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The Belgian Experience: Rwanda and Zaire

Rwanda

Background of Ethnic Tension

The Belgians let go in 1962, just after a Hutu-Tutsi war. The population density in Rwanda surpasses by twelve times that of other sub-Saharan African countries. The total today is 7.8 million. Three ethnic groupings, not tribes, live together: Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa. Four fifths of the population is Hutu, one fifth is Tutsi, and the remainder is Pygmies or Twa. The Twa are the original forest-dwelling inhabitants of Burundi, Rwanda, and Eastern Zaire. They are excellent trackers, soldiers, and agricultural laborers. Kinyarwanda is the common official language of these three ethnic groups who were part of the Banyarwanda tribal grouping. English and French are also official languages. The king, a *mwami* (*local word for ruler*), governed them until the *wazungu* (foreigners) came. Germans came first, before World War I, and governed Ruanda-Urundi with less than 100 men in the area. After WWI, and the defeat of the Germans, the League of Nations gave the area to the Belgians. It had nothing to do with the Congo, which began as a fiefdom of the Belgian King Leopold II. The Belgians governed through the Tutsi whose Nilotic origins were thought to be superior to the Hutus.

The Belgian governance exacerbated millennial differences and tensions between the Tutsi and Hutu. Educational advantages went initially to the Tutsi, but eventually the Belgians learned to sympathize more with the Hutu. They replaced Tutsi chiefs with Hutu in the 1960s. This led to a Hutu rampage against the Tutsis, a large portion of whom fled to Uganda at that time. The eventual return of this group of Tutsis from Uganda in the 1990s would lead to a second major wave of ethnic tensions and massacre. Paul Kagame, a Tutsi rebel, seized power in 1994. He allowed election nine years later and then won 95% of the vote. Kagame had put an end to a Hutu regime, which hacked or clubbed to death almost 800,000 Tutsis, in an attempt at genocide. Most Hutus participated in or were complicit in the genocide. The governing Tutsi RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) proceeded to take its revenge and put to death between 25,000 and 40,000 people, accusing them of being guilty of genocide. The RPF army chased 200,000 Hutu militia into the Congo and killed some who stayed behind. The Tutsi army then exiled another group of Hutu militia further into the jungles of the Ituri forest.

Felicien Kainamura was a leader in the cooperative movement. I first knew him as the Project Manager for the USAID-funded Silo/Grain Storage Project. He had retired from this position just a few days after I arrived in the country, but he kept an active interest and was always there to help whenever he could. The new Minister had placed a nephew of his in the Project Manager position. Then the Hutu genocide broke out. Felicien's strength and weakness was that he was the product of a mixed marriage. He had the body of a Hutu, but the size of a Tutsi. He fled to Nairobi with his wife and a child. It was clear that whichever group was in power, they would not accept him as one of them. After years of struggle in miserable conditions, and with the help of CLUSA (Cooperative League of the USA), he managed to get out of Kenya to Belgium and unite his family in Brussels.

Felicien is the lucky one. He was not hacked to death with a machete, or imprisoned in the wretched stockades of Rwanda. I helped him with some money during his Nairobi years, and I have kept in touch with news of him through my friends in CLUSA.

Once the ethnic conflict ended, Rwanda began to grow rapidly. In 2002, it grew at the rate of 9.9 percent annually. Its army remains highly respected, and plays an influential role in neighboring Congo. Ethnic terms are forbidden. All are Rwandans now. But freedom of speech is not allowed. Paul Kagame used every presidential advantage to gain his victory.

Work Framework in Rwanda

The institutional framework in which my work in Rwanda from 1981 to 1982 took place was the best of all possible worlds. My direct employer was the American PVO (Private Voluntary Organization) called CLUSA (the Cooperative League of the USA). CLUSA acted as a contractor for USAID, so I was considered a “contractor.” This meant I had Embassy housing and administrative support in Rwanda. My house belonged to the Embassy housing pool. If something didn’t work in the house, all we had to do was put in a requisition work order, and the embassy service crews would come out and fix it. I reported to the USAID Chief of Mission in Rwanda on the progress of the Grain Storage Project II. CLUSA seconded me to the Ministry of Cooperatives and Community Development. I sat there as Advisor to the Minister and overseer of the USAID/CLUSA-funded Grain Storage Project II Unit in the Ministry. The project team happened to be one hundred percent Hutu technicians, enabling me to play the Ministry against the USAID and the USAID against the Ministry, if the need arose. This was done for the good of the project to keep it moving at a fast pace. My final hat was Representative of CLUSA. This put me on the board of the National Cooperative Training School, which was being built with Swiss funds. CLUSA had responsibility for the curriculum development of that school.

Life in Rwanda

My family adapted quickly to Rwanda. The tourism brochures dubbed it the “Land of Eternal Spring.” In fact the cool mountain air meant that you didn’t need air conditioners. And the mosquitoes didn’t like the cool air and altitude, so you didn’t need mosquito nets draped over your beds. This statement could be made about very few places in Africa. The air was a bit thin due to the altitude. The reward was the cool breezes that blew through the 1,000 hills of Rwanda. My children attended the French School called Saint Exupery. It was just around the corner from our house in Kigali. My wife became quickly involved in health projects with some Spanish nuns in a distant village.

Compared to Burundi, Rwanda was a paragon of stability and security. The President in Rwanda in those years was a Hutu named Juvenal Habyarimana. At that time, 80 percent of the population was the Hutu/Bantu, who cultivated the steppes of the Great Lakes of Africa. Any Tutsi worth his weight in Rwanda would get himself over to Burundi, where the 10 percent Tutsi ruled. In Burundi

at that time the Tutsi dominated the military, the government, and the private sector. The repressed majority of Hutu in Burundi did not make for a stable and secure civil environment.

Cooperative Grain Storage Silos

My team in Rwanda in the Ministry of Cooperatives and Community Development was all Hutu. They came to work early and left late. They were happy to have a decent employment. They were both dedicated and competent. The project was constructing grain storage silos in each commune. The silos were to be managed by selected cooperatives.

My job was to analyze the cooperatives within each commune to see which would be the most fitting to manage the grain storage silo. The cooperatives needed to be a certain size, have a certain positive track record to manage successfully an ambitious undertaking like a grain storage unit, and decide in General Assembly to want to take on the grain storage unit. The members were meant to decide to deposit their excess pinto beans in the silo at the time of the harvest. They were given a sum of money from the Project's revolving fund to guarantee the deposit of the beans. During the scarce interharvest period they would have the opportunity to draw down their stocks. They could draw down from the silo, repaying the guarantee they had received. A small differential sum covered the administrative costs of the silo. This system displaced the Indian traders who bought excess harvest beans at low prices at time of harvest, and sold them back to the same farmers at high prices when the interharvest period made the beans scarce. The cooperative bank of Rwanda, called *Banques Populaires*, managed the revolving fund, which was used to motivate the first deposit by the farmers. The system worked successfully. Most cooperatives had not managed a program of the size and volume of the storage project. We were going against the cooperative principle of not loaning a sum more than about 20 percent of the financial volume of the cooperative. This is where the National Cooperative Training School came into play. Courses were designed for the cooperative leadership in elements, which would contribute to the success of the project. Courses in cooperative budgeting, financial management, and auditing were held. Courses in Cooperative Leadership were given for the board of the cooperative. Attendance at the courses was mandatory for the cooperative members who would be managing a grain storage silo.

Cooperative Sector as Basis for Development in Rwanda; Complementary Projects

Swiss aid does not exist in many countries of the world. But it is interesting to note that the countries they prioritize tend to share a series of characteristics with Switzerland. They may be landlocked, mountainous, isolated, and contain many valleys, to name a few. The Swiss helped to initiate a national Cooperative system of general stores in Rwanda. A trading relation with China was set up in which Chinese-made agricultural tools, pharmaceuticals, plates, crockery, and sundry items were made available for purchase in Rwanda in the cooperative general stores. These stores spread throughout the country and were very successful for many years. The prices were reasonable and excessive profit-taking was avoided in the cooperative movement. This Swiss aid strengthened the cooperative movement through these general stores and other related projects in Rwanda and gave it credibility. This credibility was the base on which cooperative management of the Grain Storage Silos was built.

The cooperative banking sector was likewise strengthened by the Swiss and the French. Banques Populaires were organized in a cooperative way. These banks were efficient and serious and had a very good reputation in the country. This made it the logical locus to place a revolving fund to support the Grain Storage Project. The revolving fund was placed in the Banques Populaires. The individual cooperatives could draw down on it to create their first strategic stock of beans in the silos. They would repay the Banques Populaires when their customers came in the interharvest period to draw down their bean stocks.

A minimum fee assessed against the revolving fund of the Grain Storage Silo project to cover this management would cover the financial management fees, bookwork, and administration of the Banques Populaires in this project.

Agricultural producers were organized in cooperatives. Women vegetable farmers were organized in marketing cooperative. Rwanda's national strategy endorsed the cooperative movement as an important multisectoral phenomenon to promote development. The Cooperative structure was applied to: Production; Marketing, including many important tea and coffee producers; Banking; Retail Food and hardware; and Food storage. It is important to note that the cooperatives received help from the state and its Ministry for Cooperatives. But the cooperatives were private businesses with members elected by the Board of Directors of each cooperative. The members paid dues and shared stakes in the cooperative. The state would try to legislate to improve the status of the cooperatives, and allow them to function in a more efficient way.

The USAID, while helping the farmers with silos at the cooperative and communal level, was also supporting the national strategic security stocks held in GREANARWA (Rwandan National Granary). Rwandan personnel were being trained to manage these stocks, how to buy them between floor and ceiling prices advantageous to the farmer, how to store them, and how to market them at key (times of need at a price advantageous to the consumer. This national macroeconomic pricing system, strategically set up in the country, reinforced the new system being put in place in the communes and cooperatives. State of the art storage techniques were being developed. Post-harvest losses were being reduced, and every grain of cereal and bean produced was being used to reach the goal—food self-subsistence in the country.

Chinese Governmental Aid

The China Bridge and Construction Company won a key World Bank contract to assist Rwanda with infrastructure. China needed the hard currency of the World Bank. China could provide inexpensive manpower, and thus underbid the commercial firms of Europe and the United States. The Army Engineer Corps of China built the key primary road artery between Ruhengeri and Kigali. It had not been done in the past because it was a tough piece through the mountains and required a lot of dynamiting and leveling. It was a labor-intensive project, but the Chinese built it in record time in the period from 1981 to 1982. Men who died on the job were buried standing up to symbolize the fact that the job had not yet been finished. The Chinese workers went home happy. They flew to Addis Ababa to pick up China Airways, laden with the fruit of their work in hand. They handcarried stereo-hi-fi equipment, television sets, and luxury items, bought with money saved during the work in Rwanda. The chief engineer of the China Bridge and Construction Company, Ing. Wong Shuri, and of the Chinese work team, often came by my house at night to practice his English. He had received his engineering degree from Cornell University in 1939 and hadn't used his English in years. He was later elected to the national parliament in China in sector representation of engineers since he had done such good work in Africa.

Beginning Over Again

The 1990s were mostly a lost decade of wars and genocide. By the late 1990s, the Rwandan people wanted to forget the war and get on with their development. The Rwandan lives on his fields, not in a village. He goes to the Commune for

administrative matters such as voting, banking, and marketing. The Commune elects a *Burgomaster*. If the elected official becomes unpopular, he is traditionally poisoned. The dynamic energy of the Rwandan people in those rich African highland soils will pull them up by their bootstraps again. Their future is in their hands.

Democratic Republic Of The Congo/Zaire

A two-year assignment in Zaire from 1978 to 1980 plunged me into the country's problems from the moment of arrival. My family arrived with seventeen crates of personal effects as unaccompanied luggage. To clear the customs at Kinshasa's Ndjili Airport I needed over 20 signatures. The civil servants of the Ministry of Finance, under whom customs worked, had not been paid their paltry salaries in six months. They were on the take out of the need to survive. The final bill of lading, duly signed by all, looked like a creative exercise in graffiti. A carefully calibrated quantity of "baksheesh" (Arabic word for small bribe) was needed for each signatory. If you gave too much, the amount would be increased for all the rest of the signatures. If you gave too little, the signatory would not volunteer his "John Hancock," and your possessions would remain indefinitely under customs. Sometimes days were needed to complete this process, no matter how desperate you and your children were for the contents of those personal effects. The solution was to process the matter through an intermediary, your "representative at the customs." He was provided by the shipping company, and knew exactly how much it took for each individual. The sum would be attributed to the line item, "sundry" or "other" on your bill, and everyone knew what that was all about. The system was fine-tuned. Eventually the goods arrived intact, and the movers asked for the old wooden crates as their tip. They could build furniture with them, or sell them as firewood. We readily agreed to give them the wooden crates. It was a lesson in how to adapt to the contorted bureaucracy from this first moment of arrival.

Citizen Maloka Makondji met me at the airport. He would be my boss in the GTC, the Central Technical Group for development at the central Kinshasa headquarters of the ECZ, the "Eglise du Christ du Zaire," now called the CCC (Church of Christ of the Congo). Maloka was a very personable fellow. It was a pleasure to work with him. He delegated authority easily and would sign off on the work you produced after adding his African insights and political commentary. He had done his higher studies in Chicago and had absorbed a good bit of the American practical mentality.

His wife Fran was a missionary from the Disciples of Christ Church and had met him in the Congo years earlier. They had a talented son Pierre who was educated in the states. She was white and he was black. I could see her struggling not to bridge the black-white gulf, but to meet the African cultural expectations. He was a model for the people from his tribe and village. A week would not pass without someone from his native area in the Equator province arriving at his doorstep in Kinshasa at any hour of the day and night. The wife was expected to get up, cook for that person, and provide them shelter. That ground on her physical stamina over time when she had professional responsibilities to meet on a daily basis in her work.

The marriage worked well for the long years they lived in the states. It was the life in Africa that put the stronger pressures on it. They commuted back and forth. Maloka and I traveled for over six weeks on a Mission to the states. Our mandate was to raise money. We visited the headquarters of the major protestant groups and the political centers in Washington, D.C.

In Washington, I could call any Senate or USAID office, tell them who Citizen Maloka was and his position, and solicit an audience. The combination worked well—a prestigious African and an entrepreneurial escort. We got in at all levels. One of the senators from Illinois sent us to USAID and stirred interest back in Kinshasa for funding our hospital network to do public health outreach. The result six months later was a US\$5 million public health project. It is now in its fourth phase. Maloka worked for years in the church development secretariat in Kinshasa and his wife finished her career before retirement as Secretary for the Africa Director of the Disciples of Christ in Indianapolis.

Our mandate was to transform the charitable works of the 90 different protestant denominations federated as “communities” within the Church of Christ of Zaire. The 70 hospitals needed to be transformed from curative facilities into preventative health centers of outreach to dispense public health and primary health care programs.

The Church Farms needed to become integrated rural development centers, reaching out to people of every faith to try to enhance their economic and social well being. We would put in place “development planning teams” in each of the provinces of the country to spread this message, and equip them with revolving funds to get on with their new mission. Like most development programs, it worked as well as the people who staffed it. When dedication, competence, and enthusiasm were present, the system began to work well. Without this, it was a shambles. Maloka rented me his second car, a red Volkswagen bug. I was lucky

to have anything. The only problem was that the tires were threadbare, and there were no spare tires available for purchase in Zaire. After changing tires a few times each day in the first weeks, I was able to import spares from South Africa, prepaying for them in hard currency. Fuel was in very short supply. I parked my VW in a gas station line near my house each evening in order to get a few liters of rationed fuel the next morning which would take me through a couple of days. We lived in a kind of compound in which the seventeen inhabitants were organized for self-defense. It was in the Mount Ngaliema area, close to one of the presidential palaces. Mobutu's live caged lions could be seen at the bottom of Mt. Ngaliema on the way home from work. The house guards were coordinated. Each had a whistle to blow if and when robbers entered. The other sixteen guards would come to help when they heard the whistle. The system worked more or less. Our compound was one of the lucky ones, which had few house robberies during my two years in Kinshasa. Of course, our compound was blessed with two key figures. One was the Director of Security of Morrison-Knudsen—the principal contractors building the Inga-Shaba power line—and the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) of the U.S. Embassy in Kinshasa. It would have taken some very skilled and brazen bandit teams, of which there were many, to successfully rob our compound.

Kleptocracy

Mobutu Sese Seko, the then “President for Life” of Zaire, once spoke to his civil servants in a conference in Western Zaire. He admonished, in the local Lingala language, “When you steal, do not steal stupidly. Steal a little bit at a time.” His political movement, the MPR, “Movement du Promotion de la Revolution” was nicknamed, the “Movement of Profiteers of the Revolution.” Everything was for sale for the right price in Zaire. OTRAG, a German satellite-launching venture, bought a piece of southwestern Zaire as large as the state of Vermont in order to facilitate the rocket company's launchings at the equator's level. The satellites could enter into orbit much easier at the angle enabled by the location in Zaire. Any private sector company or person with enough money could buy and launch a satellite system through OTRAG.

Zaire was the trigger of the gun that was Africa in the image of Fritz Fanon, an Algerian revolutionary writer. It is critically positioned in the center of the continent, and contains all the riches imaginable in its soils: oil, natural gas, copper, cobalt, malachite, gold, and diamonds. There are a lot of resources, both

human and physical, at stake in Zaire. In development theory, the resources should be used to enhance the life of all the people of the country, and should not be managed in a capricious way for the benefit of a few. Unfortunately, Zaire's riches have been a trough for the feeding of the greedy and unscrupulous for several centuries already. For years, the Congo did not even belong to the Belgians. It was the personal property, the fiefdom, of King Leopold. Then it became the Congo Free State. Eventually it was taken away from him by the Belgian government, and made a colony called the Belgian Congo or Congo/Leopoldville. When you tour Brussels, you are told that King Leopold built many of the buildings with his own money. That money came at the cost of the blood of many persons in the Congo who worked on the plantations of Leopold's fiefdom. If they disobeyed, their hands were cut off. A British counsel in Brazzaville reported on the baskets of severed hands; and the abuses of Leopold's fiefdom. The practice became an outrage to the world. The Congo became the Belgian Congo, and the Belgian State replaced Leopold's private fiefdom with itself.

Authenticity, Economic Development, and Zairianization

Authenticity is a series of practices initiated after independence by Mobutu to give an African identity back to the no-longer-colonized Congo. First, the Congo became Zaire. Second, Mobutu ordered Zairians to return to their original African names. He had been baptized Joseph Desiree Mobutu. He then began to use his African name, Mobutu Sese Seko, as did all his compatriots. The Congo became the Zaire River. He took the Belgian names out of the geographical place names. Stanleyville became Kisingani. Zairians were to be called "Citizens" before their surname as a sign of belonging to this new society, a nation that was striving to bring together its many tribes into a unified national identity. Neckties were forbidden because they were too foreign and European. Zairians could wear an elegant safari suit upgraded with a long collar and long sleeves, called "a bas costume," or *Abacost*. These actions gave the people a decolonized sense of identity, and better rooted them in the African continent. Mobutu was considered a genius politically for the idea behind this authenticity and many similar moves. He was able to unite the many diverse ethnic groups in Zaire as had never been done in the past.

Unfortunately, he was not as clever economically. The Congo masses, now 56.6 million people, remained in misery and poverty. The number of roads, which were usable, became less and less than those operated in the last days of the

Belgian colony. The National Roads Office (Office Des Routes) was nicknamed by the people the “National Office of Potholes (Office Des Trous)” The development Bible of the European Community at the time was to promote primary trunk road systems. That would increase production and trade, particularly from the interior to the capital cities and from there to the European metropolis. The road priority helped Ireland and assisted Portugal, but the problems in the Congo were far more complex. A network of small airports had developed, particularly on the plantations (called Domains), and near the key mineral extraction centers. Charter aircraft lifted much of Congo’s wealth out of the country to unknown destinations.

Had Mobutu solved the poverty problem of his people economically, he would not have had to invent so many clever political moves. The wealth of the country was instead swelling foreign bank accounts of the leader, who was by the 1970s known as one of the richest men in the world. His mansions decorated Abidjan and Dakar, and his apartments occupied a block in Brussels. He traveled in presidential aircraft in large entourages. Entire floors at the Plaza Hotel in New York were rented to accommodate those entourages which accompanied Mobutu when he visited the United States.

Zairinization meant the nationalization of private corporate holdings, mostly owned by expatriates, into the hands of Zairians. This was good theory. It was a way to decolonize the economy, and put the country’s main assets in the hands of the state. Zairian cronies of Mobutu were appointed to manage the companies. They were quick to cash out whatever resources were there, and abandon the companies. The experience was not successful. The new owners were not prepared in business management. A few Belgians, married to locals, had vested their holdings in the hands of their spouses. They survived the Zairinization, and continued to function. Assets already in the hands of Zairians were not nationalized. Air Virunga in the Kivu was owned by a pair of brothers who grew coffee on extensive plantations for a living. They were Zairian. They used the aircraft to export their coffee to better external markets. Air Virunga was often sited in Djibouti in transit for points in the Arab world. The brothers became very wealthy. Eastern Zaire, the Kivu, had particularly rich soils for agriculture. Although the Zairianized companies were privatized, only the friends of Mobutu were beneficiaries of the privatization. This clan extended beyond the Equator region from which Mobutu had come. Copper and cobalt remained under a state company called Gecamines, in which the Belgians had interests. These mining riches were sold in Belgian francs on Belgian markets.

Authenticity was a positive policy, which molded an African identity, but Zairinization, not bad in itself, did succeed because of the way it was carried out. Less goods and services were created; and the country's riches moved from the hands of a greedy and exploitative private sector to a greedy and exploitative public sector.

International Monetary Fund and Debt Arrears

Mobutu was not servicing the debts of the country. He was not paying interest on the loans the Congo had received. The country was a challenge case to the IMF in arrears payments. Rollovers and rescheduling had been done but the limit had been reached. Standby agreements had been signed by the government of the Congo but not respected by that same government. An IMF technical consultant at the National Bank of Zaire, who had attempted to get the bankers to respect the agreements of reform signed with the IMF, left the country abruptly after his house had been robbed one night and his daughter raped.

Structural adjustment of the country by the IMF formulary was laughable. Mobutu would argue that no matter how much the Congo owed, the country had even more riches. The guarantee was in the soils, in the mountains, and in the infinite riches that Zaire contained. Zaire went through periods of suspension of new credits; and intense monitoring of the national accounts by expatriates.

None of it worked. In another way, the experience already proved that the sterile formulas of the IMF did not work for a country like Zaire when there was no intention of good governance by the leaders. They were only playing with the WB-IMF.

A clever system was designed to save a lot of money for the economy by the Zairians: issue new money and declare the old money invalid. At the end of 1979, new money was printed and the old currency, unless deposited in the banks, was invalid after a certain grace period. The lines in front of the banks were long and unruly. Only a certain small sum could be exchanged for the new currency. Money already on deposit in accounts was respected in the change to new currency. But the move wiped out the money hoarders, the speculators, and the black market exchangers.

All the liquid money in circulation, which was not accounted for or redeemed in the short period, was a gain for the central government, since it was a loss to the people who held it. Never mind if some of the poor people who didn't trust the banks, and kept too much cash in their homes were impoverished further.

The formulas invented by the international technicians of the IMF and WB did not remedy the situation in the Congo. The human factor showed itself to be the all-important variable in solving the country's development problems.

Centralization and Decentralization

New nations are arguably looking to pull together diverse groups into a unified whole. In the Congo, a magician was needed to pull the hundreds of tribes and linguistic groups into one nation and hold them together. Secession was a constant threat. Mobutu was from a minority ethnic group in the Northern Equator province. He was not from one of those large groups that vied for dominant power. That helped him stay on top.

Centralization under the strong and dominant Luba had not proven successful. The Belgians had favored the Luba in colonial times in the Congo, as they favored the Tutsi in Rwanda. The best school systems and hospitals tended to go into the Luba country of the Kasai. A wrong move ethnically could cause the feeble coalition that was Zaire to fall apart at the seams. Lumumba, the first President, was a Luba. He had attained the status of an *evoluee* or evolved person who could cross the boundary lines between the whites who lived in their *citees*, and the masses who lived in the *villes*. Schoolteacher was a category that facilitated becoming an *evoluee*. Lumumba was in that category, allowing him to benefit from a better education and the advantages the Belgians offered to their *evoluees*. The circumstances of his death and those responsible for it are still the subject of discussion in the international journals. The consensus was that he was judged to be too much of a leftist for the dominant world powers at the time. The system was not unlike the apartheid policies of passcards and "white by night" used by the Southern neighbors. The *evoluees* had access to the white community but were eventually expected to return among their own. Centralization under an ethnic minority proved successful for a time. It was accompanied by a kind of economic centralization of which the Inga-Shaba power line was a good example.

Inga was a location in Lower Congo on the Congo River, full of waterfalls and cataracts. The descent was sharp and the hydroelectric potential was high. The biggest hydroelectric damn of Africa was built at that location. Its turbines could produce more electricity than the Aswan High dam in Egypt. All the electricity would be transmitted over 2000 miles across the country to serve the copper, cobalt, and malachite mining industry in the Shaba Province. The many villages without electricity along the way could not even tap in with a wire to steal a bit

of juice, because the current was “stepped up” at the origin in Inga, transmitted, and stepped down at the end-use point. Mobutu could control one of the main natural resources of the country by the push of a button, and keep the rebellious, separatist state of Katanga in line. Since the Congo wars of the 1950s, the leaders of the Western Congo (Katanga Province) wanted their own country. Mobutu did not care about the cost-effectiveness of the Inga-Shaba power line, built by the Idaho Company of Morrison-Knudsen. The line had a purely political motivation. It strengthened and centralized his power. When rebels from Angola invaded the Shaba in 1978, they headed directly for the generators at the Inga-Shaba connection, and then for the copper mines at Kolwesi to fully incapacitate them, and kill the Belgian technicians who were working there. I visited Kolwesi in late 1978 after the invasion. Some of the stories I heard had a moral. The Lunda tribe straddles the border area in that region. They spoke the same language. When the Lunda rebels reached Kolwesi, they started to kill all of the white people who were affiliated with the mine. In an earlier, smaller invasion, those technicians had been warned not to stay on supporting Mobutu. Lunda househelp to some American Methodist missionaries and some Belgians in Kolwesi intervened with their Lunda brothers in favor of their bosses. “These people always treated us well, do not kill them.” Other house help hurried to tell the rebels not to omit administering justice to the people for whom they had worked. Power over the revenue of the mines Shaba, be it central and provincial, was one of the keys to the control of the Congo. Economic and political centralization through the Inga-Shaba power line was one of Mobutu’s ways of holding power.

As the Congo developed, the regions learned not to expect any help from the Central government. A kind of economic decentralization was the practical fact of the day. The money of the central government just didn’t reach more than a radius of 100 kilometers around the capital city. There was no effective or official decentralization of power or authority. On the contrary, there was constant reassertion of central power. The powerful Kivu region of the East was a candidate for secession for years. Mobutu would often send his Kinshasa loyalist legions to occupy the Kivu on a pretext that mercenaries were about to invade from Burundi. It was later discovered that Mobutu himself had hired those mercenaries.

The only time I have had a machine gun pointed at my head was a visit to the Kivu in 1979. Two Kinshasa foot soldiers wanted to sequester the pickup truck of Citizen Kakule. He was Chairman of the largest rural development project North of Goma. I was visiting him. He was showing me around the region. Two soldiers approached our car and pointed their guns directly at our heads at a

stoplight. Kakule said to me, “You are not involved here. Get out now and wait for me at that gas station on the corner. I will be back in 30 minutes.” I was allowed to get out and move away. Kakule drove off toward the local Police Commissariat with the two militiamen, one keeping the gun pointed at his head. To my surprise, he was back in 35 minutes. Citizen Kakule was popular and powerful in the Eastern Congo. The police knew him well and liked him. The two militiamen had been held for questioning and Kakule returned unscathed. I was overjoyed to see him. We continued our trip looking at the development potential of the area. The money for development came from abroad, from foreign foundations and friends of the people of Kivu. It did not come from the central government.

Kivu had an important tourist potential, which was developed. A gorilla reserve was developed on the steppes of the Virunga volcano, which attracted a lot of tourists. The local volcano was in periodic eruption and reached within feet of the airport in Goma. Homes built by rich Belgians still dotted the hills and the coves around the lake outside of Goma. The area was a rich natural paradise. It was also the cradle of Aids, the green mountain monkey fever, and a number of other diseases.

The Health Sector

Zaire had three parallel health delivery systems: Protestant, Catholic, and the state. Respectively they ran approximately 70, 60, and 50 hospitals. The Protestants tended to have more money, medicine, and staff. The other two possessed these elements in diminishing order. But the modern hospitals were looked upon culturally as houses of death. You didn't go there unless you were ready to die. It was a last resort location for families after everything else had been attempted. With a couple of exceptions, no food was served. Families had to carry in food daily for the sick person. A family person had to be assigned to travel to the hospital and accompany the sick person. Later, after positive experiences, the fear of hospitals began to diminish and people looked on them in a more positive way. Mental patients were usually the violent persons who could no longer be handled as the village fool. The violent were maintained on chemotherapy and often never returned from the hospital.

The ECZ (Church of Christ of Zaire) got a \$5 million dollar, two-year grant in 1981 from USAID to mobilize its health system in a new preventative outreach mode. Before this time, the hospitals would spend 96% of their money on cure and 5% on prevention. The ratio changed to 60/40 under the new system.

The Project was called “SANRU,” or “Sante Rurale.” It is now in Phase IV and includes the protestant, catholic and state hospitals. It has been called the “showcase” project in the Congo. Rural Zonal Health Plans set the norms in each area. Mobile medical teams from each hospital make a circuit of about 20 villages each month. In each village a Health Committee names four persons to cooperate with the project: a Vaccination Specialist; a Sanitation Specialist who also promotes latrines; a Pharmacist; and a Village Midwife. Each of the four persons receives training in the hospitals. All are para-medical personnel. As the mobile medical team makes its rounds each month, they award a flag to the village that has done the most in each sector. If medical records have been established on the immunizations of all the residents, the village may win the right to fly the vaccination flag for a month. If latrines have been built behind each house, the sanitation flag may fly in that village for a month, and so on. The midwives would be graded on how many complicated births they were able to diagnose ahead of time and refer to the hospital; and the hygienic practices with which they practiced their midwifery. The villages would enter in keen competition with each other. All money would immediately be sent to the hospitals at the zonal level. It covered training classes, medicines, vaccines, and essential transport needs. No money was lost in this decentralized system. The project has been cloned in other African countries.

The UNAZA University in Kinshasa, modeled after the Louvanium in Belgium, had a prestigious School of Medicine and produced competent doctors, although the national ratio of doctors to population remained at the 1 to 2,000 level. The Congolese were gifted in surgery. Culturally, the people did not feel the person was a real doctor if he did not know how to do surgery. The Congolese surgeons showed exceptional dexterity with their hands, perfect timing, and judgment for successful surgery. But the need in medicine was for public health outreach, and not the grand curative facilities that were absorbing 90 percent of the available budgets.

The Rwanda-Eastern Congo axis around the Great Lakes of Central Africa has been shown to be the cradle of the AIDS epidemic. greenGreen mountain monkey fever, Ebola, and other diseases have had their origins in the Congo. Leprosy was endemic. Kwashiorkor was common in infants. Over time, hospitals developed mobile outreach teams, and developed the concept of training village health workers. Village pharmacists, sanitary workers, and vaccination administrators became commonplace in the villages of the eastern part of Congo. Records were kept at the village level for each child vaccinated. The pharmacists had their boxes

in the shape of a human body with the deworming medicine in the stomach of the box. Aspirins were in the head of the box. Simple penicillin was available to fight venereal disease in coordination with the chief Public Health Officer of the hospital.

Funding for health came through various Protestant and Catholic institutions. The state received some help from the bilateral and multilateral donors. Medicines were scarce as pharmaceuticals had to be imported in boxcars, which made their way up the rails from South Africa. Often the boxcars would arrive empty. Welding equipment had been used to open and empty them. Medicines could be found on the open (black) markets throughout the country. Often the hospitals were the last ones to have them. They would ask the patient's family to supply the needed medicines. Small service fees would be requested so that people would not become accustomed to get everything free from the Hospital. The fees covered part of the costs, but all of the hospitals survived on subsidies from somewhere. A self-sufficient medical sector was unheard of in Zaire.

Traditional medicine continued to flourish from the rich leaves and barks of the African forest. But little effort was made to combine the two systems. Midwives were still looked upon by the modern health sector as quasi-witches who perpetuated unhygienic and inadequate health procedures. Little systematic effort was made to upgrade their skills. The adult mortality rate in the Congo in the early fifties, on the average, was the sign that the medical system had a long way to go to reach enough of the people.

Housing Sector

The concept was one of human shelter in the tropics, rather than housing. Thatched huts at least allowed the cool breezes of the night to alleviate the heat of the people. Steamy cement walls carried status, but needed air conditioning to render the inside anything but a sauna. In naturally cold regions, the more costly cement structures may be appropriate. In time of cyclones the tin roofing on the cement houses, another status symbol, would tear by the force of the wind into shredded pieces, and become flying shrapnel, capable of cutting a person in pieces.

Habitat for Humanity International was born in Zaire in the mind of a protestant missionary, Willard Fuller, who worked in the Equator Province of Zaire. Since the 1960s, it has extended its program into over 80 countries. I was the Representative in Zaire for my short time there. The principle is simple: Villagers

are organized into common work teams to build or improve each other's homes. People with skills in the building field are given priority in these teams. Some outside expertise is made available as needed. Revolving funds are made available in the form of construction materials. The person must pay back in kind what he has received in materials. No interest is involved. His time is donated free of charge to help the others who are building their homes. The team must continue its involvement in later years in terms of maintenance of the homes. Poor areas are prioritized. Wells and sanitary facilities are also built in the same method, as necessary. In Kinshasa, Habitat obtained a parcel of land on the edge of the city spacious enough for homes for over 200 families. The families formed a community development association, which arranged to get their settlement linked to the city power grid, to the city water piping, and telephone lines. A great sense of solidarity was created, and the homes have been well maintained up to the present.

The types of homes to be built varied according to the country and the areas within the countries. Appropriate local building materials which were less expensive and replaceable in the environment were used. A brick-making machine, which made bricks from local clays mixed with enforcing materials, compressed, and dried in the sun, was a key factor. No kilns and expensive firewood was needed. Spin-off groups would begin their own Habitat process when they saw the result in a nearby village. The success of the Habitat program was the grass roots community approach, and the fact that it responded to a basic human need of shelter.

The War Continues

The country did descend into a kind of chaos at the May 1997 departure of Mobutu to Morocco and his eventual death. Laurent Kabila was quickly substituted for Mobutu and the son of Kabila, Joseph Kabila, was substituted for the father when the father was murdered. It seems the older Kabila had not kept his promises to the forces, which helped him during his long years in resistance in the bush, and in his resistance to Mobutu. The newly released diaries of Che Guevara's Congo years document his alliance with Laurent Kabila. Already in 1965, Kabila, supported by Tanzania, was leading a resistance force in Eastern Congo. Che showed little respect for him. He was never out in the bivouac but always had an excuse to be in Dar el Salaam. As the elder Kabila lead his "Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo," on its march on Kinshasa, the force was a

rag-tag group of Banyamulenge from the Kivu, and forces from interested neighboring countries, who had their self-interest in the Congo. But above all, the Kabila force was seen to be a “Trojan horse” for Kagame, the President of Rwanda. Rwanda, the fly on the back of the elephant, which was the Congo, was now controlling which way the elephant would go. But Laurent Kabila was not loyal to his Rwandan allies. In August of 1998, Rwanda and Uganda backed a rebellion that challenged the elder Kabila. Laurent Kabila was assassinated on 16 January 2001.

Troops from Zimbabwe, Angola, Namibia, Chad, and Sudan intervened to support the son of Kabila, Joseph Kabila, to lead the Kinshasa regime. Angola volunteered its Special Forces as bodyguards to protect the young Kabila and stabilize the Congo. Troops from both Uganda and Rwanda had originally entered the country to help to chase Mobutu out, but stayed on and began to lay claim to part of the Congo for their countries. The challenge was to get rid of the foreign soldiers. All the countries of the region were drawn into the conflict. Nelson Mandela from South Africa was called in to try to mediate the problem and put an end to the civil war, which found the foreign troops headquartered in Kisangani and the Eastern Zaire. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, Amos Namanga Ngongi was also sent to mediate the situation. Before a year, the Hutu Rwandan militia based in Goma declared him *persona non grata*. They felt he was unfavorable to their point of view and was no longer welcome in those parts of Eastern Congo.

An all-party conference was called in Pretoria. Agreement was reached for dates of withdrawal from the DRC of all the warring parties. To the surprise of all, the troops began to withdraw from the Eastern Congo; even the Rwandans did so on October 21, 2002. But Paul Kagame and his able Rwandan troops were still looking to settle accounts with the Hutu militia. Kabila the Younger used his own resources to bring the Congo forward in its development project. The Congo in 2004 lies between the two strongest armies in the southern part of Africa: the Rwandan Army, controlled by Paul Kagame; and the Angolan army, honed by a 27-year civil war and commanded by President Dos Santos.

The first Peacekeeping mission of the fledgling UN in the 1940s took place in the Congo. One side was based in Kisingani where the UN forces tried to intervene. History repeated itself sixty years later. The Rwandan-Ugandan group headquartered itself in Kisingani.

The Congo continued to languish, and real development remained a future project when war was the order of the day. The war dramatically reduced national

output and government revenue from August of 1998. The national external debt increased and 3.5 million people died from war, famine, and disease. Now that those foreign troops have withdrawn, the development project can move forward. President Kabila has begun to implement reforms.

IMF and WB Missions have met with the government to help it develop a coherent economic plan. The informal economy, according to the GDP data, represents the clever coping mechanisms of the resilient Congolese people, has begun to bubble again.

Departure

When my plane took off in late 1980, I breathed a sigh of relief and relaxation. One of my friends said that I would be there for the fall of Mobutu. He was wrong. It took seventeen years more for Mobutu to fall. Initially, I thought that in time of revolution I would be protected by the people I had come to help. Zaire disabused me of that naïve concept. I read of a famous doctor who had dedicated himself for years to the people of the Congolese region in which he served. When a local civil war began, his head was the first one to go up on a pole. A neighboring tribe had invaded. He was such a heroic symbol for the local tribe that he was one of the first to be killed as an example of the superior power of the invading tribe. His people were unable to protect him. I made it my business to be aware of the emergency contingency plans and evacuation points in time of unrest. In fact, there was a small boat down the Ngaliema Hill from my house, which might have enabled me to get my family across the river to Brazzaville in a time of fighting. It would have been a treacherous trip at the edge of the rapids. Fortunately we never had to use it. A Belgian woman described a scenario she had lived through during the fall of Mobutu. Masses spilled out of the *Ville* and headed for the *cite* where the expatriates and wealthy Zairians tended to live. She was hidden in the basement of her house with a view out a small window. It was a scene of an anthill which had exploded. People were carrying on their shoulders in long procession any object that could move: chairs, tables, TV sets, refrigerators, and so on. The items had been removed from the wealthy homes on the hill. They were moving downwards in procession toward the popular shantytowns. It was called distributive justice. No one was excluded from the process.

Summary

African countries with a rich natural resource base have often been subjected to more difficult development challenges than others. The stakes are higher. There is a geopolitical factor that makes all the large world powers interested in the fate of the country. In this sense, the Congo compares to Indonesia in Asia and Colombia in South America. A cartoon on the cover of *Time* magazine had the heads of leaders in Russia, the United States, and Cuba sticking up out of the African elephant grasses of the Congo.

Cobalt is an alloy of copper. It appears in the copper belt countries. The Congo in the 1960s and 1970s produced 80% of the free world's cobalt. Cobalt resists heat and is used in the tip of rockets to be launched into space at high speeds. The United States was in a "race to control outer space" with the Russians, and cobalt was considered a strategic metal. The USSR possessed large, self-sufficient cobalt deposits. Access to the cobalt market of the Congo was a high priority for the United States. It was no surprise that rebel attacks focused on paralyzing the copper and cobalt production in Eastern Congo. Mobutu leveraged the politics of cobalt a long way with his Western allies.

The case of the Congo clearly highlights the primal role of community development and the need for good governance. History moves slowly. The Congo is extricating itself from a long past, and is positioning itself for a new phase of development.

