harmful for children and fertile/pregnant women.

Also the potential for economic growth in DRC is closely linked to development of its natural resources. Extraction of high-value natural resources, such as land, forests, and minerals, is prone to corruption. There is also a strong linkage between the conflicts and the country's environment and natural resources. In DRC, corruption, weak institutions and the lack of good governance is a serious impediment for poverty reduction, inclusive economic and sustainable development. General improvements in governance, including transparency, accountability, participation and the rule of law, can help the country to balance the need of making productive use of its natural resources with maintaining its asset base through development investments.

This desk study *confirms* that the areas identified in the Terms of References are relevant: i) governance and biodiversity in agriculture/forestry, ii) renewable energy, and iii) mining. The Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change proposes to add iv) WASH to the list, due to the dire state of the sector and consequences for environmental health.

Based on the Policy Brief and the parallel Gap Analysis, conclusions are made and presented in Chapter 5, together with recommendations for Swedish environmental support to the DRC. The recommendations are accompanied with a non-exhaustive list of initiatives, which are identified for each of the four areas, that may be relevant for Sida to support or link up to.