EDUCATION

IN

THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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Background of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
The Democratic Republic of Congo is the third largest country of Africa. It covers an area of 2345 410 km² and its population is estimated to around 62 million. Approximately 250 ethnic groups inhabit the DRC and most of them share many cultural traits. The DRC was formerly, in turn, the Congo Free State, Belgian Congo, Congo-Leopoldville, Congo-Kinshasa, and Zaire. Though it is located in the Central African UN sub region, the nation is economically and regionally affiliated with Southern Africa as a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

The DRC borders the Central African Republic and Sudan on the North; Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi on the East; Zambia and Angola on the South; the Republic of the Congo on the West; and is separated from Tanzania by Lake Tanganyika on the East. Second Congo War, beginning in 1998, devastated the country greatly and involved seven foreign armies and is sometimes referred to as the "African World War". Despite the signing of peace accords in 2003, fighting continues in the east of the country with intensity of rape and other sexual violence described as the worst in the world. The war is the world's deadliest conflict since World War II, killing 6 million people.

French is the official language of the DRC whereas Lingala, Kikongo, Swahili and Tshiluba are the national languages.

The average life expectancy is 57 years and the country has a high prevalence of infectious diseases including HIV/AIDS, typhoid, malaria and hepatitis. Mineral resources include, Diamonds, copper, Gold, Manganese, Coltan, Zinc, Tin, Iron ore, cadmium, silver, uranium, niobium, cobalt, crude oil and cassiterite. Agriculture includes Coffee, Tea, Oranges, Hevea, cotton, palm oil, plantain, cocoa, timber, pineapple, Rice etc…It is well known that the uranium in the first atomic bomb the American dropped at Nagasaki and Hiroshima during the second World War came from the Shikolombwe mine of l'Union Miniere du Haut Katanga, in the DRC. Africa has 15% of the world’s niobium reserves and 80% of its tantalum deposits. The DRC alone has 60% of Africa’s niobium and 80% of Africa’s tantalum. Half of the Africa rainforest is concentrated in the DRC.

Despite the fact that the DRC is potentially rich in resources, its population lives in extreme poverty because of successive bad governments

Introduction
This report has been produced by Pierrot Ngadi, a Human Rights Activist and Chairperson of Congolese Anti-Poverty Network (CAPN). It is the outcome of the concern of CAPN over the current situation in the DRC and a meeting Pierrot had with senators such as Maria Corrigan and David Norris and students from UCD and Trinity College.

The summary of the report was also sent to Peter Power, TD – Minister of State for Overseas Development via senator Maria Corrigan, who we asked to make a follow up on our behalf. The report was intended to seek assistance from educational development programme of Ireland to enable the DRC to achieve one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Why assistance from the Republic of Ireland was needed?
Ireland has a long tradition of solidarity with the DR Congo from Roger Casement, Conor Cruise O’Brien, Irish-UN peacekeeping, former Ireland President and Higher Commissioner Mary Robinson up to the present. Because of Ireland’s own experience of colonisation and reasons including, poverty, famine and mass emigration, Ireland has been actively helping developing countries to sustain their development. A
very large number of Irish people have had an active involvement in development activities in poorer countries through missionary work and volunteering with international organisations. Also no one can ignore the commitment and support of the Irish People and organisations within humanitarian crisis.

Ireland is one of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries which are committed to supporting poorer countries such to reach their MDGs and also to reduce poverty. The Irish Government has made a commitment to reach the target of 0.7% of GDP. This commitment is reflected in substantial growth in annual allocations for Office Development Assistance (ODA) in the national budget. In 2000, Ireland was providing €254 million in ODA, which represented 0.3% of GNP. By 2004, Ireland’s ODA amounted to €480 million, or 0.4% of GNP.

Ireland is ranked as the seventh most generous OECD donor, in terms of contributions per capita. In addition to this increase in ODA allocations, Ireland has called for other OECD donors to honour the commitments implicit in the Millennium Declaration, and increase levels of ODA. (Report of Ireland-MDG, 2000)

Ireland recognises the importance of supporting effective local, national, international and multilateral institutions that can contribute to global efforts to reach the MDG’s.

If Ireland can provide educational and health assistance to DRC, Ireland will directly strengthen its programmes which address priority problems such as gender inequality, and with resources that will enable the Congolese people to access basic social services. Ireland has already designed and put in place assistance through its bilateral aid programme with countries such as Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Lesotho to address the root causes of poverty, in supporting education, health, water and sanitation, and HIV/AIDS programme within these six countries.

Ireland has committed and prioritised most of its programme to African. (http://www.irishaid.gov.ie/about.asp)

**About the Millennium Development Goals**

The MDGs are eight international development goals that the 192 United Nations member states and at least 23 international organisations have agreed to achieve by the year 2015. They include reducing extreme poverty, reducing child mortality rates, fighting disease epidemics such as AIDS, and developing a global partnership for development. It is the primary responsibility of poor countries to work towards achieving these Goals. They must do their part to ensure greater accountability to citizens and efficient use of resources. But for poor countries to achieve the first goals, it is absolutely critical that they seek support and help in developing partnerships with rich countries. In the case of DRC, it would be advantageous to develop a partnership with Ireland and develop programme towards achieving universal primary education.

Ireland has already been working with six African countries. However, the DRC will not be seeking direct financial support but rather assistance with human resources. This means identifying volunteers including teachers, doctors, and students who can support education and health programme in the DRC.

**The importance of education**

Referring to the MDGs, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon explained how education played an important role to our society today. He said “We have ample evidence that education improves individual incomes, economic growth, child and maternal health, resistance to disease and environmental practices,” (http://www.endpoverty2015.org/universal-education/news/education-vital-achieving-other-anti-poverty-targets-ban-stresses/25/sep/08)

This is true because education plays a very important role in a person’s life. It gives us power and strength. Education teaches us to write, read, think, listen, speak, discover to react and achieve in our life...If the
system of education becomes accessible, adaptable, acceptable and available in the DRC, the Congolese people will contribute a lot to their country and be able to sustain themselves. Life long learning and education is a driving force towards sustainable development; the best investment any country can make to its citizens is to educate them improve their family’s well being as this will result in the stability of both individuals and the country. The opposite is a whole generation of the country is at risk. Therefore, environment, society and economics which I consider being pillars of sustainable development for any country will collapse.

**Education in DRC**

The education system in the DRC is governed by three government ministries: the Ministère de l'Enseignement Primaire, Secondaire et Professionnel (MEPSP), the Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et Universitaire (MESU) and the Ministère des Affaires Sociales (MAS). In 2002, there were over 19,000 primary schools serving 160,000 students; and 8,000 secondary schools serving 110,000 students. Primary school education in the DRC is neither compulsory nor free unlike Uganda, Malawi, Tanzania, Kenya, and Zambia which have been able to eliminate school fees providing the next generation with the knowledge to succeed in life. The money is there, but there’s no way to get it – due to the high levels of corruption in DRC (it is ranked as 150th in the world). Though money is in the government most of the money fails to reach the schools. As expressed by Winifred Kiyabo “When I was nine my father died, that’s when my problems started. My mother didn’t have any money to pay for my school fees, and the teachers used to send me home from school. But now I’m happy… school fees have been abolished, and no one is stopping me coming to school.”

Many children in the DRC are not able to go to school because parents are unable to pay the enrolment fees. Parents are customarily expected to pay teachers' salaries. In 1998, the most recent year for which data are available, the gross primary enrolment rate was 50 percent. Gross enrolments ratios are based on the number of students formally registered in primary school and therefore do not necessarily reflect actual school attendance. In 2000, 65 percent of children ages 10 to 14 years, were attending school. As a result of the 6-year civil war, over 5.2 million children in the country receive no education.

**Education is a big challenge for the DRC?**

According to the World Bank, the DRC was one of the top five countries in the world with the largest number of children out of school as of 2003. At that time, UNICEF estimated that approximately 50 percent of children of primary school age were completely outside the educational system. Churches and church networks all over DRC had established and run schools, but still, estimates of children who did not have access to education were as high as 70 percent in the East, according to the International Federation of the Red Cross.1 percent of the national budget was allocated to education. Teachers were severely underpaid, and in North Kivu the last time teachers received their state salary of US$5.82 per month was in 1995. The 15 percent gender gap in school enrolment was explained as a result of several barriers for girls to educational opportunities. For example, the opportunity cost of girls' education was extremely high, considering the prohibitively high fees for schooling and supplies, and girls' regular participation in household and farming duties.

The education system in the DRC is completely devastated. Many schools have been seriously damaged, others have been pillaged and destroyed. This has led to more than 4.6 million children out of school, including 2.5 million girls out of a total estimated 14.3 million girls nationwide. An estimation of 40 percent of school-age children did not attend school at all, with girls constituting a majority of absentees.

The forced recruitment of boys at gunpoint, especially in the most conflict-affected eastern areas of DRC, which is another aspect to take into consideration, has reduced dramatically the number of children in school according to the **Small Arms Survey 2004**. In addition, the **Small Arms Survey 2004** recorded a survey conducted in Djugu suggesting that armed confrontations have resulted in the destruction of 211 out
of a total of 228 schools since 1999, and that over 60 percent of students (39,600 down to 10,620) and teachers (1,771 down to 701) have left schools.

In mid-2003, the RCD and the Mai Mai in Kalonge, South Kivu, destroyed schools and pillaged school supplies. According to Project GRAM-Kivu, fighters burned the schoolbooks and other school supplies of the local children who were in the midst of preparing for the state exams at the close of the school year.


In July 2005, a child in eastern DRC reported to staff of World Vision that each Friday, rather than attending classes, he and his classmates were obliged to work in their teacher's fields.

Educational Costs
Several other factors account for low enrolment rates, high drop out rates and irregular attendance. For example, the high cost of primary education prevents many families from enrolling their children in school. According to the World Bank, the total annual cost for education for one child in DRC is approximately US$63. Local sources explain that this includes approximately US$24 for school fees, US$15 for school materials, US$10 for school uniforms and US$15 for shoes. The resulting perception among many children and their families is that schooling is not as profitable as working on the family land. This is particularly true for parents who are themselves illiterate and do not see the reasons for their children to attend school. In some cases, parents choose to send their sons, rather than daughters, to school due to their inability to afford schooling for all siblings, causing frustration among girls. Due to insecurity and various violent incidents on the roads to school, many parents keep their children at home rather than sending them to school. There are 14.51million workers, most work in the agricultural sector. The wage tends to be US$40 a month. The Congolese government established a minimum wage scales but the problem is that the wages have not kept in inflation.

Teachers Salaries
Teachers have been extremely underpaid, receiving approximately US$20 per month, plus an extra US$10 in transport allowance. In September 2005, the teachers union demanded salaries in the range of US$50 to US$100 per month, although the minimum national salary should be US$208 per month. The October agreement allowed for an increase in salaries by US$45 per month for teachers in Kinshasa, US$21 in Lubumbashi and US$14 for teachers in other provinces.

Funding Data

| Public Expenditure on Education as a % of Gross National Income (GNI) | 4.6% |
| % Education budget allocated to higher education | No data |
| Loan/Grant scheme in place | No data |

Testimony of Rebecca from Oxfam about schooling in the DRC
Oxfam press officer Rebecca Wynn said “The children I am meeting here in Kibati are at school, but they get no education”. The school is where they sleep. It's their home. Ever since they fled from the violence in their villages, it's where they have slept, with leaves as their mattresses and their bodies snuggled close. A blackboard hangs on the wall, unused. On the left-hand side of it, scrawled in chalk, is a roll call from some weeks ago. On that day, 37 children attended school, seven were absent. Now every schoolchild is absent. The classrooms are homes for Congo's displaced, who have nowhere else to go. It's a devastatingly sad scene.
People talk about Congo’s massive potential – its minerals, its rainforest, its fertile land. In this classroom, I feel like I’m confronted with the most important part of that potential – its people. Wherever I’ve been in Congo in the last few weeks, I’ve been struck by the energy and sheer resilience of the people I’ve met. These people want to go places and improve their lot, but are continually being pushed backwards by Congo’s relentless violence.

In the classroom, I meet Hyirabazumgu. She is 45 and has seven children. The youngest is six and the oldest is 22. She is animated and her eyes spark as she tells me how she left her home. “What can you do when death is at your door – you just have to run,” she says, “We could see and hear bullets and shelling coming from the volcano and the national park. We knew we had to get out of there. We grabbed children, and those who had time grabbed their possessions.” She is clearly concerned about her children’s future.

To sleep and live in a classroom is the saddest thing. Our children are here doing nothing.” She points to one girl walking with a young boy. The girl is clutching a plastic bag and her eyes scan the ground. “You see that girl over there – she was talking her national exams. She is 18 and clever. Now she is just idling here, with nothing to do.”

Achievement of Universal Primary Education in the DRC
As explained previously and following the above examples and testimony we can say the Congolese government must invest in education and must ensure that education is available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable as Katarina Tomasevski, the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education expressed.

The government must comply with compulsory education requirements and must respect, protect and fulfil them as its first responsibility and duty toward its citizens. These requirements are: adequate infrastructure and trained teachers to support education delivery, non discriminatory and accessible to all, appropriate and of quality. E.g. safe buildings, a school in a village, enough teachers, free textbooks and uniforms, sanitation facilities and appropriate transport.

Unfortunately in the case of the DRC, there is simply violation of rights to education because the indicators show that primary education is not free and compulsory because of lack of infrastructures and supports, despite its constitution which was approved by Congolese voters in December 2005 guaranteeing free primary and secondary schooling for all children. There is a big budge, the money allocated for all children to receive primary education is insufficient, the quality is very poor, the state is not making concrete steps towards achieving free secondary and higher education, teachers are not well trained, and don’t receive domestically competitive salaries and lack of appropriate working conditions and teaching materials. School buildings are not safe, sanitation facilities don’t exist, and including safe drinking water, a library, ICT resources and teachers are unpaid etc...

The Creation of the Congolese Anti-Poverty Network (CAPN)
The Congolese Anti-Poverty Network grew out of a series of face to face and online meetings organised by Pierrot Ngadi and Lokola Mtwali with Congolese individuals and organisations in Dublin, Birmingham, Italy, and France and in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The outcomes of these meetings were that all participants agreed to establish the aims and objectives, membership criteria, memorandum and articles of association and the website of the network.

The CAPN work together with grass root organisations, statutory and non statutory bodies to eradicate poverty and provide a solid future for Congolese people. These aims and objectives can only be achieved by partnership working, encouraging exchange programmes, visits and volunteering, providing human
rights education promoting and supporting formal and informal education, and empowering people in communities.

Conclusion
Education is a driving force towards sustainable development and a factor in reducing poverty and inequality and for laying the basis for sustained economic growth.

From its generosity towards the poor countries, Ireland can assist the DRC to build sustainable education systems appropriate both to the needs of the Congolese people and the country through a bilateral project with the DRC. This will help the DRC to overcome those barriers within the Congolese education systems, reduce poverty and assist the country to achieve the MDG's objectives as Mozambique and Uganda who have benefited from bilateral assistance from Ireland. If Ireland can help and assist the DRC rebuild its education systems that will enable every Congolese to have an opportunity to make a better life for themselves. Unfortunately, too many children in the DRC today grow up without this chance, because they have been denied their basic right to even attend primary school. Education lies at the heart of any economy – an educated workforce increases trade, employment and money for the government. Support the youth of the DRC to enable growth in the country.

Recommendations
- Building effective link between Ireland and DRC by facilitating the transfer and exchange knowledge, skills and expertise to and from the Congo.
- Undertaking actions for mutual benefit
- Ensuring that sustainable development is at the core of all work undertaken mainly with education
- Supporting Congolese Diaspora community in Ireland in their efforts to respond to the development in their home land
- Promoting and encouraging international sustainable development volunteering to Irish public and public sector staff
- Working with partners to facilitate the work of Congolese Diaspora community in Ireland in maximising their impact on MDG delivery in the Congo
- Encouraging public sector placements and twinning which contribute to MDG delivery.
- Sponsoring events organised by CAPN that will enable Irish government and public including NGOs working in the Congo to understand more the education system within the Congo.