

Security Sector reform: a pre-requisite for structural environmental protection

A failed state is not able to protect the environment. According to the failed states index, the Democratic Republic of Congo is such a country. Ranking number two on the index in 2006, the state as protector is absent in public life. Human rights are being violated by underpaid or non-paid people in uniform, let alone the rights of the environment. There is a vicious circle: the resources of the country: diamond, gold, copper, zinc, coltan, timber have been the cause of conflict over several decades; these same conflicts have prevented the state from growing mature and protect the environment. Natural resources are today still being illicitly exploited, with great damage to nature.

Before one can structurally undertake projects to protect the environment, security needs to be established. What sense does it make if much effort is being put in an environmental project if militiamen destroy it the following week? The general term for establishment of security is Security Sector Reform (SSR). It encompasses normally the reform of the armed forces, the police and the justice system. It goes parallel with the fight against corruption and impunity. If these services are functioning reasonably well, there is a fair chance that environmental projects will have a lasting success. However, the government should develop a vision for SSR. The international community has to stay involved in the country, as the government is not able to do to all by itself. International organizations have to find the able, willing, competent and influential people to achieve the security goals and start to protect the environment.

There is a challenge ahead: also donor countries will have to create chemistry between their military and policemen on mission on one hand and environmentalist on the other, for security is a pre-requisite for structural environmental protection.

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