



CASSANDRA

CASSANDRA LOCAL CLIMATE FORUM FACTSHEET

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO





CASSANDRA TOPICS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: HEALTH, GENDER, MIGRATION AND CONFLICT

HEALTH

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a nation rich in natural resources and home to the world's second-largest rainforest, is on the frontline of the global climate crisis. The effects of climate change are deeply felt in this Central African country, where rising temperatures, unpredictable rainfall, and extreme weather events are wreaking havoc on ecosystems and communities. Beyond environmental damage, the impacts of climate change are acutely visible in the nation's health landscape, where vulnerable populations face mounting threats from disease, malnutrition, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure.



The DRC's tropical climate has long supported the Congo Basin rainforest, a global treasure that absorbs vast amounts of carbon dioxide and regulates regional weather. However, the rapid progression of climate change is destabilising this delicate system. More frequent droughts, intensified rainfall, and severe flooding are altering traditional weather patterns. These changes are exacerbated by human activities such as deforestation, driven by logging, agriculture, and charcoal production.

Deforestation in the DRC contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions, accelerating global warming. Paradoxically, the destruction of these rainforests also leaves local communities more vulnerable to climate-related shocks, as the forests provide natural buffers against extreme weather.

The health impacts of climate change in the DRC are profound and multifaceted. Rising temperatures and altered rainfall patterns are creating the perfect storm for the spread of diseases, food insecurity, and water scarcity. Increased humidity has expanded the habitats



of disease vectors such as mosquitoes. Malaria, already one of the leading causes of death in the DRC, is becoming more widespread as these conditions enable mosquitoes to thrive in areas previously unaffected.

Flooding, a growing problem due to erratic rainfall, is contaminating water sources across the country. This has led to outbreaks of cholera, dysentery, and other waterborne illnesses, especially in densely populated areas and displacement camps where sanitation is poor.

The DRC's agricultural sector, which employs the majority of its population, is particularly sensitive to climate change. Droughts and floods have reduced crop yields, leading to widespread malnutrition, especially among children. This situation is further compounded by poverty, which limits access to alternative food sources. Rising temperatures, especially in urban areas, have contributed to a rise in heat-related illnesses such as dehydration and heatstroke. Vulnerable populations, including the elderly and outdoor workers, are disproportionately affected.

The DRC's healthcare infrastructure is struggling to meet the growing demand for services. Decades of conflict and underinvestment have left the system fragile, with large portions of the population lacking access to even basic medical care. Rural areas, where most Congolese live, are particularly underserved, leaving communities with few defences against climate-induced health crises. Over 70% of the population lives below the poverty line, making it difficult for families to adapt to environmental changes or afford medical treatment when needed. Women and children, already marginalised, face the greatest risks.

MIGRATION

The Democratic Republic of Congo stands at the intersection of complex challenges posed by climate change and migration. With a population heavily reliant on agriculture, fishing, and forestry, the DRC faces significant vulnerabilities to the impacts of climate change. These challenges are further compounded by the socio-political instability that has characterised much of the nation's history. Climate change is increasingly becoming a critical factor driving migration within the country, exacerbating existing social, economic, and environmental pressures.

The DRC is uniquely susceptible to climate change due to its geographical diversity and dependence on natural resources. Rising temperatures, unpredictable rainfall patterns, and more frequent extreme weather events are disrupting ecosystems and livelihoods. For example, prolonged droughts in the southern regions, particularly in the provinces of Katanga and Kasai, have reduced agricultural yields and water availability. Conversely, heavy rains and flooding in the northern and central parts of the country have caused soil erosion, destroyed crops, and displaced communities. Climate change exacerbates deforestation driven by agricultural expansion, logging, and mining. The loss of forests not only diminishes biodiversity but also reduces the carbon sequestration capacity, contributing to a feedback loop that accelerates global warming.

Climate-induced migration in the DRC is primarily internal, with rural populations moving toward urban areas or to regions perceived as less affected by climate change. However,



this migration is often forced rather than voluntary, driven by the loss of arable land, declining water resources, and the destruction of homes and infrastructure.



Urban centres such as Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, and Goma are witnessing an influx of migrants, leading to overcrowding and putting strain on already limited resources and services. Informal settlements are expanding, characterised by poor living conditions, lack of access to clean water and sanitation, and heightened vulnerability to health crises.

In conflict-affected regions such as North Kivu and Ituri, the interplay between climate change and migration becomes even more complex. Climate stress can exacerbate competition over scarce resources, such as arable land and water, fuelling intercommunal tensions and displacement. This dynamic creates a vicious cycle, where conflict and climate change feed into each other, perpetuating instability and human suffering. The socio-economic consequences of climate-induced migration in the DRC are profound. Migrants often face challenges in securing stable livelihoods, leading to high unemployment rates. Children in migrating families frequently drop out of school, diminishing their future opportunities and perpetuating cycles of poverty.

Moreover, the strain on urban infrastructure and public services affects both migrants and host communities. Limited access to healthcare, education, and housing in urban areas creates conditions ripe for social unrest and inequality. In rural areas, the departure of working-age populations can lead to labour shortages, further hampering agricultural productivity and deepening food insecurity.



GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality remains a pressing issue globally, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is no exception. The DRC grapples with deeply entrenched gender disparities. These are rooted in historical, cultural, and socio-political factors, exacerbated by decades of conflict, weak governance, and the growing threat of climate change. The status of women in the DRC is heavily influenced by traditional norms and patriarchal structures that dominate society. Historically, Congolese culture has relegated women to subordinate roles, limiting their participation in decision-making processes within families, communities, and the nation at large. Women are often viewed as caretakers and are expected to confine themselves to domestic roles, while men dominate public life and leadership positions. Such norms create systemic barriers to women's access to education, employment, and political participation.



The DRC faces significant socio-economic challenges that disproportionately affect women. According to the United Nations, the majority of Congolese women live in poverty, with limited access to basic services such as healthcare and education. Girls are less likely than boys to complete primary school, and the gender gap widens significantly in secondary and tertiary education. This lack of educational opportunities reduces women's prospects for economic independence and perpetuates cycles of poverty.

The economic exclusion of women is further compounded by discriminatory practices in employment. Women are often relegated to informal, low-paying jobs and are underrepresented in leadership roles across sectors. In agriculture, which employs most of the population, women perform most of the labour yet have limited control over land ownership and decision-making.

Climate change has emerged as a critical factor that exacerbates gender inequality in the DRC. Environmental challenges disproportionately affect women, who are more reliant on natural resources for their livelihoods and are often responsible for water, firewood, and



food collection in rural communities. In the face of climate change, women in the DRC bear the brunt of its impacts due to their socio-economic marginalisation and limited access to adaptive resources. For example, prolonged droughts or erratic rainfall can reduce agricultural yields, jeopardising food security and increasing the workload for women who are tasked with feeding their families. Additionally, the scarcity of resources caused by climate change often forces women and girls to travel longer distances to collect water or firewood, exposing them to risks of physical harm or gender-based violence. Climate-induced migration further compounds these issues. When families are displaced due to environmental disasters, women are often left in precarious conditions in camps or urban slums, where they face heightened risks of exploitation and limited access to healthcare, education, and employment.

One of the most critical manifestations of gender inequality in the DRC is the pervasive issue of gender-based violence (GBV). The country has been described as the "rape capital of the world" due to the widespread use of sexual violence as a weapon of war during ongoing conflicts. Even outside conflict zones, GBV remains endemic, with high rates of domestic violence and sexual harassment reported. Climate change can exacerbate these dynamics by increasing resource scarcity and stress within communities, leading to a rise in violence against women and sextortion which is a phenomenon that CASSANDRA is investigating in numerous countries.

Corruption and weak governance hinder the effective implementation of gender equality policies. Cultural resistance to change further complicates efforts, as traditional attitudes toward gender roles are deeply ingrained. Moreover, the ongoing conflict in parts of the country diverts resources and attention from long-term development initiatives, including gender equality. Climate change intensifies these challenges, creating a more urgent need for integrated solutions that address both environmental and gender issues. This is why it is so important that climate adaptation strategies must incorporate gender-sensitive approaches. This must include investing in programmes that empower women with skills and resources to adapt to environmental changes, such as sustainable farming techniques, access to clean energy, and participation in climate governance. Economic empowerment initiatives, such as microfinance programmes and vocational training, can help women achieve financial independence and reduce gender disparities in employment. The fostering of community dialogues and engaging men as allies in gender equality efforts can challenge harmful stereotypes and promote cultural change.

CONFLICT

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has long been mired in cycles of violence and instability, driven by a combination of political, economic, and social factors. Despite its vast natural wealth, including minerals such as cobalt and coltan critical for global industries, the DRC remains one of the world's poorest and most conflict-ridden countries. The ongoing conflicts are rooted in a complex interplay of historical legacies, governance challenges, resource exploitation, and regional dynamics, with the added threat of climate change compounding these issues.

The DRC has been plagued by armed conflicts for decades, many of which stem from the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Refugee flows and militia movements destabilised the eastern provinces, and the ensuing wars drew in numerous regional actors,



transforming the country into a battleground for competing interests. The official end of the Second Congo War in 2003 did little to bring lasting peace, as myriad armed groups continue to operate, particularly in eastern DRC.



These groups, such as the M23, Mai-Mai militias, and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), thrive on the region's weak governance and abundant natural resources. They engage in illegal mining, extortion, and violence against civilians, including mass killings and sexual violence. The Congolese government, often characterised by corruption and inefficiency, struggles to maintain authority in these areas. International peacekeeping missions, such as the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), have had limited success in restoring stability. The DRC's wealth in natural resources, while a potential boon, has been a curse in the context of its ongoing conflicts. Minerals such as coltan, used in electronics, and cobalt, critical for electric vehicle batteries, have become central to the global economy. However, these resources are often extracted under conditions of armed conflict, with proceeds funding militias and perpetuating violence. The term '*conflict minerals*' aptly describes this dynamic, as the exploitation of resources directly fuels instability and human rights abuses.

Climate change has emerged as a significant factor exacerbating instability in the DRC. The country is highly vulnerable to climate impacts, these changes threaten agriculture, the primary livelihood for the majority of Congolese citizens, and exacerbate food insecurity, displacement, and competition over resources. One clear example is the increasing competition for arable land and water. As climate change alters the availability of these critical resources, tensions between communities, particularly farmers and pastoralists, are likely to escalate. In eastern DRC, where armed groups already exploit resource scarcity to fuel conflict, climate change creates fertile ground for further violence.

Natural disasters are forcing communities to leave their homes, creating waves of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and placing additional pressure on already fragile regions. These movements can exaggerate existing ethnic and social tensions, further destabilising the



region. Ironically, global efforts to combat climate change may also have unintended consequences for the DRC. The demand for cobalt and other minerals essential to green technologies, such as batteries for renewable energy storage and electric vehicles, has surged. While this demand represents an economic opportunity for the DRC, it also risks intensifying conflict and environmental degradation if not managed sustainably. The rush to extract these resources has led to unregulated mining practices, environmental destruction, and human rights abuses, including child labour. The lack of effective governance mechanisms to regulate the mining sector means that the benefits of this demand often bypass the Congolese people, instead enriching armed groups and foreign corporations.

CASSANDRA PILOT LOCAL CLIMATE FORUMS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

NATUREL CD is a Congolese media organisation dedicated to promoting environmental protection, combating global warming, and advocating for sustainable living. By raising awareness and mobilising communities, the organisation addresses critical challenges affecting the environment and public health, fostering a culture of responsibility and action. At the core of NATUREL CD's work is a commitment to educating communities on sustainable practices to safeguard natural ecosystems and reduce environmental degradation. Much of its work throughout the country is about raising awareness about the severe impacts of global warming, advocating for renewable energy, and inspiring collective action against climate change whilst supporting dietary and lifestyle changes that contribute to improved health while minimising environmental impact. NATUREL CD, the CASSANDRA Local Climate Forum (LCF) in the DRC, collaborates with youth movements across the Congo to champion climate justice campaigns. Recently, alongside 145 youth organisations, the group participated in a powerful demonstration demanding action from local leaders. NATUREL CD highlights the devastating human and material losses caused by climate change while calling for accountability and urgent intervention. This has led to the submission of a memorandum to the government, urging the application of the Climate Justice Law. This significant step underscores the role of young people in driving climate action and holding leaders accountable for environmental degradation.

KINSHASA

Kinshasa, the bustling capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo, is a vibrant city situated on the southern bank of the Congo River, directly opposite Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of Congo. (It is often misunderstood by non-Africans, that these are two separate countries). As one of Africa's largest and most dynamic urban centres, it is home to over 15 million residents and serves as the country's economic, political, and cultural hub. Despite facing challenges such as rapid urbanisation and infrastructure pressures, Kinshasa remains a city of resilience and creativity, symbolising the vibrant heart of the DRC. In Kinshasa, there is a need to focus on addressing specific environmental challenges, such as the flooding crisis. Rapid urbanisation, inadequate water resource management, and climate change have made the city particularly vulnerable to floods, which have caused significant human and economic losses. These floods have polluted household water



supplies, leading to waterborne diseases that disproportionately affect women and children. The CASSANDRA LCF is seeking to investigate the root causes of flooding, advocate for improved infrastructure and sustainable urban planning, promote community-driven solutions, such as reforestation and better waste management.

GOMA

Goma, a large city in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, serves as the capital of North Kivu province. Nestled along the northern shore of Lake Kivu and near the border with Rwanda, Goma is a vital hub for trade, culture, and humanitarian efforts in the region. Despite its picturesque setting, the city faces significant challenges, including its proximity to Mount Nyiragongo, one of the world's most active volcanoes.

Eruptions in 2002 and 2021 caused widespread destruction, highlighting the vulnerability of the city's infrastructure. Goma also grapples with ongoing security concerns due to armed conflicts in the region, which have led to a significant influx of internally displaced persons. Despite these challenges, Goma remains a vibrant community, with its people striving to rebuild and improve their city amidst adversity. It is a focal point for international aid organisations.

Recognising that the effects of war and displacement extend beyond physical losses to emotional and psychological wounds, the CASSANDRA LCF, in partnership with other organisations, created a summer camp for displaced children living in the Bulengo camp near Goma. This initiative brought children from Goma to visit their displaced peers, creating opportunities for healing and joy through games, storytelling, and creative



activities. The programme provided a safe space for children to process their trauma and reconnect with their sense of normalcy. By fostering empathy and unity, the initiative also



built bridges between communities and highlighted the importance of addressing the mental health needs of displaced populations.

CASSANDRA LEADERS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The DRC Cassandra Local Climate Forum is led by:

DENISE KAVIRA KYALWAHI – NATUREL CD See: <https://naturelcd.net/>

IF YOU WANT TO BECOME INVOLVED IN CASSANDRA

1: Cassandra extends an invitation to all interested parties, be they governmental agencies, NGOs, research entities, cultural actors, interest groups or concerned members of the public to participate in the establishment of Local Climate Forums and /or become involved in the initial observation and monitoring of the progress of the actions of the programme.

2. Cassandra invites any interested stakeholder to attend and actively participate in the online forums organised by Eurecat which will take place in January, June and December 2025.

3. Cassandra invites participation in the third Cassandra Conference coordinated by Eurecat which will be held in February 2026.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For a detailed explanation of CASSANDRA see:

https://cdn.eurecat.org/PDF/Cassandra2023/Cassandra_conclusions.pdf



All sessions of the Cassandra Conference 2021 and 2023 are available on YOUTUBE and can be accessed together with an ample range of resources at the CASSANDRA website: <https://cassandraconference.org/>

Follow CASSANDRA on LinkedIn at: <https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/cassandra-conference>

For any further information, suggestions or enquiries please contact: Dr Richard Elelman richard.elelman@eurecat.org

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