CF

CENTRAL AFRICA

Officer Block 2 and Enlisted Block 3

An Introduction to the Central Africa Region

Regional, Culture, and Language Familiarization (RCLF) Program

Table of Contents

Introduction

One must distinguish between the study of regions, countries, and cultures. Chapters 1 through 6 in this document introduce a region and provide some information about its countries and their relationships. They do not introduce a culture or cultures. Those chapters simply provide knowledge about the region and the environment in which people with different cultures live.

Regions and states do not have a single culture; instead they have multiple, diverse cultures. Cultures are not necessarily bound by national borders. There may be multiple cultures in a single state, while people sharing a single culture may live in more than one state.

The case study in Chapter 7 is about one specific culture in the region. Building upon the information provided in chapters 1 through 6, Chapter 7 introduces one of the many cultures in the Central Africa region, using concepts discussed in the Operational Culture General document.

Why This Region is Relevant to You as a Marine

"They want to learn; they're excited to meet us and be with us"
                                        Capt Justin Dentel, USMC, SPMAGTF-CR-AF Burundi team leader

Central Africa is considered a priority region for the U.S. because of growing economic and security interests. In recent years, Central Africa has been the epicenter of significant conflict rooted in mineral and resource management, identity, and governance.[1]

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Central African Republic (CAR) have suffered the region's highest casualties in the last 20 years due to prolonged civil conflict. Rwanda and Burundi have struggled with identity issues, but have made significant strides in the post 1994 genocide years.[2] Other threats include militant groups such as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and M-23, as well as the illicit trafficking of weapons and minerals.

The U.S. continues to offer training assistance to light infantry battalions in the DRC, Gabon, Rwanda, and other countries in the region in order to promote peace and security.[3]

The United States is actively engaged in training forces in this region, mitigating threats to civilians, and regional security.[4] The Marine Corps now deploys forces when needed to the region, in support of U.S. Africa Command (U.S. AFRICOM) missions.[5]

Some examples of USAFRICOM's missions include:

- Conducting counterterrorism activities to deter or defeat the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and other militia groups operating in Central Africa.
- Conducting security assistance missions to enhance the capability and capacity of America's Central African partners.
- Helping partner states build defense institutions and military forces that are capable, sustainable, and subordinate to civilian authority.
- Conducting military operations as part of a coordinated U.S. government action, and to help protect populations from mass atrocities.
- Conducting Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HA/DR) operations.

There are a significant number of foreign troops on the ground in this region— with more than 9000 troops combined from France, other European countries, and the African Union in the CAR.[6] France alone deployed over 2000 troops to the Central African Republic after the 2013 *coup d'état*.

The presence of U.S. forces in this region is limited to the pursuit of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), whose activities span four countries including the Central African Republic, and the Democratic

Special-Purpose MAGTF Crisis Response, Africa Engaging Troops. Each year, U.S. Marines take part in a variety of exercises in Africa (Source: DVIDS)

Republic of the Congo. Although the local population has had limited contact with American troops, Americans are generally well received. In 2014, a senior LRA commander turned himself in to U.S. troops in the Central African Republic; a move that was perceived favorably throughout the region. U.S. forces handed him over to African Union's Regional Task Force (AURTF) in Uganda.[7] The surrender to U.S. forces may have been possible because the U.S. troops are seen as neutral players in the region.

TACTICAL TIP: Many military forces in this region have, in some cases, abused their powers and neglected their mandate to protect civilians and instead committed atrocities against them. This is especially evident in the DRC, where government forces (FARDC) have been accused alongside rebel forces of rape and murder.

Geographic Overview

Why a Geographic Overview Matters to You as a Marine

Geographic features include physical and biological factors tied to location, topography, climate, soil, environmental hazards, flora, and fauna. These features influence human and social characteristics such as beliefs, behaviors, social organization, economy, and politics, to name a few. This is not to say that geography determines how people and societies behave, but rather that it has varying effects on what they believe and do.

The locations of rivers, mountains, deserts, and coasts have great influence on where people live, what crops can be raised, and what modes of transportation are suitable. Climate and weather influence how people dress, work, and earn a living. Natural disasters like hurricanes, flooding, and earthquakes can devastate a region, and displace a great number of people.

Global Location

Central Africa is part of Sub-Saharan Africa. It consists of three land-locked countries and five coastal countries. Burundi, Rwanda, and the Central African Republic are landlocked, and Cameroon, Republic of Congo Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome and Principe are coastal countries. This region stretches east from Africa's Atlantic coast into the Great Rift Valley, covering over 3.9 million square km (1.5 million square miles) of land area. This is about two-fifths the size of the United States, with a travel distance comparable to that between Washington DC to Phoenix, Arizona, roughly 2,400 km (1,500 miles).

Countries

The following countries are included in the Central Africa region:
- Burundi
- Cameroon
- The Central African Republic (CAR)
- Republic of Congo, hereinafter referred to as Congo (Brazzaville)
- The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)
- Equatorial Guinea
- Rwanda
- Sao Tome and Principe
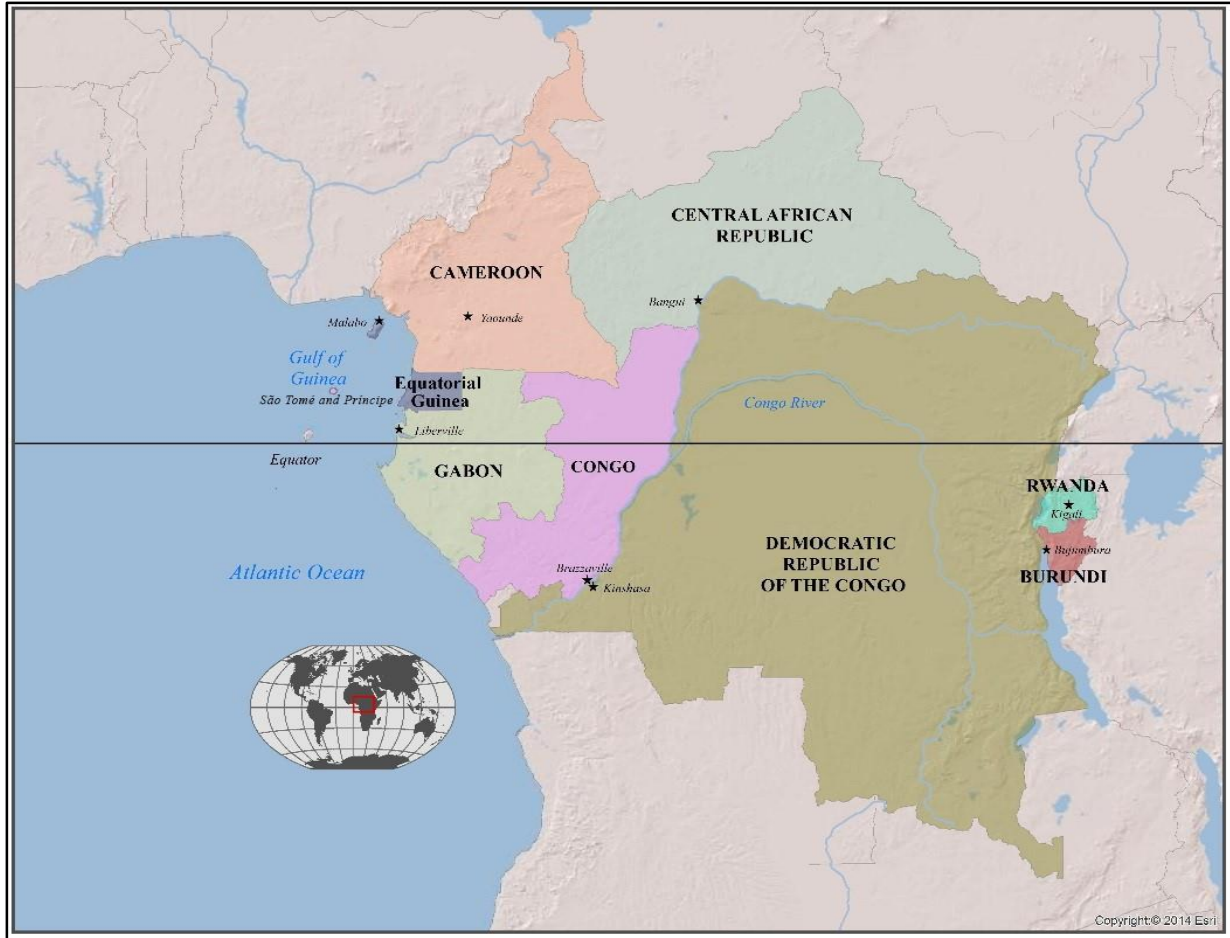
Map of the Central Africa Region (Source: Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning)

Topography

Topography has an important impact on cultural, political, and social structures in Central Africa. The locations of rivers, mountains, deserts, coasts, and boundaries have determined population density, economic activity, and cultural diversity. The topography of this region is defined by the plateau that lies 900m and falls 300m[8], with the edge of the Sahara bordering some areas of the Sahelian countries. Hilly plateaus stretch across central Cameroon and the CAR, and tropical rainforests blanket the northern Republic of the Congo and the DRC. Additionally, mountainous ranges like the Mount Cameroon in Cameroon, the Mitumba Mountains in the DRC, and the Ruwenzori predominantly stretch across Uganda, but connect with the Virunga Ranges. The Virunga Mountain ranges extend from Uganda through Rwanda and the DRC. The Virunga are volcanic ranges that spread 50 miles and have 8 volcanic peaks with the highest at 4,507m.[9]
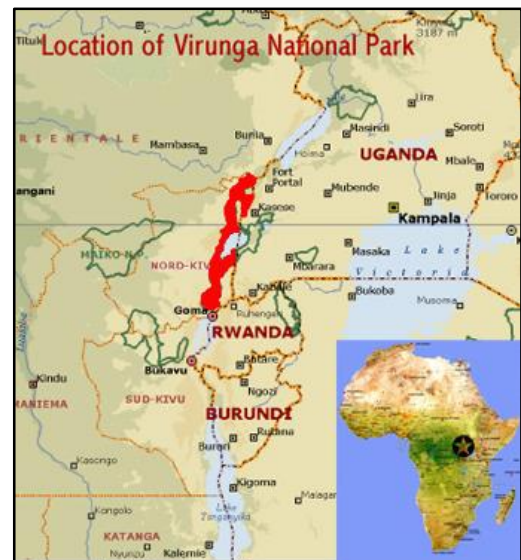
Virunga Mountain Ranges (Source: African World Heritage Sites)

The topography of Central Africa has changed over time due to deforestation, erosion, human settlement, displacement, and mining. Large mines in this region have altered the surface and soil composition forming craters, exposing the region to erosion. Other significant topographical features include the coastal lowlands, lakes, and riverine networks contained within the Congo basin, which extends 1.6 million square miles.[10]

Land

Central Africa's varied terrain includes coastal plains in the west, savannas in the east, low-lying river basins in the central area, and volcanic mountains that expand from eastern DRC into the high plateaus of Rwanda and Burundi.

The soil is fertile and the climate is generally favorable for agriculture, but conflict and displacement over the last 20 years have impacted agricultural production and human settlement. In the DRC for example, there are underlying tensions between locals and refugees, and the refugee resettlement has given rise to land disputes that, in the future, may exacerbate the current conflict in eastern Congo.[11]

Additionally, because this region is mineral-rich, land is an important commodity to small scale artisanal miners, the government, and large multinational corporations. The government of the DRC has signed extraction agreements with large multinational organizations to operate in the DRC. These operations are also impacted by small scale miners whose activities contribute to the local economy.

Apart from being used for mining, agricultural production, and settlement, land is a commodity that is bought, sold, passed on as an inheritance, and used as a means of credit across the region. Traditionally, chiefs were responsible for land allocation, but these customary land allocation structures are no longer in use. In fact, they are contentious and often lead to conflict. Traditional leaders, however, remain instrumental in mediating land disputes in rural areas.

Waterways

The Atlantic Ocean and Central Africa's many rivers and lakes serve as transportation avenues throughout the region, enhancing trade and economic development.

Congo River (DRC) (Source: MONUSCO/Myriam Asmani)

The dominant water feature of the area is the Congo River Basin, the second-largest watershed in the world. The Congo basin extends across six countries — Cameroon, CAR, DRC, Congo (Brazzaville), Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon. The adjacent land is fertile and swampy, and provides for both man and animals. The Congo Basin is home to over 10,000 species of plants, 400 species of mammals, 700 species of fish, and 1000 bird species. The human population across the Basin is approximately 75 million people.[12] Other rivers in Central Africa include the Ubangi, Gabon, and Benue Rivers. All three rivers are surrounded by the Virunga Mountain ranges and are home to hundreds of plant and animal species, in addition to human settlements.

Many of the rivers in this region do not have bridges; instead, ferries carry people and vehicles across large rivers. However, there are plans to develop a major hydro-electric power plant on the Congo River that is expected to generate approximately 4800 megawatts (MW) of power, making it the largest hydropower dam in Africa.[13]

This region is also known for its African Great Lakes; the four that lie within the Central Africa region are Lakes Albert, Edward, Kivu, and Tanganyika.

Lake Kivu is 1463 miles above sea level and is shared by Rwanda and the DRC. It is significant because it sits in a volcanic region and emits methane gases that are harmful to humans, flora, and fauna.[14] However, there is a methane expansion project on the lake to mitigate the impact of gas eruption on the lake.

Lake Albert is 100 miles long and is connected to Lake Edward (48 miles) by the Semlinki River, which is 143 miles long.[15]

Climate and Weather

Central Africa straddles the Equator, causing climates across the region to be mainly hot, humid, and tropical. The highlands of Burundi, the eastern DRC, and Rwanda have relatively temperate climates with average temperatures 74-78°F. However, in Burundi, the eastern DRC, the Rwandan highlands, and mountainous regions of Cameroon it gets cooler during the rainy seasons and through the night throughout most of the year. The extreme northern areas of Cameroon and the CAR experience hot, dry, semi-arid, and desert conditions.[16]

The coastal areas of Central Africa and its rainforests are among the wettest places on earth. Seasonal weather can be grouped into a dry and wet season. The dry season, typically lasting from November to April, is characterized by little or no rainfall. Rainy seasons typically last from May to October. Spring rains are heavier and last longer, while autumn rains are brief and unpredictable.[17]

Environmental Hazards

Central Africa faces numerous environmental challenges. Environmental hazards limit access to transportation, healthcare, and educational opportunities; these hazards may influence specific societies to varying degrees within a given country in Central Africa. These same hazards could also limit a Marine's ability to gain access to critical areas or people in the region.

This region is prone to low seismic activity along the Great African Rift Valley and the Cameroon mountain range. Additionally, because this region has numerous rivers and lakes, the region is prone to flooding in the rainy season, due to swelled rivers. These natural disasters often have second- and third-order effects, like pandemics of waterborne diseases and increased likelihoods of vector-borne diseases such as malaria.

Drought and Famine

While most of Central Africa lies within the Congo River Basin -- the wettest region in Africa -- the northern reaches of Cameroon and the CAR are outside the basin. These areas experience arid conditions due to climate change and proximity to the Sahel. This is in contrast to recurrent floods

and erratic rains in north Cameroon, which have in the past significantly impacted people's ability to sustain a viable livelihood.[18]

In addition to the climactic conditions, food insecurity in this region has also been attributed to political and economic instability. Displaced communities across this region have had unduly stressed food production for years. In response, the international community has attempted to mitigate the impact. In 2013, for example, the United Nations warned of a rise in malnutrition in the CAR if the food needs of an estimated 500,000 were not met.[19] To stem food insecurity in this post conflict zone, the World Food Program (WFP) scaled up its program and with the assistance of U.S. Agency for

USAID provides humanitarian assistance in Central Africa (Source: USAID)

International Development (USAID) expanded its reach to meet the needs of over one million people, including the displaced. Further, USAID partnered with United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to bridge the nutrition gap for children, as well as pregnant and lactating women in the CAR. In 2014 alone, the year hardest hit by conflict, USAID contributed $32.5 million to improve food consumption and reduce malnutrition.[20]

Harmattan winds

The northern parts of Central Africa experience a weather phenomenon called the *Harmattan*. This hot, dry windstorm blows from the Sahara Desert across West Africa and countries in Central Africa that border the desert, including north Cameroon and the CAR. The winds reduce visibility and cause overcast skies. A single typical event varies in intensity and can last anywhere from a day to two as it moves

TACTICAL TIP: Sandstorms are a safety hazard and may also cause maintenance problems in vehicles, generators, computers, and other electronics, thereby impeding logistics and communication.

along to the next town. The winds impact agricultural production and the local economy, hampering the activities of day wage earners. In 2010, the yellow haze engulfed northern Nigeria, and swiftly moved south to Lagos, leaving a layer of sand on surfaces. Nigeria's encounter with a major Harmattan led to the cancellation of flights, problems with a variety of mechanical equipment, and many people suffering medical issues that included head colds and asthma attacks.[21] The *Harmattan* season lasts from November to March.[22]

Landslides

The rocks and debris that cover the slopes of volcanoes often shake loose during earthquakes or eruptions, causing avalanches during the rainy season. Mounts Nyiragongo and Nyamuragira are two such volcanoes in the DRC. Mount Nyiragongo last erupted in 2002, and spewed smoke and steam.[23] In 1977, volcanic activity in Central Africa took 1000 lives. Each time there is seismic activity in this region, communities around the mountains are exposed to the dangers that come with living in close proximity to volcanic activity. In addition to volcanic

Volcanic Mountains in Central Africa (Source USGS)

activity, Mount Nyamuragira is known for mudslides, which have in the past left communities devastated.[24]

Limnic eruptions

"Lake overturns" or exploding lakes are rare natural disasters. The water at the bottom of deep lakes often contains high levels of saturated carbon dioxide and methane gas. Limnic eruptions occur when something, such as an earthquake, disturbs the lake, causing the gas to chemically react, like the bubbling that occurs when opening a can of soda. The carbon dioxide suddenly erupts from the deep lake water and spreads across the surface of the lake into the surrounding land. In towns and villages surrounded by hills, the odorless, colorless gas kills without warning. In 1986, an eruption occurred at Lake Nyos in Cameroon, releasing 1.6 million tons of CO_2, killing 2000 people and displacing 15,000 more who later suffered health effects from the gas.[25]

Lake Nyos, Cameroon (Source: Wikipedia)

Deforestation

This region has the largest expanse of forest cover in Africa, making timber a major economic resource. Logging has historically been conducted on a large scale; however, DRC banned large-scale logging in 2002 to counter deforestation. Policing the ban has been a challenge. In 2005, the World Bank issued a $90 million grant to the government of the DRC to police existing concessions and set up a sustainable program to manage the ecosystem.[26] Today, the government only grants logging permits to small-scale artisan loggers.[27] The informal timber sector provides a living for small scale loggers who supply

Logging in the Congo Basin (Source: SciDev.net)

local carpenters for use in furniture making and other wood based products. Also, because most rural households use charcoal or wood for cooking, loggers make a good income supplying local consumers with firewood.

Additionally, due to a lack of enforcement of existing laws, unregulated logging has opened up the region to criminal activity, including the smuggling of rare timber. (Criminals operating in Congo Basin are also killing mountain gorillas.) Criminal activities have had an adverse impact on tourism; tourism is a key contributor to the gross domestic product (GDP) in this region. Indiscriminate logging has displaced forest communities, such as the Pygmies, and the relocation of mountain gorillas, a major tourist attraction.

Historical Overview

Why History Matters to You as a Marine

History provides a knowledge of how people, institutions, and states in a region evolved into what they are today. It also provides insights into people's collective memory about their group and others. In other words, history not only shapes a region's current affairs, but also tells us something about the historical roots of the individual and group identities of its inhabitants.

History does not predict how groups, institutions, and states in a region may behave in the future. Instead, it provides insights into what is possible and probable.

Pre-Colonization

Leadership Structures

Prior to the arrival of European explorers in the sixteenth century, Central Africa remained relatively decentralized with no defined state boundaries. The social and traditional leadership structures were built around kinship. Notably, the traditional leadership structures across all societies in this region were similar prior to colonization: a society was headed by a chief who was perceived to be superior both socially and spiritually. The central figure in a given society was often assisted by a council of elders drawn from several villages spread across the kingdom.[28] Typically, each village had a council of elders that would manage its affairs, including organizing communal ceremonies and rites of passage such as male circumcision. Among the Bakongo for example, the largest ethnic group in this region, several villages were organized into a district; several districts were organized into a province. The province was represented by a governor who was appointed by the King of Bakongo. At each level, a council of elders played an advisory role and was instrumental in conflict resolution. However, only the King had the authority to make trade agreements or declare war.

The Arrival of Christian Missionaries

The first missionaries arrived in this region before the 1500s, but they did not have much of an impact until the 1800s, largely because the terrain made accessing the interior difficult. The London Baptist Missionaries, for example, arrived in 1845 off the Cameroon coast and traveled to the interior following the trade routes.[29] William F. Burton and James Salter, another set of missionaries, traveled through Southern Africa and entered the Congo in 1915.[30] Like other missionaries who had preceded them, Burton and Salter experienced great hardship due to Central Africa's dense forests, wildlife, and diseases like malaria. Language was another obstacle, but when missionaries learned the local dialects,

they established schools in the villages. Missionary activities marked the beginning of formal education in this region. As the number of new converts increased, the local missions began to send them out as lay leaders to work as teachers, and to proselytize to communities in the interior.

Additionally, the activities of missionaries facilitated the migration of communities from the interior to other parts of the region as far north as Sudan.[31] Officials in royal courts through Central Africa began to learn English; kings began to use interpreters to interact with missionaries and traders, thereby expanding their influence over the territory.

Missionaries also hastened the "opening up" of the region to traders; this empowered smaller traditional authorities and reduced the size larger ones. For example, the Kongo Kingdom was expansive before the arrival of Europeans; by the 1800s, however, authority of the Kongo Kingdom had decreased while other kingdoms – notably the Chokwe, Lunda, and the Ovibundu Kingdoms -- gained influence through trade.[32]

This "discomfort" with the new form of trade, along with the decision by the British government to ban the slave trade in the 1800s, led to the decline of the trade and a demand for other goods. The Industrial Revolution in the West also forced European countries to look at Africa's trade potential; the increased interest prompted many countries to actively compete for the African markets. As a result of this competition, France occupied Gabon and Congo (Brazzaville); Belgium occupied the territory now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the largest country in this region.[33] In 1884, the European powers convened a conference to discuss the exploration of Africa. The Berlin conference formally ended slave trade and partitioned Africa.[34] In effect establishing various European colonies in Africa.

The Expansion Trade and the Advent of Slave Trade

The most significant event in the pre-colonial era was the emergence of the transatlantic slave trade in 1444. There was an increased demand for labor in the new world. The Portuguese arrived in this region. The demand for labor in the West made slaves much more valuable. These events collectively prompted the growth and expansion of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade throughout this region.

Portuguese ships transported slaves as cargo from the West and Central African coast to Brazil, the Caribbean, and North America to work in sugar plantations. Ships returned to Africa loaded with European goods, including sugar and cotton, cloth, cooking utensils, umbrellas, knives, gun powder, brass, and later, rubber and ivory.

Throughout the region, traditional authorities allowed European traders to have access to trade routes; facilitated the activities of middlemen and traders who traveled throughout the region to sell goods in exchange for slaves. Slaves from Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Congo (Brazzaville), DRC, and Sao Tome and Principe were transported to European ports in England and Spain, and then to the Americas.[35]

Slavery in Africa predated the presence of European and Portuguese merchants in this region. Kongo Kings kept slaves in their campaigns of expansion of their kingdom. The first slaves to be traded to the Portuguese were those already captured by the King after conquest.[36] However, although the Kongo King Muemba a Nzinga (Afonso I) enjoyed trade and good relations with Portugal, he was became concerned when he saw the harm inflicted upon his subjects leading him to question the trade.

His reservations stemmed from the large number of people being enslaved and the manner in which they were treated.[37] The activities moved Alfonso I, a Christian, to write an appeal to the Portuguese King João III who ruled Portugal from 1521 to 1527.[38] He wrote:

> "Sir Your Highness should know how our Kingdom is being lost in so many ways… We cannot reckon how great the damage is, since the mentioned merchants are taking every day our natives, sons of the land and the sons of our noblemen and vassals and our relatives, because the thieves and men of bad conscience grab them wishing to have the things and wares of this Kingdom… So great, Sir, is the corruption…Your highness should not agree with it nor accept it."[39]

The public's growing "discomfort" with the new form of trade, along with the decision by the European powers to ban slave trade in the late 1800s, led to the decline of the trade and the rise in demand for raw materials and other goods. These events precipitated the colonization of Africa by European powers.

Colonization

The Berlin Conference

The demands of the Industrial Revolution in the West forced European countries to look at Africa's trade potential. Western powers looked at Africa as a source for raw materials like rubber, for use in the automobile industry, and ivory, which had varied uses.[40] The "interest" and competition among the European powers to occupy Africa to meet the demands of the Industrial

> **The Berlin Act of 1885:**
> The participating powers resolved to protect the freedom of religion in all colonial territories, to suppress slavery, and to preserve native tribes and "provide for their material well-being."

Age is commonly referred to as the "Scramble for Africa". The "Scramble for Africa" paved the way for dialogue on various issues arising out of the exploration of Africa.

To facilitate an organized and conflict-free exploration of Africa, German Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck convened a conference in Berlin in 1884. The two-year discussion, known as the Berlin Conference, was attended by 14 European powers. The Berlin Conference resolved to end the slave trade. Berlin conferees also agreed to partition Africa on behalf of the countries that they represented, drawing boundaries on a map and designating each new territory a colony.[41]

Following the Berlin Conference, these powers colonized the following countries:

- Germany: Rwanda, Burundi, and Cameroon (Under the terms of Germany's surrender at the end of World War I, these territories were transferred to Belgium, France, and Britain.)
- France: Congo (Brazzaville), Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic (CAR), and Gabon
- Portugal: Sao Tome & Principe
- Belgium: Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (This territory was considered King Leopold's personal territory and was not subject to the laws of Belgium.
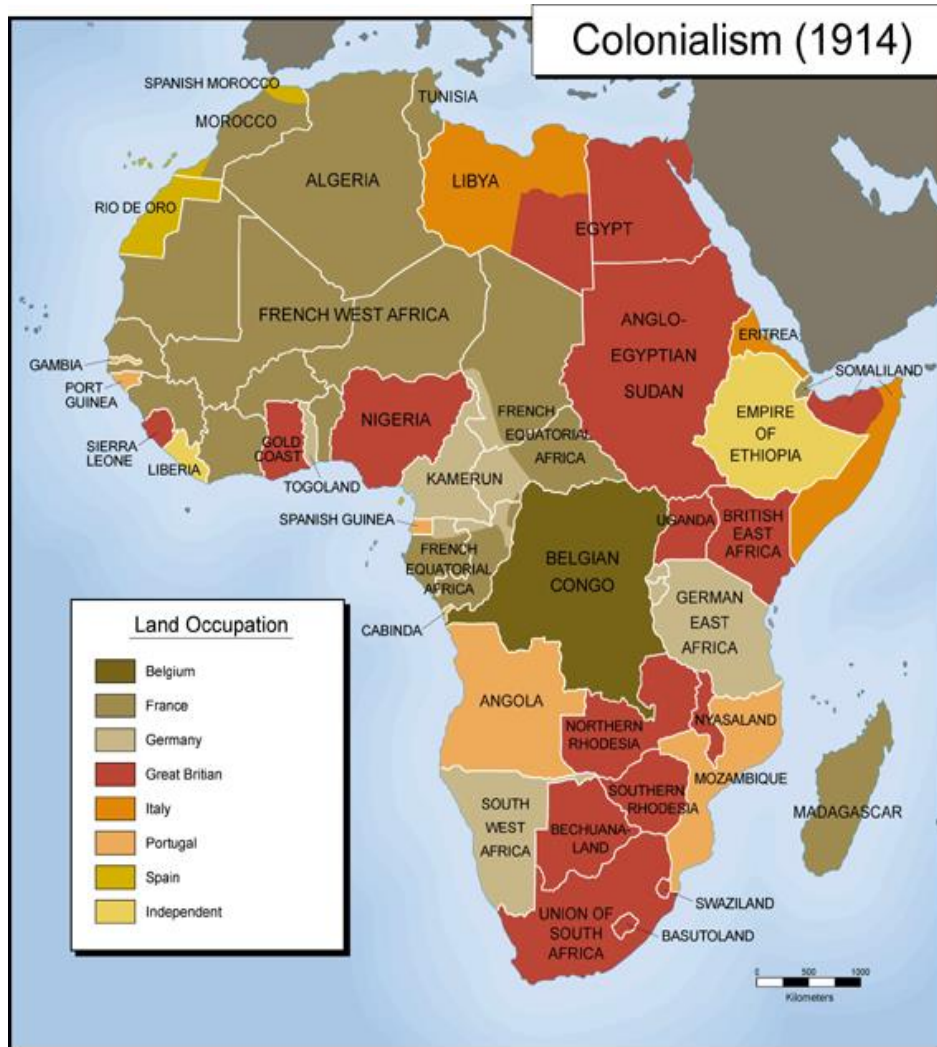
The Colonies of Africa (Source: Michigan State University)

Colonial Governance Structures

The newly formed states began to develop separately from each other in terms of governance. Generally, the colonial governance structures in Africa were based on two systems -- direct rule and indirect rule.

France, which colonized a vast portion of this region, applied "direct rule," also known as "assimilation." This meant that the colonial government ruled through traditional African authorities who acted on their behalf. This allowed the colonial government to create a society similar to that in France, including its language and culture[42].

Germany applied an "indirect rule" approach in Rwanda, Burundi, and Cameroon. This meant that the colonial government took the role of advisor – and, sometimes, supervisor -- of local indigenous authorities, such as the chieftaincy. Although the German colonial government left intact indigenous forms of governance, including the method of appointing the local chief and the council of elders, the colonial administrators interfered in the affairs of the local communities where and when it suited

them. Additionally, although the local authority collected taxes from their subjects, a percentage was retained by the colonial government.

The largest territory in this region was the DRC; it was managed by King Leopold of Belgium. King Leopold lobbied for sole control of the vast territory at the Berlin Conference. (His competitors were France and Britain, the main powers jostling for control of the African continent.) King Leopold convinced all powers present at the Berlin Conference that he was well-positioned to administer the Congo.[43]

King Leopold had a personal interest in ensuring his control in Central Africa. He outlined a humanitarian plan to ensure that the slave trade was indeed stopped; he also promised to create a conducive environment for missionaries and explorers. King Leopold created a free trade zone in Central Africa where all parties could trade regardless of the local powers that governed the area. For example, the traders from Gabon, which was colonized by the French, could trade freely in the Congo.

King Leopold named his new colony "The Congo Free State," and signed treaties with other powers including the United States. Leopold put in place an import-export framework, a tax policy, and controls on who could export ivory and rubber. This allowed him to accumulate wealth and consolidate power in Central Africa.

By 1905, reports of abuses in The Congo Free State prompted Britain and other powers to inquire about King Leopold's activities, including reports that he had revived the slave trade. In 1906, the U.S. and Britain called for changes; by 1908, King Leopold ceded control of the territory to the Belgian government.[44] The Belgian government renamed it the "Belgian Congo."[45]

Impact of Colonization on Ethnic Groups, Languages

The partitioning of Africa did not take ethnic groups into consideration. As a result, many members of the same ethnic group were – and still are -- separated by national borders.

For example: at the Berlin Conference, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania became part of the German East Africa protectorate. However, after the Government of Belgium assumed responsibility for the Belgian Congo (now DRC), both Rwanda and Burundi became part of the Belgian administrative district. In 1949, Belgium officially drew up a formal boundary between the two countries, essentially splitting up the three main ethnic groups – Tutsi, Hutu, and Twa.[46]

Another example is the Bakongo tribe, which resides across three countries – Congo (Brazzaville), DRC, and Angola. The Bakongo are divided by national borders, but continue to share a common language and culture.

This region is home to over 500 indigenous languages and dialects. Indigenous languages are used in elementary school and religious settings. However, their use is excluded from public life, as only official languages are used in governance and commerce. The following languages are spoken in this region

French: Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic (CAR), Congo (Brazzaville), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe
English: Cameroon, Rwanda,

Portuguese: Sao Tome and Principe

Impact of Colonization on Infrastructure

The impact of the colonization can also be seen in the regional infrastructure. The need to transport rubber, minerals, and other goods to the West led to the development of roads, bridges and rail networks that connected the interior with the Atlantic coast. The transportation routes, in turn, were soon dotted with towns and urban centers. France constructed the Congo-Ocean Railway, a 502 kilometer (312 mile) railroad that connected what is now Congo (Brazzaville) to the Atlantic Ocean.

Central Africa's transportation infrastructure was limited to areas of production and did not extend further. Maintenance and expansion of this network after independence was minimal at best, and much of this region remained remote until new infrastructure projects were began in twenty-first century. Today, most of this region's road and rail network has been upgraded and connected to a broader regional network designed to spur development and trade. In additional to transportation, a public service system has been established. Primary schools and medical dispensaries, built mostly by local missionaries, became the foundation for hospital and school networks that service the region today.

Post Colonization

The era of European colonization ended in 1975 when the last territory in this region was granted independence. In the early '40s, soon after World War II, resistance movements began to pressure colonial governments across the continent to grant self-rule.[47]

In Central Africa, colonial authorities had begun to transition their colonies toward independence in the late 1940s. By 1960, the first of the territories had been granted self-rule: Cameroon (1960), CAR (1960), DRC (1960), Gabon (1960) and Congo (Brazzaville) (1960). The remaining colonies in this region were granted independence soon after: Rwanda (1961), Burundi (1962), Equatorial Guinea (1968), and Sao Tome & Principe (1975). However, a lack of strong governing structures, ethnic disagreements, and competition over economic resources soon caused civil wars to break out within the newly independent countries. Many of these wars lasted for decades. Conflicts in the DRC, Rwanda, Congo (Brazzaville), and the CAR are responsible for millions of civilian deaths, and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people.

Throughout Central Africa, historical outside influences—notably trade and interaction with Europeans—have shaped religion, language, and other aspects of regional culture. These past experiences, coupled with ongoing social and political changes, continue to define regional history politics and economy.[48]

One significant development in this region has been the relationship between the governments and the former colonizers. For example, the CFA Franc *Communauté Financière Africaine* (African Financial Community), the currency used in Cameroon, CAR, Congo, and Gabon was inherited from the colonial administration. Unlike other countries in Africa that set up their own financial structures, the CFA is still guaranteed by the French Treasury (*Agence France Trésor*).[49]

The military is another sector that is still heavily influenced by its colonial history. By 1929, the French national gendarmerie was replicated in French colonies in this region; these gendarmeries were

responsible for maintaining law and order in the colonies.[50] These police units, trained and equipped by the French, were the foundation of armed forces now serving in Cameroon, CAR, DRC and Gabon. Overall, the French Army is still very active in its former colonies: it offers training and support to militaries in this region, and regularly deploys to Central African.

The above issues will be discussed in greater detail later in this module. Marines deploying to this region should be aware that instability in one country almost immediately impacts the entire region. The genocide in Rwanda is one such event that has had a widespread and lasting impact on the region today.
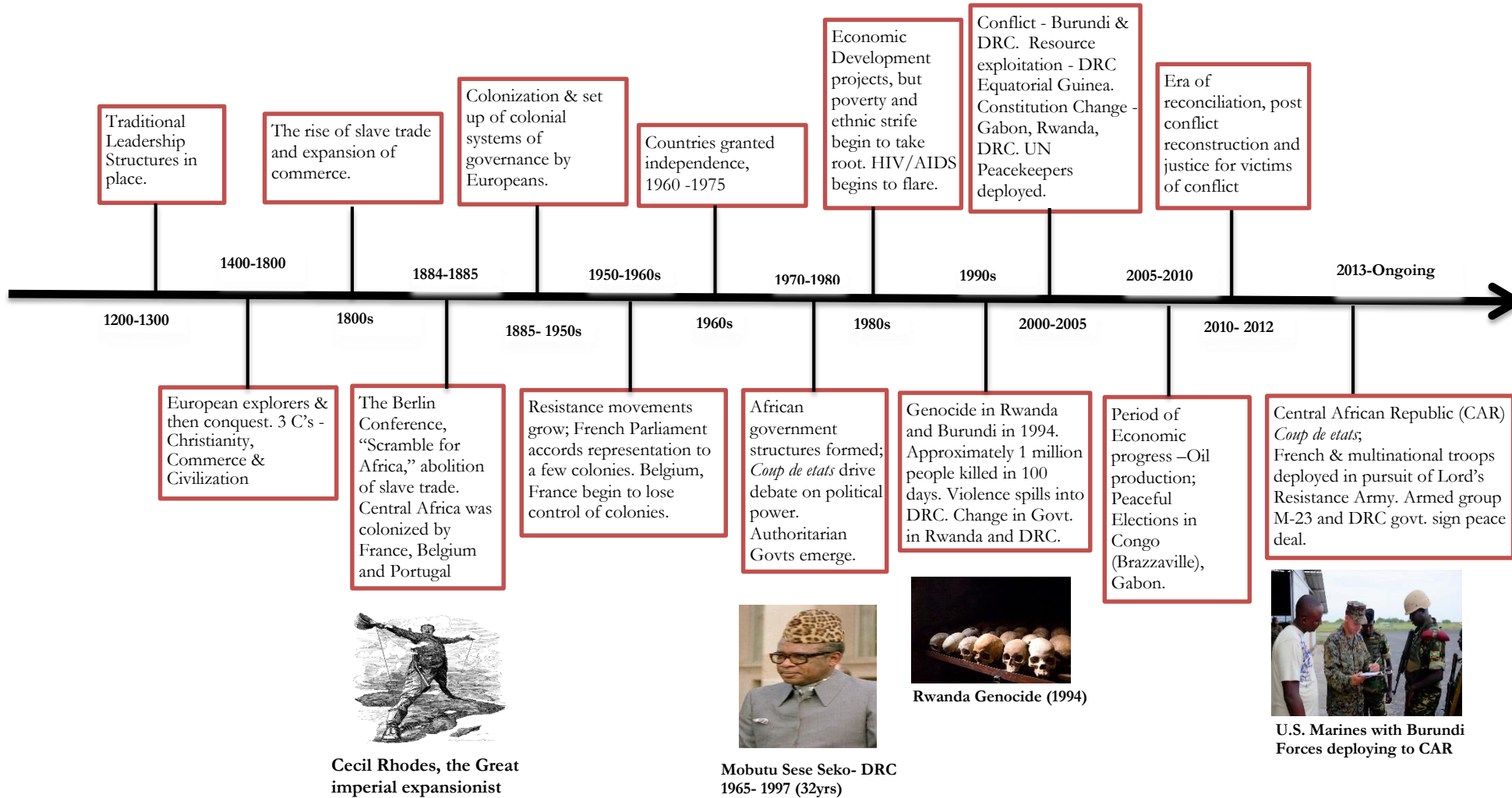
Traditional Rulers

Central Africa after the Berlin Conference

Paul Kagame - Rwanda 2000-2014

UN Forces in DRC

Traditional Leadership Structures in place.

The rise of slave trade and expansion of commerce.

Colonization & set up of colonial systems of governance by Europeans.

Countries granted independence, 1960 -1975

Economic Development projects, but poverty and ethnic strife begin to take root. HIV/AIDS begins to flare.

Conflict - Burundi & DRC. Resource exploitation - DRC Equatorial Guinea. Constitution Change - Gabon, Rwanda, DRC. UN Peacekeepers deployed.

Era of reconciliation, post conflict reconstruction and justice for victims of conflict

1400-1800

1884-1885

1950-1960s

1970-1980

1990s

2005-2010

2013-Ongoing

1200-1300

1800s

1885- 1950s

1960s

1980s

2000-2005

2010- 2012

European explorers & then conquest. 3 C's - Christianity, Commerce & Civilization

The Berlin Conference, "Scramble for Africa," abolition of slave trade. Central Africa was colonized by France, Belgium and Portugal

Resistance movements grow; French Parliament accords representation to a few colonies. Belgium, France begin to lose control of colonies.

African government structures formed; *Coup de etats* drive debate on political power. Authoritarian Govts emerge.

Genocide in Rwanda and Burundi in 1994. Approximately 1 million people killed in 100 days. Violence spills into DRC. Change in Govt. in Rwanda and DRC.

Period of Economic progress –Oil production; Peaceful Elections in Congo (Brazzaville), Gabon.

Central African Republic (CAR) *Coup de etats*; French & multinational troops deployed in pursuit of Lord's Resistance Army. Armed group M-23 and DRC govt. sign peace deal.

Cecil Rhodes, the Great imperial expansionist

Mobutu Sese Seko- DRC 1965- 1997 (32yrs)

Rwanda Genocide (1994)

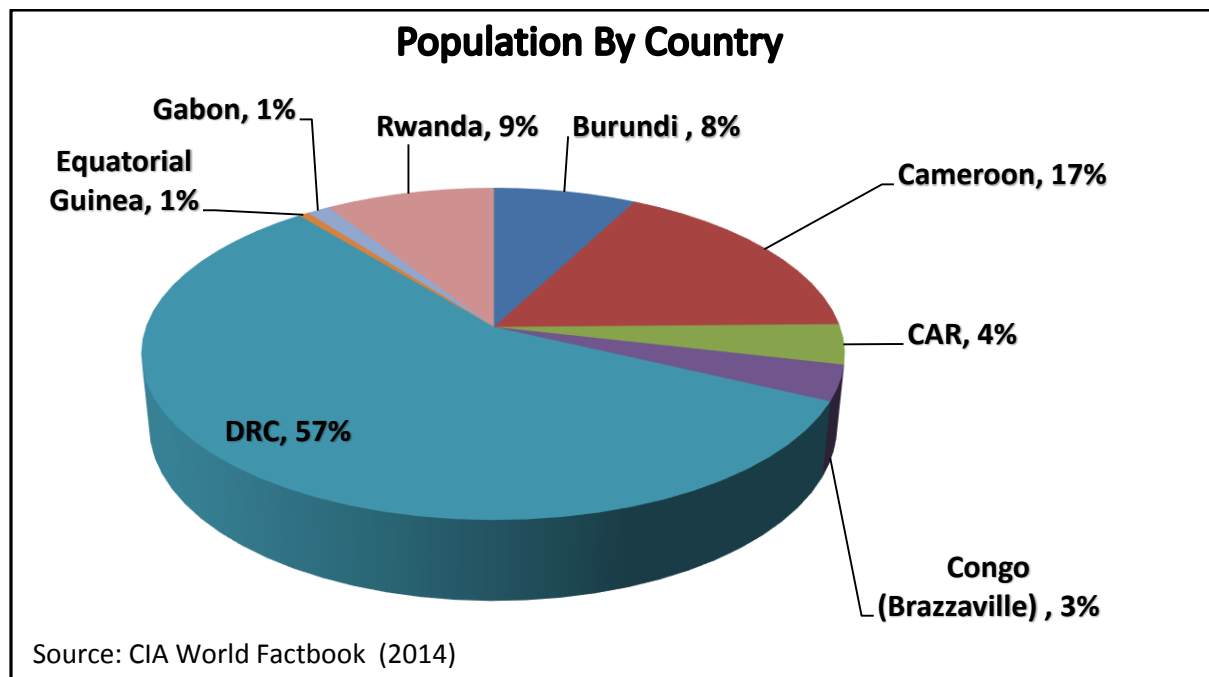**U.S. Marines with Burundi Forces deploying to CAR**

People and Society

Why People and Society Matter to You as a Marine

Missions across the range of military operations require Marines to understand, and work with, foreign populations. Knowing the people in the region, including their ethnicities, languages, and religions, as well as the way they live in social entities, enables Marines to create a mental picture of the human dimension of the region.

Demographics

In 2013, Central Africa had an estimated population of approximately 136 million people across seven countries.[51] The region's population is about a quarter of that of the United States. Most people live in rural villages near rivers. Rapid population growth will likely increase urbanization. The DRC is the region's most populated country, with a population of about 77 million.[52]

Population By Country

Gabon, 1%
Equatorial Guinea, 1%
Rwanda, 9%
Burundi , 8%
Cameroon, 17%
CAR, 4%
Congo (Brazzaville) , 3%
DRC, 57%

Source: CIA World Factbook (2014)

One major notable feature in the demographics of this region is migration. Conflict is a major driver of displacement in this region. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), the highest number of refugees and internally displaced persons in this region is in the DRC.[53] The most stable country, according to World Bank data, is Gabon.[54] Facts like this are important because official population estimates many times do not take into consideration displaced populations. Additionally, census, birth and death registration

Refugees awaiting food aid at a camp (Source: USAID)

in this region may not be accurate—especially in the DRC—where, as of 2007, only 30 percent of births and no deaths were registered by the government.[55] Regardless, the countries in this region are working towards a well-functioning civil registration system for administration and statistical purposes.[56]

The following chart depicts the population of concern, which includes, refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons.
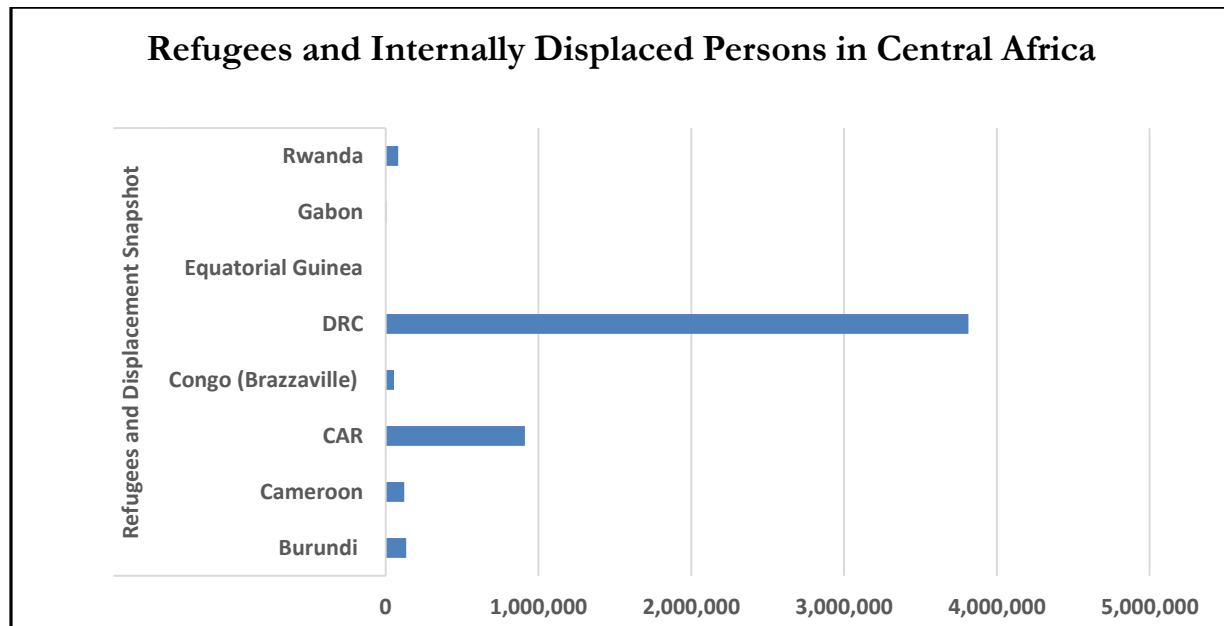
Population of Concern in Central Africa (Source: UNHCR)

Religion

John Mbiti, a famed African author and theologian, summed up spiritual life in Africa in one statement: "Africans are notoriously religious."[57] This is because religion plays a significant role in all aspects of life, shaping cultural values and identity in Africa. Religious practice in Africa is heavily intertwined with culture; the African belief system is the basis for their worldview, including morality, happiness, fear and purpose. It connects the past and the future to the present.

Church in Kindu, DRC (Source: Wikipedia)

The major religions practiced by Central Africans are Christianity and animism, sometimes called "traditional beliefs." Islam has a presence in the northern regions of Cameroon and the CAR.

Christianity

Most Central Africans are Christians belonging to two denominations: Roman Catholic and Protestant. The Christian presence in Central Africa dates to the late 1400s with the arrival of Portuguese explorers. One of the earliest missionaries to visit Central Africa was Robert Moffat in 1830.[58] This was followed by the establishment of many other missions in Central Africa run by other Christian denominations.[59]

Many Central African Christians practice syncretistic forms of Christianity. This includes mixing or merging elements of animist or "traditional" worship styles and rituals. These elements continue to influence followers of mainstream Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church today.

The prevalence of superstitious beliefs permeates organized religion and though Catholicism is widely practiced, the individual actions are dictated by a set of beliefs from both Catholicism and traditional beliefs. It is common to see an individual wearing a rosary on his neck as well as a traditional charm band on a part of his body. The evangelical movement is growing and has real day-to-day impact, offering spiritual help as well as attending to physical needs. Communities rely on their daily religious experiences to guide their daily lives, from family decision-making to influencing decisions at a community level.

Animism

Animism is the second-largest religion practiced in Central Africa. Animists believe that the universe contains three worlds: the past, present, and future; and that all three are interconnected. Animists or "traditional believers" tend to seek harmony between these worlds. There are no animist holy texts, nor official places of worship. Instead, the rituals are considered part of one's ethnic identity. Each ethnic group has its own creation story, creator-god, spirits, and rituals. Beliefs in witchcraft, sorcery, and magic are ubiquitous in this region.

Though specific rituals and beliefs vary across tribes, the Mai-Mai movement depicts a society rooted in animism. Child soldiers recruited into the Mai-Mai militia believed that they could repel bullets after being anointed with protective water by a witch doctor. Mai-Mai fighters also believed that other projectiles fired at them will turn into water.

> **TACTICAL TIP:** Traditional beliefs and superstitions are part and parcel of religious practice in Central Africa. Charms are used to keep evil spirits away and rituals are undertaken to dedicate or pay homage to ancestors. At the same time, it is common for people to share their faith in the work place. It is not uncommon to be invited to a bible study with the host military members at lunch break.

Animism is a communitarian concept, meaning that the community suffers or benefits from the consequences of one person's actions. The ancestors are also believed to be participants in the present world and can pass on good or evil to the community. Elements of the rituals practiced have influenced Islam and Christianity in this region.

> "Because traditional religions permeate all the departments of life, there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life…Where the individual is, there is his religion, for he is a religious being. It is this that makes Africans so religious: religion is in their whole system of being…What people do is motivated by what they believe, and what they believe springs from what they do and experience. So then, belief and action in African traditional society cannot be separated: they belong to a single whole." [60]

Islam

Commerce and conquest helped to spread Islam throughout Central Africa. Muslim ethnic groups such as the Fulani [Foo-LON-ee] brought their religion with them when they migrated to Central Africa from North Africa and the Sahel. The northern portions of Cameroon and the CAR have significant Muslim populations. Trade with merchants from East Africa has also introduced Islam to Burundi, the DRC, and Rwanda.

> Muslims in Central Africa adhere to the teachings of the Prophet Mohammad, and practice it within the five pillars of Islam:
> 1. Profession of one's faith (**shahada**).
> 2. Prayer (**salat**) five times a day.
> 3. Giving alms (**zakat**). **Zakat** requires giving 2.5% of a person's money each year, and a varying percentage for other assets held for the entire year.
> 4. A pilgrimage to Mecca (**Hajj**).
> 5. Fasting during **Ramadan** (**sawm**).

When deployed to this region during the month of Ramadan, be mindful: do not eat, drink, or smoke in public; and do not offer a Muslim food during that time. Note that you may need to adjust your program to accommodate a flexible working schedule.

Radical Islam, **Salafism, and Wahhabism** are uncommon in Central Africa; they have generally not been a source of widespread conflict.[61] However, in the CAR, the "Seleka Alliance," a predominantly Muslim group, mounted a successful coup in March, 2013 ousting the president.[62] The crises soon turned sectarian with Seleka Alliance attacking Christian communities in rural areas.[63] Soon after, a

counter rebel movement "Anti-Balaka," a predominantly Christian and Animist group rose up and mounted attacks against the Muslim community.[64]

Ethnic Groups

Central Africa has hundreds of ethnic groups. Most of the people in Central Africa belong to one of the many ethnic groups that collectively form the Bantu people. Hundreds of ethnic groups belong to the Bantu family. They all speak one of the Bantu languages,[65] and share common traditions and beliefs. The Bantu are descended from a common ancestor; their unique identifying features distinguish them from other neighboring groups. There are over 500 Bantu languages and dialects encompassing East, Central, and Southern Africa. Tribe, clan, and family are important units in Bantu society.[66] Although the groups are culturally aligned, ethnic conflict in Rwanda and Burundi led to the 1994 genocide which took the lives of approximately 800,000 people.[67]

The figure below shows the predominant groups in this region.
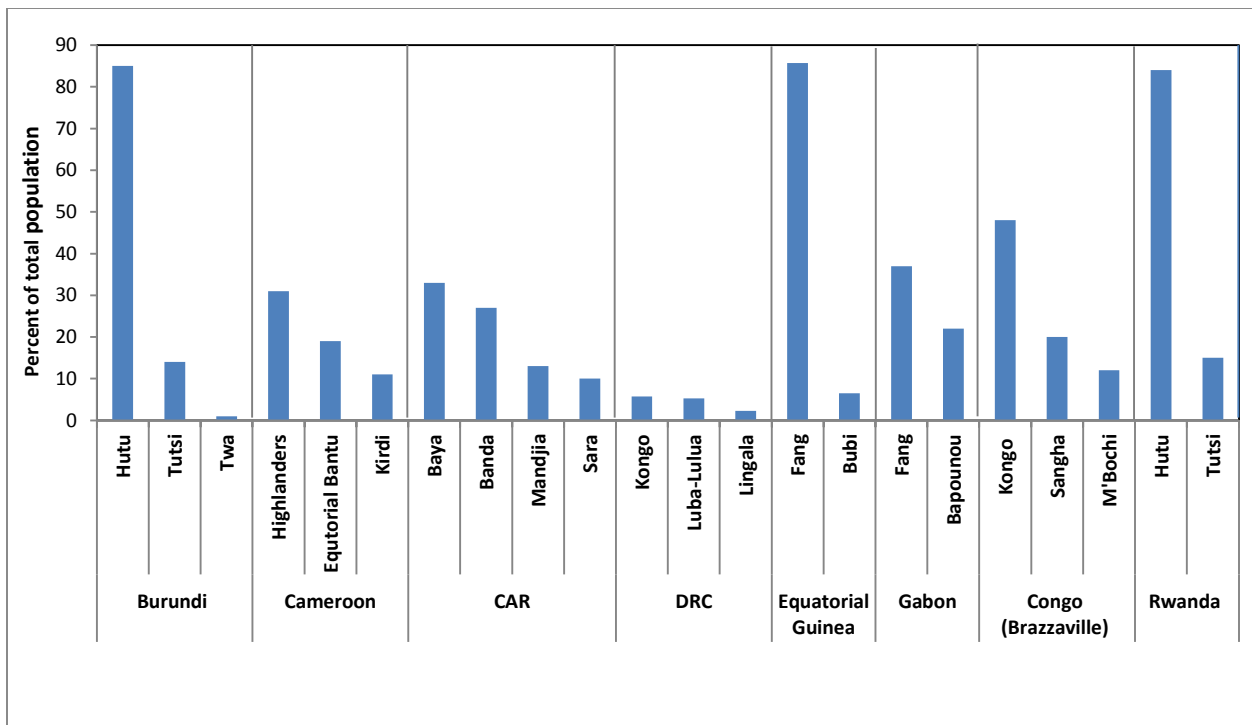
Ethnic Groups in Central Africa by Country (Source: CIA World Factbook; Joshua Project)

Languages

A Marine deployed to Central Africa who is unfamiliar with any of the predominant local languages (French, Swahili, Lingala, or Sango) should use an interpreter while interacting with the indigenous people. Nelson Mandela's insight on the power of language in communication sums the matter best: *"If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart."*

Language Groups in Africa by Country (Source: Nations Online Project)

The ethnic diversity of most Central African nations has resulted in several languages being spoken within each country. For example, in the DRC there are over 700 different dialects spoken.

The people of Central Africa are ethnically diverse, but because they have lived in close proximity for thousands of years their languages have many similarities.

Almost all languages spoken in this region are classified as Bantu languages.[68] Most Central Africans speak two or more languages: an "official language" (French or English), a "national language" (Swahili, Kirundi, Kinyarwanda, Sango, Kikongo, or Lingala), and a language spoken within their ethnic group. In Equatorial Guinea, Spanish is the official language; Portuguese is the official language of Sao Tome and Principe.

French is taught in almost all schools across the region. The majority of educated, urban people are fluent in French, including military officers and noncommissioned officers. Some military officers also speak English, especially those who have trained in the United States.

Language Groups in Africa (based on similarity of linguistic structure):
- **Afro-Asiatic:** Also known as the Hamito-Semitic language family. It includes Berber, Chadic, Cushitic, Ancient Egyptian, Omotic, and Semitic spoken in northern Africa.
- **Nilo-Saharan:** These are languages spoken in North Africa and the Sahel in Sudan, Libya, Egypt, and Algeria. They include Old Nubian and Arabic.
- **Niger-Congo A:** These are spoken in West Africa. Examples include Yoruba, Igbo, and Fula.
- **Niger-Congo B:** These are spoken by the Bantu group, which originated from Cameroon and spread across East, Central, and Southern Africa. Examples are Shona and Zulu, but the most common is Swahili.
- **Khoisan:** These are spoken by the Khoi in Southern Africa and the San (Bushmen) of the Kalahari in Namibia. It is commonly identified by its "click" sound.
- **Austronesian:** These are spoken in the island nations of Mauritius and Madagascar. One example is Malagasy.

Family Structure

The concept of family in Central Africa is different from that of the West. The extended family is an important unit in the communitarian culture in all the Central African countries. Polygamy is widely practiced, which means that the face of the family is significantly different from the family structure in the

West. Authority is structured around kinship, and the head of the family is usually the eldest male member.[69] The tribe, clan and family are taken into consideration in decision making.

There are advantages to the large familial homestead because in times of war: the larger homesteads can better protect themselves from their enemies. Larger homesteads also have a much larger workforce to support the traditionally agrarian society across the Central African region. Division of labor is distinct: women are responsible for domestic chores, including basic food supply for the family while the men are involved in farming and employment outside of the home.[70]

In urban areas, monogamous unions and the nuclear family are most common; although the extended family is consulted on important occasions such as births, marriage, and death. Members of the extended family residing in urban areas are relied upon for financial assistance by members residing in the rural areas.

In parts of Central Africa where there has been war, the modern family structure has been affected. Rwanda, Burundi, the DRC, and the CAR have been impacted by migration and displacement created by regional conflicts.

Nuclear family is common in urban areas (Source: USAID)

The economy and the scourge of HIV/AIDS have also negatively impacted the family unit: the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS is blamed, in part, for fueling the epidemic in many African countries.[71] This however, has not diminished the value of the family unit in society.

Income Distribution

This region is mineral-rich, but the potential rewards from developing these assets has not benefited the general population. Instead, years of disagreement over natural resources have negatively affected local populations.[72] For example, in the DRC of Congo, the breakdown of law and order (and the resulting conflicts) led to the plunder of state resources and entrenched corruption.[73] In many Central African countries, there is an economic gap between rural and urban populations; similarly, there is a gap between the urban rich and the urban poor (many who live on less than a dollar a day).[74]


The youth bubble is a threat to stability in Africa (Source: IRIN)

As is the case in many African countries, youth unemployment in Central Africa poses a risk to stability. Both skilled and unskilled youth lack opportunity and resources to sustain livelihoods; many young people can only earn a living in the informal sector. Unemployment and underemployment in this region are difficult to measure, but the massive segment of society comprised of unproductive young people (the so-called "youth bubble") is evident.

People in the youth bubble are susceptible to mobilization and recruitment into militias, especially in the DRC and the CAR. The informal sector is a significant contributor to the GDP. For example, in

2012, small-scale chainsaw milling enterprises accounted for 57% of Cameroon's GDP, and 87% in the GDP in the DRC.[75]

Central Africa: Unemployment Rate

■ Unemployment rate 2011 ■ Unemployment rate 2012
■ Unemployment rate 2013
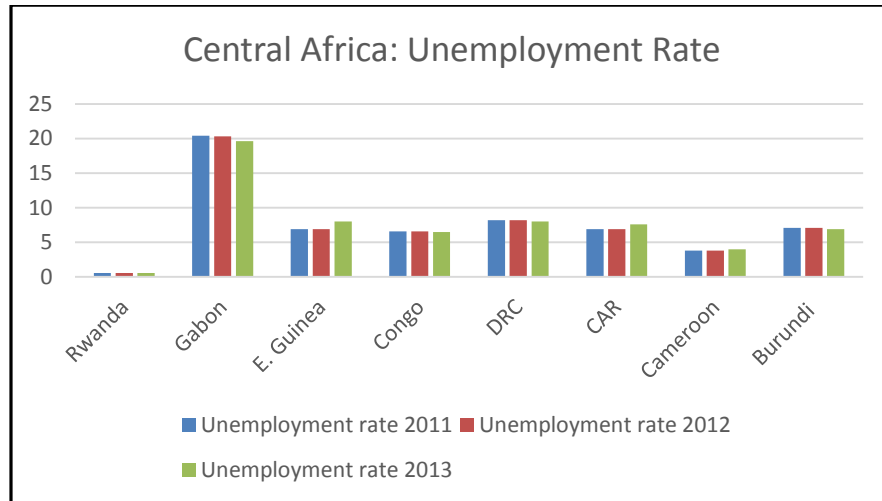
Unemployment rate, 2011-2013 (Source: World Bank)

One major concern in the region is the impact of conflict on livelihoods. The DRC and the CAR have large numbers of displaced populations; this has impacted household income due to competition for opportunities, further widening poverty gaps throughout the region. Displacement has also put a strain on many urban centers, affecting the ability of local governments to address issues relating to health, sanitation, housing, education, and crime prevention.[76]

> The urban poor live in irregular settlements and are disproportionately affected by crime due to the high unemployment.

Education

Traditionally, education in Africa was an informal process lasting throughout a person's lifetime. Participation in work, community celebrations, religious traditions, and rites of passage guided a person's educational development. Formal education was introduced in the pre-colonial era by missionaries. By the 1950s, many missions had established "brick-and-mortar" schools. However, only a few students completed their education past primary school.[77]

Literacy Rate: Central Africa (2013)	(%)
Equatorial Guinea	87
Sao Tome & Principe	84.9
Congo (Brazzaville)	83.3
Rwanda	70.4
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	67.2
Cameroon	67.9
Gabon	63.2
Burundi	59.3
Central African Republic (CAR)	48.6
Source: The African Economist	

The literacy rate in Central Africa varies, largely because of the impact of civil war in the DRC and the CAR. What is certain is that, even in the most stable economies (such as in Equatorial Guinea), the quality of education has generally improved yet is far from perfect — especially in the area of information technology.

Technical and vocational schools offer some specialized training, but they are insufficient. For example, the student-instructor ratio is deficient which is problematic because it impacts enrollment rates for the youth. The shortfall is also a challenge to policy makers who have to address the youth bulge and employment options for the youth. Although there are various programs in place to enhance

youth employability, many do not offer skills training that meets market relevant needs. As a result, industries have designed in-house training programs to bridge the skills gap.[78]

Equatorial Guinea has the highest literacy rate in this region at 87 percent, while CAR has the lowest score at 48.60 percent. (The literacy rate specifies the percentage of people, 15 years of age and above, who can read and write.)[79] The U.S. has, through USAID, boosted primary school education in the region, increasing overall the quality of education and people's access to it.[80]

In most Central African countries, the quality of a person's education reflects their socioeconomic background. Wealthy parents send their children to private schools with access to better resources, while poor children must attend underfunded public schools staffed with poorly trained teachers. Public schools face challenges to student enrollment due too many children as well as a lack of facilities and teaching materials. Additionally, large class sizes, a shortage of trained teachers and poor living and working conditions for teachers pose a challenge to the education sector in this region. Other factors that interfere with education and

**USAID working to boost access to education in Central Africa (Source: USAID)**

early learning include natural disasters, civil conflict, and HIV/AIDS. In conflict areas, children are forcibly recruited to serve in local militias. In places where the militias have disbanded, vast numbers of demobilized youth have limited or no marketable skills. Though many former underage fighters have entered the informal mining sector in the DRC, governments in this region need to do more to absorb the youth into the formal economy.

Healthcare

Central Africa is considered a high-risk area for vector-borne diseases such as malaria, and waterborne diseases like typhoid and hepatitis A.[81] By world standards, medical capabilities in the Central Africa region are below average. Some of the major challenges facing the health sector include inadequate access to healthcare and emergency facilities, lack of essential medicines, and a general inability by local governments to respond to outbreaks.[82] The availability of trained professionals and medical supplies varies from country to country, and by region within each country. Poverty, conflicts, and an underdeveloped infrastructure are responsible for limiting the availability of medical care in the region.[83]

USAID works to boost primary healthcare at the community level (Source: USAID)

HIV/AIDS in Central Africa (2012)
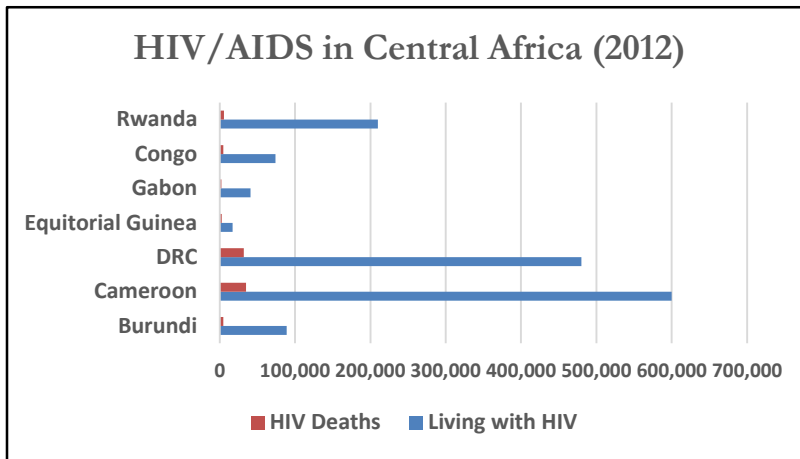
HIV/AIDS Statistics in Central Africa (Source: UNAIDS)

Sexual and gender-based violence has had multiple effects on populations in this region. Psychological and social effects include the stigmatization of victims and anxiety disorders that have been insufficiently diagnosed or treated. The most devastating effect on the population has been the rampant spread of HIV/AIDS and related diseases such as tuberculosis.

Another area of concern in the region is infant mortality. Although there has been significant improvement in tackling infant mortality, more still needs to be done, especially because of the large numbers of refugees and displaced persons in this region who lack adequate healthcare.

Infant Mortality (per 1,000 live births)
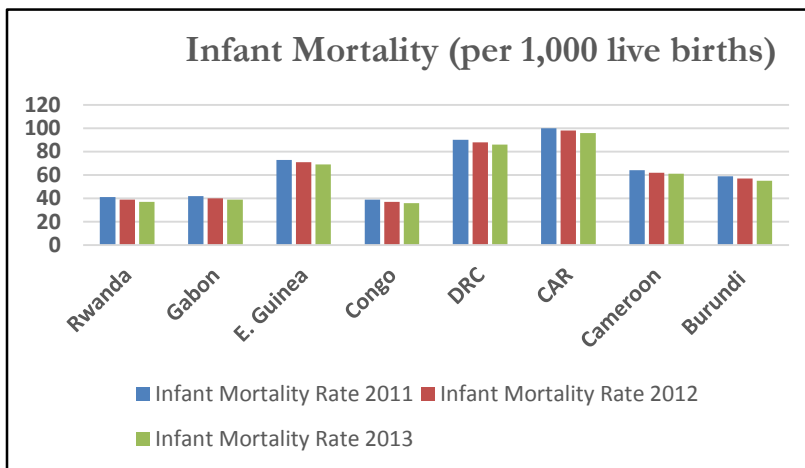
Infant mortality in Central Africa Source: The World Bank

Infant mortality rates in the region remain relatively high. However, all countries in Central Africa have experienced a decline in recent years. The decline is attributed to the efforts by governments and international partners to increase access region-wide to healthcare and to counter common ailments – malaria, diarrhea, and respiratory tract infections.

Government and Politics

Why Government and Politics Matter to You as a Marine

Most people live in states governed by formal and informal institutions. Marines need to know how power and authority are distributed in the state by studying the formal and informal structures of governments in the region. In addition, Marines need to understand how people, groups, and institutions exercise power and authority; in other words, what comprises politics in the states.

Political Systems

Most Central African countries gained independence in the 1960s. Since then, ethnic groups, religions, and traditional leaders have influenced the evolution of national political and legal systems.

Many Central African countries have functional national and local governments. However, they rely on informal leadership structures such as traditional elders or chiefs and non-governmental actors in the delivery of services, especially in the health sector. Governance which benefits the general population has been a challenged by leaders who have used the political infrastructure for personal gain. Corruption is rife, especially in the public sector.

Central Africa has had a treacherous political history. The DRC and the CAR have had politically instigated crises, and every country in this region has experienced a *coup d'état*. Between 1960 and 2014, there were 15 successful military coups in this region.[84]

Notwithstanding coups, authoritarian regimes have solidified their grip on power. One example is President Theodoro Obiang, who took over Equatorial Guinea's national government in a military coup in 1979, and has prevailed in every subsequent election -- partly because of the government's ever-increasing control of the voter registration process.[85]

In theory, governance structures in this region are decentralized. In reality, the central government holds the real power. In the DRC for example, de-mobilized rebel commanders have been reabsorbed into society, yet still yield significant power. The governor of North Kivu, the most volatile part of Eastern Congo, is a former rebel leader.[86]
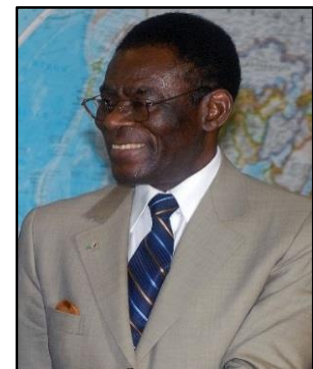
Equatorial Guinea President Teodoro Obiang (Source: Wikipedia)

Corruption Perception Index 2013: Central Africa	
Country	Ranking (of 177)
Rwanda	49
Sao Tome & Principe	72
Gabon	106
Cameroon	144
CAR	144
DRC	154
Congo	154
Burundi	157
Equatorial Guinea	163

Source: Transparency International

The term "Corruption" does not have a direct translation in many African languages. This is because reciprocity and gift-giving are cultural concepts that are expected as a form of gratitude. In today's global environment, governments in this region classify this practice as graft, where such reciprocity is demanded for a service. In most countries, it is difficult to conduct business without a "facilitation fee."

Subordinate to the national (or central) government, there are government bodies that are typically structured in three tiers; these three levels of governance are intended to give citizens a greater degree of self-rule: in the top tier, provincial governments (similar to state governments in the U.S.); in the middle, county-like district governments; and, at the bottom, town or village councils.

Prior to the mid-twentieth century, a traditional chief exercised political leadership at the provincial, district, and village level. Today, central and local governments perform these functions, effectively removing the political and economic powers of most chiefs. However, in remote areas of many Central African countries (particularly those neglected by central governments), chiefs continue to rule.[87] In fact, they arguably have the greatest awareness of the community, continually engage in conflict resolution, and are consulted by elected leaders and civil society.

USAID official consults a Chief. Local leaders engage in development activities at the village level (Source: USAID)

Nationalism

Nationalism, in this context, refers to the feeling of kinship and belonging based on shared values and beliefs, which usually translates to an identity.[88] Colonization fomented disaffection and resistance; because people were prevented from organizing country-wide resistance, communities galvanized and mobilized ethnically. The result is that in this region, populations now identify first with their tribe and then with their nation. When nations gained independence in the 1960s, the national flag became a symbol of national pride. However, self-governance saw its share of challenges, and any sense of newfound national pride soon began to erode.

Religious, ethnic, and other socio-economic issues have caused rifts that have led to conflict. In Rwanda and Burundi, for example, ethnicity became the source of conflict that eventually led to genocide in 1994.[89] In the CAR, marginalization and other governance issues led to sectarian violence in 2013.[90]

Nationalism in Central Africa can also be seen in language and language policy. Although local languages such as Lingala and Swahili are widely spoken (as are other local dialects), French is predominantly used as an official language throughout the region. This is because France and Belgium were the main actors in Central Africa during the colonial period. However, Rwanda changed its language policy after the 1994 genocide, and made English the official language.

Language has been used to promote national cohesion in a region that is ethnically diverse with hundreds of linguistic groups. Language is the most unifying element, although it has also been a source of contention because in many cases some indigenous languages are marginalized.

National pride is not normally observed in Central Africa because of overwhelming instability, poverty, and other socio-economic issues—even in nations that have enjoyed relative stability.[91] However, soccer is one sport that has united both the country and the region. In 2014, Cameroon played in the World Cup in Brazil, fueling patriotism and African pride.

Cameroon has made it to the World Cup 5 times (Source: Wikipedia)

The national flag in each of these countries is a symbol of unity and shared nationhood. However, poverty and lack of transparency have eroded public trust in governance and institutions of government, making national pride an ideal that has yet to be achieved.

Rule of Law

Most countries in this region are currently undergoing institutional reforms aimed at strengthening the judiciary.

Rwanda is a good regional example of progress and adherence to the rule of law, especially because the 1994 genocide revealed an absolute collapse of rule of law. Like other countries in this region that have undergone conflict,[92] even before the 1994 genocide, Rwanda's judicial structures were dominated by executive power and a culture of impunity.
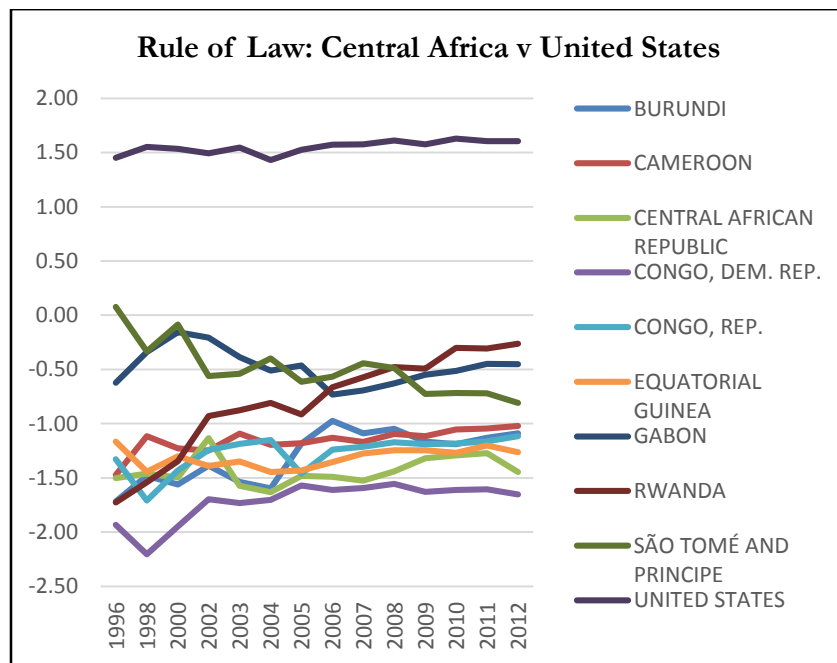
After the Rwandan genocide, the entire national judiciary was left in ruins, incapable of delivering justice for victims. In response, the International Criminal Court set up the International Criminal Court for Rwanda to prosecute perpetrators who bore the greatest responsibility for the genocide.[93] In an effort to promote reconciliation and strengthen local governments, the government of Rwanda released approximately two million offenders awaiting trial in jail back into their communities to be

tried in the *Gacaca*, or community courts.[94] *Gacaca* courts were run by lay magistrates because of the lack of trained judicial personnel to cater to the scale of the offense.

Other countries in this region emerging from conflict have faced the same challenges: an erosion of social capital and trust in the judicial system, and the lack of trained personnel to deliver justice. In the DRC, where human rights have been

violated on a mass scale by rebels and security forces--especially in Eastern Congo--the government, with the assistance from the United Nations and other partners, has put in place a vetting mechanism that prevents offenders from joining the security forces.[95]

The following table, created by the World Bank, compares "rule of law indicators" in the region as compared to the United States'. These indicators measure confidence in the judiciary and the police, compliance, enforcement of rules of society, and the likelihood of crime and violence. A higher indicator demonstrates better adherence to rule of law principles.

Rule of Law: Central Africa v United States

Legend: BURUNDI, CAMEROON, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, CONGO, DEM. REP., CONGO, REP., EQUATORIAL GUINEA, GABON, RWANDA, SÃO TOMÉ AND PRINCIPE, UNITED STATES

Y-axis: 2.00, 1.50, 1.00, 0.50, 0.00, -0.50, -1.00, -1.50, -2.00, -2.50

X-axis: 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012

The World Bank's assessment of rule of law reflects perceptions of the extent to which people have confidence in and abide by the rules of society; and in particular the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence. Measures of governance performance range from weak (approximately -2.5) to strong (2.5).

Political Conflicts

This region has experienced more conflicts than any other part of Africa; many of the crises that have rocked this region are interconnected. The ethnic violence that led to the Rwanda genocide of 1994 spilled over into the DRC, and also caused a significant backlash in Burundi.

Violence broke out in the CAR in March 2013 when the rebel group "Seleka Alliance," a predominantly Muslim group, mounted a coup ousting the president Françios Bozize.[96] The crisis soon turned

Rwanda genocide; Nyamata Memorial site (Source: Wikipedia)

sectarian with a counter-rebel movement – "Anti-Balaka," a predominantly Christian and Animist group -- mounting attacks against the Muslim community.[97] The root causes of conflict in the Central Africa Region include the unequal distribution and management of resources, governance issues, and ethnic and religious tensions.

The DRC fell gradually after the Rwanda genocide in 1994, when Rwanda pursued Hutu militia in Eastern Congo. Soon after, the government fell and the situation deteriorated further, leading to the plunder of mineral resources and escalated fighting for control of mineral-rich areas. Conflict minerals fueled the conflict, especially during the early 2000s.[98] The term "conflict minerals" refers to minerals mined originating from a conflict environment, such as the DRC, with significant human rights abuses that impact the mining and subsequent trading of the minerals.[99]

Rebels in the Central African Republic (Source: Wikipedia)

Governance issues, weak militaries, and collapsed security structures also contribute to ongoing conflicts. In the DRC and the CAR,-the largest two countries in the region,-instability is prevalent primarily due to war. War has created a breeding ground for militia groups that continue to destabilize the government. In the CAR, insurgents justify their challenge to the ruling government by citing inadequate national health and education systems, and their exclusion from the political process.[100]

Economic Overview

Why Economy and Infrastructure Matter to You as a Marine

The goods and services that people exchange, the infrastructure that people use to move them, and the formal and informal structures that make exchange possible all play critical roles in survival. A thorough understanding of a region is impossible without knowledge of its economy because the region's political, social, and cultural trends both reflect and shape economic developments and trends.

Nature of Economic Systems

There are various economic systems in this region, including a traditional economic system based on agriculture. This is evident in rural and forest communities, where subsistence production is localized, many times cashless, and often unregulated by the central government.

One example of an unregulated economy can be seen in the pygmies of Central Africa, commonly referred to as "forest people," who rely on subsistence agriculture, hunting, and gathering. The region's forested areas cover Cameroon, the CAR, Rwanda, and the DRC[101]approximately 30 million people from 150 different ethnic groups live under the forest cover of Central Africa.[102] In recent times, forest-dwellers have been pushed deeper into their ecosystem as a result of rapid deforestation caused by unregulated activities: artisan mining (which is usually random and indiscriminate), commercial farming, and illegal logging.[103]

The other type of economic system in this region is the market economy which is reliant on mining, petroleum, commercial agriculture, and timber harvesting. However, instability and the presence of aid organizations that provide direct and indirect assistance to refugees and displaced populations —sometimes in the absence of government—have created a hybrid economy. One instance of the hybrid economy can be seen in barter trade, whereby refugees exchange food aid with locals for firewood, soap, and other supplies.

> **Recommended Reading:**
>
> To read more about the economic and developmental challenges in this region, see:
>
> Report on the sustainable development goals Central Africa sub-region (Africa Development Bank)
> http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/SDG/2013/sdg2013_draft_sdgs_report_central_africa_en.pdf

Economic Trends

Although the countries in this region rely on agriculture and mining, their economies vary widely in terms of GDP growth. Economic indicators suggest that this is a region with a lot of potential, but one whose growth is hindered by corruption and a harsh investment climate directly affected by conflict and the absence of structures that accurately measure growth.

For example, Equatorial Guinea is one of the rare stable countries in this region. Its main source of wealth is oil, but the GDP does not translate into wealth for the majority. Over 77 percent of its population lives on less than 2 U.S. dollars a day.[104] In Rwanda, on the other hand, a country that is heavily dependent of agriculture and has seen significant conflict in its recent past, the population has seen gains because the government has had considerable success in the fight against corruption.

The following chart shows the GDP growth in all countries of the region in recent years.
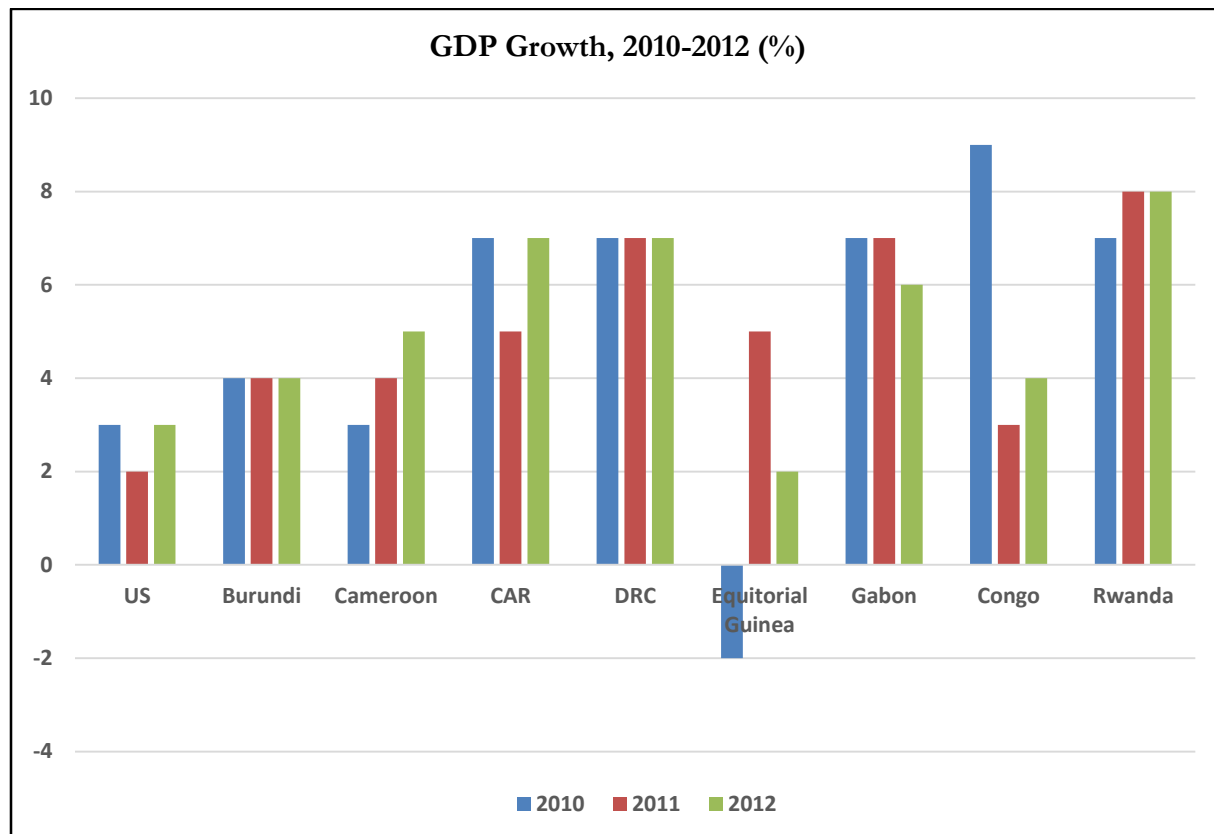
GDP Growth (Source: World Bank)

Natural Resources

Central Africa is resource-rich, with at least 1,100 mineral substances in the DRC alone. Yet it remains economically underdeveloped.[105] Unfortunately, mining operations in this region have been impacted by war and illegal cartels, especially because of the demand for minerals such as coltan found in eastern part of the DRC.[106] Coltan (columbite-tantalite) is a heat-resistant ore that is used in electronic devices such as cell phones and laptops.[107]

Cameroon, Congo (Brazzaville), Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon export a significant amount of oil and gas; the Congo (Brazzaville) has vast offshore oil fields.[108]

Although this region has been mining and exploring oil since the 1950s, economic development has stagnated because of bureaucracy, mismanagement, and government corruption. As a result, oil production in Congo (Brazzaville), Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea does not reflect the standard of living, though these countries have experienced relative stability.

Mining in DRC, CAR have been negatively impacted by conflict, while low output in Gabon, for example, is attributed to civil unrest, labor strikes, and tax disputes between the government and foreign investors.[109]

The continuous cycle of poverty and instability in this resource-rich region is often termed as the 'resource curse' which is the failure to convert resource wealth to economic development.[110] The resource curse is especially evident in this region where the mining of minerals, such as copper, coltan, and diamonds, have been an important source of revenue, but also been the cause of instability. [111] In resource-rich areas like eastern DRC armed groups compete for control of mines—thereby exacerbating conflict within the DRC and in neighboring countries.

In addition to underdevelopment and conflict, this region has been exploited by corrupt government officials and criminal cartels seeking to profit from the mineral trade. In the early 2000s, armed groups often procured weapons with proceeds from illicit mining. Today however, the Kimberly process – a certification process that tracks diamonds from source to market – has been adopted in the CAR, DRC, Cameroon and Congo (Brazzaville) with the aim to stop the trade in diamonds acquired from conflict zones.[112] The figure to the right depicts the movement of minerals from the mines to the West.[113]

Destabilizing environmental and socioeconomic issues have also arisen in many of these countries. Environmental pollution, soil erosion, water contamination, and child labor in the DRC and CAR have forced the governments to strengthen regulations in order to protect the environment and vulnerable populations. Women and refugee populations have been subjected to harmful work environments, not to mention the use of child
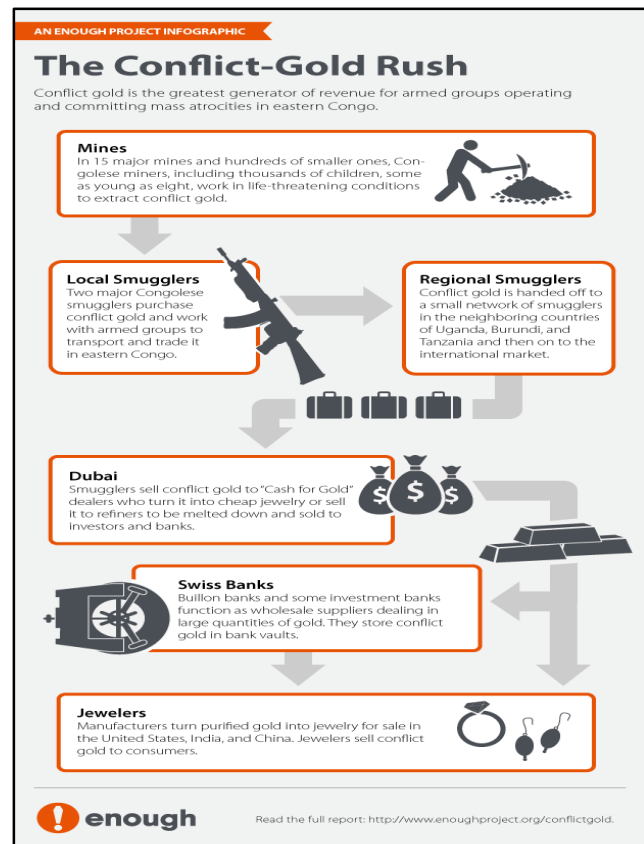
Mineral Supply Chain (Source: Enough Project)

labor in both countries. All these issues threaten economic advancements in mineral-rich regions like Katanga (DRC) and Bomandoro (CAR).[114]

Industries

Tourism

Although conflict and instability in this region have hampered tourism, some countries are making strides in the tourism sector. Rwanda, in particular, is mostly known for the 1994 genocide and the ensuing instability in the aftermath of the genocide. Since then, the country has advanced a "gorilla tourism model" to successfully attract tourists to the region. Virunga national park, which extends into the DRC, received approximately three million tourists and generated $75 million from 2006 to 2013.[115] Rwanda has built on the successes in this sector to embark on conference tourism. Rwanda is fast becoming a meeting and conference hub in this region which

Gorilla tourism in Central Africa (Source: VisitVirunga.org)

will drive up the number of visitors to the regions' traditional tourist sites such as Virunga national park.

Tourism in this region has contributed directly and indirectly to job creation, the demand for local products like furniture, the transportation sector, and other homegrown businesses. Additionally, the government of Rwanda has initiated revenue sharing programs that benefit communities located close to the Virunga national park.[116]

Although other countries in Central Africa receive visitors, none have become major tourist destinations; casual travelers have been scared off by various regional conflicts. There are, however, hundreds of aid workers, humanitarian workers, and expatriates working in the mining and oil sectors in the DRC, CAR, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea. A hybrid hospitality sector accommodates this special category of visitors, supported by a varied array of lodging options (including guesthouses and hostels) that provide jobs for hundreds of people.

Agriculture

Agriculture is a major source of economic revenue and subsistence in Central Africa. Central African agriculture is timed with the seasons, with most crops grown during the rainy season and harvested at the beginning of the dry season.

Central African agricultural products are produced for domestic and export markets. Corn and peanuts (grown largely on family farms) are consumed locally. Large industrial farms in countries such as Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea produce cocoa, bananas, and coffee for export. Burundi and Rwanda also produce and export coffee and tea. Because these exporting countries

A woman prepares goods for sale (Source: USAID)

rely on profits from just a few commodities, their economies are vulnerable to bad weather, plant diseases, and uncertainties in the global marketplace.[117]

Fishing is also a major source of income, and fish is a major source of protein in this region. The Congo River and its tributaries are important to the region's economy -- in terms of strategic value, especially in terms of hydro-power, as well as food security.

Informal Economy

Central Africa lacks enough formal jobs to offer steady wages to employ people newly arriving to its cities. Many people work as unregistered street vendors, who form the backbone of Central Africa's marketplaces. A large number of these workers in the informal economy are self-employed laborers working in industries as diverse as textiles and construction. Some workers endure dangerous working conditions, and most lack the benefits and job security that come with jobs in the formal economy. Informal commerce is an economic engine in many countries recovering from conflict, especially in eastern Congo (Brazzaville) and Rwanda.

Vendors selling water in Goma, DRC (Source: USAID)

The artisanal diamond sector provides income for thousands of nationals. Diggers, middlemen, traders, and porters are some of the tradesmen that fuel the mining economy at the local level. Most diggers in the DRC carry an Artisanal Exploitation Card, which is a trade license. Unlike mineral porters, traders and middlemen, the diggers pay taxes.

The transportation industry, including non-motor transportation, is exploited by cross-country smugglers who rely on the locals to carry diamonds and other minerals through vast

Artisan gold miners in Central Africa (Source: U.S. State Department)

expanses of forests across the border into neighboring countries. These covert trade routes are controlled by former rebels or foreign soldiers who have carved a niche for themselves along the informal trade routes. Millions of dollars exchange hands between smugglers, middlemen, and local porters every year; many families depend on this covert trading sector for their daily subsistence.

Small Scale Mining Technical Assistance and Training Service (SAESSCAM) is the government authority in the DRC responsible for organizing and supervising artisanal mining and tax collection. However, taxes levied by central government are seldom accounted for because the central government often goes for months without paying SAESSCAM agents.[118]

In the CAR, there are over 80,000 artisan miners extracting gold and diamonds using rudimentary tools.[119] Miners work in cooperative units, and though the government has designated an umbrella body -- the National Union of Cooperative Miners of Central African Republic (UNCMCA) -- to regulate the units, miners distrust the government. Thus, a majority of these mining cooperatives are not registered.[120]

Aside from the informal mining sector, locals also make a living in the logging industry. Commercial logging concessions are granted to foreign companies, so there are thousands of artisan loggers throughout the region.[121] More than anywhere else, this part of the economy is most evident in Gabon, which is the largest timber producer in this region.

The fact that much of the region's economy operates outside the tax system puts a strain on government treasuries and on the few who do pay taxes. Corruption plays a big role in a person's decision to work outside the formal economy; this is because many people believe that a substantial portion of tax revenue goes into the pockets of government officials instead of paying for legitimate government services.

Infrastructure

Transportation

Transportation infrastructure is confined to urban areas, although there are massive infrastructure projects planned for the near future. Railroad transport is limited, but air transportation is adequate and has boosted trade ties throughout the region. However, this mode of transportation is still too expensive for the general population, so most people travel by road. Most public transportation is limited to bus services and taxis traveling between major cities and villages. Buses are unreliable and often unsafe.[122]

Most roads in Central Africa consist of two lanes, with a few divided highways found mostly in major urban cities. During the rainy season, roads are extremely dangerous; traveling at this time of the year can only be done safely with off-road-capable vehicles. Gas and diesel fuel for vehicles is expensive, especially in land-locked Central African countries. In rural areas, fuel stations are scarce and fuel quality is often poor.

All Central African countries have at least one international airport that accommodates international, national, and local flights. In most countries, small, private airlines also exist; these private airlines fly out of the many smaller airports that dot the region. Corruption and high tariffs are the greatest hindrances to the flow of goods into and throughout the region. China is the main investor in this region's infrastructure projects.

TACTICAL TIP: Poor infrastructure will likely impact any mission in this region. It is important to plan ahead and to be prepared for all eventualities. There is often no power; no ready access to supplies, and Marines may have to share provisions with international counterparts.

Utilities

Wood and charcoal provide the majority of the region's energy needs—usually for cooking. Oil, electricity, and commercial energy are also used widely in urban centers. Minimal access to electricity, outdated equipment, poor maintenance, and increased demand contribute to power shortages and frequent power outages. Many businesses, upper-class people, and expatriates have diesel-fueled power generators to augment their spotty supply of electricity.[123]The U.S. has launched the Power Africa Project to increase access to power in Sub-Saharan Africa by utilizing alternative energy sources

such as wind, solar, hydropower, natural gas, and geothermal resources.[124] This program will have a significant impact on the quality of life as well as the cost of living.

Drought often causes water levels to drop in lakes and rivers which are vital to supplying power in Africa; drought seriously affect the ability of hydroelectric power generators to provide consistent service to many parts of this region. The Inga Falls Dam on the Congo River is a major hydroelectricity supplier in this region. The government of the DRC plans to upgrade generators and other structures at the dam in order to increase output. When upgrades are completed, it is estimated that electric power output from Inga Falls will equal 20 nuclear power

Inga Dam (Source: Internationalrivers.org)

plants, producing up to 40,000 MW of electricity, enough to power the entire region.[125]

Communications

The quality of service delivered by the region's landline telephone system is poor, but wireless communications systems can match the standards set by any Western mobile telephone service. Several European cell phone companies operate in the area, and cell phones and internet cafes have proliferated in the past decade. Mobile telephone service is a particularly reliable means of communication in most urban centers. [126]

Internet connectivity, however, remains poor because of limited landline communications and the slow roll-out fiber-optic broadband services. Limited public access to the Internet has slowed economic development in Central Africa. Wireless communications solutions are beginning to facilitate better access to the World Wide Web, primarily for people living in cities or near cell phone towers that border major roadways. Across Africa's remote environments, more and more people are connecting to the internet via mobile phones. Many established news outlets across the

Cellphone use in Africa (Source: USAID)

continent are now competing with social media—particularly Twitter and Facebook, which are accessed via a Short Message Service (SMS) platform.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the radio was the most popular technology in Central Africa for news and entertainment. Because of its wide broadcast reach, the radio was also used to topple governments in several countries even to mobilize Hutu militias in the 1994 Rwanda genocide. Today, the mobile phone is the most effective communications device, transforming text messaging into effective "narrowcasts" for targeted public service announcements, especially during looming crises—natural or man-made. However, the new medium does not always communicate a constructive message: mobile phones are also widely used by transnational terrorist organizations, criminal groups, and militias to plan and coordinate attacks.

Mass Media

Most families in urban centers have access to television broadcasts and international media outlets. In rural areas, poverty and limited power infrastructure limit the ability of people access to television and the Internet. Radios tend to be the most important source of information in these outlying areas. Each country also has multiple TV stations, print newspapers, and a variety of online news outlets.[127]

Press freedom in most Central African countries is nominal at best, though the situation is considerably better in Sao Tome and Principe, where freedom of the press is a constitutional guarantee that has not adhered to in law and practice by all stakeholders. Sao Tome is an exception, not just in this region, but in the entire African continent. The DRC experienced the greatest press freedom in the early 2000s; this coincided with the height of a national insurgency, when government control was at its weakest.[128]

Although governments do not practice outright censorship, the manner in which facts and opinions get reported is often affected by who owns a media outlet (much of the media in Central Africa is controlled by governments or politicians), arbitrary regulations, strict defamation and security laws, violence, and harassment of journalists. Journalists and publishers often practice "self-censorship," for fear of reprisals by organizations outside of governments, such as businesses and organized crime.[129]

English-language Mass Media

Countries where English is an official language (Cameroon and Rwanda) have English-language TV, radio, and newspapers. English-language media, especially newspapers and online news outlets, may be found in other countries as well.[130]

> Most people in this region get their news from local radio outlets. However, the BBC World Service has a wide reach and usually covers significant events, though not specific to a country or locale.

Television broadcasting is also most common in urban centers, but the radio is still the most commonly used medium because it is affordable.

Newspapers are also mostly distributed in urban centers, and only among the literate. As mentioned earlier, Equatorial Guinea has the highest literacy rate in this region at 87 percent, while CAR has the lowest literacy score at 48.60 percent.[131] Newspaper readership is pegged on literacy as well as economics – like the television, only a few can afford to have one. However, many more people are able to access TV broadcasts through a family member or a neighbor. It is common to see neighbors come together to watch an important newscast or a football match; it is even more common to see three to four people share a newspaper.

Regional Security Issues

Why Regional Security Issues Matter to You as a Marine

A thorough understanding of a region is difficult without an awareness of its most significant security challenges. These challenges tend to affect not only relations between states in the region, but also the social structure through the behavior of its people and the choices they make. Regional security issues encompass a host of topics ranging from wars between states, to insurgencies, to organized crime, to weak institutions, and systemic corruption. Furthermore, some of them involve violence, while others weaken states and societies and have the potential to turn low-level conflicts into violent confrontations.

Introduction

The Central Africa region is significant for its complex security challenges -- as well as its strong potential. For several decades, regional conflicts have destabilized governments, displaced massive numbers of people, created significant casualties, and precipitated many humanitarian crises. This region has experienced more conflict than any other in Africa, and the conflicts are interlinked, with many stemming from the most significant event in the region – the 1994 twin genocide in Rwanda and Burundi.

One major security issue in this region includes the threat posed by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The LRA initially organized in Northern Uganda in 1987, and has since executed a terror campaign including the abduction of over 70,000 children in Uganda, South Sudan, DRC, and the CAR.[132] The United States is actively engaged in pursuing its leader, Joseph Kony.[133] Although the group cannot be approached from a purely military angle, the U.S. has engaged host nations in an effort to strengthen their capacity to counter the threat. In May 2010, President Obama signed into law the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act, This American measure assists the governments of Uganda, CAR, and DRC in neutralizing the threat posed to civilians and regional stability by the LRA.[134]

Recommended Reading:

To read more about the Lord's Resistance Army from its inception see:

The Lord's Resistance Army of Today by Ledio Cakaj (Enough Project) http://www.enoughproject.org/files/lra_today.pdf

The Lord's Resistance Army: The U.S. Response by Alexia Arieff and Lauren Ploch (Congressional Research Service) https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42094.pdf

In addition to the LRA, there are numerous other rebel groups in this region, including the M-23 (March 23rd Movement) which was active in eastern DRC for about 20 months between 2011 and

2013. M-23is responsible for the death and displacement of thousands people, among other atrocities.[135]

In the CAR, a Christian majority nation, three rebel groups organized under one umbrella group - Seleka Alliance. This trio was comprised of: the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity, the Wa Kodro Salute Patriotic Convention, and the Convention of Patriots for Justice and Peace. All three were a part of the group that had signed Libreville Comprehensive Peace Agreement with the Francois Bozize government in 2008.[136] Bozize was faulted for not implementing the agreement; this led to a coup in 2013 that spiraled into a religious conflict between Muslims and Christians.[137] In January 2014, after Bozize's ouster, the CAR appointed an interim government whose role is to stabilize the country and preside over elections.[138] Following the 2013 coup d'état and ensuing sectarian violence, France saw a need to deploy over 2000 troops to the CAR to support of the transition. Between 2013 and 2015, a total of 9000 foreign peacekeeping troops from France and the African Union were deployed to the CAR.[139]

Other issues that have destabilized this region include criminal enterprises such as arms trafficking, timber smuggling, and the black market mineral industry. Although regional and international cartels are largely involved these illegal activities, the political class and regional governments have been accused of complicity. In the DRC, the covert trade in natural resources is a major conflict driver. Minerals such as coltan, diamonds, and others being used as a medium of exchange by many rebel groups.

Although this region is complex, and the security issues are numerous, this section will only discuss three main root causes of instability. They include:
- **Conflict**
- **Armed Groups and Rebel Movements**
- **Illegal Enterprises and Trafficking**

Conflict

This section will address three main types of conflict in this region.
- Ethnic Conflict
- Political Conflict
- Resource Conflict

Ethnic Conflict

Central Africa is made up of several hundred different ethnic groups. Ethnic violence in this region has been as a result of perceived social, economic, historical, or political issues. Rwanda and Burundi, which have parallel pasts including sharp tensions between the two main ethnic groups the Hutu and the Tutsi, provide a good example of ethnicity as a conflict driver in Africa.[140]

Historical accounts in Rwanda and Burundi indicate that the Belgian colonial authority employed Tutsis in government in the 1920s; this created a Tutsi monopoly which bred animosity between the Tutsi and the Hutu.[141] These tensions led to a Hutu uprising in 1959 that precipitated the exile of thousands of Tutsis to neighboring countries.[142]

After Rwanda independence, ethnic tensions simmered. By the 1980s, more than 480,000 Tutsi refugees in neighboring counties were mounting pressure on the government of Rwanda to allow for their return.[143] Soon after, a rebel movement rose up, and in October 1990, a war broke out when the Rwandan Patriotic Army (RFA) invaded a Rwandan border post from neighboring Uganda.[144]

Rwanda Genocide Memorial (Source: Geckos Adventure)

The Rwandese Patriotic Army was the military arm of the rebel group Rwandese Patriotic Front that had been arming and training in Uganda. France and Belgium intervened militarily and helped quash the invasion: France sent 600 troops and Belgium sent 400.

Recommended Reading:

To read more about the Rwanda Genocide see:

The Rwandan Genocide: How It was Prepared (Human Rights Watch) http://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/africa/rwanda0406/rwanda0406.pdf

The Triumph of Evil (PBS) http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/

The Rwandan Genocide: 20 years later http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/

The trigger of the 1994 genocide was the crash of the presidential plane: Juvénal Habyarimana, the President of Rwanda, and Cyprien Ntaryamira, the President of Burundi, were both killed when the Rwanda presidential jet was shot down on its way back from the Arusha Peace Summit in Tanzania in April, 1994.[145] The deaths of the two leaders prompted Hutu youth militia known as *"Interahamwe"* (those who attack together) to embark on systematic machete killings aimed at eliminating the Tutsi ethnic group.

The Rwandan genocide resulted in the deaths of over one million people in the first hundred days and the displacement of thousands more.[146] The killings had been planned and executed with leverage from the national government apparatus. Up to this point, the government had demonized the Tutsi as the enemy. To counter this alleged Tutsi threat, the government mobilized the Hutu while justifying its actions as self-defense.[147]

The genocide also created an influx of refugees in the region, with the highest number of people moving into Goma in eastern DRC.

Tutsi Exiles in the Region in 1994	
Points of Concentration	**Approximate figures**
Northern Burundi	270,000
Western Tanzania	577,000
Southwestern Uganda	10,000
DRC (3 camps)	1,244,000

Source: UNHCR Special Unit for Rwanda and Burundi as of November 16, 1994

The refugee population in the DRC posed a threat to the Tutsi-led government that had taken over in Rwanda. Subsequently, fighting broke out in the refugee camps in the DRC, extending the breadth of the genocide. Militias took control of the camps and instability ensued in Eastern Congo.

In 1997, Mobutu Sese Seko, then President of Zaire, now DRC, was overthrown.[148] This was the beginning of a host of regional issues that have persisted and continue to present challenges to regional and global security.

Twenty years have passed since the 1994 genocide, and both countries have made tremendous strides socially, politically, and economically. However, there are still remnants of the conflict in the region. However, there are still remnants of conflict in the region. Burundi for example, experienced a crisis in mid-2015 after an attempted coup d'état that resulted in over 100,000 refugees in Rwanda, the DRC and Tanzania.[149] Additionally, there are still lingering elements rebel groups in eastern Congo (DRC) and the long-term stability of the CAR remains challenged because of an unresolved political and sectarian issues that create perpetual instability. Conflict in the region could flare up at any time, should unexpected variables –such as an HA/DR scenario—reignite underlying tensions.

Political Conflict

Governance issues, weak militaries, and a collapsed security structure trigger political conflict in this region. For decades, conflict in Central Africa has been fueled by limited government infrastructure, an inability to enforce laws, and scarce avenues for legitimate economic pursuits.

The root causes of political conflict include poverty, bad governance, corruption, social inequality, economic marginalization of communities, tensions over land rights, and identity issues. Additionally, disputes between groups in power and groups in opposition have resulted in armed confrontations, coups d'état, and armed resistance to central governments.

This region is especially prone to instability because of the ripple effects of conflicts in neighboring countries. For instance, the situation in the DRC was triggered and sustained by the Rwanda genocide.

This region has experienced 15 successful *coups d'état* since 1960.[150]

Country	Year
Burundi	1966, 1976, 1987, 1996
Central African Republic (CAR)	1966, 1979, 1981, 2003, 2013
Congo (Brazzaville)	1963, 1968
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	1960, 1965, 2001
Sao Tome & Principe	2003

The most recent coup in this region was in the CAR in 2013. One of the root causes of the conflict was marginalization of the northerners. The northern part of CAR is arid and not suitable for agriculture. The north also bears the effects of the Sahelian climate like the *harmattan* winds which are hot, dry windstorm occurring between November and March. The south however, is lush and fertile with rainforests and the Ubangui River Basin; which flows into the Congo River. These geographical and environmental features have fomented ethnic and social conflict in the CAR.[151]

Additionally, bad governance, corruption, looting of the state, and the CAR government's penchant for presiding over illegal networks collectively disenfranchised the population and crippled the economy, especially after the 2013 coup.[152]

Further complicating matters in CAR is neighboring Chad's repeated efforts to influence the country's political affairs. In fact, and to this day, most experts agree that no significant change ever occurs in CAR's political arena without Chad's consent. In this case, Chad's government was implicated in this most recent crisis that turned into a sectarian conflict.

Chad's primary reason for meddling in CAR's internal affairs in 2013 was to protect its own national interests by taming southern Chad's Sara insurgency. The Sara is a group of non-Muslim tribes resident in southern Chad. They all have similar dialects and are considered one group, making it the largest ethnic group in Chad.

Following Chad's independence, the Sara dominated the government, thereby breeding tensions between themselves and other ethnic groups, particularly the Muslim tribes in the north. The first Chadian president, Char a Sar, was assassinated in 1975 in a rebellion mounted by his own tribe. By 1978, a northerner was president tilting the balance of power. Because the Sara extend into northern part of CAR, they have maintained a stronghold on both sides of the border - in southern Chad and northern CAR.[153] The Sara have been a threat to the power structure in Chad whose current president, Idriss Deby, is from a minority ethnic group, the Zaghawa.

In its strategy to control the Sara, the political leadership in Chad believed that it could prop up an administration in the CAR that would then control the dynamics of the Sara community.

> "Chad has played an influential and ambiguous role in the Central African Republic. It was accused of supporting the overthrow of the nation's president, and then later helped remove the rebel who ousted him, making way for a new transitional government. In a statement the Chadian government said that its 850 soldiers had been accused of siding with Muslim militias in sectarian clashes with Christian fighters that have swept the Central African Republic for months."[154]

The DRC has also experienced its share of political conflict. As stated above, the Rwandan genocide and the influx of Rwandan refugees were the main triggers of instability in the Congo. Rwanda and Uganda were instrumental in the ouster of Mobutu Sese Seko by Laurent Kabila. Kabila led a Tutsi-dominated force, the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (ADFL) against Mobutu's forces, and in pursuit of Hutu militia, the *Interahamwe*, in eastern Congo.[155]

Laurent Kabila took over the government in 1997, but was killed by his bodyguards in 2001, leaving the reins to his son, the current president of the DRC, Joseph Kabila.[156] Though he has retained the presidency for many years, he has been unable to resolve many of the issues still facing the DRC. Progress is slow and the country's vast mineral wealth, competition for resources, criminal gangs, and numerous militias pose grave threats to stability and to democratic gains. Nonetheless, most of the country is stable and the population is slowly reaping the benefits of stability as the government's development agenda takes shape.

The DRC and the CAR are the two largest countries in this region. Therefore, their internal stability is necessary for regional stability. The U.S. is working to strengthen governance in the DRC, and is assisting the African Union in pursuit of stability in the CAR. The stability of this region is a challenge because economic development can only take place in a secure environment.

Resource Conflict

Natural resources in some Central African countries cause and exacerbate conflict. Instability in eastern Congo is driven by a host of factors, but has been sustained by competition over resources. Rebel groups and government forces fight over control of mines; smuggling cartels and multinational companies are also blamed for contributing to conflict. Resource exploitation has continued to be a source of instability, especially because proceeds from their sale have been used to sustain militias, and for the personal enrichment of politicians.[157]

"Conflict minerals" is a term used to describe those minerals mined in an environment of armed conflict.[158] They include gold, tin, and tungsten, which are all used in electronics. Additionally, the DRC produces approximately 17% of global

> Although regulations are in place, criminal activity has been used to fund armed groups.

diamonds, 34% of the world's cobalt, and 10% of copper. The country also holds 60-80% of global reserves of coltan, a rare mineral used in the manufacture of cell phones and computers. In the DRC, although the government has enacted laws to regulate the mining sector and protect artisan miners, criminal elements have infiltrated this sector.

For some time, the struggle to control the region's immense resources has involved several regional and foreign powers.[159] Additionally, networks of military, political, and business elites have aligned themselves with regional and international players' intent on plundering and trading these resources. Proceeds from this trade in minerals, timber, and elephant tusks are often used to procure arms and supplies used in regional conflicts, further fueling regional violence. The impact on local populations has been felt across the social structure, with miners and mineral traders being illegally taxed, robbed, and killed.

The illegal trade in minerals has also resulted in the exploitation of communities by government forces. Consequently, vast parts of the region, especially in the CAR and the DRC, remain relatively lawless and insecure, even in areas under government control. These affected areas have been victimized by armed groups looting, attacking, and perpetrating mass rape on civilian populations.[160]

Apart from minerals, illegal timber extraction and smuggling is ubiquitous. Central Africa's forest covers 45% of the region, except for the northern parts of Cameroon and the CAR, which border the Sahelian countries.[161] Cameroon is one of the largest exporters of timber, while Bas-Congo province in the DRC is the most exploited. However, the DRC government is working with partner nations to convert the region into a viable area capable of sustaining agriculture and providing food to multiple communities across the region, especially because of its rich soils.

This region is also prone to poaching. In 2014, the United Nations Security Council renewed sanctions against those persons and entities that support poaching. On average, 20,000 elephants are killed in this region each year. Money earned from the covert sale of ivory is funneled into illegal activities, or is used to finance rebel groups such as the LRA.[162]

Armed Groups and Rebel Movements

There are a number of armed groups operating in Central Africa. These groups pursue ethnic or political goals. At times, different groups have cooperated with each other to achieve similar goals. Given the porous and unsecured borders in this region and cross-national ethnic ties, it is not

uncommon for militias and rebel groups to freely operate across national boundaries. Several militias and rebel groups operate in the region. The Lord's Resistance Army, the M23 rebel movement,[163] and the Seleka Alliance[164] are the most active.

Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)[165]

Joseph Kony (Source: U.S. State Dept.)

The LRA has been in existence since 1986; it is Africa's oldest, most persistent, and most violent insurgent group. The group was started by Alice Lakwena from remnants of the Uganda People's Democratic Army, which was comprised of the Acholi ethnic group in Northern Uganda. Originating in Uganda, just outside the region, the group purportedly fights for the interests of the Acholi people of Northern Uganda. In 1987, the President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni, led the National Resistance Army and overthrew then President Tito Okello and the Acholi, sending many northerners from the Acholi tribe into neighboring Sudan. Alice Lakwena, who claimed to have mystic powers, then led an insurgency against the new regime. Consequently, Joseph Kony rose out of this movement.[166]

The LRA has executed a brutal campaign against the civilian population by killing, maiming, and abducting children in Uganda. More widely, the LRA has committed mass atrocities, including forcibly recruiting and indoctrinating children and forcing them to fight as child soldiers. Reports show that between 1987 and 2006, over 20,000 children were abducted for use as child soldiers or sex slaves. Additionally, the LRA displaced over two million people in northern Uganda alone.[167]

The Ugandan government has responded to this threat through diplomatic dialogue -- and militarily.

Military operations targeting LRA include a counterinsurgency campaign in Operation Iron Fist in 2002 to eliminate the threat in northern Uganda. In 2008, Uganda launched Operation Lightening Thunder, to counter and pursue the LRA.

The LRA has been designated a terrorist group by the African Union and the United States. Although Operation Lightning Thunder has encountered challenges, it has dealt a blow to this insurgency movement and prevented further harm to the civilian population in this region.

After losing its home base in Uganda due to increasing pressure and loss of public support, the LRA now operates in the neighboring countries of South Sudan, Darfur in Sudan, northeastern DRC, and the CAR.[168] In 2010, President Obama signed the Lord's Resistance (LRA) Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act and deployed troops to support Operation Lightning Thunder.[169] The International Criminal Court has issued indictments against Joseph Kony for "murder, abduction,

sexual enslavement, mutilation, and mass burnings of houses and looting of camp settlements; that abducted civilians, including children."[170]

The M23 Rebels

The March 23 Movement, popularly known as M23, is a rebel militia group opposing government forces in eastern DRC.[171] The group was comprised of former Congolese soldiers who had defected from the Congolese Army after a mutiny in March 2012. That event was triggered by the collapse of a peace treaty that sought to integrate them within the national military apparatus. M23 was led by a former general, Bosco Ntaganda, who is now being tried at International Criminal Court for rape, murder, and other human rights abuses committed in the conflict. He was first indicted in 2006 for recruiting child soldiers, and surprisingly turned himself in at the U.S. embassy in Rwanda.[172] M23 primarily controlled eastern Congo, especially around the city of Goma, the capital of North Kivu.

Reports state that this armed group penetrated eastern Congo with the assistance of Rwandan and Ugandan armed forces. In 2012, a special United Nations panel -- UN Group of Experts on the DRC -- established that there was a link between M23 and the governments of those two countries. The UN group accused Rwanda and Uganda of offering M23 direct military support.[173] It was also alleged that the group, comprised of ethnic Tutsis, received support from Tutsi sympathizers in neighboring Rwanda. Additionally, M23 is said to have aligned itself with other regional militias and armed groups. The motive behind the rebel attacks was to gain control over

M-23 rebels in the DRC (Source: Wikipedia)

mineral mines. M23 worked with other local armed groups to smuggle gold through Uganda across an M23-controlled border crossing.[174]

In 2013, following several months of fighting against DRC and UN-backed troops, the M23 rebels signed a peace accord and officially agreed to a cease-fire. However, sporadic fighting between the rebels and government-backed forces continued in some areas of eastern Congo.[175] In December 2013, the government of the DRC and the rebel group signed a peace agreement that included disarmament of the group and a partial amnesty for war crimes.[176] The group was disbanded in 2014.

The Seleka

The Seleka rebel movement in the CAR is an alliance of four Muslim rebel groups that were complicit in the overthrow of François Bozizé in March 2013. Seleka, meaning "alliance" in the local Sango dialect, is an amalgamation of four rebel groups, two of which signed a peace agreement with the central government in 2007. [177] The terms of the agreement included payments to members of the rebel group upon disarmament. In 2012, the groups came together in opposition to the former president's failure to honor the terms of the peace deal, and over marginalization of the northern parts of the country.[178]

After seizing control of the country, the group embarked on a terror campaign against civilians suspected of being sympathetic to the deposed president. What began as a campaign against a government's failure to address poverty and underdevelopment turned sectarian, and evolved into the

rebel group mounting attacks against Christians. This gave rise to an armed resistance by vigilante groups comprised of former soldiers under an umbrella group, the "Anti-Balaka," meaning anti-machete in the Sango dialect.

The Anti-Balaka group recruited from the Christian and animist communities in Borab District, which is the former president's hometown. The Anti-Balaka organized attacks against the Seleka, a predominantly Muslim group. Both groups committed atrocities against the unarmed civilian population, leading to the intervention of African Union troops and French troops. Although the groups signed a ceasefire agreement in July 2014,[179] violence and instability persist.

Illegal Enterprises and Trafficking

Trafficking in Persons

Central Africa is a source, destination, and transit point for human trafficking. The victims of this trafficking are sent to a variety of destinations, ranging from relatively poor countries to affluent ones in Africa and Europe.[180] In Central Africa, children and adults are trafficked for domestic servitude, sexual exploitation, agricultural labor, and mining. Additionally, militia groups actively target and kidnap children for use in armed conflicts.[181]

> **TACTICAL TIP**: Marines deployed to this region must prepare to encounter child soldiers fighting with the LRA, among other armed groups.

Conflict has made the CAR and eastern Congo increasingly vulnerable to trafficking. Armed groups kidnap and forcibly recruit children and women as combatants, to work as porters and as sex slaves in rebel groups. Reports indicate cross-border kidnappings, especially from Uganda and Rwanda, into rebel groups in eastern Congo. Young boys are forced to work in the mines, and are held as debt bondage by mining cartels. Additionally, young girls are held in brothels, and peacekeeping troops have been implicated in prostitution and pedophilia.[182]

Poverty is the main motivation for human trafficking. Although there are no accurate statistics in this region, reports indicate that rural communities are targeted all over the region.[183] Child labor is common in poorer countries like Cameroon, where children are trafficked to work in richer countries such as Equatorial Guinea.[184]

Illegal Smuggling

Lawlessness and instability in the region have made room for criminal activities that finance armed groups. The mining industry has been hardest hit by criminal cartels in the region because they have mapped transit routes in and out of mining areas in eastern Congo and the CAR through Rwanda and Uganda. A 2013 UN report shows that obscure mining concessions in the Congo have destabilized the mining sector. Although mining is regulated, criminal cartels and armed groups have managed to siphon millions of dollars out of the country by exploiting informal networks in the sector.[185] This UN assessment noted that "$271 million's worth of gold — two-thirds of the total value of smuggled DR Congo-extracted gold — passed through Uganda in 2013."[186]

Another criminal activity that has taken root amidst the lawlessness and in the ungoverned spaces is the poaching of elephant and other animals. Militants are heavily involved in poaching in the Virunga National Park in the DRC and in the CAR. Elephant tusks are smuggled to ivory markets in Asia.[187]

Lawlessness has also created a profitable environment for drug traffic. Drug trafficking in this region is mainly limited to marijuana because cocaine and other illicit drugs are still too expensive for the local communities. Marijuana is grown in many countries in this region and is easily smuggled across borders, and armed groups use it to drug their fighters.[188]

Central Africa is home to the largest rainforests in Africa, and demand for timber in East and Southern Africa is driving the trade. Although most logging is conducted by artisan and small-scale loggers, armed groups supervise the trade and secure smuggling routes across the borders. For instance, timber is smuggled through Rwanda and Burundi into Kenya.[189]

Other goods trafficked into Central Africa include arms. Although the prime weapon used in the Rwanda genocide was a machete, the Congo war introduced the use of the machine gun; a brisk arms trade within the region soon followed. Although there have been disarmament programs in conjunction with the United Nations, thousands of arms remain.[190]

Use of Child Soldiers

Child soldiers (aged from 6 to 17 years) have served as combatants in regional conflicts in Central Africa.[191] Several thousand children have served as soldiers in conflicts in the DRC, CAR, and Rwanda. In the DRC, for example, both rebel and government forces have used child soldiers, both boys and girls, in conflicts in the eastern provinces.[192]

Child soldiers in the Central African Republic (Source: UN)

Child soldiers are recruited in a variety of ways. Abduction is a tactic used by some regional groups, such as the LRA. In some cases, children are volunteered by their villages to serve with armed groups in exchange for safety from attacks. Extreme poverty and hunger have led some parents to give up their children to rebel groups, where they can be provided basic needs and supplies.[193]

Upon joining these armed groups, child soldiers are indoctrinated to espouse the agendas of their new leaders. Indoctrination is achieved through torture, brainwashing, and dependency on drugs. These children are forced to commit atrocities such as murder, rape, and mutilation for their respective warlords. Child soldiers are also loaned out to fight in neighboring countries. Tutsi backed rebels from Rwanda, for example, who support the M23 fighters in neighboring eastern DRC, have recruited and abducted children for service in support of the M23.[194]

The use of child soldiers in the region poses long-term social and security concerns. Child soldiers face significant challenges in reintegrating back into society at the end of hostilities. Additionally, the presence of unemployed youth and young adults who spent a significant amount of their teenage and

adolescent years fighting, and failed to complete a basic education or learn any other legitimate skills, will continue to pose concerns to regional security.

Conclusion

The atrocities committed in this region in the last 20 years are numerous. Women and children have especially suffered. Rape has been used as a weapon of war, and children have been forcibly recruited into militia. Although reforms in governance and the security sector are underway, the root causes of conflict, especially poverty, persist. Overall, the issues of concern include: persistent intra- and inter-country conflicts, weak governance, ethnicity/identity politics, and mismanagement of mineral resources.

Case Study: The Bakongo

The case study in this chapter introduces a culture from the Central Africa region, using the concepts introduced in the Operational Culture General (OCG) document (see attached document).

Introduction

Central Africa is home to a diverse conglomeration of ethnic groups. The cultural identity of these groups has evolved over time through migration, geographic access to (and exclusion from) economic opportunity, and interactions with explorers and colonizers.

Although most Central Africans are administered by national governments, they typically identify themselves as members of specific ethnic groups. These ethnic groups have lineages that can be traced back several centuries. Understanding the genesis, beliefs, and evolution of these groups is important to your understanding of current regional, ethnic, and cultural dynamics.

The case study on the Bakongo in the DRC, Congo (Brazzaville), and Angola will highlight the importance of cultural identity in this ethnically diverse region.

The Bakongo

The Bakongo people are an ethnic group found in the DRC, Congo (Brazzaville), and northern Angola.[195] They were originally a loose grouping of several tribes in the ancient Kongo Kingdom of Central Africa. They spoke a common language, and were related by similar customs and culture.[196]

In 1482, the Bakongo came in contact with Portuguese colonists, initiating several centuries of trade and social interaction.[197] Such interactions with the West played a significant role in the evolution of the Bakongo people, with effects that came with colonization and the spread of Christianity. The Bakongo adopted many aspects of European culture and linguistic heritage. For

Bakongo Homeland (Source: Smithsonian Institution)

example, Kikongo is no longer the official language of the region, and has been replaced with Portuguese and French.

Past conflicts, intensified by European arms and support, precipitated the fragmentation of the Kongo Kingdom.[198] The partitioning of the kingdom into French, Belgian, and Portuguese protectorates at the Conference of Berlin in 1884 accelerated its decline.[199] Eventually, the borders of emerging African states bisected the region traditionally occupied by the Bakongo. Today, the Bakongo are split between three countries: the DRC (45 percent), Congo (Brazzaville) (48 percent), and Angola (13 percent).[200]

Regardless of the formal governmental borders, the different tribes of the Bakongo continue to identify themselves as descendants of the former empire. There are several villages and communities in rural areas where descendants of the original Kongo Kingdom share similar interests, and have come together around social and cultural issues within their respective political boundaries.[201] The Bakongo people are mostly concentrated in their historic geographic areas. However, limited economic opportunities and the pursuit of better educational and economic opportunities have led to an exodus of many Bakongo youth. Many of these young people have chosen to live in neighboring major urban areas.[202]

Physical Geography

The Bakongo live in a tropical climate straddling the equator, and this physical environment has played an important role in shaping the Bakongo as farmers, fishermen, and hunters. The annual precipitation in the area where they live is810-2000 mm (31-78 in), which is optimum for locally grown crops.

The Congo River is the main geographic feature of the region. It covers more than 3700 mi (5955 km), with several tributaries that have provided an unbroken link for transportation, communication, and trade.[203] The Bakongo have used this river and its many tributaries to support their agriculture and fishing. The rainforests surrounding the Congo River are also home to diverse flora, fauna, and thousands of animal species, including apes, baboons, birds, fish, and reptiles among other wildlife; these provide plenty of wild game for hunting.[204] In fact, the Bakongo are skilled hunters. The name "Congo," means "hunter," thus the name "Bakongo."[205]

The rise of the ancient Kongo Kingdom as a regional power was largely due to the size of its population: current statistics put their population at 10 million across three countries.[206]

The Bakongo historically thrived through agriculture and trade: they were able to navigate the rainforests at the advent of the Atlantic trade with European explorers, and were active agriculturists as the rich soil provided a fertile ground for the cultivation of crops in quantities large enough to sustain local communities and also supply a thriving trade in agricultural products..[207] However, overreliance on agriculture has destroyed forests and other habitats, and now threatens the existence of numerous endangered species. In recent years, communities have turned to mining and timber harvesting/ logging, which led to additional deforestation and soil erosion.

Population growth and industrialization in the area where the Bakongo live have increased the demand for electricity. The construction of the Inga dam on the Congo River, which will be the largest

At completion, the Inga project will surpass the capacity of China's Three Gorges Dam which is strategically important for the country and the region as it will meet up to 50% of Africa's electricity needs.

hydropower dam in Africa and will generate approximately 4800 megawatts (MW) of power, will be a boost to the Bakongo way of life in the Congo basin and the environment in its surrounding areas.[208]

The Economy of the Culture

Agriculture, fishing and arboriculture (cultivation of trees and shrubs) supplemented by animal husbandry served as the basis of the ancient Kongo economic system. Because the Bakongo population habitat is surrounded by rainforests, arboriculture is a way of life as the many types of shrubs and plant in the environment are used for food and for medicinal purposes. The Bakongo grow crops such as maize (corn), plantains (bananas), cassava, and beans.

Today, agriculture remains the basis of the economic system in rural areas; however, farming is mostly practiced by individual families and is largely informal, with no government oversight or taxation. Farmers grow food for personal consumption; the excess is traded in local markets or transported to large urban areas for sale. Cash for goods is the primary method of exchange, although informal trading systems such as bartering meat for grain, palm oil, or honey are not uncommon in some rural areas. The traditional agrarian economy has evolved with other sectors taking shape.

The importance of the Congo River to the Bakongo economy and way of life, historically and today, cannot be understated, as the River served as a primary source for food and water. Today in addition, the Congo River provides formal employment in support of hydropower and as well as tourism.

The informal sector in particular is a major economic variable because it contributes directly to the high rate of unemployment in the region. There are several factors that have contributed to the growth of the informal economy in this region including a poor strategic plan by governments and weak taxation and regulation systems. Additionally, Bakongo's informal economy has grown due to a youth population without specialized skills (and without access to capital) and an employment market unable to absorb available skilled workers.[209] The informal economy in this region is a source for legal and illegal goods; a majority of the population relies on the informal economy for sustenance.

> Industrialization introduced change in the Bakongo's way of life. Subsistence agriculture, small-scale fishing, and the use of barter trade evolved into small-scale industries with cash as the medium of exchange. The conflict in the DRC also introduced change in the economy, because of population displacement, changes in settlement patterns, and the impact that the mining sector had on the larger economy.

In Africa, and particularly in this conflict-prone region, most people derive an income from the informal sector because formal enterprises are very limited. Although artisanal mining is regulated and contributes to the formal sector, lack of enforcement of existing mines has led to the increase of unlicensed artisanal miners. In the DRC, there are secondary trades associated with mining, such as blacksmithing, middle-men who source minerals, and motorbike transporters who access small-scale mines in the interior. Most of these subsidiary trades are not taxed but constitute a part of the local economy.

Mining in Central Africa (Source: USGS)

The government and the private sector employs only a few people. A majority of employment opportunities can be found in micro production units and medium-sized enterprises that manufacture household goods, including stoves, 'jiko'-pots and pans, and other items. Small production units are homegrown enterprises and are regulated just like medium-sized enterprises. They do employ a small minority, however because most have sporadic financing and income streams are not as consistent as in other formal sectors. It is common therefore for households to supplement their income sources by engaging in an informal enterprise.

The difficulty in accessing the formal economy is clearly evident in Congo (Brazzaville), where the Bakongo are the largest ethnic group. To officially register a business and acquire the necessary permits for its operation is difficult and costly; thus, many people resort to conducting business informally and bribing officials to bypass the process.[210] As a result, the Bakongo have become less dependent on government and other formal employment, and have instead innovated alternative income streams. In rural areas, this income is derived predominantly from agriculture, logging, and mining; in rural centers, alternative income is often derived from music and fashion.

Members of the Kimbaguist Symphony (Source: PBS)

The music industry in this region is one of the fastest growing in Africa. This industry contributes to the culture and the economy. Soukous/ Lingala – a dance music with the same style and rhythm as rumba -- is now renowned across the continent. Local Soukous artists make a decent living, and a music production industry to support the art has grown within and outside this region.

Classical music has also risen in popularity in the last 20 years. Two groups in particular have achieved fame both regionally and internationally:[211] The Kimbaguist Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1994 by the Kimbaguist church and the Kinshasa Symphony. Members of neither group receive consistent remuneration for their performances, except for record sales and a few instances where they perform for international audiences or are hired by the expatriate community. These two groups do, however, engage in formal and informal employment to supplement their income.

Another subsector in the Bakongo economy is the fashion industry, a thriving unregulated sector in Congo (Brazzaville) and the DRC. The fashion industry among the Bakongo drives the local economy, and has also created a "pseudo culture." For instance, the *sapeurs* who are members of SAPE (Society of Tastemakers and Elegant People), have created a culture and a way of life through fashion.[212] The *sapeurs* pride themselves in demonstrating a unique form of social behavior emulating French dandyism in their decorum, style, talk, and walk.[213] To them, maintaining their dress and style is more important than having an expensive car or house,

Sapeur in the Congo (Source: Globedia.com)

or even a savings account. They invest all they have in their lifestyle, while at the same time sustaining a sub-economy.

"Exalted by their community, *Le Sapeurs* are treated like out-and-out celebrities and wallow in the warmth of exaltation like the poseurs they indubitably are. Often paid to attend weddings, funerals and anniversaries their role is to confer events with a certain *je n'est sais quoi* that, inherited from an infinitely more courteous age, is entirely deficient in this the twenty-first Century."[214]

Fashion and music not only express the cultural values of the Bakongo, but have offered an economic livelihood to many segments in the informal sector. These sub-sectors are gradually expanding the formal sector as the government increases its ability to regulate and tax certain trades.

There are significant challenges that have hindered the economic development of the Bakongo. Despite the population's ability to adapt and innovate, development has stagnated due to an underdeveloped infrastructure, the destruction of habitable land due to deforestation, the effects of conflict on their environment, and the displacement of communities -- all of which have impacted income sources. Although GDP in this region is on the rise because of investments in infrastructure and mining, corruption is also on the rise in the public sector, and communities have yet to see tangible benefits.

Change is evident in the way traditional tax structures have evolved, as governments in this region have strengthened them to meet their obligations to the populace. One example is in artisanal mining: it began as an unregulated field; now it is regulated. As a result, communities have had to adapt in order to comply with regulations. This adjustment has also accelerated the rate of corruption as some try to bypass the system.

In Angola, the Bakongo population, which is as high as 1.6 million people[215], has been engaged in an active cross-border trade since before the country gained its independence. However, when the civil war broke out right after independence in 1975[216], other ethnic groups resented the Bakongo for allegedly accumulating wealth during this period through various trades, including the sale of foodstuffs to the Bakongo communities across the border in the DRC. Their economic activity grew as a friction point between them and other communities who questioned their citizenship, referring to them as "Zairians." However, today the oil sector in Cambida -- the region in Angola with the largest population of Bakongo -- economically benefits Bakongo communities on both sides of the border, contributing to the formal and informal economy.

Overall, the Bakongo have suffered much hardship and poverty. Like many communities in this region, formal employment is evasive and areas such as mining and oil drilling require training. The governments in this region are working to alleviate poverty, though they have yet to achieve any significant milestones. Foreign direct investments in the oil and mining sectors have some impact on local communities, though the impact as it relates to the Bakongo has yet to be quantified.

Social Structure

Family

The Bakongo social structure is organized around family, though the concept of family is different from that in the West. Emphasis here is placed on the extended family. The smallest unit is the family and the largest unit is the clan (*Kanda*), which consists of members of the same ancestral line.[217]

Membership and inheritance within the *Kanda* are based on matrilineal blood lines. Historically, the Bakongo has been a matriarchal society, and the mother's elder brother is a key decision maker in the family. This ensures that the ancestral bond of the clan remains the same, and under this system, children inherit from their mothers and maternal uncles. This differs from Western traditions, where the patriarchal lineage is common and inheritances are customarily passed down from fathers.

However, urbanization and education have perpetuated individual independence and the matriarchal concept is only evident during ceremonies such as births, marriage, and death. Most Bakongo who reside outside of the social unit in cities or in the West have adopted an individualistic lifestyle.

Traditionally, in Bakongo society, neighbors and clan members share responsibility for raising children, [218]and it is common for neighbors or relatives to discipline a child who is not theirs.

This extended family structure of clans, relatives, and neighbors impacts choices. Members of the same clan often share values and a belief system. It is not a foregone conclusion, however, that members of the same clan definitely will share values and beliefs. Religion's impact on society has also affected family structure, in that members of the same clan may have different values and divergent religious beliefs. The same applies to political leanings, although in rural areas it is common for a community linked through kinship to have similar political views and vote for the same candidate or political party.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic among the Bakongo, as well as other communities in this region, has challenged communitarian norms. The pandemic has introduced change in this collectivist cultural pattern: individuals are now increasingly making decisions out of self-interest rather than the interest of the community. Additionally, the stigma and discrimination of those infected with this disease leads to secrecy that further increases the rate at which the HIV/AIDS is spread. This is especially so because HIV testing treatment centers are identifiable and often located in the common public sites such as shopping centers or markets, and thus most HIV patients are publically known to the community. Therefore, when working in this region, consider the shifting cultural patterns and take a holistic approach, taking into account the second and third order effects of the disease.

In the past 20 years, the family unit has been impacted by the war in the DRC, which is home to over 1.1 million Bakongo.[219] Thousands of men, who were traditionally the heads of the household, died as combatants or as victims; this left women with new roles: providing food, shelter, and clothing.

In addition to war, the Bakongo like other communities, have borne the brunt of HIV/AIDS. This pandemic disintegrated the family structure further as a result of stigmatization. The high rate of HIV infections via mother to child transmission directly impacted the family unit, causing real or supposed patients to be ostracized by the extended family. The psychological impact of the war and the HIV pandemic is evident in today's society, although counseling is a significant part of the HIV prevention and treatment programs.

Marriage

The most important rite of passage among the Bakongo is marriage, and most unions are monogamous. Marriage is traditionally initiated by a man's family, which must pay a "bride price" dictated by family status, economic conditions, or the perceived worth of the girl.[220] Weddings are

formal events, with most of the community involved in cooking, organizing, and celebrating the newlyweds. Once again, the community and the extended family are involved in the entire process, from the bride price ceremony to the actual marriage ceremony. Additionally, having many children is seen as a sign of wealth and power.[221]

Gender

Among the Bakongo, males are usually the head of the household. Women traditionally play a secondary, subservient role—at least publicly. Gender also defines labor divisions: child rearing is an important task relegated to women, while men are considered primary breadwinners and engage in labor-intensive tasks such as fishing and hunting. While both sexes participate in farming, women usually specialize in less labor-intensive forms of agriculture, such as the cultivation of corn, peanuts, and beans. The cultivation of bananas and cocoa and the preparation of palm wine, are primarily the responsibilities of males.[222]

> The concept of reciprocity is important in the Bakongo culture. Bride price is viewed not as payment for the bride, but as gratitude to the bride's family for raising a daughter. Bride price marks the beginning of the relationship between the extended families of the bride and the groom.

In post conflict zones, and indeed in this part of the world, gender roles are not as static as they were in traditional societies. Additionally, the absence of formal employment opportunities has diminished the role of men as providers. Thus, the role of women has evolved from that of child-bearers and keepers of the homestead to providers and protectors. Further, women have bonded together because of the suffering their households have experienced from hunger and violence. Bakongo women form the informal social welfare system as caregivers of HIV orphans, the sick, and the injured in their communities. Additionally, they had to assume a broader decision-making role at the height of the civil war in the late 1990s, when most men were off fighting in various militias. Further, Bakongo women in the DRC have suffered as direct victims of violence in conflict; especially in the DRC, where rape was used as a weapon of war to destroy communities.

> Generalized reciprocity in Bakongo society can be seen in the division of labor between the sexes. The work of both genders contributes to the common good, and no one expects to be compensated directly for their contributions.

A former commander of the UN peacekeeping forces in the DRC, Major-General Patrick Cammaert, viewed rape as a weapon that targets an entire community: "You destroy communities. You punish the men, and you punish the women, doing it in front of the men…It has probably become more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in armed conflict."[223]

> Gender roles in traditional African societies were distinct and women were seen as the protected and defended, and men as the providers and the protectors. However, conflict and pandemics have introduced change: today, as a result, there are many female-headed households. Historically, the Bakongo were a collectivist/communal society, and the use of rape as a weapon of war was an assault on their cohesion and sense of community.

Language

Kikongo is a Bantu language, and is the primary language of the Bakongo. In all, there are about 500 different languages spoken by 250 Bantu ethnic groups.[224] Since there are so many different languages

used, the Kikongo language is a key unifying feature among the various Bakongo people groups.[225] The vastness of the former Kongo Kingdom is reflected in the varying dialects, including Fiotim, Bwende and Dzamba, which are similar in phonetics. Kikongo is widely understood and spoken among the Bakongo tribes; it is the national language of the DRC, Congo (Brazzaville), Gabon, and Angola.[226]

Today, there is no longer an official unified Kongo Kingdom. While the Bakongo have maintained their language and culture, they have also assimilated the language and some cultural attributes of their former colonial occupiers.[227] Further, the Kikongo language is important for the maintenance of the Bakongo identity, especially because members of this

Communities in this region identify with their ethnic groups and their language. Language can also be a mobilization tool. During the Angola civil war, the identity shared by the Bakongo in Cabinda (Angola) and those across the border in the DRC fostered trade as other ethnic groups struggled economically. Though the mobilization was not orchestrated maliciously, it resulted in other ethnic groups in Angola resenting them for being "unpatriotic," and questioning their citizenship.

ethnic group reside in three countries.[228] In an effort to unify the Bakongo people, the government of the former Zaire (DRC) created a standardized version of Kikongo; this standard language is still taught in DRC schools.[229]

Political Structure

The ancient Kongo Empire was ruled by King Manikongo, who administered six provinces. The Manikongo oversaw a flourishing trade network that solidified his influence in the region.[230] This precedent means that the Bakongo have historically had—and are therefore accustomed to—well-organized political structures and leadership. Prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, the Bakongo were organized in villages comprised of several clans.[231] Several villages were grouped into districts. A provincial governor was appointed by the king in each district.

Today, the Bakongo people operate within both formal and informal political structures. Formal structures are part of the national apparatus for representation and accountability. Informal structures are centered on traditional forms of governance, which were inherited from former generations. These informal structures play an important role in the everyday life of the Bakongo. In rural areas, informal governing structures are often more important than formal structures.

The Bakongo have played a significant role in national politics. In the DRC, for example, the Alliance de Bakongo (ABAKO), led by Joseph Kasa-ubu, was a formal political party that played a key role in the independence movement against Belgian colonial rule in 1960.[232] Its primary aim was to advance the independence of Congo from foreign rule. The ABAKO aimed to achieve this by focusing on its members' shared ethnic identity as Bakongo; this rallied support against the non-Bakongo (i.e. the Belgians).[233]

The informal political structures are similar in DRC, northern Angola, and Congo (Brazzaville), with all relying on local leaders and especially chiefs to mobilize communities at the grassroots

The Bakongo mobilized along ethnic lines for political and religious purposes. The Alliance de Bakongo (ABAKO) played a crucial role in gaining independence from Belgian rule by focusing on ethnic identity. Joseph Kasa-Vubu, a Bakongo, played a key role in this mobilization for independence.

level. The formal structures are centered on democratically-elected governments with an executive branch, a legislature, and judiciary in all three countries.

The DRC legislature consists of 608 seats, with 500 in the lower house, known as the National Assembly; and 108 people serving in the Senate, elected by provincial assemblies. Members of the National Assembly serve a term of five years.

Democracy in this region is enshrined as a constitutional ideal, but challenges remain. Unfortunately, corruption and political patronage undermine governance and the capacity to institute quantifiable reforms. A lack of political will and a lax judicial framework also make it difficult to tackle corruption.[234]

Continued ethnic rivalries and civil wars have weakened government structures and hampered service delivery. Furthermore, the war-wary population, including the Bakongo, has low regard for public service and for the government as a whole. Instead, they have faith in local traditional leaders. Because local traditional leaders are not elected and often have kinship ties with the community, it is easier for communities to identify with them as they know the hardships endured by the locals. Although the central government holds real power and has the backing of the military, local traditional leaders are accessible, respected, and considered more legitimate than government representatives. For example, traditional leaders in the DRC who preside over ceremonies are consulted in matters that require the application of customary law.[235]

In traditional Bakongo society, the ancient Kongo king (*Mani Kongo*) was a spiritual and civil leader with near god-like powers.[236] It was believed that the king could communicate with the dead and wielded power over crops and nature.[237]

Modern-day Bakongo are now governed by systems within their respective political boundaries, but leadership at the tribal level is largely unchanged. Chiefs and village elders still wield significant power at the local level, and are usually trusted to handle social and communal issues. Formal government utilizes chiefs and village elders because their influence is local, and elected officials look to them to mobilize communities during times leading up to elections. Although there is a perception that the informal structures are in competition with formal ones, both the elected official and the traditional leader have a symbiotic relationship. A Bakongo chief relies on formal government for resources and influence at the national level, and the elected officials rely on chiefs to shape the public debate on local issues.

> Traditional institutions among the Bakongo have adapted with the changing political landscape manifested in the dissolution of the Kongo Kingdom and the shifting of political boundaries. Today, the formal political structure -- especially the legislative branch -- rely on the traditional structure to mobilize communities and to galvanize support for a project or cause.

Belief Systems

The mythical ancestor of the Bakongo people, Ne Kongo Nimi, is believed to have had three children whose descendants are the Bakongo clans.[238] This trio of children was known as "Bana ba Ne Kongo," which became the genesis of the name "Bakongo."[239] Interaction among the Bakongo is defined by rules of decorum based on age, gender, and status. Respect for elders is paramount, and the young are expected to consult and defer to people senior to them on most issues.[240]

A handshake between older and younger members of society is usually initiated by the elder person, while the young person normally initiates the encounter with an appropriately respectful greeting. The Bakongo find it disrespectful to stare into the eyes of an elder person while shaking his hand. Instead, during a handshake with an elder, it is considered appropriate to give a slight bow of the head while holding one's own right wrist with the left hand.

Formal Religions

When the Portuguese first arrived on the coast of Central Africa in the 1400s, they used the Congo River to establish diplomatic relations with the Bakongo, bringing trade and Christianity to the region. As early as 1491, the Kongo King had opened up his region to Catholic missionaries who set up schools in the area. The missionaries became useful allies, subtly reinforcing the King's authority. The royal family, families of chiefs, and elders began sending their children to school and their wives to church.[241] To this day, Christianity continues to be the primary religion of the Bakongo;[242] and because of this history a vast majority of Bakongo identify themselves as Roman Catholics.[243]

Other Christian sects have emerged among the Bakongo. The Church of Christ on Earth, formed in the early 1900s by Simon Kimbangu, preaches against traditional practices of sorcery, polygamy, and respect for nature.[244]

The Kibanguist church practices a theology based on traditional animist rituals and Christian precepts. It was formed in 1921, and has a considerable following in the DRC and the region. The church had adopted a collectivist concept, Nsinsani, where members contribute money from their earnings for the sustenance of the movement. The contributions have facilitated the growth of savings and credit facilities that function as micro banks that help to finance several small development projects.[245] Thus, the leaders of the movement wield significant power in local politics.

Kimbangu was critical of the Catholic Church, which, he argued, had strayed from its origins and was increasingly corrupt and immoral. When Simon Kimbangu was alive, Belgian colonialists viewed his popularity and ability to mobilize the Bakongo as a threat to their rule. Consequently, he was incarcerated, and Kimbanguism was outlawed. It has since experienced a resurgence in the region, and is now considered to be the first independent African church in Central Africa.[246]

Traditional Religions

While the Bakongo are overwhelmingly Christian, they also believe in sorcery and witchcraft. The supreme head of Bakongo deities is Nzambi, who is "above everything."[247] It is common among the Bakongo people to practice Christianity in formal church settings, and to practice traditional religious rites steeped in mysticism and tradition outside the church. This is particularly true among Bakongo living in rural areas.[248] This is because customs and cultural practices in rural areas are frequent and recurring, whereas urban populations are exposed to secular beliefs or stringent Christian practices emerging from the fast growing evangelical movement that does not tolerate traditional rites and rituals in religious practice.

The Bakongo do not see a distinction between the living and the dead; rather, they believe that the realm of the living and the dead intersect: the dead are capable of influencing outcomes in the land of the living.[249] Consequently, elaborate rituals are performed to ward off evil, appease the dead, and ask

for protection from ancestral spirits. It is not uncommon for some Bakongo to wear "medicine charms," which, they believe, protect them from evil spirits.[250]

One of the most important positions in Bakongo society is that of the Magician or the Prophet. The strong belief in the afterlife and the power of the dead over the living has given sorcerers and traditional doctors significant power to influence leading members of society. Magicians are viewed as channels to the afterworld, who communicate with the dead. As a result, they serve as counselors to chiefs and tribal leaders, and are often paid a fee for consultations and advice. They recommend solutions to communal problems. They are feared and respected because of the mysticism surrounding their role in society.[251]

The Bakongo distinguish between 3 types of magicians:
- *Nganga Nkisi* is a witchdoctor who uses charms to heal or protect.
- *Nganga Mbuki* is an herbalist who heals ailments.
- *Nganga a Ngombo* is a diviner, that is, someone who predicts the future.[252]

The Bakongo also revere anyone believed to have healing powers, and thus prophets are iconic in Bakongo society. Several religious sects ascribe to their theology.

The two most important religious prophets in the Bakongo culture are Simon Kimbangu, founder of Kimbanguism,[253] and Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita. In the seventeenth century, while the Bakongo Kingdom was disintegrating, Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita emerged as a heroine.[254] She assumed this role for attempting to revitalize the Bakongo, by preaching a version of Roman Catholicism that was set within the framework of Congolese history and culture.[255] Because her preaching was thought to be hostile towards Europeans, she was arrested by Pedro II Nkanga, King of Kongo, who was a Christian and friendly to Europeans. The King ordered that Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita be sentenced to death for her heretic teachings. To this day, she remains an inspiration for the Bakongo people.[256]

Conclusion

You might have noticed that the case study does not include all, or even many, of the concepts discussed in the Operational Culture General document. This is only natural; a comprehensive body of literature devoted to the study of a single culture is rare. In fact, Marines are frequently called upon to operate in areas where current information on local culture is scarce. What the OCG and the chapters in this document do is help Marines learn about their assigned region, and acquire skills and concepts that will assist them in operating effectively in complex cross-cultural situations in any part of the globe when information is scarce or rapidly changing.

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