



State of the **Wildlife Economy** in Africa

Case Study: Democratic Republic Of Congo

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Photographers

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DISCLAIMER

Although every attempt was made to collect data from as many sources as possible, both online and from numerous, varied other sources, this report is in no way exhaustive and there are a number of data gaps. For a number of the wildlife economy activities the 'latest' available data was often still 5-15 years old, highlighting a major gap in terms of relevant, recent, robust data to measure the value of the wildlife economy in Africa. The authors have taken care to ensure that the material presented in this report is accurate and correct. However, the authors do not guarantee the accuracy of the data or material contained in this report, and accept no legal liability or responsibility connected to its use or interpretation.

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List of acronyms

AfDB: African Development Bank

ANAPI: Agence Nationale pour la Promotion des Investissements

ARR: Afforestation Reforestation & Revegetation

AWF: African Wildlife Foundation

CBD: Convention on Biological Diversity

CDF: Congolese Franc

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency

CITES: Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

CMS: Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals

DRC: Democratic Republic of Congo

EAC: East African Community

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

GFW: Global Forest Watch

GVL: Greater Virunga Landscape

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organisation

HDI: Human Development Index

ICCN: Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature

IMF: International Monetary Fund

IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature

ITA: International Trade of Administration

IITA: International Institute of Tropical Agriculture

MEDD: Ministère de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable

MENCT: Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation and Tourism

MPA: Marine Protected Area

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organisations

NSCF: National Strategy for Community Forestry in DRC

NTFPs: Non-Timber Forest Products

OFAC: Observatoire des Forêts d'Afrique Centrale

REDD+: Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation

SADC: Southern African Development Community

SOWC: School of Wildlife Conservation

SIDA: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

UNODC: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

UNCTAD: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO: United Nations Educational and Cultural Organisation

UNEP: United Nations Environment Programme

UNEP-WCMC: United Nations Environmental Programme - World Conservation and Monitoring Center

USD: United States Dollar

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

WEII: Wildlife Economy Investment Index

WHO: World Health Organization

WTTC: World Travel and Tourism Council

WTO: World Trade Organisation

WWF: Wild World Fund for Nature



CASE STUDY INTRODUCTION

Overview of the research

Conservation of wildlife is frequently seen as a cost to governments, resulting in little investment in wildlife resources despite the extensive contributions that the wildlife economy can, and does, make in terms of employment and revenues. The African Leadership University's School of Wildlife Conservation received funding to conduct research and produce the inaugural State of the Wildlife Economy in Africa Report, as well as country case studies for all African countries, to illustrate the current and potential value of wildlife to economies in Africa and through this to encourage investment in this important economic asset. The report development process highlighted data gaps that should encourage the collection of robust data related to wildlife economies in order to better understand the vast contribution of wildlife resources to local, national and regional economies.

For the purposes of this research, the wildlife economy is defined as:

"The Wildlife Economy uses wildlife, plants and animals (marine and terrestrial), as an economic asset to create value that aligns with conservation objectives and delivers sustainable growth and economic development"

Wildlife economies can include a mix of consumptive and non-consumptive uses. The growth and development of the wildlife economy in Africa is influenced by a number of factors, including, amongst others:

- The enabling environment which either facilitates (or not) various stakeholders, including communities and the private sector, to engage in and benefit from the wildlife economy. This includes policy, legislation and supporting institutions
- The stock of wildlife resources for use in the wildlife economy
- Investment in wildlife resources to 'grow' the asset base on which the wildlife economy depends
- Political will and support
- Infrastructure to support the wildlife economy, such as roads, airports, hotels, etc.

As the first comprehensive regional assessment of the wildlife economy in Africa, the State of the Wildlife Economy in Africa report had the following main objectives:

1. To provide an overview of the status of the wildlife economy in Africa, including country case studies
2. To provide an overview of the regulatory framework governing the wildlife economy, including country case studies
3. To highlight gaps in the data in terms of country data, as well as data specifically relating to different types of wildlife economy activities
4. To analyse and highlight best practices of particular relevance to the region, through the use of case studies
5. To provide facts and figures required by governments and investors to make informed decisions, track progress and provide guidance for implementation in terms of the wildlife economy
6. To raise the profile of the wildlife economy in Africa and to highlight the importance of seeing wildlife as an asset to invest in
7. To promote the learning of lessons between countries and organisations
8. Where possible, to provide key recommendations for policy and practice

The overall aim of the report was to highlight the potential of the wildlife economy and encourage more public and private investments in protected and conserved areas to improve biodiversity outcomes and support economic development.

Success would include turning conservation into a growth industry, attracting young, inspired leaders, increasing private sector investment in wildlife resources and related businesses, involving communities and increasing their benefits and nature/wildlife becoming more abundant. Ultimately, the aim of the ALU SOWC research is to ensure that governments see wildlife as a key strategic asset and, therefore, create an enabling environment for the wildlife economy and the conservation of related wildlife resources.

The first full report focused on five main wildlife economy activities: ecotourism, hunting, wildlife ranching, carbon finance and forest products. The activities included in the report

had the criteria of having to contribute to both biodiversity conservation and social and/or economic development. For all ALU SOWC wildlife economy reports, the activities are defined as follows:



Ecotourism includes non-consumptive tourism related to nature/wildlife.



Hunting includes trophy hunting, game meat hunting, as well as some aspects of fishing, such as artisanal, small-scale and recreational fishing.



Wildlife ranching includes the breeding of wild/indigenous animals for hunting, game meat, products and other uses.



Other consumptive use includes forest products used commercially and for subsistence purposes.



The carbon market includes projects that earn income through REDD+ and other mechanisms that sequester carbon, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and conserve/preserve natural systems of carbon.

The full report covered 54 countries in Africa. Data for all 54 countries was, however, not available and a selection of case study countries, with diversity in terms of geographic location, biomes, wildlife economy activities, policy and socio-economic context were selected (selection criteria described below). Throughout the report, Text boxes were included covering other countries in order to cover as many countries on the continent as possible and to provide examples of different approaches to the wildlife economy, as well as innovative examples and best practices. Wherever possible, attempts were made to allow for generalisations, and where not possible, caveats or specific enabling factors have been highlighted.

The case study countries in the full report were selected based on the following criteria:

1. A diversity of regions: to ensure that we included one example from each of the regions: East Africa; Southern Africa; West Africa and Central Africa.
2. Diversity of wildlife economy activities: to make sure that the case study countries included a diversity of activities rather than focusing on one activity such as ecotourism, and to make sure that as many different activities were covered as possible, including ecotourism, trophy hunting, game meat hunting, wildlife ranching, non-timber forest products, carbon projects (current and future), artisanal fisheries, etc.
3. Diversity of enabling environments: to enable an analysis of different policy, legislation and institutions and their effectiveness in supporting the wildlife economy.
4. Diversity of biomes and ecosystems, including forest, marine, savannah, fynbos, miombo woodland, tropical rainforest, etc.
5. Availability of data: we chose countries where we had a number of in-country contacts to assist with on the ground research, given that the team couldn't travel due to the COVID pandemic.

Data collection process

A research project of this magnitude requires a number of different approaches to gathering the data and information required to present analyses and a useful picture of the wildlife economy in Africa. Given various time and budget constraints, and limited access to printed documents, it was decided to largely focus on conducting a literature review, as well as desktop research and, where possible, contacting in-country sources to gather data.

Where possible, future research aims to conduct more primary research and data collection. Currency amounts have been converted to USD for comparison purposes, with the local currency amount still included, using the average annual USD rate for the year of the data. Some graphs and tables have, however, been kept in the local currency because fluctuations in the exchange rates can affect the USD amount in such a way that it does not reflect the true local and national economic impacts as well as the local currency amounts do.

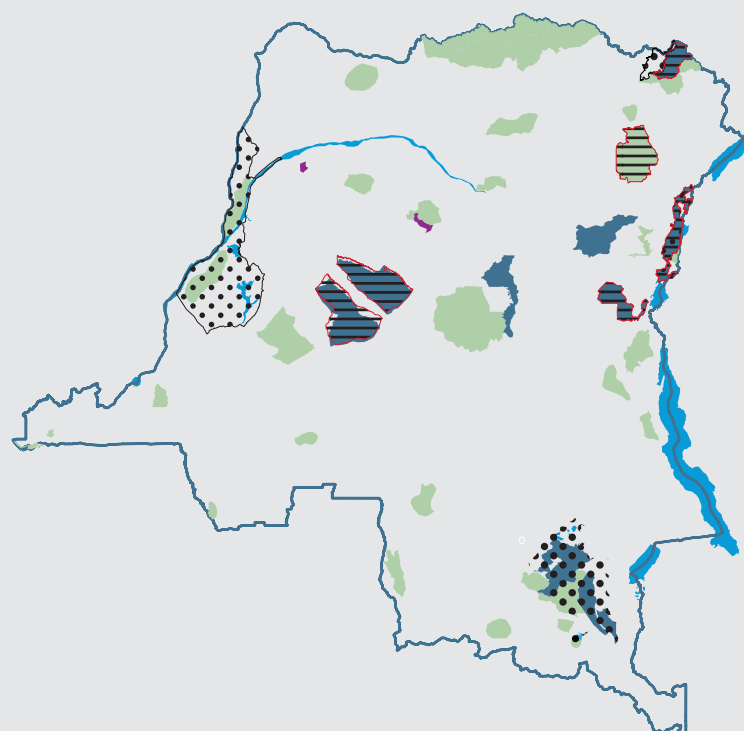
During the research for the full report, it was found that very few countries in Africa have a good understanding of the value of the wildlife economy at a national level. For certain wildlife economy activities there was information and data available at a local, and often only a project level, and often this data was only collected for the duration of the project, or when funding was available. This resulted in data for the continent, as well as per country, largely being inconsistent, incomparable, and often quite old. The overall research project highlights a large gap in data on the value of the wildlife economy and the important need to have consistent, comparable data to ensure that the value of the wildlife economy is truly understood. This information would allow for better policy and investment decision making and would encourage greater investment in the wildlife economy once the true value is understood. Research for the case study countries includes contacting relevant contacts in the specific countries, an extensive literature review and engaging stakeholders to collect as much relevant, up-to-date data as possible. It also includes stakeholder workshops and external reviews of the case study by relevant experts.

The complexity of stakeholders involved in the wildlife economy and the fact that a large amount of activity also occurs in the informal sector also results in difficulty in collecting and collating data that provides a true reflection of the value of the wildlife economy. The data collection process is in no way exhaustive and is done with the purpose of providing an illustrative overview of the wildlife economy. Following on from the full report, the Roadmap for Africa's Wildlife Economy report, and numerous country case studies, this case study focuses on the state of the wildlife economy in Democratic Republic of Congo.

All country case studies follow the same structure to allow for comparisons and ease of reading. The general structure is as follows:

- Country map with key statistics
- Wildlife economy summary graphic
- Key points related to the wildlife economy
- Introduction/background: conservation and socio-economic
- Regulatory framework/enabling environment
- Wildlife economy activities (where relevant):
- Ecotourism
- Hunting
- Wildlife trade
- Wildlife ranching
- Forest products
- Carbon finance
- Other activities
- Conclusion
- References

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO



Socio-economic/
governance

GDP per capita (USD)

627.5

Gini coefficient

42.1

Transparency International
Corruption Perceptions Index

Ranked 163rd
out of 180 countries

Total population

105.7 million

Mo Ibrahim Governance Index

Ranked 48th
out of 54 countries

Mo Ibrahim Governance Index

Score 32.8

Protected areas

8 national parks

2 wildlife reserves

12 nature reserves

2 community reserves



Conservation

60 protected areas

**348,147 km² total protected
areas coverage**

768 km² marine protected areas



Species numbers

>900 fish species

1100 bird species

431 mammal species

300 reptile species

Sources: ICCN, 2026; Parc Marin des Mangroves, 2026, Pélissier et al., 2018; Transparency International, 2024; UNEP-WCMC, 2026; WHO, 2024; World Bank, 2023

Overview of the wildlife economy in DRC



Forest products

- DRC is home to the second largest tropical rainforest in the world and more than 40 million people depend on this forest for their livelihoods.
- Wood fuel contributed approx. 12% of total household income in Kisangani and up to 75% in Kinshasa for fuelwood and charcoal producers.
- Approximately 80% of the population in the capital city consume edible insects, with approx. 9,600 tonnes of caterpillars sold annually and approx. 3 - 5 tonnes of dried caterpillars exported to the African diaspora in Europe valued at approx. USD 106,000.



Carbon

- The DRC has four ongoing carbon projects covering approx. 510,860 hectares of forest land with the Mai N'dombe REDD+ project covering the largest area.
- The Mai N'dombe REDD+ project is currently protecting 300,000 hectares of critical bonobo and forest elephant habitat and approx. 50,000 people also live in and around the Mai N'dombe REDD+ Project.



Fisheries

- The Eastern Great Lakes region has the highest percentage of ichthyological fauna in the DRC, with 63% of the country's more than 900 fish species.
- In 2023 the annual production was approx. 267,310 tonnes (approx. 37.8% of DRC's fishing potential), however, the estimated fishing potential is over 707,000 tonnes per year.
- Fish and fish products imports were approx. USD 183.1 million in 2022 and the exports were approx. USD 121,590.
- Approximately 21% of farmers in the Kinshasa region concentrate solely on fish farming.
- The Virunga National Park supports a thriving fishing industry, which employs approx. 27,000 people.



Hunting

- In 2015, the value added by the village hunting sector was estimated at USD 636 million.
- In 2017, the total net profit through village hunting was USD 374 million, with a high rate of return of approx. 40%.



Tourism

- Between 2019 and 2021, tourism sector's contribution to GDP declined sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a 30.9% contraction in 2020.
- Tourism's contribution towards GDP increased by 3.5% in 2023, contributing 1.7% to the country's GDP (USD 1.1 billion).
- Approximately 567,100 tourism jobs were directly created in 2023 (contributing 0.5% of total employment).
- In 2017 Virunga National Park tourism revenue was approx. USD 4 million from 8,000 visitors.

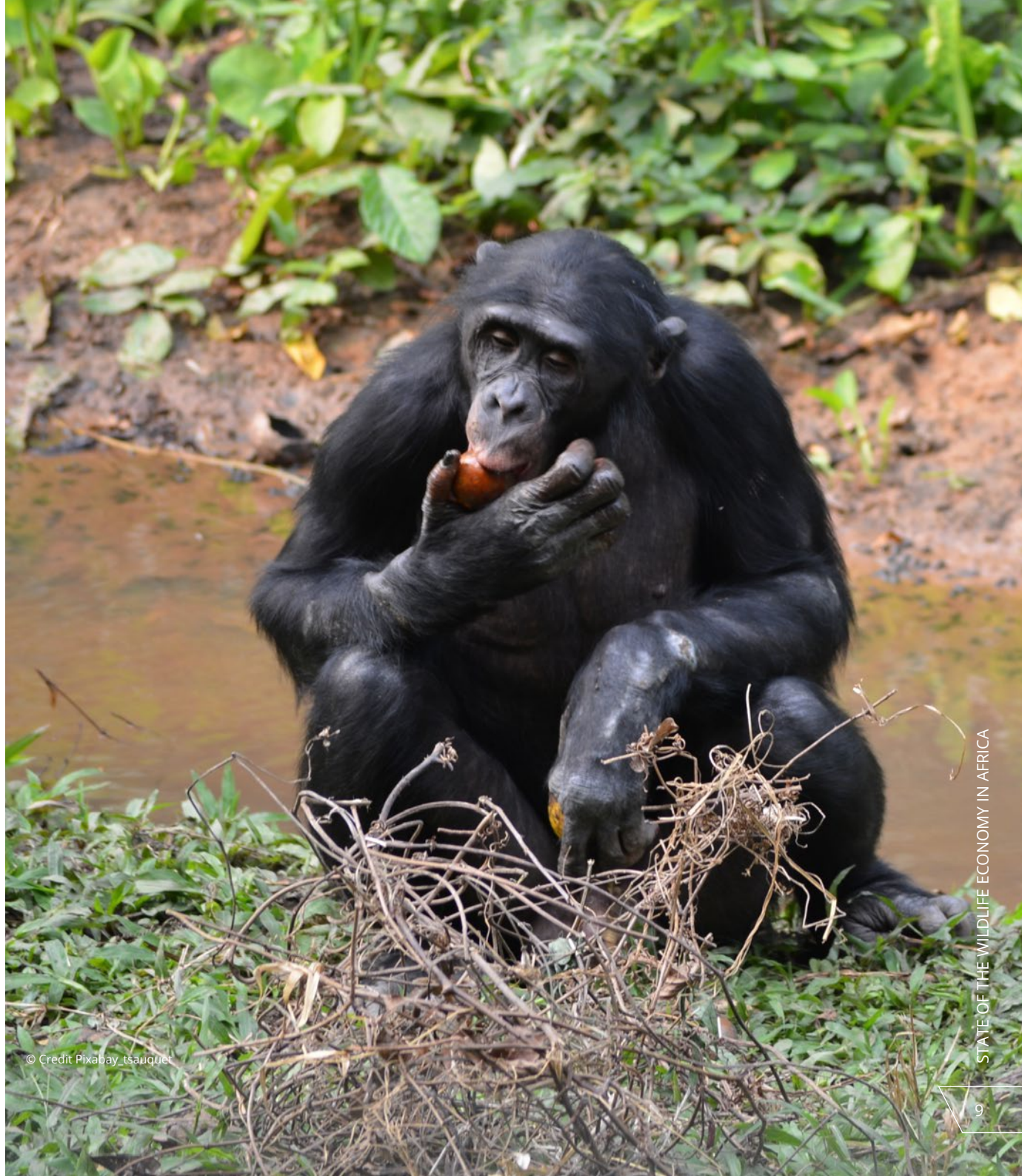


Wildlife trade

- African cherry (*Prunus africana*) comprised 56.86% of commercial exports (all wild-sourced); top destinations were Spain, France, and India.
- Between 2014 and 2017, DRC exported 23,297 live African grey parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*); 98.71% were wild-sourced.
- The illegal utilisation of wildlife resources is concentrated on timber, charcoal, and wildlife products, with an estimated annual value of USD 1 billion.
- DRC accounted for 1.35 tonnes of ivory items sold, more than 65% of the ivory sold in five countries: DRC, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo and Gabon.

Key messages

- The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is the **most biologically diverse country in Africa, and one of the most important biodiversity hotspots** in the world, encompassing over half of Africa's tropical forest.
- Currently, the DRC's economy is based mainly on extractive industries, which are highly dependent on world prices and international economic dynamics. There is **a need to diversify in terms of wildlife economy activities to promote sustainable development and the conservation of natural resources.**
- The **main threats to biodiversity in the DRC** include deforestation and habitat degradation, illegal logging, poaching, mining, and political and social instabilities.
- **Wildlife resources constitute a critical livelihood source**, and the forest provides food, medicine, domestic energy, building materials and cash income for rural and urban populations.
- The DRC is a **strategic country in the carbon market**. Government institutions should work together with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to reveal the real carbon sink DRC represents and to claim related compensation.
- **Data and information on all the wildlife economy activities was found to be disaggregated, often outdated and largely incomparable** between sites as well as over time.



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Introduction to the biodiversity and natural resources in the DRC

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a **Central African country that shares borders with nine countries**, namely Central African Republic, South Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Zambia, Republic of Congo, and Angola. The country's eastern borders trace a path from north to south, closely aligning with the African great lakes of the rift valley spanning over 1,400 km (Ministry of Tourism, 2021). With Uganda, it shares Lake Albert, Lake Edward, the Lubirihia River, and the Rwenzori Mountains; with Rwanda, its limit is Lake Kivu; with Burundi, its limits are the Ruzizi River and the northern part of Lake Tanganyika; with Zambia, its limits are Lake Moero and the Luapula River (Ibid.). To the west, it is separated from the Republic of Congo by the Congo River (Ministry of Tourism, 2021).

The DRC covers more than 2.3 million km² and ranks as **the second largest country in Africa**, after Algeria (CIA, 2022). With a surface area equivalent to the coverage of Western Europe, the DRC is the **largest sub-Saharan African country** (World Bank, 2022). The country has a **crucial tropical forest reservoir in Africa** (FAO, 2020), with the Congolese rainforest being the **world's second-largest tropical forest encompassing half of the African tropical forest** (UNEP/GEF, 2021 & WWF, 2024 & 2026). The **Congolese rainforest represents 17% of world rainforest coverage**, with a surface area of 135 million hectares and a total of 11 vegetation types including swamp forest, tropical lowland rainforest, tropical sub-montane rainforest, three types of Afromontane Forest, Zambezan forest (*Muhulu*), Zambezan woodland (Miombo), Sudanese woodland, coastal sclerophyllous forest and mangroves (Musampa et al., 2012; ITA, 2022). Additionally, Samndong and Nhantumbo (2015) and Hardly et al. (2013) highlighted that the Congolese rainforest covers:

- The largest region of the Guineo-Congolian Forest which represents nearly half of Africa's rainforest and covers the central basin,
- A strip of wooded savannah separating the Zambezan zone from the Guineo-Congolian region,
- Afromontane woodland region with several large lakes in the eastern region of the country, and
- A narrow band of woody and herbaceous savannah in the north.

The Congo Basin or Congolese rainforest is known as **one of the planet's most important sources of natural wealth** (Samndong & Nhantumbo, 2015) endowed with highly diverse fauna and flora. **The country currently has 60 protected areas with various designations** (see Table 1, some of which have more than one designation) (UNEP-WCMC, 2026). **The protected areas system currently covers approx. 14.94% of the national territory** (Ibid.).

Table 1: Protected areas in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Designation	Number
National parks	8
Natural reserves	12
Biosphere reserves	3
Wildlife reserves	2
Primate nature reserve	1
Community reserves	2
Hunting areas	16
UNESCO-Man and Biosphere reserves	3
Scientific reserve	1
World Heritage sites	5
Ramsar sites	4
Botanical and zoological gardens	8

Source: UNEP-WCMC, 2026

The vast protected area network in the DRC is home to a diversity of species including: 1,100 bird species, 240 amphibian species, 431 mammal species, and more than 300 reptile species, 900 fish species and 10,000 plant species (Pélissier et al., 2018). The country's biodiversity is hosted in various habitats including **six main landscapes:** the Ituri-Epulu-Aru landscape, Maiko-Tayna-Kahuzi-Biega landscape, Salonga-Lukenie-Sankuru landscape, Lake Tété-Lake Tumba landscape, Maringa-Lopori-Wamba landscape, and Virunga landscape (Samndong & Nhantumbo, 2015). Some of these landscapes are transboundary ecosystems that connect forests, savannahs, rivers and wildlife populations. Examples of these landscapes are the Greater Virunga Landscape (GVL) shared between

Uganda, DRC and Rwanda (see Text box 1) and the Garamba-Bili-Chinko landscape extending across the northeastern DRC and southeastern Central African Republic (see Text box 2) (GTV, 2026; Ondoua et al., 2017).

The **Congolese rainforest is a biodiversity hotspot that ranks DRC as the fifth most biodiversity-rich country in the world** (UNEP/GEF, 2021 & Interactive Country Fiches, undated a). The Congo basin forests harbour a **high number of endemic bird, mammal, amphibian and plant species** (UNESCO, 2010). Iconic mammal species include okapi (*Okapia johnstoni*) and white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*), the endangered bonobo (*Pan paniscus*), common chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*), and the two endangered subspecies of the eastern gorilla specifically the mountain gorilla (*Gorilla beringei beringei*) and eastern lowland gorilla (*Gorilla beringei graueri*) (Samndong & Nhantumbo, 2015).

DRC has a coastline of 40km and marine and coastal area of 13,299km², of which approx. 760km² covers the marine and coastal protected area (MPA) (ACAPS, 2016; Parc Marin des Mangroves, 2026; UNEP-WCMC, 2026). This MPA, *Parc National des Mangroves* (Mangroves Marine Park), is home to coastal and marine ecosystems such as mangrove forests, wetlands, seagrass habitats and flooded savannas (Clément et al., 2024; Ramsar, undated). The mangrove forests host three globally endangered and protected species, with other species such as *Rhizophora racemosa*, *Rhizophora mangle*, *Avicennia germinans*, and *Laguncularia racemosa* (Clément et al., 2024; Laudisoit et al., 2015). **The coastline provides nesting sites for five of the world's seven sea turtles species, including olive ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*), leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) and green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*)** (Clément et al., 2024; Clowes, 2017; Laudisoit et al., 2015; Parc Marin des Mangroves, 2026). The MPA is also home to the African manatee (*Trichechus senegalensis*), crocodiles, hippopotamuses and migratory bird species (Laudisoit et al., 2015; Parc Marin des Mangroves, 2026). However, these marine and coastal ecosystems and biodiversity are threatened by anthropogenic activities including fuelwood cutting, refinery pollution, illegal exploitation of resources in the MPA and land exploitation and privatisation (Clowes, 2017; Rolley & Moulds, 2025; Ramsar, undated).

Text box 1

The Greater Virunga Transboundary landscape

The Greater Virunga Landscape (GVL) is one of Africa's most important transboundary conservation regions, stretching across DRC, Uganda and Rwanda. The landscape includes montane forests, savannahs, lakes, wetlands, volcanoes, and alpine habitats and supports high biological diversity. It is recognised as the most species-rich network area on the African continent. GVL supports high biodiversity and has become an important platform for regional collaboration on wildlife monitoring, tourism, law enforcement, community-conservation and wildlife and protected area management. What started as a collaboration around mountain gorilla conservation later expanded into broader landscape-level management coordinated through the Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration.

The region hosts over 5,164 species of mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and plants, including at least

27 primate species. It also has the world's remaining mountain gorilla population and provides habitat for chimpanzees and freshwater biodiversity. More than 50% of mainland Africa's bird species, 39% of mammal species, 19% of amphibians species and 14% of reptile and plant species are found in the GVL. The landscape covers some internationally recognised protected areas including Virunga national park in DRC, Volcanoes national park in Rwanda and Bwindi and Queen Elizabeth national parks in Uganda. However, the landscape is vulnerable to challenges such as climate change, anthropogenic pressures such as population growth, illegal resource extraction and agricultural encroachment. Civil unrest and insecurity in the Eastern DRC also exacerbates this landscape vulnerability and threatens its management.

Sources: GTVC, 2026; Refisch & Jenson, 2016

The **main threats to biodiversity in the DRC** include deforestation and habitat degradation, illegal logging, poaching, mining), political and social instabilities (UNEP, 2022). Mining is of particular concern given the country's globally significant reserves of cobalt, coltan, copper, gold, and other minerals (Milburn, 2014), and the growing demand for critical minerals associated with the global energy transition (Aska et al., 2025). While mining remains an important contributor to economic development, its expansion can place additional pressure on forests, freshwater systems, wildlife habitats, and other natural assets that support the wildlife economy (see Text box 3). These threats are deeply connected to land tenure insecurity. Much of the forested land is under customary tenure systems, where rights are poorly documented and often contested. This lack of clarity creates space for overlapping claims, weak enforcement, and exploitation by armed groups or commercial actors (D. Tshidinda, personal communication, 29 May, 2026). In 2022,

there were 986,310 deforestation alerts reported in DRC, covering a total of 12,100 hectares (GFW, 2022). Additionally, a decade of violent conflict has severely constrained conservation efforts in the DRC, while continuing insecurity in eastern DRC has made the management of protected areas both difficult and dangerous (IUCN, 2025a; Musampa et al., 2012). In some areas, threats posed by armed groups to ecoguards and conservation personnel have weakened the protection of wildlife and habitats, contributing continued declines in wildlife populations and habitats (OCHA, 2021).

Text box 2

Garamba-Bili-Chinko landscape

The Garamba-Bili-Chinko landscape is a transboundary landscape extending across the northeastern DRC and southeastern Central African Republic (CAR). This landscape includes the Garamba complex, the Bili-Uéré and Bomu reserves and Chinko conservation area. The region has extensive forest savannah transition ecosystems that support African elephants (*Loxodonta africana*), Kordofan giraffes (*Giraffa camelopardalis antiquorum*), bongo (*Tragelaphus eurycerus*), chimpanzees, giant forest hogs (*Hylochoerus meinertzhageni*), forest buffalo (*Syncerus nanus*), wild dogs (*Lycaon pictus*) and other species. This area is ecologically important as it links parts of the Congo Basin to the Guinea-Sudano savannah zone, creating a habitat that supports both forest and savannah species. Garamba national park and its surrounding domains cover 14,000 km² and support over 20,000 animals from 23 species, while Chinko covers approx. 64,000 km² and is one of the few places in Africa where both forest and savannah elephants live in the same ecosystem. Both these protected areas found in this landscape are managed by African Parks, creating opportunities for stronger landscape transboundary conservation initiatives involving government bodies in DRC and CAR. However, this landscape is affected by illegal wildlife trade, weak resource governance, insecurity posed by armed groups and poaching, which threaten wildlife populations inhabiting the landscape. Some assessments have highlighted the need for stronger transboundary collaboration and coordinated management across the wider Garamba-Bili-Chinko systems, hoping to address some of the challenges affecting the landscape.

Sources: African Parks, 2026a, 2026b; Ondoua et al., 2017



Text box 3

Mining and biodiversity in the Democratic Republic of Congo

DRC holds some of the world's largest reserves of cobalt and significant deposits of coltan, copper, gold, and diamonds. As global demand for critical minerals used in renewable energy technologies, batteries, and electronics continue to grow, pressure for mineral exploration and extraction is likely to increase across the country.

Numerous mineral-rich areas overlap with forests, protected areas, and other biodiversity-rich landscapes. Mining titles cover a large share of the country and occur around or within several protected areas, including Virunga National

Park, Kahuzi-Biega National Park, Okapi Wildlife Reserve, and Itombwe Nature Reserve. Mining expansion can affect biodiversity through forest clearance, road development, water pollution, soil degradation, habitat fragmentation, and increased hunting associated with mining settlements and transport corridors. Studies from the Congo Basin also show the impacts of mining often extend beyond the extraction site itself, driving additional deforestation through expansion of roads, settlements, and agricultural activities. These pressures have implications for wildlife economy because sectors such as nature-based tourism, fisheries and

sustainable use of forest products and non-timber forest products depend on healthy ecosystems. As demand for critical minerals grows, balancing mining development with biodiversity conservation will become increasingly important for maintaining the country's natural assets for sustainable use.

Sources: Inogwabini et al., 2026; Noiraud et al., 2017; Verweijen et al., 2023

Socio-economic overview

The DRC population is estimated at 105.7 million inhabitants (World Health Organisation, 2024). The mining sector is responsible for approx. 30% of the GDP and accounted for more than 90% of total exports in five years prior to 2020 (Okenda, 2020). The diversity of fauna and flora of the DRC provide goods and services, as well as jobs that are critical to the livelihoods of millions of people living in rural and urban areas of the country. Yet, despite the scale and global value of these extractive industries, the financial benefits have not translated into broad-based prosperity for most Congolese people, particularly rural communities living closest to areas of high biodiversity and natural resource extraction. For many, the benefits derived from nature remain largely subsistence-based, while the costs of environmental degradation, land-use change, forest loss, pollution, and weakened ecosystem services are borne locally.

The country is among the five poorest countries in the world as more than 69% of the population live in extreme poverty (World Bank, 2026). In 2018, approx. 73% of Congolese (approx. 60 million people) lived on less than USD 1.90 a day

(SIDA, 2022). As such, one out of six people living in extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa lives in the DRC (World Bank, 2022). The high poverty rate is also due to decades of war, poor governance, and under-investment resulting in poor access to basic services (IMF, 2022). Furthermore, the low Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.52 out of a possible 1.00, ranking 171 out of 193 countries and the even lower inequality adjusted HDI, with a score of 0.34 in 2023 shows persistent struggle of the average Congolese to access basic services (UNDP, 2025).

After a decade of contraction, the DRC's economic growth revived in 2002, registering an average growth of 5.8% through to 2012. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic induced lock down in 2020, the economic growth went down to 1.7% (IMF, 2022). The DRC was projected to experience economic growth of 6.2% in 2022 (World Bank, 2022). However, the economic growth accelerated to 6.5% in 2022, maintaining the good pace of 6.2% set in 2021 (World Bank, 2025). This growth was projected to be driven by a number of factors, including increased oil production, improved efficiency in the agricultural and mining sectors, and growth in the non-oil sector (World Bank, 2022 & 2025). **The DRC's GDP per capita was USD 627.5 in 2023** (World Bank, 2023).

From a governance perspective, **the DRC ranks extremely low on many indices measuring governance and corruption.** In the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance, the country ranked 48 out of 54 countries, with a score of 32.8 out of 100, showing weak performance in safety and security, rule of law, participation, rights and inclusion (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2024). Governance challenges continue to exacerbate due the resurgence of the M23 armed group in 2021 in the eastern region of the country and this situation has worsened the humanitarian situation in the region (World Bank, 2026). The conflict has also displaced millions of people and has been associated with high levels of gender based violence (Ibid). In Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, the country ranked 163 out of 180, with a score of 20 out of 100, indicating a high level of public sector corruption (Transparency International, 2024). In 2023 DRC ranked 40th out of 53 countries in terms of the African Leadership University School of Wildlife Conservation's Wildlife Economy Investment Index (WEII). See Text box 4 for more details on the WEII.





Text box 4

Wildlife Economy Investment Index (WEII) for DRC

The Wildlife Economy Investment Index (WEII), developed by the African Leadership University's School of Wildlife Conservation, aims to evaluate the potential of African countries in terms of their wildlife assets and the management of these and the investment-enabling environment related to the wildlife economy. It is a comprehensive tool that gauges five fundamental pillars: wildlife assets, wildlife management, ease of doing business, public sector capacity, and investment safety.

In the first version of the overall WEII rankings published in 2023, DRC was ranked 40th out of 53 countries (São Tomé and Príncipe were not included in the overall WEII score due to insufficient data), with a score of 42.31. For the Wildlife Status Sub-index the country ranked 10th (score of 42.27) and for the Investment-Enabling Environment Sub-index, the country ranked 45th in Africa (score of 37.35). See Figure 1 for an overview of the country's scores across the WEII, with green denoting positioned in the upper third of African countries, yellow in the middle third and red in the lower third.

According to the WEII report for DRC, the country scored in the bottom third in terms of Investment enabling environment, specifically in terms of the investment safety and ease of doing business. The country shows strength in wildlife status possessing abundant wildlife assets particularly in the species richness, endemic species and ecological habitats sub-categories.

In terms of recommendations from the WEII report, the below were highlighted.

A need to:

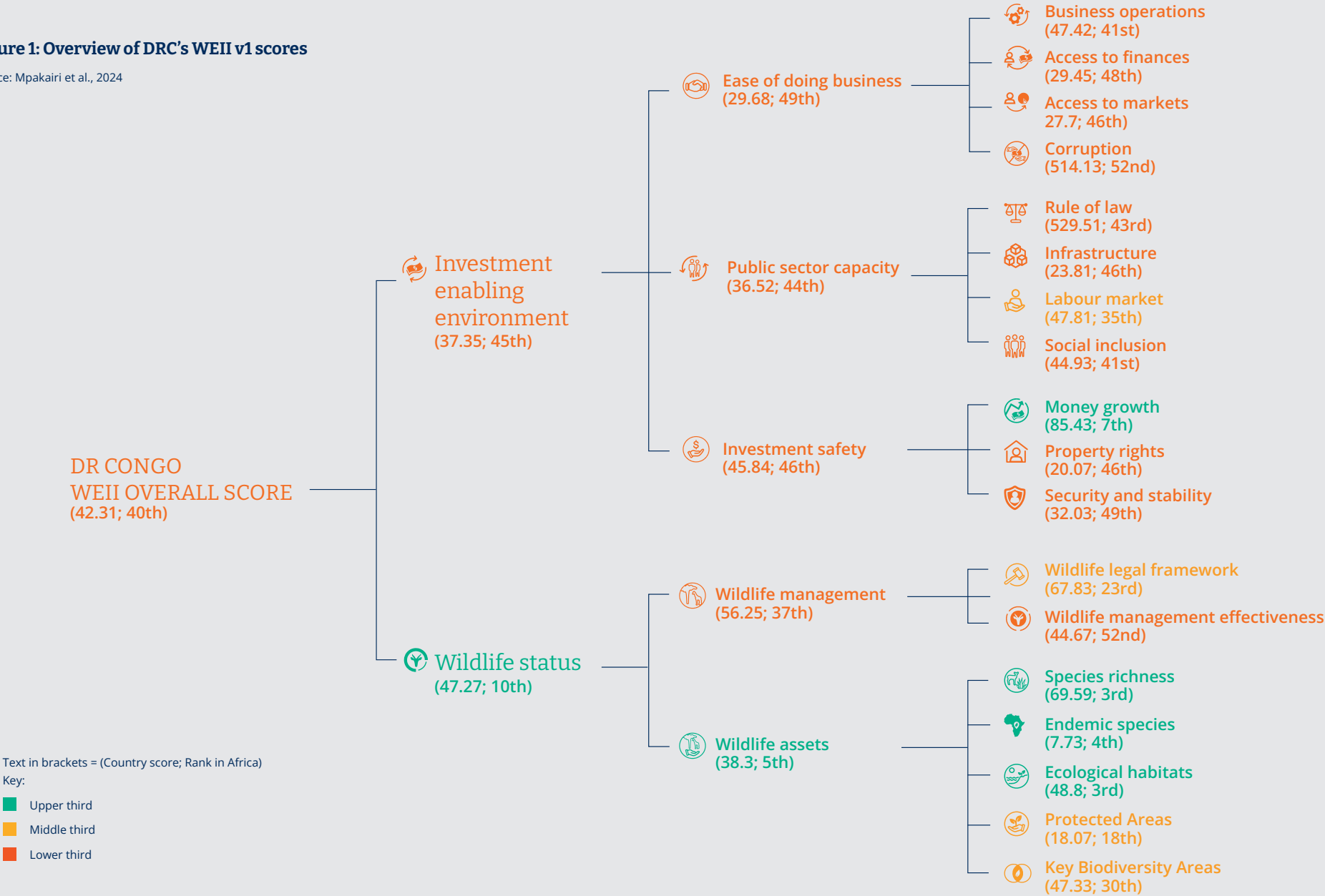
- Ensure conflict resolution and stability;
- Promote biodiversity conservation;
- Enhance the investment enabling-environment;
- Reduce corruption and strengthen the legal and institutional framework;
- Continually collaborate with regional partners such as EAC and SADC to address shared environmental challenges.

For more details on these recommendations and for the full scorecard for DRC on all 280 indicators, please see the [DRC's WEII report](#).

Source: Mpakairi et al., 2024

Figure 1: Overview of DRC's WEII v1 scores

Source: Mpakairi et al., 2024



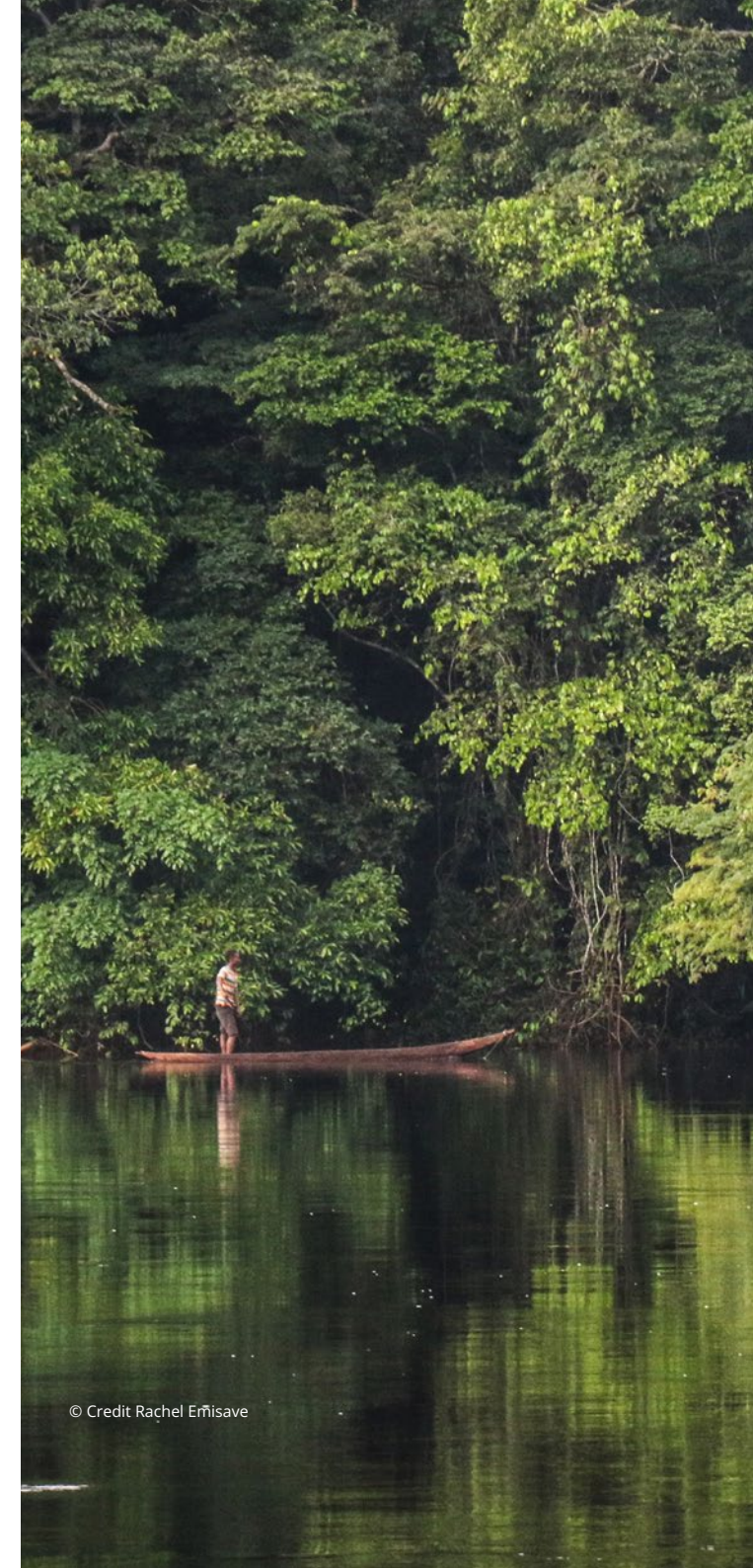
Regulatory framework of the wildlife economy

The DRC has a variety of different policies and legal frameworks which govern wildlife and natural resources. Article 215 of the 2006 Congolese Constitution highlights that the Congolese legal system follows an approach where international laws become part of domestic laws and are more powerful than domestic laws (Ruppel & Bwiza, 2013). However, Articles 214 and 216 limit the operation of Article 215 by requiring domesticating legislation for specified types of international treaties and subjecting the application of international law in the DRC to the Constitution (Ibid.).

The wildlife management legislation includes the Forest Code which promotes biodiversity conservation by protecting the fauna and flora. The Environmental Protection Act No. 11/009 of July 2011 set out the fundamental principles of protecting the environment and included the public in environmental decision-making (Montaño et al., 2021). The law No. 69-041 of 1969 on the Conservation of Nature highlights the need to train, inform and involve local communities living in or around parks in conservation matters with the assistance of competent authorities and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), mainly through the Great Ape Conservation Plan (Abbot et al., 2018 & Maldonado et al., 2012). Law No 14/003 of 11 February 2014 on Nature Conservation was enacted to support the national government strategies concerning the conservation of nature. This law repeals the Ordinance Law No 69-041 of 22 August 1969 on the Conservation of Nature and introduces important innovations in the protection of the environment (Bindu, n.d.). The **innovations include** public participation in the decision-making process, local community involvement in the strategic steps for establishing and managing protected areas, social and environmental impact studies for all projects relating to the creation of protected areas, traditional knowledge on nature conservation, access to biological and genetic resources, just and equitable benefits derived from resources (Ibid.).

The country has a diversity of legislative and regulatory texts on wildlife conservation (see Table 2 for a non-exhaustive list). The DRC is also a **party to various multilateral environmental legal instruments**. With regards to biodiversity management,

the DRC has ratified a number of international agreements and conventions (see Table 2 for a non-exhaustive list). Noticeable but still weak efforts have been invested in developing policies, validating biodiversity-related legislation and establishing appropriate institutions (Abbott et al., 2018). **Weaknesses in the institutional framework are caused by** poor coordination, inadequate funding for biodiversity protection, corruption, and jurisdictional conflicts. The DRC's policy and regulatory environment operates within a challenging governance context, where implementation capacity, institutional coordination, and technical resources remain uneven. Continued investment in evidence-based policy review, regulatory enforcement, and institutional strengthening will be important for improving natural resource governance outcomes (World Bank, 2022). To overcome this crisis, the government should recognise the wildlife benefits of reduced human activity in certain areas and increase attention on improving regulation and legislation related to wildlife and the sustainable use of natural resources.



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Table 2: Key policies and legislation related to wildlife management in the DRC

Policy/regulation	Description	Source
National legislation		
Law n°22/030 of July 15, 2022 on the protection and promotion of the rights of Pygmy indigenous peoples	This Law corrects the injustice or lack of attention in favour of the indigenous peoples and promotes their rights as any other citizen, especially their right to access land and natural resources on which they depend.	Available at https://www.leganet.cd/Legislation/Droit%20Public/DH/Loi%2022.030%20du%2015%20juillet%202022.html [Accessed 16 th January 2026].
Law N° 011/2002 on the Forestry Code	This Law defines the legal framework applicable to the conservation, exploitation, and valorisation of forest resources throughout the national territory. It comprises 156 articles divided into ten Titles, namely: General Provisions (I); Legal Status of Forests (II); Forest Use Rights (III); Forest Protection (IV); Forest Inventory, Management, and Restoration (V); Forest Concessions (VI); Forest Exploitation (VII); Forest Taxation (VIII); Penal Provisions (IX); Transitional and Final Provisions (X).	Available at https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC034383 [Accessed 16 th January 2026].
Law No. 82-002 of 28 May 1982 to regulate hunting	This Law sets out general regulations on hunting, characterised by restrictions on customary hunting. It comprises 90 articles divided into seven chapters, namely: General provisions (I); Hunting: hunting reserves, hunting areas and periods, hunting instruments and methods, hunting animals, photography and cinematography, hunting guide (II); Hunting licences: preliminary provisions, ordinary licences, special licences (III); Hunting products (IV); Protection of property and persons (V); Penal provisions (VI); Final provisions (VII).	Available at https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC004275 [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
Law No. 18-018 of 9 July 2018 on the Fundamental Principles Relating to Tourism	This Law establishes the fundamental principles relating to tourism and sets out the rules governing the regime and organisation of the tourism sector in accordance with Article 203, point 15 of the Constitution. Particularly, this Law aims to enhance the value of the national tourism heritage; promote sustainable tourism for economic development; promote investment and the development of public-private partnerships in tourism and hospitality; promote tourism that is accessible to all and based on universal design; diversify tourism products and improve competitiveness; and foster closer relations among peoples through travel.	Available at https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC189365 [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
Law No. 09-002 on the delimitation of the territorial sea of the Democratic Republic of Congo	This Law establishes its maritime borders and materialises its fundamental rights to utilise these maritime areas.	Available at https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC096746 [Accessed 16 th January 2026].
Law n°69-041 of 22 August 1969 relating to the conservation of nature	This Law establishes the legal framework for the designation, protection, and management of integral nature reserves in DRC. It defines prohibited activities within these reserves, outlines penalties for violations, creates the Institute for the Conservation of Nature (Institut Congolais de la Conservation de Nature, ICCN) responsible for their administration, and sets out its mandate, powers, governance, staffing, and financial management.	Available at https://www.leganet.cd/Legislation/Droit%20administratif/Environnement/OL.69.041.22.08.1969.htm [Accessed 16 th January 2026].
Law No 11/009 of July 2011 related to environmental protection	This Law sets out the fundamental principles of environmental protection and establishes the institutional framework, as well as the procedural and financing mechanisms for environmental protection. It sets out the rules governing the management and conservation of natural resources and regulates civil liability in this area by providing for offences and penalties.	Available at https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC109798 [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
Law No 14/003 of 11 February 2014 on nature conservation	This Law sets the rules governing the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and access to and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of biological and genetic resources. It contributes in particular to ensuring the conservation of ecosystems and natural habitats, the protection of wild fauna and flora species, and sustainable development within protected areas.	Available at https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC140376 [Accessed 19 th January 2026].

Table 2: Key policies and legislation related to wildlife management in the DRC (continued)

Policy/regulation	Description	Source
Decree n°006 of September 15 th , 2023 fixing the distribution of the State's share of the profits from the sale of carbon	This Decree determines the terms and conditions for distributing the State's share of the profits from the sale of carbon credits in accordance with the mechanism for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries (REDD+).	Available at https://www.leganet.cd/Legislation/Dfiscal/Finances/AIM%2015.09.2023.html#:~:text=Le%20Ministre%20d'Etat%2C%20Ministre,l'Environnement%20et%20D%C3%A9veloppement%20Durable [Accessed 16 th January 2026].
Decree no. 23/22 of 14 June 2023 on the creation, organisation and operation of a public body called the Carbon Market Regulatory Authority in the DRC	This Decree aims to make the most of the efforts made by the DRC to preserve its forests, strengthen its carbon stocks and contribute to regulating the global climate, thereby improving the living standards of its population.	Available at https://www.droitcongolais.info/files/72.06.23-Decret-du-14-juin-2023_ARMCA.pdf [Accessed 16 th January 2026].
Decree of 12 July 1932 on the regulation of fishing concessions	This Ordinance governs fishing privileges in lakes. It has 12 articles divided into six chapters, including General rules concerning fishing concessions, rights, restrictions and duration of concessions; Applications for concessions and formalities; Respect for the rights of indigenous people; Obligations of the concessionaire concerning fishing practices, development of the concession and prohibition of its transfer, payment of a fee, prohibition of hindering navigation and prohibition of modifying the regular regime of the waters; Sanctions; Revocation of the concession; Possible reparation of damages.	Available at https://www.leganet.cd/Legislation/Droit%20economie/PECHE/D.12.07.1932.htm [Accessed 16 th January 2026].
Decree n° 08/08 of 08 April 2008 fixing the procedure of classification and declassification of forests	This Decree defines the procedure for the classification and declassification of forests. It comprises three chapters. Chapter I deals with general provisions; Chapter II sets out the procedure for the classification of forests and Chapter III the procedure for the declassification of forests.	Available at https://www.leganet.cd/Legislation/Droit%20economie/Code%20Forestier/D.08.08.08.04.08.htm [Accessed 16 th January 2026].
Decree No 14/019 of 02 August, 2014 on procedures for conduction Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs)	This Decree aims to establish the rules governing the operation of the various procedural mechanisms for environmental protection defined in Chapter 3 of Law No. 11/009 of 9 July 2011 on fundamental principles relating to environmental protection. These mechanisms are: Strategic environmental assessment; Environmental and social impact assessment; Conditions and procedures for conducting environmental audits; The public environmental inquiry procedure.	Available at https://www.leganet.cd/Legislation/Droit%20administratif/Environnement/D.19.019.02.08.214.htm [Accessed 10 th August 2023].
Ministerial decree n°056 CAB/MINETAT/MIN-EDD/EBM/TSB/02/2025 of July 31, 2025 on the total protection of African grey parrots	This Decree establishes precautionary measures for the total protection of the African grey parrot (<i>Psittacus erithacus</i>) throughout the national territory, in accordance with the international commitments of the Democratic Republic of Congo, notably CITES.	MEDD, 2025
Ordinance n°14/CAAB/MIN/ENV/2004 of 29 April 2004 on the implementation measures of law n°82-002 of 28 May 1982 on hunting regulations	This Ordinance sets out the measures for the implementation of Law No 82-002 of 28 May 1982 regulating hunting, particularly those relating to hunting areas, prohibited hunting methods and weapons, hunting licences, certificates of lawful possession, issued to cover the regular possession of hunting products and by-products, import, export and re-export permits. The profession of a hunting guide and his/her responsibilities in case of hunting offences committed by his/her clients is also regulated.	Available at https://www.leganet.cd/Legislation/Droit%20economie/Chasse/A041.29.04.2004.htm [Accessed 19 th January 2026].

Table 2: Key policies and legislation related to wildlife management in the DRC (continued)

Policy/regulation	Description	Source
Ordinance 069 of 4 December 1980 on provisions relating to the issuance of the legitimate possession permit and the import or export permit	This Ordinance regulates provisions relating to the issuance of permits for the lawful possession of any live non-domestic animal, any bird, or any trophy, as well as permits for import or export.	Available at https://www.leganet.cd/Legislation/Droit%20administratif/Environnement/AD.069.04.12.1980.htm [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
Ministerial Ordinance n° CAB/MIN/ AFF.ENV.DT/124/SS/2001 of 16 March 2001 fixing the periods for the taking of grey parrots in the Democratic Republic of Congo	This Decree regulates the hunting periods for African grey parrots (<i>Psittacus erithacus</i>), a fully protected species, as well as the breeding cycle to ensure the survival of these species.	Available at https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC070230 [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
Ministerial Order n°020/CAB/ MIN / ECN-EF / 2006 of 20 May 2006 approving the list of animal species protected in the Democratic Republic of Congo	This Order approves the updated list of protected animal species in DRC, establishing two appendices that define the status of 72 fully protected species and 234 partially protected species across different taxonomic categories.	Available at https://medd.gouv.cd/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Arrete-Min-du-20-mai-2006.pdf [Accessed 16 th January 2026].
Ministerial Ordinance n° CAB/MIN/ ECO-FIN&BUD/AF.F-E.T/0187/02 of 20 April 2002 on the modification of tax rates with regards to forestry and wildlife	This Ordinance amends the rates of forestry and wildlife taxes.	Available at https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC070150 [Accessed 16 th January 2026].
Order No. 056 CAB/MIN/AFF- ECNPF/01/00 of 28 March 2000 regulating international trade in endangered species of fauna and flora (CITES)	This Order sets out the rules and conditions for the possession, trade and transport in the Democratic Republic of the Congo of any specimen of a species covered by the CITES Convention. It indicates in particular the various management authorities and the various types of permits and certificates.	Available at https://cites.org/sites/default/files/documents/E-CoP20-Prop-05.pdf [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
National Development Strategy Plan 2019-2023	The overall aim of the national development plan is to overcome poverty. It consists of five pillars: • Human capital development, social and cultural development • Strengthening good governance, restoration of state authority and consolidation of peace • Consolidation of economic growth, diversification and transformation of the economy • Land use planning, reconstruction and modernisation of infrastructure • Environmental protection, fight against climate change, sustainable development and balance	Available at https://climate-laws.org/document/national-strategic-development-plan-pnsd-2019-2023_5df4 [Accessed 10 th August 2023].
International and regional regulatory framework		
African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, 1968	This Convention commits the signatory countries to take the necessary measures to ensure the conservation, use and development of land, water, flora and fauna resources based on scientific principles and taking into consideration the major interests of the population.	Available at https://au.int/en/treaties/african-convention-conservation-nature-and-natural-resources [Accessed 19 th January 2026].

Table 2: Key policies and legislation related to wildlife management in the DRC (continued)

Policy/regulation	Description	Source
Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Ramsar, 1971	Its mission is the conservation and sustainable use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution to the achievement of sustainable development throughout the world.	Available at https://www.unesco.org/en/biodiversity/wetlands [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
Convention on the Protection of the World Heritage, 1972	The Convention outlines the obligations of the Parties regarding potential sites identification and their responsibility in their conservation and preservation. Each country that ratified the Convention commits to protecting its own national heritage in addition to the World Heritage Sites that are present on its soil.	Available at https://whc.unesco.org/en/convention/ [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), 1973	This Convention aims to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten the survival of the species.	Available at https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/int_exp_regs_part1_1_e.pdf [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
Convention on Biological Diversity Rio, 1992	The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the international legal agreement for “the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources” which has been ratified by 196 nations, including the DRC.	Available at https://www.cbd.int/convention [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), 1979	This is an environmental treaty that engages together the States’ parties to the conservation of migratory species, their habitats and migration routes.	Available at https://whc.unesco.org/en/glossary/220 [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
Agreement on the Conservation of Gorillas and their Habitats, 2007	The Convention is a multilateral environmental agreement covering all ten gorilla range states. It provides governments, NGOs, scientists, local populations, and the international community as a whole with a legally binding policy to maintain and restore gorilla populations and their habitats.	Available at https://www.cms.int/gorilla/en/legalinstrument/gorilla-agreement [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
The Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration (GVTC), 2015	Greater Virunga Transboundary Collaboration (GVTC) is collaborative framework of programmes, plans and activities to conserve a network of Protected Areas disseminated along the shared borders of Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda, and together forming a unique ecological unit known as the Greater Virunga Landscape (GVL). The objectives of the collaboration are: -Collaboration for improved transboundary conservation of natural resources -Ensuring improved and coordinated landscape level planning and management of natural resources -Sharing of skills and expertise -Benefit and cost sharing across borders -Ensuring all-encompassing research and information management.	Available at https://greatervirunga.org/the-treaty/ [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
East African Community (EAC) Treaty, 2022	The DRC recently signed (2022) the EAC treaty as seventh partner joining the existing six partner states (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda) with a mission to widen and deepen economic, political, social and cultural integration in order to improve the quality of life of the people of East Africa. This includes commitments under the Treaty “to develop a collective and co-ordinated policy for the conservation and sustainable utilisation of wildlife and other tourist sites in the Community.” EAC’s Strategic Plan of Wildlife Management includes an aim “to ensure that wildlife is a key driver in the regional economy.”	Available at https://www.eac.int/press-releases/2402-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-joins-eac-as-its-7th-member [Accessed 10 th August 2023].
Southern African Development Community (SADC)	The DRC is a member of SADC. The main objectives of SADC are to achieve development, peace and security, and economic growth, to alleviate poverty, enhance the standard and quality of life of the peoples of southern Africa, and support the socially disadvantaged through regional integration, built on democratic principles and equitable and sustainable development.	Available at https://www.sadc.int/ [Accessed 6 th October 2023].

Table 2: Key policies and legislation related to wildlife management in the DRC (continued)

Policy/regulation	Description	Source
SADC Regional Biodiversity Strategy	The Regional Biodiversity Strategy aims to provide a framework for cooperation and implementation of provisions toward sustaining the region's biodiversity. Noting practical constraints on sustaining biodiversity in the region, the Strategy outlines tactics for addressing focal areas that cut across several sectors – forestry, wildlife, agriculture, and others. These tactics are based on a scope of developing programmes to enhance economic development without compromising sustainable use. The Strategy also suggests activities for its funding and implementation, encouraging SADC Member States to develop projects in biodiversity focal areas.	Available at https://www.sadc.int/document/sadc-regional-biodiversity-strategy [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
SADC Law Enforcement and Anti-Poaching Strategy (SADC LEAP)	The Strategy aims to provide a framework for country and regional cooperation, together with international engagement on natural resource management and wildlife-related law enforcement and anti-poaching issues; paying special attention to issues that transcend national boundaries and to encourage concerted action by SADC Member States in the protection, management, conservation and sustainable use of their wildlife and other natural resources.	Available at https://www.sadc.int/sites/default/files/2021-11/SADC_Law_Enforcement_and_Anti-Poaching_Strategy-English.pdf [Accessed 19 th January 2026].

Institutions for managing the wildlife economy

In the DRC, **the Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation and Tourism (MENCT) governs all environmental activities** under ordinance No. 08/074 of 24 December 2008 on the roles of Ministries (see Table 3 for a non-exhaustive list of institutions) (République Démocratique du Congo, 2008). The ministry responsible for the environment in the DRC has experienced several changes in name and associated responsibilities: directorates of nature conservation, land affairs, tourism, water and forests have all been included and excluded at various times since the ministry was created under Ordinance No 75-231 of 22 July 1975 (E. Tambara, personal communication, 26 May, 2026). A USAID report released in January 2010 stated that MENCT has the leading role in environmental management and its mandate is to promote, supervise, and coordinate all activities related to the environment. **The multitude of wildlife resources in the DRC is managed under a multisectoral approach.**

The Presidential Ordinance No. 07/018 of 16 May 2007 authorised the Ministry of Mines to address all mine-related matters, including environmental issues while the MENCT is assigned to be responsible for Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA). The resulting conflictual situation between the two Ministries has yielded **poor management of the sector, which hinders most wildlife conservation related activities** (Abbott et al., 2018).



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Table 3: Key institutions managing the wildlife economy in the DRC

Institution	Description	Source
Public Institution		
Ministry of Tourism	The Ministry of Tourism is responsible for implementing the national tourism policy, improving infrastructure and promoting the sector to the public, regulating and controlling tourism activities, as well as cooperating with international bodies.	Available at https://tourisme.gouv.cd/missions-et-attributions [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (<i>Ministère de l'Environnement et du Développement Durable</i>) (MEDD)	Responsible for combatting all forms of pollution, preventing desertification, and protecting fauna, flora, and the natural environment. It is also in charge of soil, forest and woodland regeneration and sustainable use of forest resources.	Available at https://www.dbsa.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2021-05/Chapter%208b%20DRC%20English.pdf [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
Forest Department	The Forest Department operates under MEDD and is responsible for managing, protecting and conserving forests in order to ensure their sustainable use and management of forests and forest trade for socio-economic development through the Forest Code, Law No. 011/2002 of 29 August 2002.	République Démocratique du Congo, 2022
National Aquaculture Service (<i>Service national d'aquaculture</i> - SENAQUA)	The nationwide responsibility for aquaculture lies with the SENAQUA within the Ministry of Agriculture. Its remit is to draft national aquaculture development policies and strategies, and coordinate and organise aquaculture development within the Ministry of Agriculture.	Available at https://firms.fao.org/fi/website/FIRetrieveAction.do?dom=countrysector&xml=naso_congo.xml&lang=en [Accessed 10 th August 2023].
Congolese Environmental Agency (<i>Agence Congolaise de l'Environnement</i> (ACE))	Its main mandate is the administration and coordination of the environmental and social impact assessment process in DRC.	Available at https://medd.gouv.cd/ace/ [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
The Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation (<i>Institut Congolais de la Conservation de la Nature</i> (ICCN))	A technical and scientific agency with a mission: • To ensure the protection of fauna and flora in the Protected Areas • To promote scientific research and tourism in these areas while respecting the fundamental principles of nature conservation • To manage the so-called “trapping” stations established within or outside the Protected Areas	Available at https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/events/event-95-iccn.pdf [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
International Organisation/Institution		
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	UNDP uses its expertise in strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters. It integrates climate change measures into national policies, strategies, and planning.	Available at https://www.undp.org/about-us [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
African Development Bank (AfDB)	As part of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) programme, AfDB supported the Forestry Investment Programme under the Integrated Emissions Reduction Project in the Mbuji Mayi/Kananga and Kisangani regions.	Available at https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/drc-integrated-redd-project-mbuji-mayi/kananga-and-kisangani-basins-piredd/mbkis-project-completion-report [Accessed 19 th January 2026].

Table 3: Key institutions managing the wildlife economy in the DRC (continued)

Institution	Description	Source
World Bank	The World Bank improved the Forest Landscape Management project under the REDD programme which has the objective of testing new approaches to improve community well-being and forest management in certain areas.	Available at https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/889041467996698593/environmental-and-social-management-framework [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)	WWF-DRC's vision is to contribute to the preservation of the natural capital of the DRC in order to support its sustainable development by simultaneously improving the human development index and creating a low-carbon economy model.	Available at https://www.wwfdrc.org/en/about_us/wwf_in_drc/ [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
African Wildlife Foundation (AWF)	African Wildlife Foundation has been ahead of the curve in developing innovative conservation strategies so wildlife, wild lands, and people can thrive.	Available at https://www.awf.org/ [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)	The Wildlife Conservation Society's largest country programme has been working to save Congo's wildlife and wild places for almost three decades. Protecting this astonishing biodiversity means saving wild places that sustain the local people, protect natural resources, and buffer global climate change.	Available at https://drcongo.wcs.org/ [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
Fauna & Flora International (FFI)	FFI supports the Congolese protected area authority (the <i>Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature</i>) and local communities to manage the country's astounding biodiversity.	Available at https://www.fauna-flora.org/countries/democratic-republic-congo/ [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
African Parks Network (APN)	APN has a management agreement for Garamba National Park. It focuses on intensive law enforcement efforts to counter the poaching threats the Park faces on a constant basis, and progressing on the Sustainable Development initiative that will impact more than 100,000 people living around Garamba.	Available at https://www.africanparks.org/ [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS)	The Frankfurt Zoological Society is an international conservation organisation. Its goal is the conservation of wildlife and wilderness.	Available at https://fzs.org/en/ [Accessed 19 th January 2026].
Apiculture Flore Développement (APIFLORDEV)	The objective of the Association is to generate additional income for villagers in Kasangulu and Madimba territories in Congo Central province in the DRC by training and equipping men, women and unemployed youth with apiculture skills.	Available at https://www.apiflordev.org/projets/carri/# [Accessed 9th April 2025].

Wildlife economy activities in the DRC

The main wildlife economy activities in the DRC include tourism, fishing, hunting, wildlife trade and forest products. They also extend to conservation employment, research and monitoring and carbon and ecosystem service markets (E. Tambara, personal communication, 26 May, 2026). These activities contribute to the economy through job creation, revenue generation, sustainable development and poverty alleviation. This section provides relevant information on the main wildlife economy activities and attempts to illustrate their significance to the DRC's economy. **Comparable, consistent, up-to-date data for most activities was, however, difficult to find**, but the data which was found still illustrates a large contribution to the local as well as national economy. In order to sustainably manage the wildlife economy, it is important that consistent, comparable data is collected in order to understand the value of different wildlife economy activities and to ensure data-driven policy- and practice-decision-making.



Tourism

The DRC has a number of unique tourist opportunities, including wildlife reserves, indigenous cultures, and geological wonders that are not easily found anywhere else in Africa. **The DRC's tourism potential and its cultural, natural and historical wealth give the tourism sector the advantage of being an important pillar for national economic growth.** The growth of tourism is one of the strategic pillars of the National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2024-2028 (*Ministère du Plan et de la Coordination de l'Aide au Développement*, 2024). It is a part of the dynamic of shifting from an all-oil growth model to one that expands the productive base of the country by fostering other potential areas for development (Ibid.). **In 2024, the DRC approved its National Tourism Policy, which sets out four objectives to be achieved by 2030: strengthening partnerships, promoting sustainable tourism, diversifying tourism products, and enhancing institutional capacities** (de Souza, 2024). The policy aims to generate USD 7 billion in annual foreign exchange earnings and create between 200,000 and 500,000 jobs by 2030 (Ibid.). Prior to the adoption of this policy, **the DRC had not effectively implemented specific measures for the development and promotion of tourism-related activities** (Sumba, 2018).

Travel and tourism remains a small but meaningful contributor to the DRC's economy. **In 2019, the sector's total contribution**

to GDP was approx. CDF 2.2 trillion (approx. USD 1.4 billion), equivalent to 1.9%, before declining sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a 30.9% contraction in 2020 alone (WTTC, 2024). The sector's recovery has been gradual. **By 2022, the sector contributed 1.7% of GDP, equivalent to approx. CDF 2.1 trillion (approx. USD 1 billion)**, indicating a 14.0% growth from previous years (WTTC, 2023). **In 2023, total contribution increased further to CDF 2.5 trillion (USD 1.1 billion), still 1.7% of GDP and a 3.5% annual increase, while 2024 was estimated at 1.8% of GDP equivalent to CDF 2.69 trillion (approx. 1.1 billion)** (WTTC, 2024). The sector is also an important source of jobs. **In 2019, travel and tourism supported 500,400 jobs (1.6% of total employment)**, declining by 17.1% in 2020 due to the pandemic (WTTC, 2024). **Employment subsequently rebounded to 491,500 jobs in 2022 (WTTC, 2023) and 567,100 in 2023, which is 13.3% above the 2019 baseline** and a 6.4% growth from previous years (WTTC, 2024). **The sector was further estimated to provide 595,800 jobs in 2024 (1.7% of total employment)** (Ibid.). Despite this recovery, the sector's relative contribution remains well below the Sub-Saharan African average of 6.2% and the global average of 9.1% (WTTC, 2024), reflecting the dominance of mining and other extractive industries in the Congolese economy (World Bank, 2023).

International visitor spending in the DRC was CDF 178 billion (USD 76 million) in 2019, representing only 0.6% of total exports (WTTC, 2024). After the COVID-19 disruption, visitor exports recovered to CDF 215.1 billion (USD 106.7 million) in 2022 (+14.2% from 2021) and CDF 237.7 billion (USD 101.6 million) in 2023, exceeding 2019 levels by 33.6% (WTTC, 2023; WTTC, 2024). **In 2024, tourism revenue excluding tourist transportation reached approx. USD 245 million, and the country welcomed 382,000 tourists in 2021** (World Data, 2026). Tourism in the DRC is largely domestic and leisure oriented. In 2023, domestic spending accounted for 88.2% of total internal tourism spending equivalent to CDF 1.77 trillion (approx. USD 755.6 million), with international visitors contributing only 11.8% (WTTC, 2024). Leisure travel dominated at 76.5% of total spending in 2023, up from 74.0% in 2022, with business travel making up the remaining 23.5% (WTTC, 2023; WTTC, 2024). Source markets also shifted noticeably between 2022 and 2023. **In 2022, inbound arrivals were led by Angola (14%), France (10%), Belgium (10%), India (4%) and Germany (2%)** (WTTC, 2023), whereas by 2023 **Uganda dominated at 88% of arrivals, followed distantly by Angola (2%), Belgium**

(1%), France (1%) and India (0.5%) (WTTC, 2024). Travel and tourism also attracted capital investment of CDF 469.6 billion in 2023, with the sector's share of total national investment forecast to reach 1.9% by 2034 (Ibid.). This investment will contribute to job creation and the country's economic growth.

The tourism industry in the DRC and in most developing countries, suffers from poor management of protected areas with little to no inclusion of local communities (Ilunga, 2022). **Some of the challenges faced by the DRC** include lack of awareness on the importance of tourism, lack of defined products for different market segments, poor infrastructure, misunderstandings among stakeholders, and insecurity.

Ecotourism

Ecotourism in the DRC is organised principally around the country's network of protected areas, which covers approx. 324,768 km² of land across 60 sites, including 8 national parks, 12 hunting areas, and 11 nature reserves (USAID, 2024; UNEP-WCMC, 2026). Of these, four protected landscapes have been identified as holding the strongest short and medium-term tourism potential: Virunga National Park, Kahuzi-Biega National Park, Salonga National Park, and the Okapi Wildlife Reserve (USAID, 2024). Other parks contributing to the country's ecotourism offering include Mount Nyiragongo (within Virunga), Bombo Lumene National Park, Garamba National Park, and Mangroves National Park (National Parks, 2023). Virunga National Park was the first national park established in the DRC (1925) and on the African continent, and is inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (UNESCO, 2026; Virunga National Park, 2026a). It also remains the most visited national park and natural attraction in the country (see more Text box 5) and supports local livelihoods of communities living around the park (see Text box 6). Kahuzi Biega National Park is another site providing ecotourism activities and has the potential to significantly contribute to socio-economic development in the country (see Text box 7). Despite this asset base, the DRC continues to capture only a small share of regional ecotourism flows. Persistent insecurity, a burdensome visa process, weak tourist transport infrastructure, and limited national-level promotion together constrain visitation, and the country was ranked 136th of 140 on the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index in 2019 (WEF, 2019; USAID, 2024).



Text box 5

Overview of Virunga National Park

Virunga National Park is located in the eastern part of the DRC within the Albertine Rift Valley and covers an area of 8,090 km², divided into four sectors (northern, central, southern, and lake). The main attractions in this National Park relate to the presence of the two most active volcanoes in Africa, Mount Nyiragongo and Nyamuragira, within its boundaries. It also harbours a large portion of Lake Edward, one of the great lakes of the Western Rift Valley, shared with Uganda. The wildlife diversity of 196 species of mammals, 109 species of reptiles, 65 species of amphibians, and 2,705 plant species, coupled with 300 records of endemic fauna and flora species, makes this national park a favoured tourism destination. It is also the only protected area in the world to host all three taxa of African great apes, namely mountain gorillas, eastern lowland gorillas, and eastern chimpanzees.

Table 4 presents some of the tourism products currently offered in Virunga National Park.

Primates are the most observed animals in the park, with 22 primate species recorded. The mountain gorilla (*Gorilla beringei beringei*) is the most sought-after species, and Virunga supports nearly one-third of the global population. Other primates include blue monkey (*Cercopithecus mitis*), chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*), De Brazza's monkey (*Cercopithecus neglectus*), Dent's mona monkey (*Cercopithecus denti*), golden monkey (*Cercopithecus kandti*), grey-cheeked mangabey (*Lophocebus albigena*), Hamlyn's monkey (*Cercopithecus hamlyni*), olive baboon (*Papio anubis*), red colobus (*Piliocolobus badius*), and the red-tailed monkey (*Cercopithecus ascanius*) (Ibid.). Approx. 706 species of

birds are found within the park's forests and surrounding terrain, and the park is recognised as an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International. Other popular wildlife include elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*), buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*), aardvark (*Orycteropus afer*), waterbuck (*Kobus ellipsiprymnus*), topi (*Damaliscus lunatus*), red river hog (*Potamochoerus porcus*), giant forest hog (*Hylochoerus meinertzhageni*), and warthog (*Phacochoerus africanus*). Predators include lion (*Panthera leo*), leopard (*Panthera pardus*), mongoose (*Herpestes javanicus*), and Nile crocodile (*Crocodylus niloticus*).

Sources: UNESCO, 2024; USAID, 2024; Virunga National Park, 2026a

Table 4: Tourism products found in Virunga National Park

Park area	Tourism product
South	Mountain gorillas trekking (Mikeno), Nyiragongo and Nyamulagira volcanoes and scientific tourism (volcanology) Tshegera Island (Lake Kivu) Tongo chimpanzees Senkwekwe Gorilla Sanctuary (Rumangabo) Chimpanzees (Rumangabo) Scientific tourism (primatology)
Periphery	Caves (Mikeno, Nyamabere, Lume, Mwenda) Thermal waters (Mutsora) Waterfalls (Nyahanga, Semliki) Folk dances Culinary specialties Religious sites (Muramba, Mount Mikeno, Tshiaberimu) Cultural site (Ishango) and scientific tourism (archaeology) Historical sites (Cyanzu, Kibati)

Source: Balole-Bwami, 2018

Park area	Tourism product
Centre	Large savanna mammals Sport fishing (Rutshuru River) Thermal waters (May-ya-moto) Mountain gorillas (Sarambwe) Walk on Lake Edward and the Rutshuru River Scientific tourism (hydrobiology) Bird tourism and scientific tourism (Lulimbi) Balloon safari Chimpanzees (Kinyonzo)
North	Eastern gorillas (Tshiaberimu) Climbing Mount Ruwenzori Large savanna mammals (Ishango) Walks on Lake Edward and the Semliki River Sport fishing Forest walk and canopy tour Bird tourism and scientific tourism



Text box 6

Socio-economic value of Virunga National Park

Virunga National Park has the potential to be a major economic driver for DRC. The Park is home to a variety of wildlife, including 200 critically endangered mountain gorillas (*Gorilla beringei beringei*), which attract tourists from all over the world. The Virunga National Park has received approx. 15,000 tourists since the re-introduction of ecotourism in 2014. In 2017 the Park's tourism revenue reached approx. USD 4 million from 8,000 visitors, while in 2013, tourism was already estimated to generate USD 48.9 million, the largest single contribution to the local economy at that time.

The longer-term economic potential of the Park is considerably larger than what is currently realised. The WWF valuation estimated that the future direct use of Virunga's ecosystem could generate USD 348 million per year, of which tourism accounts for USD 235 million, fisheries USD 90 million, and hydropower USD 10 million. The indirect use value, derived from the provision of ecosystem services, was estimated at USD 63.8 million, with carbon sequestration (USD 55 million), erosion control (USD 7.8 million), and water supply (USD 1 million) as the principal contributors. The non-use value, representing the value attached to keeping the Park's resources available for future use, was estimated at as much as USD 700 million per year. Combined, these figures place the Park's total economic potential at over USD 1.1 billion per year, with the capacity to support more than 45,000 jobs, including existing positions. Tourism revenue is shared between conservation, operations, and community development: 50% of visitor permit revenue is allocated to the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN), 20% to park operations, and 30% to a community fund that supports small development projects, public lighting, and small-scale entrepreneurship. In 2017, the community fund budget totalled USD 458,566. A separate assessment by Balole-Bwami (2018) found that

tourism revenues from Virunga could exceed USD 10 million for visitor permits alone, and almost USD 250 million if the full range of international tourist expenditure (transport, lodging, catering, services) were included.

These projections have not been realised in recent years owing to repeated disruptions. After the COVID-19 epidemic and the partial reopening of the Southern Sector in 2021, activity was set back by the eruption of Mount Nyiragongo, which destroyed chalets at the summit, and by armed group attacks that caused damage in the gorilla-viewing area. Most ecotourism activities were subsequently suspended, and only Tchegeza Island on Lake Kivu remained open to visitors throughout this period, while the savanna zone in the Central Sector and Mount Rwenzori in the Northern Sector were closed on security grounds. Visitation figures from 2023 illustrate how concentrated activity became during this period: Tchegeza Island recorded 4,500 visitors and 251 overnight stays. It has been reported that most of this ecotourism on the Island was driven by domestic and resident visitors, of whom 70% were Congolese nationals. Additionally, in 2024, the park generated approx. USD 106,000 from ecotourism activities on the Island. This pattern indicates that, in the absence of stable conditions for international ecotourism, domestic and regional markets, particularly from Goma, have been the main source of footfall.

The Park's broader socio-economic value reaches beyond tourism and is increasingly visible in two areas: energy and employment. Through its hydroelectric infrastructure, Virunga supplies reliable, affordable, and clean energy to over 30,000 households in the surrounding region, addressing a basic development gap in an area where electricity access remains limited and where alternative sources are often costly or environmentally damaging. The

park also provides job opportunities, currently employing more than 800 rangers, the majority of whom are recruited from local Congolese communities and trained by ICCN and the Virunga Foundation. Rangers benefit from stable, formal employment in a labour market constrained by ongoing conflict and limited opportunity, and they deliver wildlife protection in an area where armed groups remain active. Their work, however, comes at significant personal risk. Virunga's rangers have repeatedly been targeted by armed groups while carrying out their duties, with more than 170 rangers reported killed in recent decades and several major attacks recorded in recent years, including the killing of 12 rangers and five civilians in April 2020, and additionally, the killing of two rangers in an armed attack at Kamuhororo (Kockott, 2020). The fact that this workforce continues to operate, often at considerable personal risk, is itself an indicator of the Park's value, both as a conservation institution and as one of the few large-scale, formal employers in eastern DRC. The Park's contribution to fisheries reinforces this point: it supports an estimated 27,000 jobs and generates USD 30 million per year, with Lake Edward and Lake Albert producing approx. 22,000 tonnes of fish, of which 15,000 tonnes come from Lake Edward, valued at an average market price of USD 2 per kilogram. The Park's forests provide a further USD 10 million in timber and other forest products. Additional revenue is generated through the sale of carbon credits awarded for the avoidance of greenhouse gas emissions.

Sources: Doumenge et al., 2021; WWF, 2013; Balole-Bwami, 2018; Virunga National Park, 2026a,b; USAID, 2024



Text box 7

Overview of Kahuzi-Biega National Park and its socio-economic importance

Kahuzi-Biega National Park (KBNP) is located in the eastern DRC, approx. 20 km west of Lake Kivu, and lies close to the borders with Rwanda and Burundi. The Park covers 600,000 hectares and forms part of the wider Maiko-Tayna-Kahuzi-Biega Landscape, a globally prioritised conservation area composed of five protected sites. KBNP was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1980 and takes its name from the dormant volcanoes Mount Kahuzi (3,308 m) and Mount Biega (2,790 m), part of the Mitumba Mountain Range within the Albertine Rift (Ibid.). Vegetation within the Park ranges from dense lowland rainforests through montane and bamboo forests to sub-alpine prairies, and the altitudinal gradient is wide enough that visitors can observe the shift from lowland to highland habitats within a single site, a feature shared by very few other protected areas in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Park's flagship species is the Eastern Lowland Gorilla (*Gorilla beringei graueri*), also known as Grauer's gorilla. KBNP is also home to 13 other primate species, forest elephants (*Loxodonta cyclotis*), buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*), and bongo (*Tragelaphus eurycerus*), and holds the highest mammal diversity recorded in the Albertine Rift. Approximately 335 bird species have been recorded, 32 of them endemic, and the Park is recognised as an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International (BirdLife International, 2026).

Tourism activity in KBNP centres on gorilla trekking, supported by three habituated gorilla families. The trekking fee for international visitors is USD 400, lower than the USD 800 charged in Uganda (as of July 2024) and the USD 1,500 charged in Rwanda. Other activity fees for international travellers include USD 35 for mountain

hiking and USD 50 for camping. Recorded visitation has fluctuated over time. KBNP data indicate annual revenue in excess of USD 900,000 in 2017, with over 1,500 visitors recorded (Doumenge et al., 2021), while current annual visitation stands at approx. 2,000. These figures sit well below the tens of thousands recorded at peak in the 1990s, which suggests that the site operates considerably below its historical capacity. The price differential with neighbouring countries gives the Park a potential competitive position, although the higher cost of getting to KBNP and the security situation in eastern DRC partially offset this.

The Park generates real benefits in the form of employment and tourism revenue, yet equitable benefit-sharing among surrounding communities remains a pressing issue, and is one of the principal challenges shaping the current management arrangement. In April 2022, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and ICCN signed a public-private partnership for the management of KBNP, with an explicit commitment to a rights-based approach that prioritises approx. 6,000 Batwa Indigenous peoples living around the Park alongside conservation objectives. The Park is currently patrolled by approx. 300 active ecoguards, with operations concentrated in the highland sector. Owing to its proximity to Virunga National Park and the Rwanda and Burundi borders, KBNP also holds notable cross-border tourism circuit potential, particularly when combined with Nyungwe National Park in Rwanda.

Sources: IUCN, 2025b; USAID, 2024

Unique tourism products

Source: E. Tambara, personal communication, 26 May 2026

DRC has the natural assets to offer tourism products that are difficult to replicate anywhere else in Africa or the world. Its appeal lies in the sheer scale, diversity and rarity of its wildlife and landscapes: the Congo Basin rainforest, vast savannahs, volcanoes, mountains, crater lakes, great rivers, wetlands and some of the continent's most remote protected areas. The country is home to globally iconic and highly distinctive species, including eastern lowland gorillas (*Gorilla beringei graueri*), bonobos (*Pan paniscus*), okapi (*Okapia johnstoni*), forest elephants (*Loxodonta cyclotis*) and the endemic Congo Peafowl (*Afropavo congensis*) (see Text box 8), alongside exceptional birdlife, primates and forest biodiversity. Its waterways are equally unmatched. The Congo River and its tributaries create opportunities for river-based tourism, expedition cruising, sport fishing, cultural tourism, island and riverine community experiences, and multi-day journeys through one of the world's great rainforest systems. Taken together, **these assets position DRC not as another conventional safari destination, but as a frontier nature destination built around rarity, scale, discovery and ecological uniqueness.**

This uniqueness also gives DRC the opportunity to develop a broad portfolio of tourism products for different markets. For domestic and regional tourists, the country can build accessible products around city escapes, cultural heritage, lakeside recreation, river experiences, national parks, festivals, food, music and short-stay nature tourism. For international tourists, DRC can develop premium, specialist products around gorilla trekking, birding, bonobo tracking (see Text box 9), rainforest expeditions, volcano and mountain trekking, scientific tourism, photography, conservation travel and high-end adventure itineraries. For adventure and extreme-adventure travellers, DRC's remote forests, active volcanic landscapes, rugged terrain and extensive waterways offer possibilities for expedition trekking, river expeditions, kayaking, overland routes, wilderness camping, canopy and forest exploration, and challenging conservation-linked journeys. If developed with strong safety systems, infrastructure, professional guiding, community participation and clear conservation safeguards, these products could help DRC stand apart as one of the world's last great wilderness tourism frontiers while creating new income streams for communities, protected areas and the national economy.

Text box 8

The Congo Peacock – A unique birding asset for DRC's tourism offering

The Democratic Republic of Congo offers one of Africa's most distinctive specialist tourism products: the chance to see the Congo Peafowl, also known as the Congo Peacock (*Afropavo congensis*). Endemic to the DRC and Africa's only true pheasant, the species is regarded by serious birders as a "holy grail" of African birding. Its rarity, deep-forest habitat, elusive behaviour and limited distribution make every sighting highly prized. Key sites such as Lomako-Yokolala Faunal Reserve, Kahuzi-Biega National Park and Salonga National Park provide opportunities to position the DRC as a frontier destination for specialist birding and forest wildlife tourism, especially when combined with bonobo

tracking, eastern lowland gorilla trekking, forest walks, primate viewing and Congo Basin biodiversity expeditions.

The Congo Peafowl also illustrates the wider untapped potential of DRC's rare and endemic wildlife. Specialist birders are often conservation-oriented travellers who stay longer, use expert guides and are willing to pay for access to remote habitats and exceptional species. Although published data on tourist numbers or revenue specifically linked to Congo Peafowl viewing appear limited, available information suggests park access fees in remote birding areas such as Lomako may be around USD 60 per person

per day, while DRC's higher-value wildlife products such as gorilla trekking are commonly reported at around USD 400–450 for international visitors. With better access, safety, trained bird guides, clear visitor fees, community services and partnerships with specialist birding operators, the Congo Peafowl could become a powerful flagship for high-value birding tourism, supporting conservation, local livelihoods and DRC's wider wildlife economy.

Source: E. Tambara, personal communication, 26 May 2026

Text box 9

Bonobo tourism – A global asset only DRC can offer

The Democratic Republic of Congo is the only country in the world where bonobos occur in the wild, giving it a globally unique tourism asset. Bonobos (*Pan paniscus*) are endangered great apes found only in the forests south of the Congo River, with population estimates varying because much of their range remains difficult to survey. A commonly cited minimum estimate is around 15,000–20,000 individuals, while broader estimates suggest the population could be between 29,500 and 50,000. Their close genetic relationship to humans, complex social behaviour, female-led social structures and rarity make them one of the most compelling wildlife experiences DRC can offer.

DRC already has a foundation on which to build bonobo tourism. Lola ya Bonobo, near Kinshasa, provides one of the most accessible bonobo experiences and has hosted dozens of rescued bonobos, making it well suited for

education, domestic tourism and short-stay international visitors. In the wild, Lomako-Yokolala Faunal Reserve covers about 3,625 km², is estimated to support around 1,000 bonobos, and has already undertaken anti-poaching patrols and bonobo habituation for ecotourism and research. Lyonji Bonobo Community Reserve is another promising destination, demonstrating how community-based conservation can protect bonobo habitat while creating tangible opportunities for local guides, community scouts, accommodation providers, transport operators and nature-based enterprises (IUCN APES Portal).

The opportunity is to develop a tiered bonobo tourism model that links accessible, community-based and premium wilderness experiences. Lola ya Bonobo can anchor awareness and short-stay tourism near Kinshasa; Lyonji can demonstrate community-led conservation tourism; and

Lomako can support high-value, low-volume expedition tourism for specialist visitors. While reliable published data on visitor numbers or revenue specifically from bonobo tourism remain limited, remote forest access fees have been reported at around USD 60 per person per day, with additional local spending on guides, trackers, porters, transport, food and logistics. With stronger safety systems, trained guides, disease-risk protocols, visitor management, community benefit-sharing and partnerships with specialist operators, bonobo tourism could become one of DRC's most distinctive wildlife economy products while reinforcing the country's role as the sole global custodian of this extraordinary great ape.

Sources: AWF, 2026; IUCN APES Portal, 2026



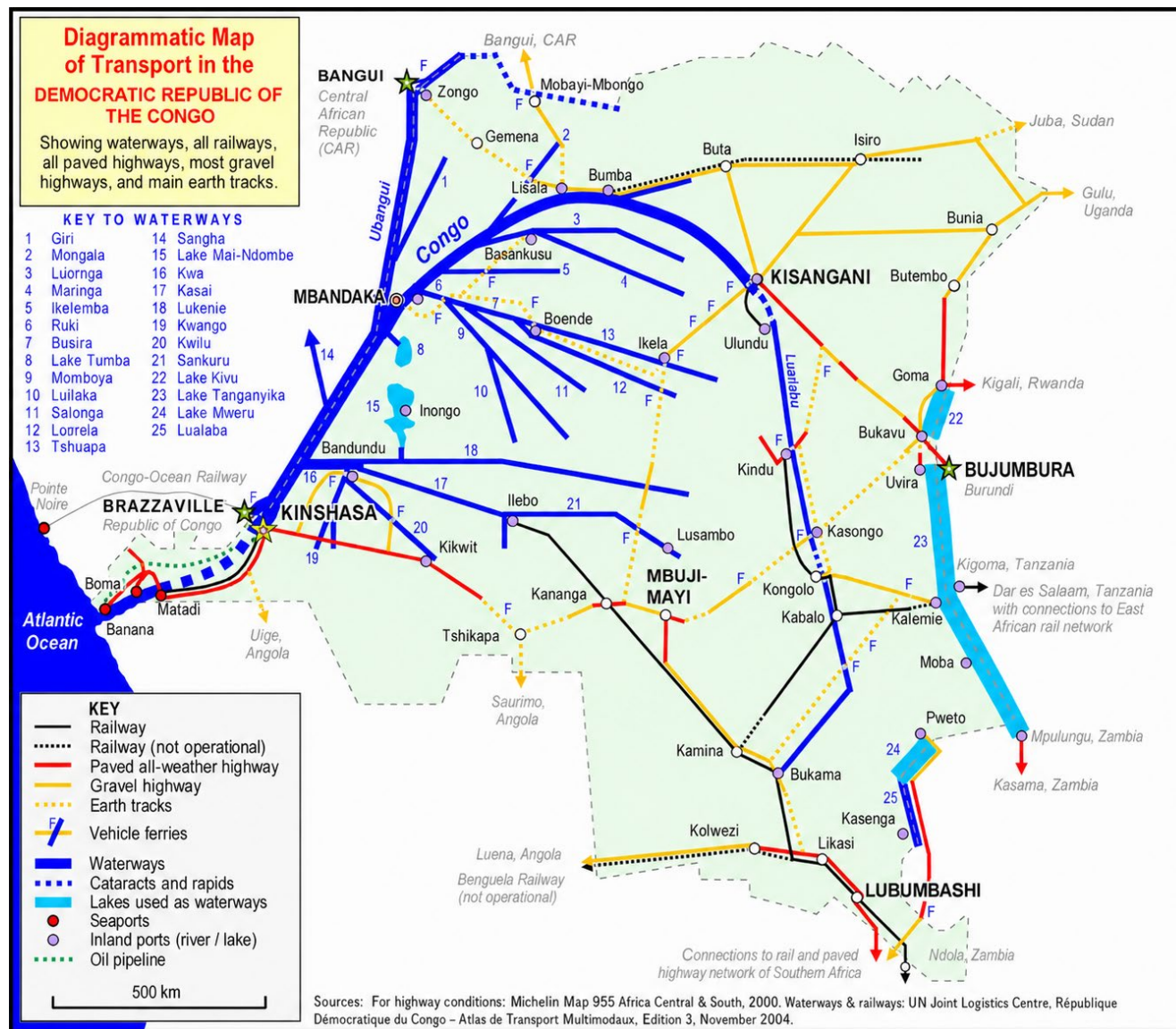
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Challenges

Tourism is one of the world's largest industries and relies heavily on infrastructure development, quality accommodation and a well-developed hospitality sector. Beyond physical infrastructure and hotel investment, the sector also depends on skilled people who can deliver high-quality visitor experiences (E. Tambara, personal communication, 26 May 2026). Despite DRC's high tourism potential, only a few people have benefited from the industry rather than improving lives and reducing poverty for the majority (Leonard et al., 2020). The DRC has the potential to be a major tourist destination, but the **lack of awareness of the importance of tourism from local governments and the poor infrastructure in the country are major challenges to the development of the tourism industry.**

First, **basic infrastructure is lacking, and most tourist services and facilities are low in quality.** Although the country has many tourist attractions, few are properly developed, and those that are often lack proper roads to access them (UNCTAD, 2019). Key gaps include poor road access (see Figure 2 showing the transports map in DRC) to tourism sites, limited and unreliable air connectivity, inadequate signage and visitor information, weak telecommunications and internet coverage, unreliable electricity and water supply, limited sanitation and waste management systems, insufficient health and emergency response services, and a shortage of quality accommodation and hospitality facilities near key attractions (E. Tambara, personal communication, 26 May 2026). In many areas, visitor reception centres, trails, viewing platforms, interpretation facilities, safety systems, and trained guides are also limited or underdeveloped. These gaps reduce destination competitiveness, increase travel costs, limit private sector investment, and weaken the overall visitor experience. Additionally, visas are expensive and difficult for foreign visitors to obtain, and there are no measures in place to make the visa process easier (Ibid.).

Figure 2: Map of transport routes in the Democratic Republic of Congo



Source: CIFOR, 2023

DRC also lacks a clear marketing strategy developed in collaboration with the private sector. There is no defined tourism product to help the DRC stand out from its neighbours, and the country does not have a recognisable identity on the international tourism map (UNCTAD, 2019). Additionally, national tourism agencies rarely participate in regional or international tourism events.

Misunderstandings among tourism stakeholders, governance, and political misalignment of policies also reduce the attainment of sustainability of the tourism industry in the DRC (Dieke, 2020). Despite possessing a wealth of wildlife and nature-related tourist resources, some stakeholders in the DRC are unsure about the industry's positive effects on the economy and society due to a lack of data and evidence that the sector fosters growth and development (Bezuidenhout & Grater, 2016).

The DRC has many touristic zones that could attract more tourists. Still, its **insecurity, and arbitrary taxation**, hinder tourists from travelling to the country (Kuka et al., 2021). Therefore, the government should work on promoting the tourism sector, as it is one of the fastest-growing industries in the world. This can be done by investing in public infrastructure and promoting diversification through launching tourism initiatives such as developing new tourism products, e.g. museums, or cultural centres.

The **tourism sector in the DRC is under-resourced** and the National Tourism Office (ONT), which is responsible for promoting tourism, does not have sufficient material, financial, and human resources (WTO, 2016). It also does not have any decentralised services, as a result, it is not capable of responding to the sector's development needs (Ibid.).

Opportunities

Tourism is an important sector in many African economies due to its contribution to GDP, employment and trade (UNCTAD, 2017). International organisations have, therefore, adopted it to reduce poverty in developing countries through the creation of jobs and an increase in exports (Kuka et al., 2021). The tourism industry is expected to increase domestic production and job creation and reduce poverty through cooperation with

international and regional organisations. For example, DRC signed the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in 2018, and ratified it in 2022 with 43 other African countries (ITA, 2024). The AfCFTA creates a continental market of more than 1.2 billion people and aims to facilitate trade through reduced or zero tariffs, improved market access, and the gradual elimination of trade barriers (Ibid.). The agreement creates a single market for goods and services across Africa, which will make it easier for people to travel between countries (AU, undated).

To benefit from the wider African market created by AfCFTA, the DRC will need to deliberately design tourism products that speak to African travelers, not only long-haul international visitors (E. Tambara, personal communication, 26 May 2026). This means developing affordable and accessible regional travel packages, weekend and short-stay itineraries, family and group travel options, diaspora and heritage tourism, faith and cultural tourism, music, food and festival-based experiences, river and lake excursions, sports and adventure tourism, and city-to-nature packages that connect Kinshasa, Goma, Lubumbashi and other gateways to nearby attractions (Ibid.). The country will also need to improve regional connectivity, simplify visa and border processes, support cross-border tour circuits with neighbors such as Angola, Uganda, Rwanda, Zambia, Tanzania and the Republic of Congo, and promote DRC in African source markets through targeted campaigns (E. Tambara, personal communication, 26 May 2026). Without products, prices, services and marketing tailored to African tourists, the DRC risks missing the opportunity presented by AfCFTA and continuing to rely mainly on non-African visitors and business travel.

Tourism includes all groups of people, promoting peace and social inclusion. It has been recognised that tourism can, in some cases, create wealth in disadvantaged areas, such as Goma, which has been affected heavily by insecurity and inequalities in the DRC, where it can contribute to economic inclusion (Etambakonga & Mugangu, 2020). Similarly, different authors (Trogisch & Fletcher 2020; Haeusler et al., 2019; Sharma et al., 2018) have suggested that tourism can be used to prevent wars or maintain peace through peacebuilding. The tourism sector has the potential to be a major driver of economic growth and development in the DRC. Therefore, **the government of the DRC should prioritise the development of the tourism sector by investing in infrastructure, promoting diversification,**

and ensuring that local communities benefit from tourism development.



Hunting in DRC is regulated through national legislations that are implemented at a provincial level. **The central government of the DRC is given exclusive authority under its constitution to control hunting, fishing, and the capture of wild animals** (Library of Congress, 2013). Congolese provinces retain exclusive jurisdiction in applying national legislation concerning hunting and fishing (Ibid.). The Hunting Law of 1982, (Law No. 82-002) and its implementing Decree 014 of 2004 are among the laws in the DRC that directly protect wildlife and address poaching and illegal trafficking. The legislation protecting wildlife limits the locations where hunting is permitted, the quantity of animals that may be hunted, and the methods that may be used in hunting (Law No. 48/83, art. 36). Hunting activities within designated hunting zones are also linked to wildlife availability and approved development and management plans under the DRC wildlife framework (Law No. 37-2008) (Library of Congress, 2013).

The Waters and Forests Agency (Bureau des Eaux et Forêts) (currently under MEDD) grants permits for export and scientific research in accordance with international conventions (Law No. 37-2008, art. 30). Hunting permits and licences are granted according to decree Law No. 48/83, art. 11. No person may engage in hunting activities without holding a permit or licence and without submitting to the authority of the place where the hunting activities are intended (Law No. 48/83, art. 7). A hunting permit is also necessary to hunt by certain special means mentioned in the Law, for example automatic weapons, poison, and toxic products (Law No. 82-002, art. 21). **There are three basic types of hunting permits established by the Law on the Conservation and Exploitation of Wildlife of 1983** (Law No. 48/83, art. 12). They are sport permits, scientific permits, and special possession permits. The Law 37 of 2008 on Wildlife and Protected Areas expanded this list and provided for two additional types of permits such as village hunting or harvest permits, and collection permits (Law No. 37-2008, art. 41). The last two were aimed at **regulating traditional hunting carried out by rural populations** to satisfy their individual and

communal needs within their territories or within zones open to traditional hunting (Law No. 37-2008, art. 62).

According to the DRC Law No. 82-002, art. 64 and Law No. 37-2008, art. 36 the following hunting activities are strictly forbidden:

- Hunting at night,
- Shooting a wild animal from a motor vehicle, vessel, or aircraft,
- The use of hunting techniques, methods or instruments causing unnecessary suffering to animals or damaging their environment,
- Prejudicial manipulations of wild animals, and
- Hunting on public roads.

Approximately 60% of the forest in the Congo basin is found in the DRC, where most of the region's population lives (Majambu et al., 2019). **Out of approx. 90 million people in 2019, 65% live in rural heavily forested areas and primarily rely on locally hunted meat as a source of protein** (Ibid.). In addition to serving an essential nutritional function for rural communities in the DRC, wild foods also serve as a significant source of income to be used for the purchase of goods such as medical supplies and the acquisition of assets such as fishing nets by allowing households to improve their livelihood strategies (Van Vliet et al., 2014). **Village hunting is the most common type of hunting activity that occurs in the DRC** with bushmeat being the main target for relish purposes. In practice, village hunting is expected to be limited to permitted areas, seasons, species, and traditional or authorised hunting methods, with restrictions on protected species and hunting in conservation areas (D. Tshidinda, personal communication, 26 May 2026). However, enforcement remains uneven, and much village hunting operates through a mix of customary practice, subsistence needs, local markets, and formal regulation. More recently, community-level approaches, including locally tailored hunting rules and sustainable hunting management plans, have been promoted in some areas to better align subsistence hunting with wildlife conservation and local livelihoods (Ibid.).

In 2017 the **total net profit through village hunting was approx. USD 170 million per year**, with a high rate of return of approx. 40% (Valimahamed et al., 2017). These profits are distributed across both rural and urban areas. It should be

noted that sales in urban areas are particularly profitable, with a turnover close to that of sales in rural areas, but at half the volume. **In 2015, the value added by the village hunting sector was USD 636 million**, which is the difference between the value of the bushmeat that was hunted and the cost of the guns, traps, and other equipment that was used to hunt it (Ibid.). This indicates that the value added by an economic sector is the difference between the value of the output of the sector and the cost of the inputs used to produce that output.

The exploitation of wildlife for bushmeat for both subsistence and commercial sale leads to numerous concerns, notably regarding the long-term sustainability of this practice as it relates to wildlife populations (Vitekere et al., 2021). Illegal hunting activities have resulted in a loss of some of the smallest bodied faunal species across large swathes of forest. For example, a large area of the Sankuru Natural Reserve almost lost all bonobos (*Pan paniscus*) (Liengola et al., 2009). In a survey of the corridor area between the two sectors of one of the largest national parks (Salonga National Park), bonobos were never found closer than 10km from the nearest village (Estrada et al., 2018). **It was also reported that between 2003 and 2006 bonobo mortality was a direct consequence of illegal hunting in Salonga National Park and hunting pressure was considered to be high in the north and east of the park (Ibid.).**



Wildlife trade

The DRC is a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) which took effect in the DRC in 1983. According to UNEP, the CITES and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), of the 22,000 to 25,000 elephants killed each year in Africa by poachers, it is likely that less than 2,500 elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) are killed in the DRC, given the distribution of elephant populations and their numbers. However, the **DRC alone accounted for 1,355kg of ivory items sold in 2015**, more than 65% of the ivory sold in five countries: DRC, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo and Gabon (Nkoke et al., 2017). Although the elephant is totally protected under the DRC legislation, challenges related to the implementation and

enforcement of wildlife protection regulations in some areas continue to affect conservation outcomes (Ibid.). Between 2005 and 2014, DRC exported diverse fauna and flora wild species valued at millions dollars (see Text box 10). Wildlife trade can be legal or illegal. Legal wildlife trade can be sustainable and contribute a large amount to a country's GDP if conducted responsibly, while illegal trade is unregulated and largely unsustainable. The next section provides information on the legal trade in endangered wildlife.

CITES-listed species trade data

CITES regulates the international trade in endangered species to ensure their survival and safeguard biodiversity, employing its regulations to manage and monitor the trade in endangered species. This section examines DRC's CITES exports and imports over 10 years (2014-2023)¹. The data was sourced from the CITES trade database, and all subsequent information on CITES-listed species is derived from this database (CITES, 2025), unless stated otherwise.

Between 2014 and 2023, DRC exported 1.6 million CITES-listed specimens, 11.75 times the number of the 134,038.90 specimens imported. Accurately determining the exact number of CITES-listed species traded via the CITES database is challenging due to inconsistent recording methods. Quantities often include partial specimens, derivatives, and measurements by weight or volume, potentially leading to inflated figures. As a result, these quantities require scrutiny, as they may not reflect the actual number of taxa imported. Quantities are reported from both the exporter and the importer. Amounts reported were calculated using the highest reported value, whether from the importer or exporter, depending on which was greater. Table 5 indicates the purposes and reported quantities of exports and imports from DRC.

Table 5: Purpose of DRC's exports and imports of CITES-listed species (2014–2023)

Purpose	Exports		Imports	
	Quantity	%	Quantity	%
Breeding in captivity	1,628	0.10%	697	0.52%
Circus or travelling exhibition	10	0.001%	0	0%
Commercial	1,534,049.347	97.41%	132,153.9	98.59%
Educational	89.232	0.01%	129	0.10%
Hunting trophy	4	0.0003%	4	0.003%
Introduction into the wild	0	0%	222	0.17%
Law enforcement	75	0.005%	20	0.01%
Personal	2,256	0.14%	85	0.06%
Scientific	22221.131	1.41%	6	0.004%
Uncategorised	14171.0662	0.90%	668	0.50%
Zoo	375	0.02%	54	0.04%
Total	1,574,878.78		134,038.90	

Source: CITES, 2025

Exports from DRC are predominantly for commercial purposes, accounting for 97.41% of all exports. More than half of these commercial exports (56.86%) consist of African cherry or African almond (*Prunus africana*), sourced entirely from the wild, with Spain (41.05%), France (25.58%), and India (23.39%) as the leading destinations. Other major exports include African teak (*Pericopsis elata*) (17.51%) and East African sandalwood (*Osyris lanceolata*) (10.44%). Table 6 summarises the reported quantities of species commercially exported from the DRC to the top ten destination countries.

¹ CITES annual reports are due October 31 of the following year, so 2024 trade data was submitted in 2025 and likely unavailable before the deadline. Therefore, data up to the end of 2023 was used.



Text box 10

Wildlife trade trends in the DRC between 2005 - 2014

According to CITES between 2005 and 2014, the DRC's top exports were African teak also known as *Pericopsis elata* (*Afrormosia*) timber and wild-sourced African Cherry bark (*Prunus africana*), with most of these goods exported to China and Belgium. Trade in *Prunus africana* declined significantly between 2008 and 2009, with no trade reported 2009 - 2011. This decline coincided with a European Union (EU) import restriction in 2008. The main animal product exported was wild sourced live parrots, of which African grey parrot (*Psittacus Erithacus*) was the main species traded. Between 2005 and 2014, the value of **DRC's CITES exports was estimated at USD 933.1 million**. The products with

the highest total estimated value exported from DRC were *Pericopsis elata* timber valued at approx. USD 734.4 million, *Prunus africana* bark valued at approx. USD 166.7 million, and live *Psittacus erithacus* valued at approx. USD 30.6 million.

According to the CITES trade database, direct exports from DRC between 2005-2014 were 93% live parrots constituting of 86% African grey parrots and 7% Red-fronted parrots (*Poicephalus gularis*) and 7% live reptiles constituting of 3% chameleons and 4% tortoises. Between 2005 and 2014, the top exporters of parrots, in the Southern African

Development Community (SADC) region, in terms of value were also the top in terms of export volume. South Africa's parrot exports comprised 94% of all exports and total estimated value (approx. USD 548 million), followed by DRC with 5% of both export volume and estimated value (approx. USD 31 million). Within the same period, DRC also exported approx. 259 live De Brazza's Monkey (*Cercopithecus neglectus*), 15 Dryas Monkey (*Cercopithecus dryas*) and 1,039 White-bellied Pangolin (*Manis tricuspis*) (Ibid.).

Source: Sinovas et al., 2016



Table 6: Top ten destination countries for the DRC's commercial exports of CITES-listed species (2014–2023)

Importer country	Scientific name	Common name	Trade terms	Reported quantity
Spain				363,603.81
23.70% of commercial exports	<i>Entandrophragma cylindricum</i>	Sapele mahogany	Logs, sawn wood	100.11
	<i>Pericopsis elata</i>	African teak	Logs, sawn wood, timber, veneer	5,431.70
	<i>Prunus africana</i>	African cherry	Bark	358,072
China				232,898.20
15.18% of commercial exports	<i>Afzelia bipindensis</i>	Yellow Afzelia	Logs	16.37
	<i>Balaeniceps rex</i>	Shoebill	Live	14
	<i>Balearica pavonina</i>	West African crowned crane	Live	50
	<i>Balearica regulorum</i>	Grey crowned crane	Live	220
	<i>Bubo africanus</i>	Spotted eagle-owl	Bodies	4
	<i>Cephalophus dorsalis</i>	Bay duiker	Bodies, skins	6
	<i>Cercocebus chrysogaster</i>	Golden-bellied mangabey	Bodies, skins	6
	<i>Cercopithecus ascanius</i>	Red-tailed monkey	Bodies, live	28
	<i>Cercopithecus hamlyni</i>	Owl-faced monkey	Bodies	2
	<i>Cercopithecus mitis</i>	Blue monkey	Bodies	2
	<i>Cercopithecus neglectus</i>	De Brazza's monkey	Live	45
	<i>Cercopithecus nictitans</i>	Greater white-nosed monkey	Live	10
	<i>Cercopithecus wolffi</i>	Wolf's monkey	Live	5
	<i>Colobus guereza</i>	Eastern black-and-white colobus	Bodies	4
	<i>Guibourtia demeusei</i>	Red bubinga	Logs	3,335.44
	<i>Gypohierax angolensis</i>	Palm-nut vulture	Bodies	5
	<i>Kaupifalco monogrammicus</i>	Lizard buzzard	Bodies	4
	<i>Khaya anthotheca</i>	East African mahogany	Logs	296.17
	<i>Khaya ivorensis</i>	Ivory Coast mahogany	Logs	977.04
	<i>Lophocebus aterrimus</i>	Black crested mangabey	Bodies, live, skins	58
	<i>Manis spp.</i>	Pangolin species	Scales	750
	<i>Manis tricuspis</i>	White-bellied pangolin	Scales	950
	<i>Panthera pardus</i>	Leopard	Trophies	2
	<i>Papio anubis</i>	Olive baboon	Bodies, skins	4
	<i>Pericopsis elata</i>	African teak	Live, logs, sawn wood	114,561.42
	<i>Poicephalus gulielmi</i>	Red-fronted parrot	Live	600

Table 6: Top ten destination countries for the DRC's commercial exports of CITES-listed species (2014–2023) (continued)

Importer country	Scientific name	Common name	Trade terms	Reported quantity
	<i>Prunus africana</i>	African cherry	Bark	10,000
	<i>Psittacus erithacus</i>	African grey parrot	Live	1,800
	<i>Pterocarpus erinaceus</i>	Barwood	Logs, sawn wood	12,902
	<i>Pterocarpus soyauxii</i>	African coral wood	Logs, sawn wood	5,873.30
	<i>Pterocarpus tinctorius</i>	Bloodwood	Logs	80,359.46
	<i>Scotopelia peli</i>	Pel's fishing owl	Bodies	4
	<i>Varanus exanthematicus</i>	African large-grain lizard	Live	2
	<i>Varanus niloticus</i>	Nile monitor	Live	2
France				224,541.73
14.64% of commercial exports	<i>Pericopsis elata</i>	African teak	Logs, sawn wood	695.27
	<i>Prunus africana</i>	African cherry	Bark	223,160
	<i>Pterocarpus soyauxii</i>	African coral wood	Sawn wood	686.46
India				208,981.19
13.62% of commercial exports	<i>Pericopsis elata</i>	African teak	Live, logs, sawn wood	4,961.19
	<i>Prunus africana</i>	African cherry	Bark	204,020
Uganda				160,080
10.44% of commercial exports	<i>Osyris lanceolata</i>	East African sandalwood	Logs, wood product	160,080
Vietnam				81,948
5.34% of commercial exports	<i>Afzelia bipindensis</i>	Yellow Afzelia	Logs	165.09
	<i>Galago moholi</i>	Lesser bushbaby	Live	50
	<i>Guibourtia demeusei</i>	Red bubinga	Logs	913.63
	<i>Pericopsis elata</i>	African teak	Logs, sawn wood, timber	77,024.32
	<i>Pterocarpus soyauxii</i>	African coral wood	Logs, sawn wood	3,658.72
	<i>Pterocarpus tinctorius</i>	Bloodwood	Logs	132.24
	<i>Stephanoaetus coronatus</i>	African crowned eagle	Live	4
United States of America				74,138.30
4.83% of commercial exports	<i>Chamaeleo dilepis</i>	Flap-necked chameleon	Live	50
	<i>Cordylus tropidosternum</i>	Tropical spiny-tailed lizard	Live	10,430
	<i>Cyclanorbis senegalensis</i>	Senegal flapshell turtle	Live	15
	<i>Cycloderma aubryi</i>	Aubry's flapshell turtle	Live	94
	<i>Falconiformes spp.</i>	Falconiformes species	Feathers	1
	<i>Kinixys erosa</i>	Serrated hinge-back tortoise	Live	441

Table 6: Top ten destination countries for the DRC's commercial exports of CITES-listed species (2014–2023) (continued)

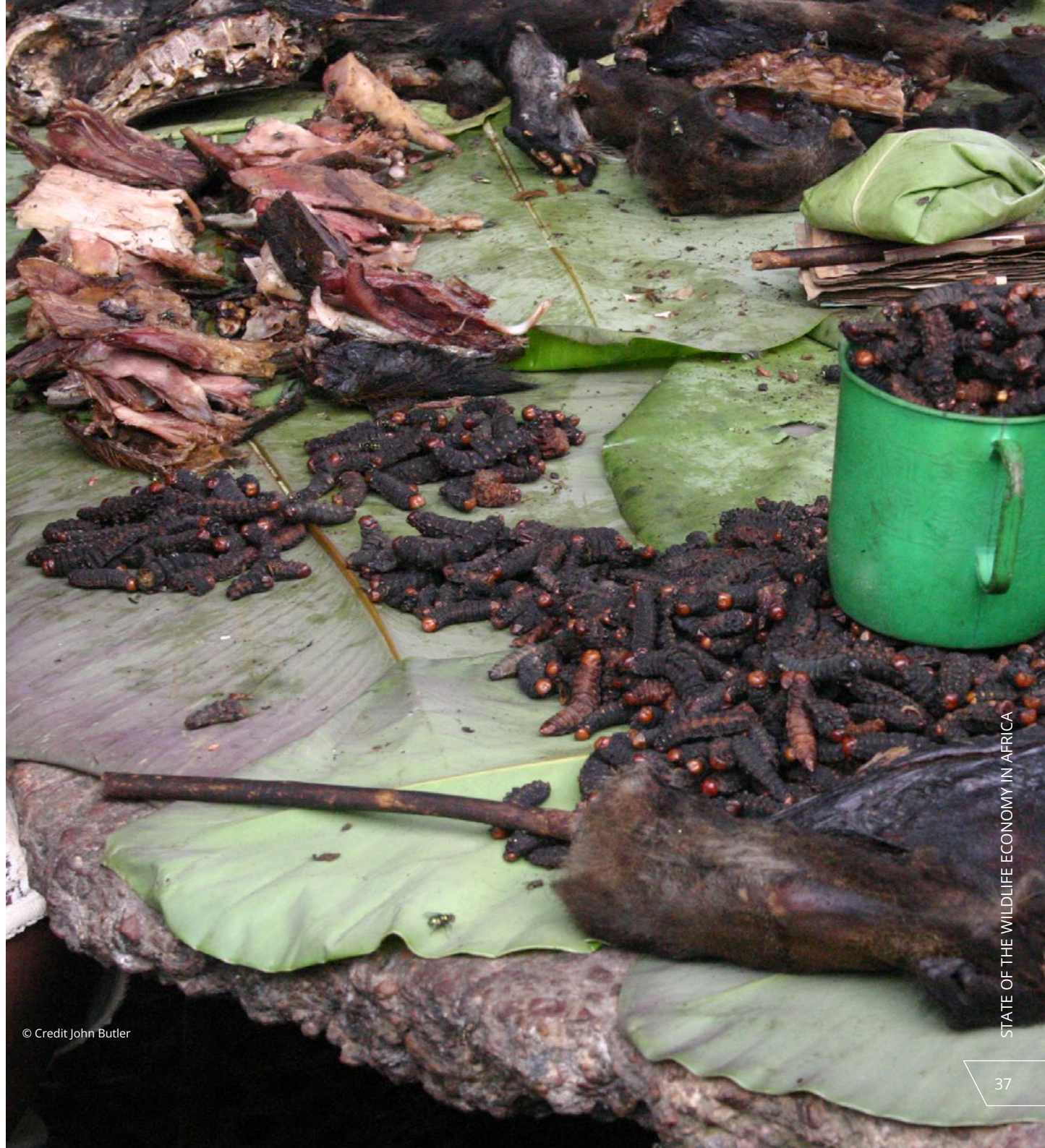
Importer country	Scientific name	Common name	Trade terms	Reported quantity
	<i>Kinixys spekii</i>	Speke's hinged tortoise	Live	113
	<i>Kinyongia carpenteri</i>	Carpenter's chameleon	Live	75
	<i>Pandinus dictator</i>	Scorpion dictateur	Bodies, live	7,913
	<i>Pandinus imperator</i>	Emperor scorpion	Live	46,500
	<i>Pericopsis elata</i>	African teak	Logs, sawn wood, timber	1,657.30
	<i>Rhampholeon boulengeri</i>	Boulenger's pygmy chameleon	Live	1,000
	<i>Stephanoaetus coronatus</i>	African crowned eagle	Live	5
	<i>Trioceros ituriensis</i>	Ituri forest chameleon	Live	75
	<i>Trioceros johnstoni</i>	Johnston's chameleon	Live	975
	<i>Varanus albigularis</i>	Rock monitor	Live	4,794
Belgium				72,220.50
4.71% of commercial exports	<i>Afzelia bipindensis</i>	Yellow Afzelia	Logs	113.07
	<i>Guibourtia demeusei</i>	Red bubinga	Sawn wood	26
	<i>Pericopsis elata</i>	African teak	Live, logs, sawn wood, timber	24,866.59
	<i>Prunus africana</i>	African cherry	Bark	47,000
	<i>Pterocarpus soyauxii</i>	African coral wood	Sawn wood	214.81
Italy				31,729.69
2.07% of commercial exports	<i>Khaya anthotheca</i>	East African mahogany	Sawn wood	69.95
	<i>Pericopsis elata</i>	African teak	Logs, sawn wood, timber	1,660
	<i>Prunus africana</i>	African cherry	Bark	30,000
Taiwan				15,242.11
0.99% of commercial exports	<i>Kinixys erosa</i>	Serrated hinge-back tortoise	Live	100
	<i>Pericopsis elata</i>	African teak	Logs, sawn wood	15,142

Source: CITES, 2025

DRC was among the world's largest exporters of African grey parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*), captured in large numbers from the wild for the international pet trade (Hart et al., 2016). In parts of West Africa, the species is also used for belief-based practices, which place additional pressure on wild populations and pose challenges for biodiversity conservation (Assou et al., 2021). See Text box 11 which provides more details on the illegal trade of African grey parrots in the DRC.

Congolese forests and biodiversity are seriously threatened by uncontrolled hunting and fishing, the bushmeat trade, and the destruction and fragmentation of habitats (UNEP-MONUSCO-OSESG, 2015). These pressures are closely linked to broader systems of illegal resource extraction and transnational trade, including the poaching of high-value species for international markets (Ibid.). Organised crime and illegal trade in natural resources continue to create conflict in the eastern DRC, although the law n°14/003 of 11 February 2014 on nature conservation stipulates in article 14, that it is forbidden to: *"deliberately take, fish, capture, harass or kill specimens of protected species in the DRC"* (République Democratique du Congo, 2015).

Overall, the illegal utilisation of wildlife resources in the DRC is concentrated on timber, charcoal and wildlife products, with an estimated value of USD 1 billion (UNEP-MONUSCO-OSESG, 2015). A 2015 UNEP report reveals that most of the net profits of the illegal exploitation go to transnational organised criminal networks based outside DRC (Ibid.). **There exists an extensive and uncontrolled illegal utilisation of wildlife in the DRC, mainly for bushmeat.** The value of this exploitation is high and has a major impact on the abundance of biodiversity. See Text box 12 on the illegal trade of hippopotamus as an example.



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Text box 11

Illegal trade of African grey parrots in the DRC

African grey parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*) have experienced a significant decline in DRC, particularly in the northern and central regions (Makal, 2025a). Patrols concluded by Lukuru Foundation in Lomami Luidjo, Maniema province, recorded a 36% drop in sightings between 2016 and 2021 (Ibid.). This decline is closely related to the increased trapping for the pet trade, which has expanded since 2012 (Makal, 2025a).

Weak enforcement of international trade regulations and corruption have led to the illegal trade, even after the species were placed under full protection in 2023 (Ibid.). Since CITES came into force in 1975, more than 1.2 million live parrots (of various species) have been reported in international trade, with 62% recorded as wild-sourced or of unknown origin, likely also from the wild (Martin et al., 2018; UNODC, 2016). **Between 2014 and 2017, the DRC exported 23,297 live parrots for commercial purposes, 98.71% of which were sourced from the wild** (CITES, 2025). No exports after 2017 are recorded in the CITES trade database. The leading importers were Turkey (30.48%), Singapore (19.52%), and Oman (11.59%). Turkey has also been identified as a key transit hub for parrot shipments between Africa and Asia (Martin et al., 2018).

Trapping activity intensifies from June to August, when parrots gather around fruiting trees. Hunters use glue made from forest vines to catch these birds and sometimes remove chicks from nests (Makal, 2025a). Economic assessments from the mid-to-late 2010s show clear mark-ups along the commodity chain: trappers typically received USD 4-23 per bird, intermediaries resold them for USD 35-100, and export prices exceeded USD 200 depending on destination and mortality risks during transport (UNODC, 2016; Martin et al., 2018). More recent figures from the DRC show a similar pattern at the lower end of the chain. In Maniema, parrots can sell for as little as USD 6, rising to around USD 100 in Kisangani, while international prices

have increased sharply, reaching up to USD 1,500 in markets such as the United Arab Emirates (Makal, 2025a).

Healthier parrots sell for higher prices because they are more likely to survive long journeys (UNODC, 2016), yet transport conditions remain poor. Birds are packed into crates and moved by boat or plane with limited ventilation, and an estimated 70% of captured grey parrots die before reaching major transit points (Makal, 2025a; Dasgupta, 2025a). If 86,000 parrots were shipped from Kisangani between 2016 and 2022, the total number captured may have exceeded 250,000 once mortality is taken into account (Makal, 2025a). Most of the value is captured further along the chain, while rural trappers carry the highest risks for the lowest returns (UNODC, 2016; Martin et al., 2018). Captive breeding in South Africa has proven profitable, but wild-sourced birds continue to generate higher returns for trade networks (UNODC, 2016).

In 2013, the CITES Secretariat instructed importing countries to verify permits issued by the DRC, and in 2016, it recommended a full trade suspension following evidence of fraudulent permits and quota breaches (UNODC, 2016). The illegal trade closely resembles the legal market, with unlicensed trappers supplying local buyers who gather and prepare birds for exporters, often without valid permits and in disregard of closed capture periods (UNODC, 2016). Some provinces have taken steps to address this issue. For instance, **Maniema, Sankuru and Tshopo have banned the parrot trade and started seizing birds that were illegally captured** (Dasgupta, 2025b). *Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature* (Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation) created a rescue centre in Kisangani that receives confiscated parrots. To date, there are three rescue and rehabilitation centres for African grey parrots in DRC (Makal, 2025b). However, these centres face resource

shortages and limited support from the government (Makal, 2025a).

The Lukuru Foundation has been working to rescue and rehabilitate African grey parrots confiscated from trafficking activities. **In October 2025, fifty African grey parrots were released in the wild after rehabilitation by the Lukuru Foundation, which has freed 400 birds to date** (Makal, 2025b). Despite new enforcement efforts, this Foundation warns of recapture risks and stresses the need for targeted awareness campaigns to prevent parrots from re-entering trafficking cycles (Ibid.). **The DRC government, in August 2025, issued a national decree banning all capture and domestic trade of African Grey Parrots** (Dasgupta, 2025a). This move aligns the country with the international ban under CITES and closes loopholes that traffickers had exploited, such as mislabelling African grey parrots as legally exportable species (Ibid.). Despite this significant move to protect grey parrot populations, enforcement and awareness efforts remain key challenges (Makal, 2025a).

Sources: CITES, 2025; Dasgupta, 2025a, b; Makal, 2025a, b; Martin et al., 2018 & UNODC, 2016



Text box 12

Illegal trade and the poaching of hippopotamus in DRC's national parks

Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*) are hunted for meat but also for international commercial trade in teeth, tusks, ivory carvings, skins, and skin products. Hippopotamus ivory is mainly used for carving and is popular among consumers as it is generally cheaper (Fisher, 2016) and more easily attainable than elephant ivory. During the DRC's civil wars (1990-1994), Virunga National Park, which once held the highest concentration of hippos in Africa (estimated at 30,000 hippos in 1974), declined by more than 96% due to poaching by militia for human consumption and ivory trade (Udahogora et al., 2020; IUCN National Committee of The Netherlands, 2019).

Hippopotamus poaching in the DRC also negatively impacted people and their livelihoods. Hippopotamus dung is an important source of food for other aquatic creatures including tilapia, a fish widely consumed in Africa. The hippopotamus population of Lake Edward was severely depleted by poachers, resulting in a loss of the extensive tilapia fishery, fisher's livelihoods, and a key nutrient source for local people (Esperance, 2018). In the Northeast of DRC, in the Garamba-Bili-Chinko landscape, which includes Garamba National Park and several reserves, there was large-scale hippo poaching and trafficking by armed groups, militia, and militarised poachers; they sell the meat locally,

but transport ivory and skins to larger towns and cities (Ondoua et al., 2017). The wildlife economy provides a sustainable framework for managing wildlife resources, including hippos, to benefit both people and nature. By **developing and promoting responsible ecotourism and investing in sustainable fisheries management, the DRC can reduce hippo poaching and protect its wildlife heritage for future generations.**

Sources: Fisher, 2016; IUCN & Ondoua et al., 2017





Text box 13

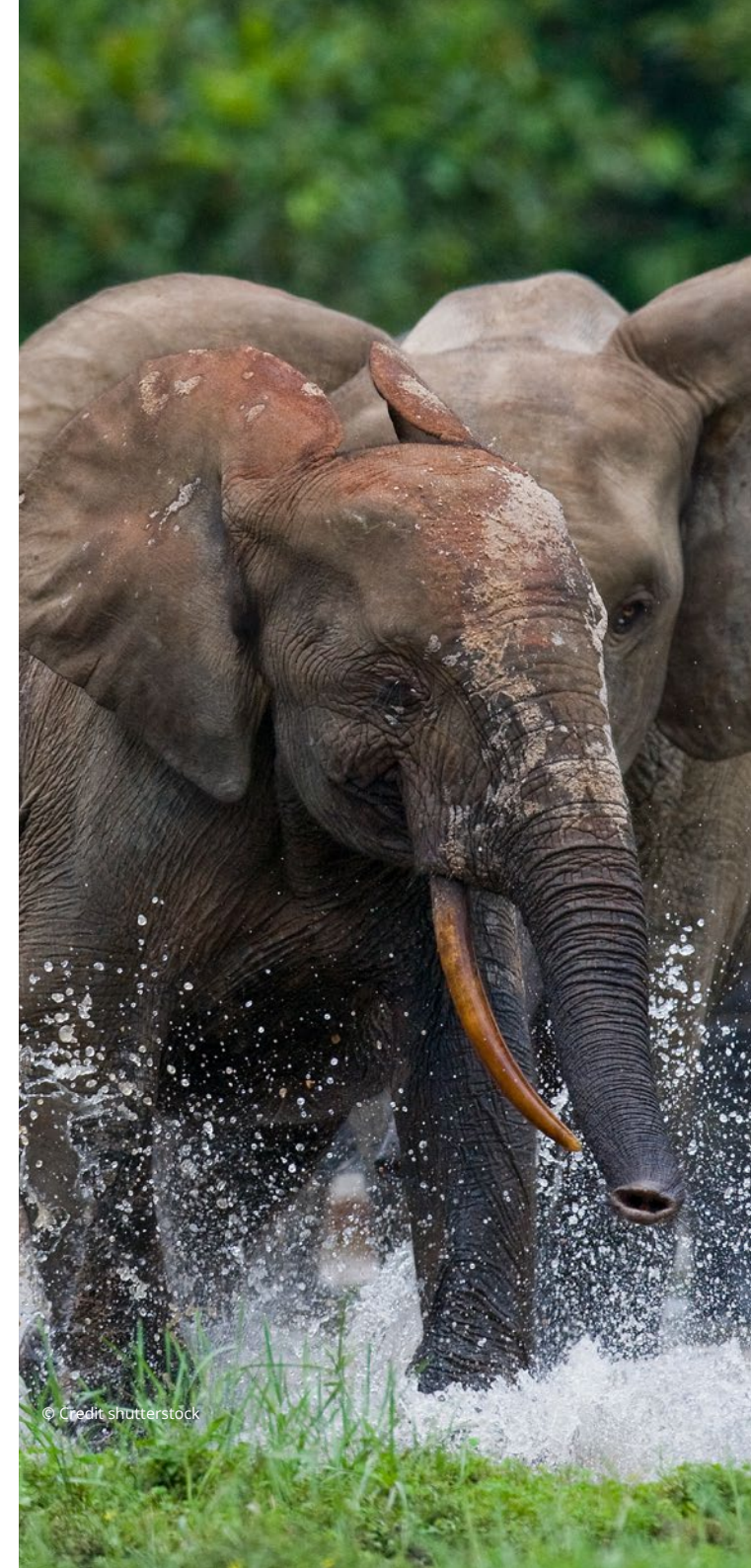
Illegal poaching of elephant and pangolin

Satisfying the international demand for ivory led to a drastic reduction in African elephant populations from 2010 to 2012 (Mashini et al., 2017). In Central Africa, there was a 66% drop in African elephant populations between 2008 and 2016 (Mwatha & Christopher, 2020). The DRC is home to some of the most important forest elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) and pangolin populations mainly giant pangolin (*Smutsia gigantea*), white-bellied pangolin (*Phataginus tricuspis*), and long-tailed pangolin (*Manis tetradactyla*). However, these populations are under threat from illegal poaching. The Garamba National Park, which is home to the biggest known concentration of elephants in the eastern region of Central Africa, has also been the target of **poaching that has been both illegal and authorised by local armed forces**.

In 2004, 176 elephants were illegally killed in Garamba National Park, declining to 119 in 2012. In that same year, a single poaching incident resulted in the killing of 22 elephants, and by 2015, nearly 90% of the park's elephant population had been lost to ivory poaching (African Parks, 2026; IUCN, 2025c). Since then, poaching pressure has declined markedly. **By 2020, ivory poaching had fallen by around 90% and elephant numbers had begun to stabilise** (African Parks, 2024). Between 2020 and 2024, only four elephants were reported poached, compared to 141 between 2016 and 2017 (African Parks, 2026; IUCN, 2025c). **In 2008, Virunga National Park also recorded that 63 elephants were illegally killed.** According to the poachers interviewed in the northern DRC, trafficking ivory in that region is impossible without the cooperation of the military. This is because the military controls checkpoints and roadblocks, which are used to smuggle ivory out of the country.

The DRC is also a major source of pangolin scales. Between 1984 and 2016, the **DRC legally exported 1,705 kg of pangolin scales**. However, it is believed that the actual amount of pangolin scales exported from the DRC is much higher, as much of the trade was illegal. The DRC is the third-most frequently identified country active in terms of the illegal pangolin trade. It is the source of pangolin scales for both Uganda and Cameroon. **The DRC recorded 3,400 kg of seizures of the huge (500 kg) pangolin scale between 2001 and 2016. In 2021, authorities in Kinshasa seized 938 kg of ivory and 34 kg of pangolin scales, with an estimated value of around USD 3.5 million** (Ojewale, 2023). Larger seizures have also been recorded elsewhere in the region. In the port city of Pointe-Noire, 20,000 kg of pangolin scales were seized in 2018 and 9,000 kg in 2020 (Ibid.). In Garamba National Park, a three-year investigation led to the arrest of a transnational wildlife trafficking network and the seizure of 318 kg of pangolin scales, equivalent to more than 500 animals (African Parks, 2024). The illegal poaching of elephants and pangolin in the DRC is a serious conservation concern. It is threatening the survival of these iconic species, and it is also undermining the rule of law in the country. Illegal wildlife trade in the DRC highlights the need for increased law enforcement and conservation efforts to protect its elephant and pangolin populations, which are an important part of the wildlife asset base of the country.

Source: Information presented in this Text box was extracted from the Wildlife Crime Threat Assessment in West and Central Africa study by CITES, UNODC, 2018.



© Credit shutterstock

In the DRC, there was a drastic reduction in the elephant population estimated in the 20th century at one million to a hundred thousand in the early 1980s (Ondoua et al., 2017). For instance, the elephant population in 2011 was estimated at 6,000 down from 22,000 before the civil war in the Eastern DRC. This decline was significant in Okapi Wildlife Reserve, with a 50% decline from approx. 6,400 to 3,000 elephants left in the wild (Beyers et al., 2011). This decline was most likely due to, on the one hand, poaching aimed at satisfying the international networks of the illegal ivory trade and on the other hand to the fragmentation of the elephant populations (see Text box 13). There is an ivory market in the city of Kinshasa despite the fact that the elephant is classified in the category of fully protected species and therefore cannot be traded (Machini et al., 2017). Despite the illegality of the ivory trade, some markets display ivory objects sold in full view of everyone. The largest and most famous of these markets remains that of Bikeko, located in the city centre of Kinshasa (Ibid.).

Great ape trade

The bonobo (*Pan paniscus*) is only found in the DRC, where small groups are spread out over a large area south of the Congo River (Bessone et al., 2025). **The DRC has a long history of transnational organised criminal networks being involved in the trade in numerous live wildlife species** (Stiles, 2023). Around 2004, poachers began hunting apes for their meat, body parts, and live babies after a realisation that they could make a lot of money by selling the live babies to syndicates in Kinshasa, which have connections to zoos and pet shops in Dubai and China (Nkala, 2021). During the current ape poaching crisis in the DRC no great apes have been exported with CITES permits at least not with permits indicating *Pan* or *Gorilla* species (Stiles, 2023). The advertisement of live baby great apes through social media platforms are on the rise with prices for the animals having quadrupled compared to a decade ago (Nuwer, 2023). The price of chimpanzees has gone up to USD 100,000, bonobos up to USD 300,000, and gorillas up to USD 550,000 (Ibid.). The great ape markets in Dubai and China are mainly zoos seeking live apes for wealthy people who keep them as pets (Stiles, 2023). Kinshasa is the epicentre for the trade of live baby primates as a by-product of the illegal bushmeat trade (Ibid.). **Retailing at an average of USD 1.50 per kilogram, gorilla meat is much cheaper than its beef and chicken alternatives, which sell**

for as much as USD 5.00 per kilogram around Kinshasa (Stiles, 2023). The cheapest baby chimpanzee can be sold for USD 100 and the most expensive juvenile gorilla can be sold at USD 650 (Ibid.). Local markets offer less profit than selling to foreigners. The regulation of the great ape trade in the DRC could potentially help to reduce the illegal trade, if effectively managed and monitored.

Legal wildlife trade is an important part of the wildlife economy that often generates significant income for countries. If not managed effectively, sustainably and transparently, wildlife trade, especially the illegal wildlife trade, can result in overharvesting and a decline in species.



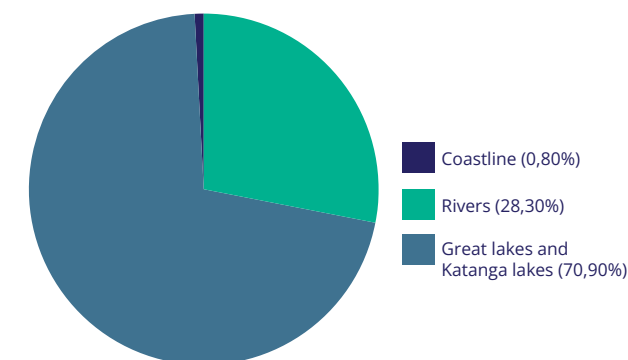
Fisheries

The DRC has a 37 km long Atlantic Ocean coastline with an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) covering an estimated area of 1,150 km² (CIA, 2022). The fisheries sector includes marine fisheries, inland fisheries and aquaculture (ANAPI, 2022). The majority of the stated marine production comes from small, independent businesses that use beach seines and canoes (ANAPI, 2022). With its vast hydrographic network of rivers, lakes and coastal waters, **fisheries play an important role in food security, livelihoods and local economies across the country.**

Based on the production capacity of major lakes, rivers and the Atlantic coastline, annual fisheries production potential is estimated between 331,660 and 707,260 tonnes (FAO, 2021). The eastern Great Lakes (Tanganyika, Albert, Edward and Kivu) and Katanga lakes account for approx. 70.9% of the country's maximum fisheries potential, followed by the rivers (28.3%), while the Atlantic coastline contributes less than 1% (0.8%) (Ibid.) (see Figure 3). Lake Tanganyika alone has an estimated production potential of up to 400,000 tonnes annually, making it the country's most productive freshwater fishery resource. Productivity also varies considerably among water bodies, ranging from 13-40kg/ha in parts of the Congo River basin to 176kg/ha in the Kamalondo Depression (FAO, 2021). Table 7 provides an overview of fisheries potential in DRC's water bodies including lakes, rivers and the coastal waters.

The fisheries sector is an important source of employment and income for many fishermen and women in the country. **Inland fisheries, the largest fisheries subsector employ approx. 600,000 people** (FAO, 2021). Although fisheries contribute little to the DRC's GDP, it has been estimated that **the sector contributes between approx. USD 63.4 million and USD 166.3 million annually** (Ibid.). **Women represent less than 6% of fishers involved in capture fisheries, but play a more important role in post-harvest activities, representing approx. 28% of fish processors** (FAO, 2021).

Figure 3: Share of maximum fisheries potential production in DRC



Source: FAO, 2021

The ichthyological fauna of the DRC counts approx. 40 families grouping more than 900 species (Luhusu & Micha, 2013; Péliissier et al., 2018). The main species harvested vary among the DRC's major fishing areas, approx. 63% are in the waters of the Eastern Great Lakes (Tanganyika, Edouard and Kivu), 28% in the fluvial system, 8% in the depression lakes and the Katanga reservoirs, 1% in the maritime waters of the Atlantic Coast (Ibid.). Table 8 summarises the common species caught in the country's Eastern Great Lakes and coastal waters.

Table 7: Fisheries potential in the Democratic Republic of Congo's water bodies

Water body	Area in DRC (km²)	Potential production		Productivity		Share of maximum potential production (%)
		minimum (tonnes/year)	maximum (tonnes/year)	minimum (kg/ha)	maximum (kg/ha)	
1. Rivers						
Congo River and tributaries	34,312	90,000	137,000	26	40	19.4
Lake Tumba and tributaries	3,400	5,000	8,000	15	24	1.1
Lake Mai-Ndombe and tributaries	21,000	27,000	55,000	13	26	7.8
Subtotal 1	58,712	122,000	200,000	54	90	28.3
2. Eastern Great Lakes and Katanga lakes						
Lake Tanganyika	15,000	125,000	400,000	83	267	56.6
Lake Albert	2,438	9,700	13,300	40	55	1.9
Lake Edward	1,650	15,000	20,000	91	121	2.8
Lake Kivu	1,600	7,000	19,000	44	119	2.7
Lake Mweru-Luapula Complex	3,400	12,000	12,000	35	35	1.7
Kamalondo Depression	1,700	30,000	30,000	176	176	4.2
Lake Tshangalele (Lufira Reservoir)	500	4,460	4,460	89	89	0.6
Lake Nzilo (Lake Delcommune)	280	2,500	2,500	89	89	0.4
Subtotal 2	26,568	205,660	501,260	647	951	70.9
3. Marine						
Atlantic Coast	800	4,000	6,000	50	75	0.8
Subtotal 3	800	4,000	6,000	50	50	0.8
Total	86,080	331,660	707,260	751	1091	100

Source: FAO, 2021



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Table 8: Main catch fish species in the Eastern Great Lakes, Atlantic coast and Lake Moero

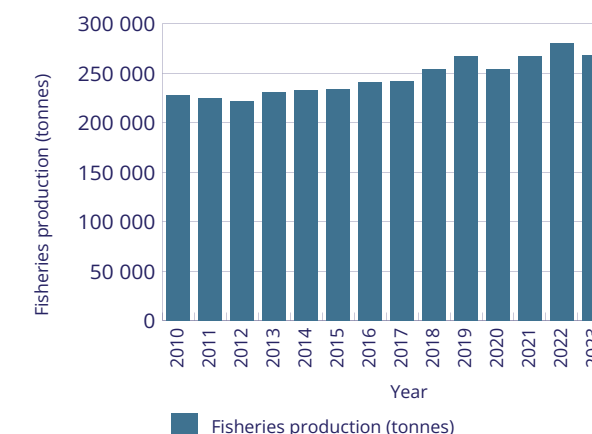
Water body	Main catch species
Atlantic Coast	Cichlids (<i>Julidochromis spp.</i>), white shark (<i>Carcharodon carcharias</i>), sole (<i>Solea spp.</i>), perch, conger eel (<i>Conger spp.</i>), captainfish (<i>Polydactylus quadrifilis</i> or <i>Lates spp.</i>), barracuda (<i>Sphyraena spp.</i>)
Lake Tanganyika	<i>Stolothrissa tanganyicae</i> (75%), <i>Limnothrissa miodon</i> (10%), <i>Lates spp.</i> , <i>Luciolates spp.</i> , and other pelagic species (15%)
Lake Kivu	<i>Barilius ubangensis</i> , tilapia (<i>Oreochromis/Tilapia spp.</i>), <i>Haplochromis spp.</i> , <i>Stolothrissa tanganyicae</i>
Lake Edward	Tilapia (<i>Oreochromis/Tilapia spp.</i>) (60%), lungfish (<i>Protopterus spp.</i>) (10%), <i>Bagrus spp.</i> (10%), <i>Clarias spp.</i> (10%), <i>Barbus spp.</i> (5%), other species (5%)
Lake Albert	Tigerfish (<i>Hydrocynus spp.</i>), <i>Alestes spp.</i> (likely the intended taxon for “baremos”), <i>Lates spp.</i> , tilapia (<i>Oreochromis/Tilapia spp.</i>), <i>Bagrus spp.</i>
Lake Mweru (Moero)	<i>Oreochromis macrochir</i> (formerly <i>Tilapia macrochir</i>) (80%), <i>Clarias spp.</i> , <i>Synodontis spp.</i> , <i>Labeobarbus altianalis</i> (or <i>Barbus altianalis</i>), <i>Mormyridae species</i> (elephantfishes)

Source: ANAP, 2022

Fisheries production volumes have increased over the past decade, although production remains well below the country's estimated potential (Figure 4). **Annual fisheries production increased from approx. 227,500 tonnes in 2010 to a peak of 279,680 tonnes in 2022 before declining slightly in 2023** (Statbase, 2026). **In 2023, annual production was approx. 267,310 tonnes (FAO, 2023), representing only approx. 38% of the estimated maximum production potential of 707,260 tonnes annually.** Fisheries accounted for 98% (approx. 261,960 tonnes) of total fish production, and aquaculture contributed the remaining 2% (approx. 5,350 tonnes) (Ibid.). This gap between current production and estimated potential

suggests considerable opportunities to expand fisheries and aquaculture production and highlights constraints such as limited investment, infrastructure, and management capacity (D. Tshibinda, personal communication, 26 May 2026). Addressing these constraints could improve food security, reduce dependence on imports, and support livelihoods through increased domestic production (Ibid.). Fish and fish product imports were valued at approx. USD 183.1 million in 2022, while exports amounted to only USD 121,590 (FAO, 2023) (see Table 9 and 10). The large difference between imports and exports highlights the country's continued dependence on imported fish products despite its substantial domestic fisheries resources. The most commonly harvested fish group in 2023 was freshwater fish, with a production of 253,190 tonnes, while crevalle jack (*Caranx ignobilis*) was among the least harvested species at 370 tonnes (see Table 11).

Figure 4: Fisheries production (tonnes) 2010-2023



Source: Statbase, 2026

Table 9: Economic value of the top 10 imported products

Product	Description	Value (USD million)
Jack, horse mackerel	frozen; excluding fillets, livers and roes	159.9
Fish	dried, whether or not salted; not smoked	81.8
Sardines, sardinella, brisling or sprats	prepared or preserved; whole or in pieces	5.9
Tilapias	frozen; excluding fillets, livers and roes	5
Fish	frozen; excluding fillets, livers and roes	1.6
Mackerel	frozen; excluding fillets, livers and roes	1.5
Sardines, sardinella, brisling or sprats	frozen; excluding fillets, livers and roes	1.4
Carp	fresh or chilled; excluding fillets, livers and roes	1.2
Catfish	frozen; excluding fillets, livers and roes	0.89
Jack, horse mackerel	fresh or chilled; excluding fillets, livers and roes	0.77

Source: FAO, 2023

Table 10: Economic value of the top 5 products exported

Product	Description	Value (USD)
Nile perch, snakeheads	frozen; excluding fillets, livers and roes	63,664
Fish, other than species in 0305.3	dried, salted or in brine; not smoked	22,397
Fish, other than species in 0305.4	smoked, including fillets	18,380
Freshwater ornamental fish	live	15,725
Sardines, sardinella, brisling or sprats	prepared or preserved; whole or in pieces	1,209

Source: FAO, 2023

Table 11: Top ten harvested fish species and their volume in 2023

Rank	Species	Production (Tonnes)
1st	Freshwater fishes	253,190
2nd	Nile tilapia	5,400
3rd	Large head hairtail	2,090
4th	Croakers, drums	1,910
5th	Marine fishes	1,680
6th	Sharks, rays, skates,	690
7th	Sea catfishes	530
8th	Threadfins, tasselfishes	450
9th	Tongue fishes	410
10th	Crevalle jack	370

Source: FAO, 2023

Fisheries also support important regional trade networks, particularly around Lake Kivu where fish markets in Bukavu and Goma connect producers, traders, processors and cross-border buyers in Rwanda and eastern DRC (Parker et al., 2018). Women play an important role in these value chains through fish trading associations and regional distribution networks (Ibid.) (see Text box 14).

**Text box 14****Fish trade in Bukavu and Goma**

The demand for fresh fish in Bukavu and Goma cities appears to be sufficient to attract new entrants into the market. The fishermen in these towns use the direct sales and distribution model whereby prices reach USD 3.50 to USD 5 per kg for producers selling to intermediaries with known regular customers. Most intermediaries are women traders who occupy a similar value chain role for many products and distributors buy in larger volumes for sale. For distributors, **prices can reach USD 10 per kg, and after basic processing (gutting, filleting) it can reach USD 14 per kg (USD 12 for fillets, USD 2 for remaining bones)**. Sales through an open market model appear to be more price sensitive and with less certainty of clearing available stock, this suggests the direct sales model may be reaching the most lucrative end of the market, below which there is a greater sensitivity to price and volume demand.

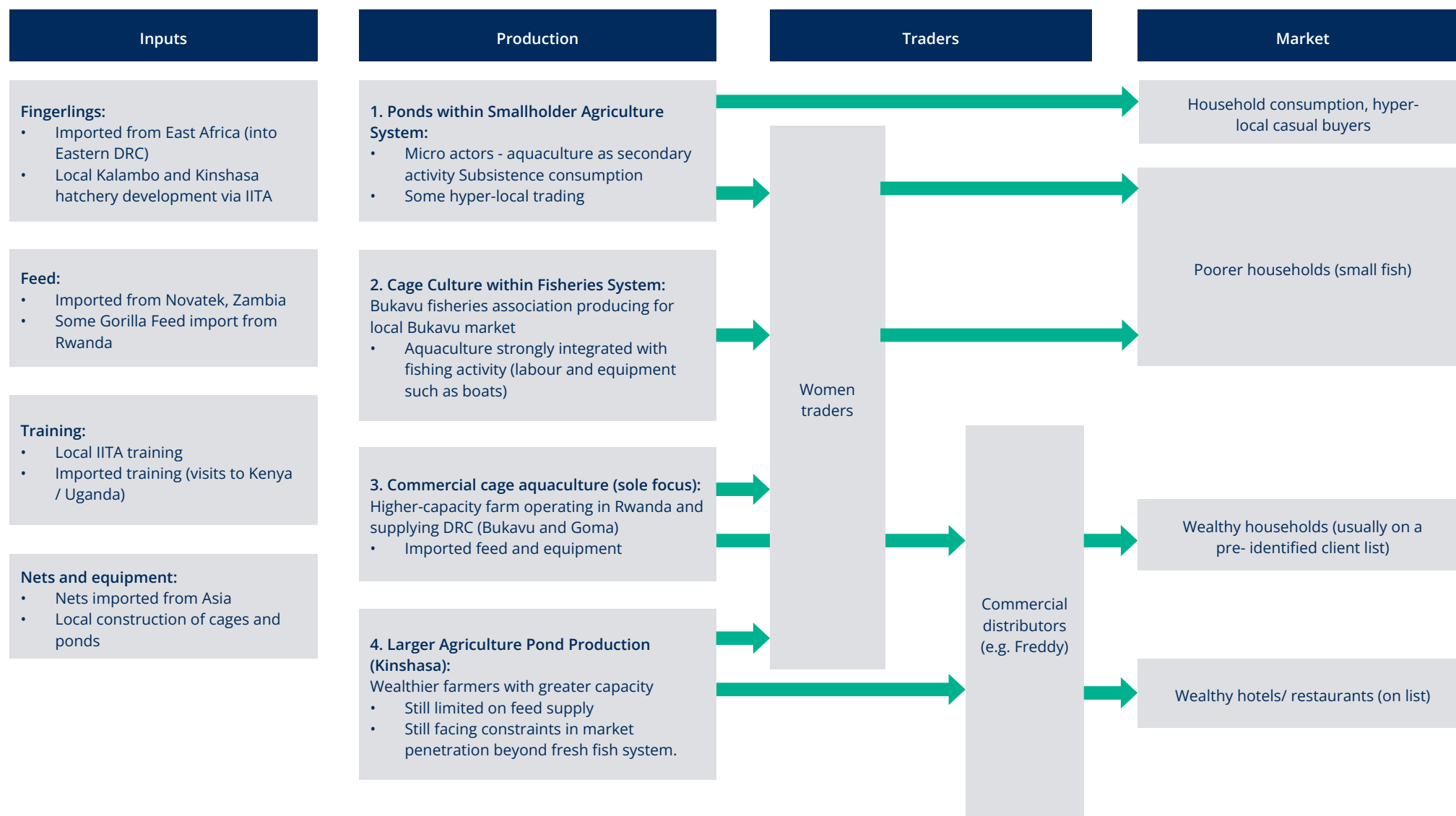
The network of women traders is an important part of the market system in the fishery sector of the DRC. The fish is sold to a network of women fish traders, who then distribute them to markets in North and South Kivu and

Rwanda shown in Figure 5. Women traders in this region often organise into associations to help them market their products. The fisher association of 300 members has a women trader network of 70, giving it a ratio of around four male fisher association members to one female trader (the gender split is understood to be 100%). This shows that although production may be male dominated, the whole value chain impact for women can be advantageous and promises good impact in (semi-formalised) jobs and income generating opportunities. Congolese women traders on the border of Rwanda are organised into associations and make trips across to Kamembe and Cyangugu to buy fish and import them from Lake Kivu Tilapia Ltd.

Source: Parker et al., 2018

Figure 5: Value chain for the aquaculture in South & North Kivu, Kinshasa and Tanganyika

Source: Parker et al., 2018



The main fisheries legislation in the DRC is composed of a decree on exclusive fishing rights of 1932, hunting and fishing act of 1937, and regulations and ordinances associated with these acts. The 1937 Act pre-dates all major international agreements relating to fisheries. A description of the DRC's legal framework was made as follows:

- The Decree on exclusive fishing rights allows competent authorities to grant exclusive fishing rights in a designated area. The Decree outlines the general terms and conditions governing fishing practices, alongside the rights and obligations of each contracting party.
- Ordinance No. 432/Agri. of 26 December 1947 (as amended in 1952 and 1954) provides for the deployment of fisheries officers to control fishing activities.
- The 1981 Regulations prohibit the use of electro-fishing, explosives, and toxic substances throughout the country, and provide for the seizure of illegal fishing gear and any catches.
- The 1979 Ordinance (as amended in 1983) sets specific permit fees and outlines the various issuing authorities. The Ordinance provides for four categories of fishing permit: industrial, artisanal, traditional and sport fishing.

The DRC is a member of several regional fishery bodies including the Lake Tanganyika Authority (LTA) and the Committee on Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture of Africa (CIFA) (Breuil & Grima, 2014). State commissioners are responsible for the issue of commercial rights with artisanal rights being issued by regional Governors. Local commissioners are responsible for the issue of traditional and sport fishing licenses (Ibid.). Compliance with the fisheries regulations is the responsibility of the Department of Fisheries (DoF).

Aquaculture

The aquaculture industry in the DRC is mostly unstructured and integrated with other sources of revenue (Parker et al., 2018). The sector **is mostly centred on subsistence fish farming**, where the production of tilapia and catfish predominates despite the possibility of raising additional species (FAO, 2026). FAO (2023) reported that only 2% of total fish production (approx. 5,350 tonnes) came from aquaculture. This figure shows that the sector is small and largely informal, focusing on meeting local demands as most of the fish produced is consumed domestically (D. Tshibinda, personal

communication, 26 May 2026). Smallholder farmers frequently engage in fish farming as a supplementary occupation to crop and livestock farming. **Inadequate support and limited access to get aquaculture products to large fishery markets** are the likely reasons for the slow growth in this sector; with a noticeable preference to diversify farming activities as a resilience mechanism (Parker et al., 2018). Therefore, because of inadequate support, farmers in the fishery sector are increasingly choosing to diversify their farming activities in order to reduce their risk.

Besides the integrated farming system that is adopted by farmers to effectively manage time and resources, the farming activities chosen for diversification vary with the region (IITA & Worldfish, 2018). Approximately 21% of farmers in the Kinshasa region concentrate solely on fish farming (Kinkela et al, 2017). Food production and paid labour are typically the primary sources of income in the Kivu Province, with fish farming being a supplementary activity (IITA & Worldfish, 2018). This reveals that **the focus of fish farming in the DRC in 2014 was focused on income diversification and the provision of food for subsistence** (Breuil & Grima, 2014). Prior to 2011, up to 230,000 tonnes of fish were harvested from fisheries each year, but only 3,000 tonnes of fish generated by aquaculture (Parker et al., 2018). In 2013, 12% of the agricultural GDP in the DRC came from the fisheries and aquaculture sectors (Kurien & Lopez, 2013). The majority of the production is used domestically, with increased imports of fish from China and other African countries mainly Egypt, Namibia, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Uganda (Breuil & Grima, 2014).

Aquaculture has significant long-term development potential in the DRC. However, increasing production would require long-term investment in all segments of the value chain, such as feed production, subsidiary functions (public and private), research and development, education and training, and extension services (Farley, 2019). In order to boost DRC's supply, stakeholders in the aquaculture sector will also benefit from understanding the market opportunities and limits.

Artisanal and continental fishing

The DRC's annual production from artisanal and continental fishing is approx. 240,000 tonnes, i.e. nearly 30% of the potential (ANAPI, 2023). Due to the short length of the

coast, catches of marine origin are modest and estimated at approx. 2% of total production since the 1980s (Ibid.). This total production corresponds to an average annual consumption of 5.5 kg per inhabitant. This production all comes from small-scale fishing using traditional methods, see Text box 15.



© Credit Amwanga, 2022



Text box 15

Artisanal fishing in Kisangani

Artisanal fishermen in Kisangani in the DRC report low yields in the Congo River. This is a problem for both the fishermen, who rely on fishing for their livelihood, and the local population, who depend on fish as a source of protein.

Traditional fishing practices have been the major contributor to depleting the aquatic environment in Kisangani. However, fishermen in Kisangani contend that they must rely on the methods they know, and that the government should provide them with more support. The DRC has abundant fishing resources, but these resources are not being used to their full potential. A lack of capital investment and proper policies are partly to blame for this. Fish inspectors in Kisangani reported that fishing policies

do exist to maintain enough stock, but that the challenge is implementing them. There is a lack of funds to hire surveillance officers, which makes it difficult to monitor the fishing industry. Some fishermen use mosquito nets to fish, which are inadequate and degrade the aquatic environment. It is important, therefore, for fishermen to learn other methods of fishing that are more sustainable. Overall, the artisanal fishermen in Kisangani are facing a number of challenges, including low yields, unsustainable fishing practices, and a lack of government support.

The government needs to take action to address these challenges and ensure that the Congo River's fishing

resources are used sustainably. **The government might consider the following actions to support artisanal fishermen:** providing fishermen with training on sustainable fishing practices, investing in infrastructure and equipment to improve the efficiency of the fishing industry, enforcing fishing regulations more effectively and supporting the development of alternative livelihoods for fishermen. By taking these steps, the government can help to ensure that the Congo River's fishing resources are used sustainably for the benefit of both the fishermen and the local population.

Source: Amwanga, 2022



Forest products

The DRC hosts 60% of the second largest tropical rainforest in the world and more than 40 million people depend on this forest for their livelihoods, thus making it critically important in terms of the survival of these populations (Butler, 2020; Rainforest Foundation UK, 2018). **Approximately 26% of the country's forest is under protected status** while 14,7% is attributed to logging concessions (NSCF, 2018). The **most prominent activities in the forest sector include logging and the collection of non-timber forest products (NTFPs).** **The forest sector contributes to the country's economy in various ways:** it provides a large number of direct and indirect jobs, provides and redistributes wealth along the value chains and also provides many ecosystem goods and services that contribute to the regularisation of many vital functions for the entire planet.

The majority of DRC's rural population depends on the forest in their daily lives (Mendako et al., 2022). They derive most of their **protein, medicines, energy, and income from**

the forest (Pandey et al., 2016). These products and services provide employment opportunities and generate income through various informal sectors (Lippe et al., 2022). Of note, **wood fuel revenues, especially charcoal, contribute substantially to household income** (Ibid.). This contribution ranges from 12% for fuelwood producers around Kisangani to 75% for charcoal producers around Kinshasa, which helps in poverty reduction (Schure et al., 2010; Dubiez et al., 2021). A study by Mendako et al. (2022) showed that forest income contributed to the livelihoods of **rural households in the Rubi-Tele Hunting Domain where their average annual value per household was estimated at CDF 1.21 million (approx. USD 659), contributing 32.46% to the total annual income** (see Text box 16).

The forestry sector in the DRC creates employment and provides goods such as timber, fuelwood and non-timber forest products, as well as services including carbon sequestration and climate regulation for local communities (UNEP/GEF, 2021). Formal wood production has never exceeded 400,000 m³ and has stagnated for several years between

200,000 and 300,000 m³, representing only a small share of regional production (Eba'a Atyi et al., 2022). In 2010, formal wood production (industrial and artisanal) contributed approx. 0.37% to GDP (USD 80 million), of which 0.33% and 0.04% came from industrial concessions and artisanal permits, respectively (Lee, 2015). In contrast, informal wood production, including wood fuel, accounted for the vast majority of the sector's value, estimated at USD 1.68 billion or 95.5% of total output (Ibid.). Most actors therefore operate in an informal space, driven by legal shortcomings and widespread irregularities in the issuing of permits (Lescuyer et al., 2014). The structure of this informal sector, particularly the role of small-scale chainsaw milling and its importance in domestic timber supply, is further detailed in Text box 17 on small-scale chainsaw milling and Text box 18 on domestic timber use and urban wood markets. A forest code was adopted through Law No. 11/2002 to promote sustainable resource management and increase the contribution of forests to the country's economic, social and cultural development (Embassy of the Democratic Republic of Congo, undated).



Text box 16

The contribution of forest products to rural households in the Rubi-Tele Hunting Domain

Income from forest-based activities was found to be crucial for rural households in the Rubi-Tele Hunting Domain (RTHD), as shown in Table 12. Bushmeat, firewood, construction materials, fruits, mushrooms, and *amarenthaceae* (amaranth or pigweed) leaves constituted the main forest products extracted by these households. Bushmeat generated CDF 1.34 million (approx. USD 724) as average annual income, and its share to total forest income was 46.26%. CDF 333,000 (approx. USD 179) was the average annual income per household generated from firewood extraction, contributing 22.03% to total

income from forest products. Construction materials, fruits, mushrooms, and *marenthaceae* leaves income shares to total forest income were 26.98%, 0.65%, 2.68%, and 1.4%, respectively. This importance to household incomes highlights the great importance of implementing sustainable forest management policies and strategies that can balance the needs of conservation and development of rural households living around protected areas in the DRC.

Source: Mendako et al., 2022

Table 12: Average annual household income from forest products

Income components	Households involved (%)	Average annual income (CDF)	Average annual income (USD)
Bushmeat	42.11	1,340,312	532.93
Firewood	80.70	333,000	132.41
Construction materials	51.75	635,938	252.86
Fruits	6.14	129,942	51.67
Mushrooms	16.67	196,421	78.10
Marenthaceae leaves	10.53	161,790	64.33

Source: Mendako et al., 2022



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Text box 17

Domestic timber supply from small-scale chainsaw milling

Small-scale chainsaw milling has expanded in the Democratic Republic of Congo over the past two decades, largely in response to growing urban demand for affordable timber and the limited reach of the industrial sector. It is carried out by individual operators who fell and process trees directly in the forest using chainsaws, supplying domestic markets and, to a lesser extent, neighbouring countries. The activity is mostly informal, shaped by gaps and inconsistencies in the legal framework rather than clear non-compliance.

By the early 2010s, the sector had become the main source of timber supply in the country. Annual production was estimated at over 1 million m³ of sawnwood, equivalent to approx. 3.4 million m³ of roundwood, far exceeding industrial output. Most of this production (approx. 85%) was consumed domestically, with a smaller share traded across borders. This shows its central role in supplying urban construction markets, particularly in cities such as Kinshasa and Kisangani.

The sector is also a major source of employment and income. It supports at least 25,000 direct jobs across rural production sites and urban markets. Domestic timber markets generate more than USD 100 million in annual sales, with net revenues estimated at over USD 100 million. A substantial share of this value remains in rural areas through wages, tree sales and local agreements, although only a limited portion is captured by the state due to the largely informal nature of the sector.

Key challenges include unclear and sometimes conflicting regulations, high costs and practical barriers to obtaining permits, and weak enforcement. These conditions encourage informal practices and limit the sector's contribution to public revenue. At the same time, operators face constraints linked to access to finance, equipment and market information.

Addressing these constraints requires interventions that recognise the diversity of production strategies within the sector rather than applying uniform regulatory solutions. Two measures appear particularly important. First, formal chainsaw milling permits need to be made more accessible by reducing their cost and simplifying procedures, as current requirements remain beyond the reach of most operators and reinforce informality. Second, the range of timber species traded on domestic markets should be broadened. At present, production is concentrated on a small number of high-value species, which increases pressure on these resources and limits market flexibility. Expanding the range of species could reduce pressure on preferred trees while improving supply and market stability.

Sources: Lescuyer et al., 2014; Lescuyer et al., 2026



Text box 18

Domestic timber use and urban wood markets

The timber sector in the Democratic Republic of Congo is largely oriented towards domestic consumption. High demand for wood energy and the limited reach of the formal industrial sector mean that most production circulates within national markets, supplying households, construction and small-scale processing activities. The majority of timber is used as wood fuel, estimated at approx. 28 million m³ or 84% of total consumption, while sawnwood accounts for a smaller but still significant share (4.8 million m³, or 18%) (Lee et al., 2015). In contrast, formal exports remain negligible, representing less than 1% of total production.

Small-scale chainsaw milling provides most of the timber used in these markets. Production is estimated at over 1 million m³ of sawnwood per year (approx. 3.4 million m³ in roundwood equivalent), far exceeding output from the formal sector (Lescuyer et al., 2014). Kinshasa is the largest market, with annual consumption of nearly 175,000 m³ of chainsaw timber, including a substantial share derived from industrial waste. Timber trade in urban markets is concentrated on a limited number of high-value species, notably sapelli (*Entandrophragma cylindricum*), sipo (*Entandrophragma utile*), wengé (*Millettia laurentii*), afrormosia (*Pericopsis elata*) and iroko (*Milicia excelsa*) (Nyengue, 2014). These markets also provide employment, with more than 2,600 permanent and approx. 3,900 temporary jobs in Kinshasa, and additional jobs in Kisangani, although these figures do not capture employment along the wider value chain.

Source: Cerbu, 2016

Woodfuel and charcoal

The need for charcoal is of great importance in the DRC. In both rural and urban areas, the use of charcoal and firewood as cooking fuel is a very common practice in households and the demand is particularly high in cities (Dubiez et al., 2021). **The high demand for woodfuel and charcoal in the country has resulted in deforestation** and poor forest condition in the country (Behrendt et al., 2013), but it provides a large amount of employment, given the value chain of production and commercialisation (producers, traders, transporters, etc.) (Schure et al., 2014).

Studies on the production, consumption and energy efficiency of wood energy carried out for Kinshasa, Lubumbashi and Bukavu confirmed **the predominance of charcoal (96.7%)** for energy use in the DRC and a low usage of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Goma and Bukavu (on average 1%) but slightly more in Goma (7%) (CAFI, undated). The wood-energy sector (charcoal and firewood) generates **a total added value of USD 300 million (approx. 90% of this value came from charcoal production) in Kinshasa, USD 50.6 million in Lubumbashi, USD 26.5 million in Goma and USD 16.5 million in Bukavu** (Dubiez et al., 2020, 2021; Imani et al., 2021; Péroches et al., 2021). More detail on the charcoal sector in Bukavu can be found in Text box 19. These studies also showed that the **wood-energy sector provided employment to approx. 690,000 people in Kinshasa (charcoal production contributed approx. 87% to the employment) and 186,000 people in Lubumbashi (approx. 96% of the employment was from the charcoal production)** (Dubiez et al., 2020; Péroches et al., 2021).

In the city of Goma, the average daily consumption of woodfuel per person amounted to 0.43 kg of charcoal and 0.02 kg of wood, i.e., 3.50 kg of wood equivalent (Dubiez et al., 2021). In Goma, total wood energy demand is estimated at around 1.53 million tonnes of wood equivalent per year for a population of approx. one million, including 186,000 tonnes of charcoal and 32,000 tonnes of firewood (Ibid.). In Kinshasa, a person consumes an average of 0.346 kg of charcoal and 0.016 kg of firewood per day (Dubiez et al., 2020). At city level, this varies from 9.84 to 13.39 million tonnes of wood equivalent, per year according to population estimates (Ibid.). Moreover, in the city

of Lubumbashi, the average daily individual consumption was estimated at 0.466 kg of charcoal, i.e. an average consumption of 3.73 kg of firewood equivalent per day (Péroches et al., 2021). The city's overall consumption is estimated at 2.87 million tonnes of wood equivalent annually (Ibid.). Overall, rural and urban populations use a large quantity of charcoal and woodfuel which, amongst other things, leads to health risks related to the carbon monoxide released by the smoke, deaths caused by indoor pollution, as well as deforestation (Behrendt et al., 2013; Interactive Country Fiches, undated b).

Non-Timber Forest Products

The importance of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and their contribution to food security and poverty reduction are generally underestimated because most of them do not appear in national economic statistics (FAO, 2010). Fruits, flowers, seeds, and fibres constitute the main NTFPs of the DRC (Mapeki-peki, 2025). They are used for food, medicine, and various technical uses (tools, constructions, heating, etc.) and also contribute to improving community incomes (Ibid.). Almost all animal species are locally traded mainly for local consumption, including protected species such as African forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*), gorilla (*Gorilla beringei* and *Gorilla gorilla*), bonobo (*Pan paniscus*) and chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*), pangolin (*Phataginus tricuspis*) and grey parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*) which go into illegal international trade (IFAW, 2024). **Approximately 50% of the Congolese population remain dependent on NTFPs in their daily lives** (OFAC, 2023). NTFPs supplement income activities and require relatively little investment of time and/or effort (Ibid.).

Gnetum spp. (Fumbwa)

***Gnetum* spp are climbing vines found across West and Central Africa, mostly in fallows and secondary forests, whose leaves are used as a protein-rich vegetable and as medicine** (Manirakiza et al., 2009). Commonly called *fumbwa* in the DRC, it is popular in Kinshasa, being available throughout the year and therefore important for food security (Ibid.). The leaves are used in herbal medicine and as food, very rich in protein. This makes them important in terms of the food security of rural and urban households (Ingram et al., 2012). **The collection of *Gnetum* spp is a thriving business in Kinshasa producing approx. USD 1.2 million each year,**



Text box 19

Charcoal sector in Bukavu city

The charcoal sector in Bukavu is a major contributor to the local economy. Approximately 97% of households in Bukavu use charcoal regularly for cooking. The average daily consumption of woodfuel by an inhabitant of Bukavu is 0.31 kg of charcoal and 0.05 kg of wood. This means that the annual domestic consumption of wood-energy in Bukavu is 0.917 million tonnes of wood equivalent. To meet this demand, the charcoal sector in Bukavu involves a number of actors, including producers, traders, and transporters. Fifty seven percent of charcoal comes from forests and 41% from plantations, mainly eucalyptus. Activities related to **the charcoal sector generate a total value added (TVA) of approx. USD 16.5 million** annually. This sector is unbalanced with a distribution of the TVA of 66% for producers and 32% for traders. It **involves approx. 27,600 producers, 5,600 traders (retailers and wholesalers) and 1,200 transporters via road and lake**. State services intervene in the sector via formal and informal taxes which represent USD 0.7 million annually.

Charcoal producers market their charcoal either locally or in the market of another village. Charcoal producers in Bukavu are still using the technique of traditional circular or buried millstones. Most producers (69%) buy the resource to produce charcoal either by buying trees or by renting land. Producers' **annual income varies from USD 100 to USD 1,400** depending on the origin of the wood (plantation or forest) and the place of sale. Wholesalers have higher annual incomes than producers because the volumes marketed are much larger. **Wholesalers and semi-wholesalers/retailers have annual revenues of approx. USD 3,150/year and USD 300/year respectively.**

Sources: Imani et al., 2021; Krieger et al., 2021

with a dish of *fumbwa* costing on average USD 0.76 (Bakkegaard et al., 2016). In 2010, approx. 1,744 people were directly involved in harvesting 200 tonnes each year in the provinces of Bandundu, Mbandaka and Equateur (Ibid.). *Fumbwa* is recognised as the staple food for the majority of households in the DRC. However, given the importance and especially the mode of collection, increasing pressure is being exerted on the species with probable ongoing decline of its natural population (Ingram et al., 2012). Deforestation resulting from agricultural practices and logging would also contribute to the decline in the natural stock of *Gnetum spp.* (Ibid.). **Improved harvesting and domestication techniques are therefore required to ensure the sustainability of this NTFP.**

Edible mushrooms

Edible mushrooms are fleshy fruit bodies of macro-fungi foods found in many societies and provide an important source of income and healthy food with good nutritional value in many regions of the DRC (Mondo, 2024). **In the DRC, because of their nutritional and market value, mushrooms are one of the priority NTFPs** (Moïse & Michel, 2021). During the lean season, they are considered substitute foods for meat and fish (Briki & Mbumba, 2021). They only appear seasonally in the wild, most often at the start of the rainy seasons. In the DRC, there are **approx. 377 edible mushroom species** and the highly consumed species belong to the genera *Auricularia*, *Termitomyces*, *Plerottes*, *Liken*, *Cantharellus*, *Amanita*, *Lactarius*, *Schizophyllum*, *Lentinus*, *Pleurotus* and *Russula* (Mjaika, 2022). **A study conducted in the open forests of Katanga reported an annual harvest of 50 kg of mushrooms** (Moïse & Michel, 2021). These same authors estimated the individual annual consumption at 30 kg. In addition, as highlighted in Text box 20, many mushrooms in the DRC are also used in medicines, for recreational purposes as well as for beliefs and myths (Milenge Kamalebo et al., 2018). Another study conducted by Habineza Mpunga et al. (2025) revealed that three types of mushroom are largely consumed in North Kivu including wild edible mushrooms, cultivated mushrooms (*Pleurotus spp.*) and mushrooms packaged in tins. They further found that a collector gathers an average of 78 kg of wild mushrooms from March to May and approx. 130 kg from September to January in Virunga National Park and its surrounding areas. This shows that **September to January, which is the long rainy season**



Text box 20

Traditional knowledge about wild mushrooms in Tshopo Province

The people from Tshopo Province in the DRC use 73 species of wild mushrooms either for food (68 species), as medicine (nine species), in a recreational context (two species), related to myths and beliefs (seven species). **Women are more involved in harvesting** and possess very high knowledge on edible taxa as well as their wider cultural significance. **The knowledge of useful mushrooms differs between ethnic groups.** The Ngando people in Tshopo Province have the highest ethnomycological expertise, which is expressed in their extensive cultural and practical use of mushrooms. *Pleurotus tuber-regium* is the

most important species in Tshopo Province as it is being used for food, as a medicine, and for many other purposes. *Daldinia eschscholtzii* is the most important for medicinal applications, while *Schizophyllum commune*, *Auricularia cornea*, *A. delicata*, *Marasmius buzungolo*, and *Lentinus squarrosulus* are mostly appreciated for food. The older generations in Tshopo Province have more knowledge on how to handle more species and are skilled with medicinal and mythical uses of mushrooms.

Source: Kamalebo et al., 2018

period, is the peak period for wild mushroom collection. In these areas, collectors sell 1 kg of wild edible mushrooms at USD 2, farmers sell 1 kg of cultivated mushroom at USD 3 and retailers from urban areas sell 1 kg wild mushroom at USD 5, which is the same price for cultivated mushrooms (Mpunga et al., 2025).

Wild edible insects

Edible insects have gained popularity in Africa as alternative food resources (Musundire et al., 2021). Among the positive attributes that make edible insects suitable as food and feed substrates include rapid reproduction, high energy conversion efficiency, wide distribution, diversity, and possibility to reduce waste and high nutritional composition (Ibid.). Edible insects are an important but not exclusive source of food nutrients for rural communities in the DRC (FAO, 2015). In the DRC, wild insects have been a part of the diets of many ethnic groups for a long time (Bakondongama et al., 2016; Bocquet et al., 2020). An inventory study by Nsevolo (2023) showed that **148 species of insects are consumed in the DRC** dominated by the orders of *Lepidoptera* (60.1%), *Orthoptera* (10.1%), *Coleoptera* (8.1%) and *Hymenoptera* (8.1%). However, **the most edible insects**

consumed in DRC are caterpillars (See Text box 21), with approx. 28 species of caterpillars consumed in the country (Bomolo et al., 2019). **Most insect species consumed in the DRC are not farmed but mainly collected from different natural habitats** (forest, savanna or farmland) in their respective ecological zones (Latham, 2021; Nsevolo et al., 2023). Daily yields vary significantly according to years, seasons, insect species and host trees (Ibid.). It has been reported for example, an average of 9.1 kg/year/tree of pallid emperor moth (*C. forda*) harvested on 'Tali' (*Erythrophleum suaveolens*) or up to 11.3 kg/tree/year of caterpillar (*I. oyemensis*) harvested on 'Sapelli' (*Entandrophragma cylindricum*) (Muvatsi et al., 2021).

Collection techniques mainly vary according to insect species and their behaviour (lonely, clumped species, scrolling or flying), as well as their host plant (tree, shrub or grass) or substrate types (Ibid.). They remain mostly traditional; **children and women being the key actors** (Latham, 2021). Most of the edible insect species are processed prior to selling, although some of them (e.g., African pan weevil (*R. phoenicis*) and tobacco cricket (*B. membranaceus*), are mostly sold alive. The techniques of processing are mostly traditional



Text box 21

Caterpillars' consumption in DRC

In the DRC, **the consumption of caterpillars is estimated to be 40% of total animal protein consumed.** The annual production of dried caterpillars in the Kwango district of the DRC is estimated at 300 tonnes per year. The DRC exports approx. 3 - 5 tonnes of dried caterpillars per year to the African diaspora, such as France and Belgium costing approx. USD 106,000. **The sale of these caterpillars provides an average monthly profit of USD 805.36 to wholesalers.** In many families, the collection and resale of caterpillars helps to finance the schooling and health costs of household members. These activities are estimated to provide an incentive of USD 25 per month in Equateur Province in the DRC. During the period of July to September 2015, the Liranga market received approx. 250 bags of 55 kg, or 14 tonnes, of dried caterpillars and the Makotimpoko market received an average of 200 bags of 55 kg, or 11 tonnes, per month. In early July 2015, a 55 kg bag of dried caterpillars was sold for USD 288, or USD 5.24 per kg, in Liranga and Makotimpoko. The price dropped to USD 270, or USD 4.9 per kg, during the period of abundance of the product on

the market. The price then rises again during the period of scarcity, reaching USD 324, or USD 5.89 per kg. Women participate more as retailers than wholesalers in the trade of *Imbrasia truncata* in the Liranga and Makotimpoko markets. *Elaphrodes lactea* Gaede locally known as (*Tunkubiu*) is a highly commended edible caterpillar in the Miombo forest where both caterpillars and pupae of this species are consumed in the DRC. In Lubumbashi the trade of *Elaphrodes lactea* Gaede is mainly informal, with the average price/kg varying between USD 2.32 (during in-season) and USD 5.24 (during off-season). During the peak season of caterpillar production in Lubumbashi, the harvester's average income per day varies between USD 1.6 and USD 3.0 whereas it varies between USD 2.2 and USD 5.2 during the pupal season. **The development of sustainable caterpillar harvesting models through community participation** is an important aspect to ensure conservation of the ecosystem and to reduce pressure on the forest where the caterpillars are harvested.

Sources: Bomolo et al., 2019; Latham, 2021; Mabossy-Mobouna et al., 2022



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and might involve boiling, smoking, roasting, frying or simply sun-drying. **In Kinshasa, 80% of its population consume at least one edible insect species five days per month, with an estimated 9,600 tonnes of caterpillars sold each year** (Nsevolo et al., 2023). Thereby, the incomes generated by this activity contribute to women empowerment and to the well-being of households (Nsevolo, 2016) and wild edible insects play an important role in the wildlife economy in DRC.

Honey

Honey is one of the most important non-timber forest products consumed in the DRC. It is used as food due to its rich nutritional values and as medicine to heal some diseases such as stomach ulcers, coughs, eye-related diseases

and burns (Awono et al., 2008). Two methods of producing honey are practiced in DRC, including wild honey (forest and savannah honey) and beekeeping honey (Ibid.). Honey is mostly produced in regions close to the Congo-Basin rainforest, such as Bas Congo and plateau Bateke. In these two regions, 78% of honey produced comes from beekeeping activities, while the remaining 22% is gathered from wild colonies in forests (Awono et al., 2008). On average, a beekeeper has seven hives producing 10 litres and eight litres harvested from wild hives (Ibid.). Annual honey production was estimated at 5,135 litres, of which 3,752 litres were harvested from artificial bee hives while 1,382 litres were harvested from wild or forest hives (Awono et al., 2008). Beekeeping is a growing sector in DRC, with many NGOs providing beekeeping training to thousands

of Congolese. For instance, there are 2,000 beekeepers trained in North Kivu province, owning approx. 23,000 hives. These beekeepers produced approx. 89 tonnes of honey in 2023 (Radio Okapi, 2024). Honey production is an important source of livelihood in many rural households (Gyau et al., 2014). See Text box 22 for detailed information about the economic impact of honey production in different regions of DRC.



Text box 22

Honey production in DRC and its socio-economic importance

The export price of natural honey from the DRC has seen a steady increase between 2018 and 2025. In 2018, the export price per kilogram was USD 2.45, which increased to USD 2.60 in 2019. In 2020, the price rose to USD 2.75, and in 2021 it further increased to USD 2.90 per kilogram. The most recent data shows that the export price per kilogram of natural honey from the DRC was USD 3.05 in 2022. This represents an increase of 24.5% from 2018 to 2022. Based on this trend, it has been projected that the likely export price per kilogram of natural honey from the DRC would be approx. USD 3.20 in 2023 and USD 3.35 per kilogram in 2024. In 2025, the retail price range for natural honey

was between USD 34 to USD 78 per kilogram. The honey producers in the Batéké plateau (Bandundu Province) zones in the DRC operate on a small scale, with about 60 producers, mainly individuals, with an average of seven hives per person. Total annual production is approx. 500 litres, 83% of which are sold in local towns at an average of USD 2.6 per litre, the price depends mainly on the place and the person. Consumers use honey as medicine (65%) and food (35%). Processing and the use of secondary products are virtually non-existent in these regions. In the Kinshasa honey market in 2007, the income generated by wholesalers was estimated at USD 237,000 and that by retailers at almost

USD 67,000. **The average annual income of individual producers in 2007 was estimated at USD 3,500.** As the global demand for honey continues to grow, the DRC is well-positioned to capitalise on this opportunity and enhance its position as a leading exporter. **By investing in capacity building, promoting sustainable beekeeping practices, and expanding access to markets, the DRC can empower its honey producers to increase their incomes and contribute significantly to the country's economic development.**

Sources: Wamucii, 2025; Ingram et al., 2017

Bushmeat

In the African tropical rainforest, where there is a deficit of livestock, bushmeat has long served as a vital source of protein and of household income (Yasuoka, 2014). **Bushmeat is an integral part of the diet of rural and urban populations in DRC, where it contributes to food and nutritional security** (Ibid.). Bushmeat represents one of the largest informal economies in the country and is mostly traded domestically, flowing from rural areas to towns. Communities largely depend on bushmeat for socio-cultural, economic and nutritional needs (Trefon, 2023). Communities consume bushmeat due their cultural beliefs as they have some symbolic importance as shown in Table 13, and nutritional value. The cultural, medicinal and commercial importance of bushmeat is illustrated by the utilisation of pangolins in DRC (See Text box 23), where the species is consumed and used in traditional medicine despite being protected (Malimbo et al., 2020; Swiacká et al., 2022). Bushmeat also supports local livelihoods and informal economies, as shown by the hunting and trade networks documented in Yangambi (see Text box 24), where hundreds of people are involved in the bushmeat value chain through hunting, brokering, processing and trade (Van Vliet et al., 2019).

Unfortunately, some of the animal species hunted for meat by local communities are already threatened or endangered. Van Vliet et al (2012) found that meat and carcasses of two near threatened species, okapi (*Okapia johnstoni*) and leopard (*Panthera pardus*) and One Endangered species, bonobo (*Pan paniscus*), were being sold in local markets in Kisangani in 2008-2009.

In Kinshasa, there are approx. 700 bushmeat sale points per 100,000 inhabitants, including markets, cold storage facilities, restaurants, street stalls and butcheries (Fa et al., 2019). **Annual bushmeat consumption is estimated at 100,000 tonnes in Kinshasa and 10,000 tonnes in Kisangani** (Valimahamed et al., 2017). Since these two cities together account for 45.5% of the DRC's urban areas, total urban bushmeat sales are estimated at 183,400 tonnes per year (Ibid.). This represents slightly less than half of the volume sold by hunters in rural areas, as most rural bushmeat is consumed locally by rural households or residents of small towns (Valimahamed et al., 2017). At the national level, **approx. 1 million tonnes of bushmeat is consumed annually across the DRC** (WWF, 2026), with the sector **generating gross revenues of approx. USD 1 billion per year** (Valimahamed et

al., 2017). Given that much of the trade takes place through informal and largely unreported channels, these figures should be regarded as indicative rather than precise. Nevertheless, they illustrate the substantial economic role of bushmeat in the DRC, while also drawing attention to the challenges of regulating the sector and ensuring the long-term sustainability of wildlife resources, biodiversity, and food security. However, once broader costs are factored in, net economic returns become negative. These estimates are summarised in Table 14.

Mbandaka, a major forest-encircled city in the DRC, serves as a key trading hub for bushmeat sourced from its surrounding rural areas. The Congo River enables transport by boat to Kinshasa, where the meat is then distributed to urban markets, with the prices increasing significantly along the way (Trefon, 2023). Table 15, indicates different bushmeat prices from Mbandaka to Kinshasa in 2020.

Table 13: Symbolic importance of bushmeat in different DRC cultures

Animal	Usage	Characteristics
Blue duiker (<i>philantomba monticola</i>), baboon (<i>papio</i>), chimpanzee (<i>pan troglodytes</i>), monkey (<i>cercopithecidae</i>), frog (<i>anura</i>), lion (<i>panthera leo</i>), elephant (<i>Loxodonta</i>), hippopotamus (<i>Hippopotamus amphibious</i>), hyrax (<i>Hyracoidea</i>), red-river hog (<i>Potamochoerus porcus</i>), bosman's potto (<i>perodicticus potto</i>).	As food recommended for pregnant women and for bathing new-borns with their bones	Gives physical agility and strength
Monkey (<i>Cercopithecidae</i>), blue duiker (<i>Philantomba monticola</i>)	Eating their brains	Gives children intelligence and agility
Turtle (<i>testudines</i>)	String made from skin	Contraceptive
Bat (<i>chiroptera</i>)	Eating its liver offers relief	Polyuria (excessive urine production)
Python (<i>python sebae</i>)	Eating the python flesh	Invulnerability to snake bites
Pangolin (<i>Pholidota spp</i>)	Inhaling the powder of dried pangolin scales	Reduces miscarriage risks

Source: Trefon, 2023, pp. 106-110

Table 14: Financial and economic assessment of the bushmeat sector

Estimates of gross financial income (USD million)	
Gross financial profit -rural	393.2
Gross financial profit - urban	550.9
Gross financial profit export	-
Gross financial profit - total	944.1
Estimates of net financial income (USD million)	
Net rural financial benefit	170.1
Net urban financial benefit	203.5
Net export financial profit	-
Net total financial profit	373.6
Estimates of gross and net economic income (USD)	
Gross economic profit	1 billion
Net economic profit	-85.7 million

Source: Valimahamed et al., 2017

Table 15: Approximate bushmeat prices from Mbandaka to Kinshasa in 2020

Species	Mbandaka price (USD)	Kinshasa price (USD) (Libongo port)	Kinshasa price (USD) (urban market)
Monkey (whole, smoked)	5	12.5	17.5
Turtle (live)	4	12.5	20
Bush pig (smoked, sold in parts)	50	75	110
Small duiker (whole, smoked)	5	12.5	17.5
Buffalo (smoked, sold in parts)	110	150	250
Dwarf crocodile (live)	25	42.5	60

Source: Trefon, 2023, p. 122.



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Text box 23

Pangolins (*Pholidota spp.*), species overutilised by communities in the DRC

The utilisation and commercial importance of pangolins has increased in recent years (Ingram et al., 2019). According to the IUCN, they constitute one of the most threatened groups of mammals in the world with eight extant species, including four in Africa and four in Asia (IUCN, 2019). The DRC has a fairly rich biological diversity with three species of pangolin. In general, **overutilisation of pangolin scales and meat is the main threat to the survival of the species** (Heinrich et al., 2017). In the DRC as in many countries of the world, the pangolin is protected. A study conducted

in 2020 revealed that the local populations of the Tayna Nature Reserve (RNT) in North Kivu utilise the pangolin in various forms, in particular through the trade in species or parts, the consumption of bushmeat and for medical use. In this study, more than 50% of the people surveyed eat pangolin for three main reasons: preference (44%), habit (33%) and health care (19%). This meat is obtained mainly by hunting and sometimes through purchasing it. In addition, the scales of the pangolin, as well as some of its other parts, are widely used in traditional medicine for

the treatment of various health concerns. In 2022, another baseline study from Odzala-Kokoua National Park showed, apart from consumption, there were 22 medicinal uses for pangolins and the taste of meat was the main preference (71.3%) of respondents (Swiacká et al., 2022).

Sources: Malimbo et al., 2020; Swiacká et al., 2022



Text box 24

Bushmeat hunting in Yangambi

A total of 845 people in Yangambi town were found to be involved in the bushmeat hunting and trade value chain. Three main categories of actors were found to be actively involved in bushmeat hunting, i.e. hunters, brokers, and traders. Approximately 253 traders and brokers (153 women and 100 men), 539 hunters and 53 women, who participate in hunting trips with their husbands as their primary activity. The volume of smoked bushmeat varied from 2,150 to 3,036 kg/week with an approximated range of 103 to 145 tonnes per year.

Bushmeat hunting occurred throughout the year with peaks in August, September, and December. Approximately 34 species were hunted in Yangambi, the most traded species were small monkeys and red duiker (*Cephalophus spp*), blue duiker (*Philantomba monticola*), bush pig (*Potamochoerus porcus*), and bushy-tailed porcupine (*Atherurus africanus*) (see Table 16). Most bushmeat was smoked and sold. Traders sold an average of 10 kg of bushmeat per week, with a profit margin of approx. USD 0.99 per kg. Thus, **the weekly profit that the traders made was equivalent to USD 7.3 per week, or USD 29.3 per month**. Female-headed households are involved in the bushmeat trade due to the relatively low investment required compared to other businesses. For hunters, income varied depending on skill but could range between USD 15 to 20 a week for a net profit of approx. USD 40 per month and approx. USD 400 annually. Commercial hunters sold 80% of their meat. The most profitable months were October to December, during the rainy season, and the least profitable were January to March, during the dry season.

Source: Van Vliet et al., 2019

Table 16: Species hunted and traded as bushmeat in Yangambi

Order	Family	Scientific name	Local name in Turumbo	English name
<i>Afrsoricida</i>	<i>Tanricidae</i>	<i>Potamogale velox</i>	<i>Bowengele</i>	Giant otter shrew
<i>Artiodactyla</i>	<i>Bovidae</i>	<i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i>	<i>Kenge</i>	Bushbuck
		<i>Tragelaphus spekii</i>	<i>Mbulimasuwa</i>	Marshbuck
		<i>Cephalophus nigrifrons</i>	<i>Mbengela</i>	Black-fronted duiker
		<i>Cephalophus callipygus</i>	<i>Koto</i>	Peters’ duiker
		<i>Cephalophus dorsalis</i>	<i>Koto</i>	Bay duiker
	<i>Giraffidae</i>	<i>Okapia johnstoni</i>	<i>Okapi</i>	Forest giraffe, Congolese giraffe, or zebra giraffe
	<i>Suidae</i>	<i>Potamochoerus porcus</i>	<i>Ngulu</i>	Red river hog
	<i>Tragulidae</i>	<i>Hyemoschus aquaticus</i>	<i>Elebe, Bolafi</i>	Water chevrotain
<i>Carnivora</i>	<i>Felidae</i>	<i>Panthera pardus</i>	<i>Nkoy</i>	Leopard
	<i>Herpestidae</i>	<i>Crossarchus alexandri</i>	<i>Liende</i>	Alexander’s Cusimanse
	<i>Mustelidae</i>	<i>Aonyx capensis</i>	<i>Bohoso</i>	African clawless otter
	<i>Viverridae</i>	<i>Genetta servalina</i>	<i>Isisimba</i>	Servaline Genet
		<i>Genetta victoriae)</i>	<i>Bolende</i>	Giant forest genet
		<i>Civettictis civetta</i>	<i>Libobi (Limbuta)</i>	African civet
		<i>Nandinia binotata</i>	<i>Alela</i>	African palm civet or two-spotted palm civet
	<i>Cetartiodactyla</i>	<i>Bovidae</i>	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>	<i>Nzayi</i>
<i>Philantomba monticola</i>			<i>Mboloko</i>	Blue duiker
<i>Hyracoidea</i>	<i>Procaviidae</i>	<i>Dendrohyrax sp</i>	<i>Eloka</i>	Tree hyrax or tree dassie
<i>Macroscelidea</i>	<i>Macroscelididae</i>	<i>Rhynchcyon cirnei</i>	<i>Ifini</i>	Checkered elephant shrew or checkered sengi
<i>Pholidota</i>	<i>Manidae</i>	<i>Smutsia gigantea</i>	<i>Liha</i>	Giant pangolin
<i>Primates</i>	<i>Cercopithecidae</i> <i>Piliocolobus badius</i> (Kerr, 1792) <i>Ekota</i>	<i>Piliocolobus badius</i>	<i>Ekota</i>	Red colobus
		<i>Papio anubis</i>	<i>Abula</i>	Olive baboon or Anubis baboon
		<i>Cercopithecus Ascianus</i>	<i>Kidekide</i>	Red-tailed monkey
		<i>Cercopithecus neglectus</i>	<i>Funga</i>	De Brazza’s Monkey
		<i>Cercopithecus wolfi</i>	<i>Bongande</i>	Wolf’s mona monkey
		<i>Cercopithecus hamlyni</i>	<i>Kputuko</i>	Hamlyn’s monkey or the owl-faced monkey
	<i>Hominidae</i>	<i>Pan troglodytes)</i>	<i>Mukomboso</i>	Chimpanzee
	<i>Lorisidae</i>	<i>Perodicticus potto</i>	<i>Efombe</i>	Bush bear or tree bear
<i>Proboscidea</i>	<i>Elephantidae</i>	<i>Loxodota africana</i>	<i>Nzoku</i>	African Elephant
<i>Rodentia</i>	<i>Hystricidae</i>	<i>Atherurus africanus</i>	<i>Nziko</i>	African brush-tailed porcupine
	<i>Nesomydae</i>	<i>Cricetomys emini</i>	<i>Lotomba</i>	Giant pouched rat
	<i>Sciuridae</i>	<i>Protoxerus strangeri)</i>	<i>Bokoma</i>	Forest Giant Squirrel
	<i>Thryomyidae</i>	<i>Thrynomys swinderianus</i>	<i>Simbiliki</i>	Greater cane rat
<i>Tubulidentata</i>	<i>Orycteropidae</i>	<i>Orycteropus afer</i>	<i>Tumba, Libongo</i>	The aardvark or antbear

Overall, the DRC's forest sector plays a significant role in the country's economy, providing employment, goods, and services to communities. Formal wood production accounts for a small portion of the sector's value, while informal production, including wood fuels, contributes significantly. The demand for woodfuels, particularly charcoal, is high and has led to deforestation. However, the sector also generates substantial income for rural households, particularly through the production and sale of charcoal. Balancing the need for conservation with the development needs of communities living around protected areas is crucial for the sustainable management of the DRC's forests.



Carbon market

Forests play a critical role in global efforts to combat climate change, as reducing deforestation can significantly lower greenhouse gas emissions (IPCC, 2019). The DRC holds the largest and best-conserved forests in the Congo Basin, with a national forest carbon storage potential evaluated at 1,326 megatonnes (Mt) of CO₂ equivalent in 2019 (Kengoum et al., 2020). However, **the country experienced an annual deforestation rate of between 0.2% and 0.3% from 2000 to 2015** (Ibid.). This loss is reflected in national emissions trends: between 2000 and 2018, forestry and other land use accounted for nearly 86% of greenhouse gas emissions, followed by waste (11%), energy (0.86%) and agriculture (0.61%), with the forestry and other land use and energy sectors being the two largest sources of carbon dioxide and methane emissions (USAID, 2023).

Given this profile, **the DRC is a strong candidate for international climate initiatives** such as the mechanism for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), which promotes sustainable forest management in developing countries. The DRC has progressively built a national framework to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in line with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (MENCT, 2009). Since 2009, it has participated in REDD+ through a national strategy aiming to stabilise forest cover at 63.5% of the national territory by 2030, reduce forest emissions by 56% over the 2013–2030 period, and simultaneously increase GDP and reduce poverty



Text box 25

The Mai N'dombe REDD+ Project

The Mai N'dombe REDD+ project was established in 2011 with the aim **to reduce approx. 1,000 metric tonnes of CO₂ emissions over 30 years**. It is one of the ongoing projects in DRC (see Table 17). The project is **currently protecting 300,000 hectares of critical bonobo and forest elephant habitat** with a goal of addressing three million hectares of threatened forest. Approximately 50,000 people also live in and around the Mai N'dombe Forest including some of the most marginalised communities in the world (Tshonda, 2019). These indigenous communities depend on the forest for fruit, fish, meat, honey and medicinal herbs. Since the project launch in 2011, logging concessions have not been regranted and with the reforestation programme, the deforested areas are regenerating. **Agroforestry and fishing programmes have relieved deforestation pressure and improved nutrition for the community.** Twelve schools have been built, a secondary health clinic for the central village and a mobile medical clinic were established that treated thousands who previously had little or no health care access (Wildlife Works, 2026). Additionally, the project has created approx. 300 local jobs, and improved access to clean water and energy (Ibid.). Because of logging activity and hunting, leopard, elephant, and buffalo had not been seen in the area since the 1970s

(Diaw & Franks 2019). However, in 2020 these species finally returned to the Mai N'dombe Forest and the bonobo population has been reported to be gradually increasing.

The project's long-term goal is for the local community to have and to lead reliable financing for their forest economy to support the health of the people, forest and wildlife.

- **Community:** Increase access to quality education and health; improve land tenure status through participatory mapping; promote sustainable agriculture, household livestock management and fishing, increase access to markets and improve infrastructure and create jobs.
- **Climate:** Reduce CO₂ emissions within the project area by stopping planned legal and illegal forest deforestation and degradation with sustainable financing for a regenerative forest economy.
- **Biodiversity:** Retain/restore ecosystem integrity through alternative livelihoods, education and outreach and to establish protocols to avoid human-wildlife conflict as wildlife populations increase.

Sources: Kengoum et al., 2020; Wildlife Works, 2026

(UN-REDD, 2012). Several REDD+ and afforestation and reforestation initiatives have since been developed in the country (see Table 17), showing growing interest in forest-based climate mitigation and community-led conservation approaches. One of the best-known examples is the Mai N'dombe REDD+ project (see Text box 25), which combines forest protection, biodiversity conservation, community development through programmes focused on sustainable livelihoods, health, education and ecosystem restoration (Kengoum et al., 2020; Wildlife Works, 2026).

A mitigation scenario projected a 17% reduction in emissions between 2000 and 2030 at an estimated cost of USD 12.24 million (Kengoum et al., 2020). The DRC strengthened its commitments through an updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) submitted in October 2021, pledging a 21% emissions reduction over 2021 to 2030, equivalent to up to 650 metric tonnes of CO₂ by the end of the decade (USAID, 2023). Of this target, 19% are conditional on international support, with the remaining 2% to be delivered through domestic efforts (UNDP, 2023; USAID, 2023).

For mitigation, the NDC prioritises four sectors: energy, agriculture, forestry and other land use, and waste, and outlines 52 priority adaptation actions (UNDP, 2023). These adaptation priorities are elaborated in the National Programme of Action for Adaptation to Climate Change (NAPA, 2006) and the National Adaptation Plan to Climate Change (2022 to 2026), both of which highlight water resources, forestry, agriculture and coastal zones as the most urgent areas for intervention (USAID, 2023). Delivering the full NDC is estimated to require approx. USD 48.68 billion, split evenly between mitigation (USD 25.60 billion) and adaptation (USD 23.08 billion) (Ibid.). Beyond these formal frameworks, ecological processes also contribute to mitigation: elephant conservation, for instance, helps sustain ecosystems dominated by large trees, which play a critical role in carbon sequestration (see Text box 26).

REDD+ has not been an easy, quick, or cheap process in the DRC, even though the country has great potential for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. **Over the past decade, REDD+ development in the DRC has been slow, and the innovative results-based payments that REDD+ offers have not yet been widely implemented** (Kengoum et al., 2020). In addition, a **lack of international funding and market demand** has made it difficult to support ongoing REDD+ projects. **The political environment in the DRC has also complicated REDD+ implementation** (Kengoum et al., 2020). As suggested by Diaw and Franks (2019), decision makers will need to be flexible in order to build the DRC's strategic and adaptive capacity, as well as the country's REDD+ governance and institutions.

Table 17: REDD+ projects in the DRC

Project name	Last update	Size (hectare)	Start year	Project type	Status
The Mai N'dombe REDD+ Project	15 Sep 2020	300,000	2011	REDD	Ongoing
Tayna / Kisimba-Ikobo REDD+ project	15 Dec 2020	330,000	2009	REDD	Cannot be confirmed
Isangi REDD+ project	15 Sep 2020	201,731	2009	REDD	Ongoing
Isangi geographically integrated REDD pilot project	9 Dec 2020	No data	2010	ARR	Ended
Ecomalaka+	9 Dec 2020	5,476	2007	REDD	Ended
Luki	9 Dec 2020	No data	2012	REDD	Ended
Sud Kwamouth	18 Dec 2020	10,000	2011	ARR	Ended
Geographically Integrated REDD+ Pilot: Mambasa	31 May 2018	No data	2011	ARR;REDD	Ended
Sankuru	17 June 2020	700,000	2010	REDD	Ended
Appui au Développement de l'Agroforesterie Communautaire en RDC (Support for the development of community agroforestry in DRC)	17 June 2020	No data	2012	REDD	Ended
Equateur	9 Dec 2020	No data	-	REDD	Ended
Mt Hoyo pilot REDD+ project	9 Dec 2020	135,701	2011	REDD	Ended
Ibi-Bateke	15 Sep 2020	4,129	2008	ARR	Ongoing
PIREDD/MBKIS	17 Jun 2020	11,500	2013	ARR	ended
PGAPF Kinshasa	17 Jun 2020	No data	2013	ARR	Ended
Reforestation project using native species in Maringa-Lopori-Wamba region (Democratic Republic of Congo): establishment of the 'Bonobo Peace Forest'	9 Dec 2020	5,000	-	ARR	Ongoing
Jatropha Cultivation in the Democratic Republic of Congo	7 July 2020	14,000	2009	ARR	Abandoned

Source: CIFOR, CEC, CIRAD & IFRI, 2021

***ARR=Afforestation Reforestation & Revegetation



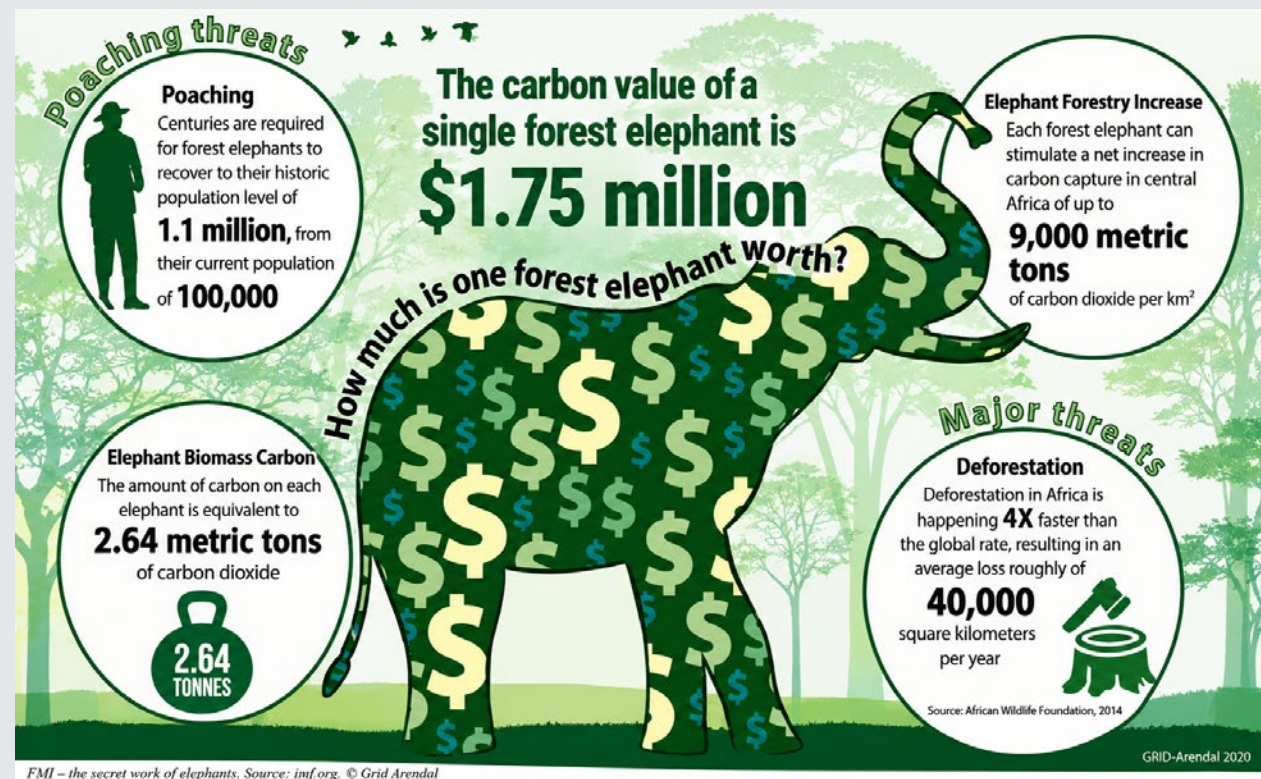
Text box 26

Elephants, major players in the promotion of large trees and carbon sequestration in African forests

Elephants need a large home range and a significant amount of food to meet their nutritional and reproductive needs. Their feeding habits favour the survival of large trees with high wood density that store carbon more efficiently. **The feeding habits of elephants directly contribute to the conservation of forests and increase their capacity to store carbon dioxide** (Cuni-Sanchez et al., 2021). As they move through forests, foraging on leaves, fruit and tree bark, elephant herds allow larger trees to outcompete other species. Thinner, shorter trees are within reach for elephants, and many grow readily digestible leaves. Elephant foraging grounds are thus more abundant in heftier, taller trees that store more carbon. **According to Chami et al. (2020), a single elephant produces a carbon value equivalent to at least USD 1.75 million (see Figure 6).** According to these same authors, a restoration of the former population of elephants and their former distribution (2.2 million km²), 6,000 metric tonnes of carbon dioxide per km² would be sequestered. Losing elephants would mean losing more than these majestic mammals; it would transform the forest structure. If forest elephants disappeared, low wood density tree species would proliferate to the detriment of bigger species. Vyawahare, (2023) forecast that this could translate into a 6-9% loss in above-ground carbon storage.

Source: Vyawahare, 2023

Figure 6: Carbon value and ecological importance of forest elephants



Sources: Chami et al. 2020; Vyawahare, 2023



Film and photography in DRC

Given the biodiversity in DRC, wildlife filming and photography has great potential in the country. The country is home to an incredible diversity of wildlife, which include African forest elephants, giraffe, zebra, bonobo, Giant Forest hog, amongst others. This has therefore made DRC an important place for many filmmakers and photographers to film wildlife. There are various ways to generate income from wildlife filming and photography in the DRC. One way is to sell the footage or images to documentary filmmakers, nature magazines, or stock photo agencies. The footage or images can be used to create educational materials or to promote tourism in the DRC. There is also the possibility of building local capacity to make wildlife documentaries which would result in more employment and value chains during the value addition process. Gorilla filming and trekking is common in the DRC and mostly done in Virunga National Park and Kahuzi Biega National Park. Visitors are required to have a gorilla permit to be allowed to film and trek the lowland gorillas in Kahuzi Biega National Park and Mountain gorillas in Virunga National Park (Text box 27). Fees for filming and photography should better reflect the value of biodiversity in order to ensure increased value retention within the country.

Several high-profile nature-related films and visual productions have already been developed in or around the DRC, most notably Virunga, the Oscar-nominated Netflix documentary that brought global attention to the risks faced by rangers protecting Virunga National Park and its endangered mountain gorillas (E. Tambara, personal communication, 26 May 2026). Other productions and photographic work have focused on the Congo Basin, bonobos, Grauer's gorillas, forest elephants, volcanoes, rivers, and the extraordinary landscapes of eastern DRC. However, **the country has not yet fully captured the wider economic, reputational, and institutional value that such films and photography can generate** (Ibid.). Beyond direct revenues from filming permits, crew logistics, guiding, accommodation, and conservation fees, film and photography can help position the DRC as one of Africa's most important biodiversity destinations, strengthen global awareness of its natural assets, attract conservation finance, inspire domestic pride, and support destination branding through powerful storytelling (E. Tambara, personal communication, 26 May



Text box 27

Gorilla filming and trekking in the DRC

Eastern Lowland Gorilla filming in the DRC is only possible when you acquire a gorilla permit, filming permit and permission but the park is also open for trekking, which makes the gorilla permits competitive and scarce especially during peak seasons. To be cleared for gorilla filming in the DRC one needs to have gorilla permits as well as to pay filming fees. The gorilla permits in the DRC cost USD 400 for non-residents, USD 200 for East African residents, and USD 20 for national citizens of Congo. Gorilla trekking is a daily activity done in Virunga National Park where a gorilla permit costs USD 400 per person per trek for the high season months of Mid-December to mid-March then June to October and USD 200 for the low season months of mid-March to mid-May and then mid-October to mid-December every year. However, the DRC has no specific permitting system available in place, so location permits for filming are negotiated on a case-by-case basis. Processed filming permits, gorilla trekking permits for all the crew members and all permissions with local authorities in DRC are needed to be allowed to film the Eastern Lowland gorilla in the DRC. The filming equipment also needs to be cleared with customs at the point of entry in the DRC. Filming the Eastern Lowland gorilla in the DRC is done throughout the year and the best time is during the dry season which occurs in the months of December, January, February, June, July, August and September.

Despite the numerous permits required for filming, there are still further opportunities for the country to earn income and create employment from film and photography, through copyrights and creating locally owned film companies, and or building the capacity of local people that can be used for filming and photography.

Sources: Africa Adventures, 2023; Eco adventure safaris, 2023



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2026). To tap into this potential, the DRC needs a clearer and more competitive film and photography framework, including transparent permitting procedures, differentiated fees that reflect conservation value, requirements for local hiring and skills transfer, support for Congolese filmmakers and photographers, stronger partnerships with international production companies, and mechanisms to ensure that parks and surrounding communities benefit from productions (Ibid.). **The country should also proactively curate and promote its conservation stories, landscapes, species, and community-based conservation models as part of a national tourism and wildlife economy brand**, so that film and photography become tools not only for revenue generation, but also for visibility, investment attraction, conservation advocacy, and long-term destination development.

Opportunities and challenges for the wildlife economy in the DRC

Opportunities for the wildlife economy in DRC

- **Nature-based tourism (NBT):** DRC has some of the most biologically diverse protected areas that can lead tourism sector growth and diversity in terms of products and services offered. The country could focus on the following areas to achieve this:
 - **Diversification of tourism destinations and products:** Tourism destinations attracting the majority of visitors are located in the Eastern DRC and focus more on gorilla tourism. The country can diversify tourism destinations by developing and upgrading other national parks and reserves, investing in regional marketing tourism to attract more domestic tourists. The country can also diversify tourism products by promoting ecotourism of other iconic species found in protected areas and promoting cultural tourism and avitourism.
 - **Development of cross-border tourism:** cross-border tourism with neighbouring countries such as Rwanda and Uganda could help increase tourism activity in eastern DRC. Joint tourism routes linking parks across the borders may increase the numbers of visitors received and encourage longer stays within the region. The existence of endemic species in Eastern DRC parks will create opportunities to diversify tourism experiences

beyond existing gorilla tourism products. However, this would require greater investment in infrastructure such as roads, national airports, hotels and border access, with improved security in eastern provinces.

- **Exploring and developing coastal and marine NBT:** Despite its small coastline of 37km, DRC has opportunities to develop coastal and marine NBT around Moanda, the country's main coastal town on the Atlantic ocean. The area's beach, mangroves, estuary, other coastal ecosystems and the Mangroves Marine Park (Known as *Parc Marin des Mangroves* or Moanda Marine Park), could support small-scale sustainable coastal and marine NBT activities. However, investments in road access, Matadi national airport renovation, local tourism facilities and coastal management would be needed to support the development of this NBT.
- **Regulated wildlife use:** Bushmeat remains an important source of protein and income in both rural and urban areas (Yasuoka, 2014). Given the scale of existing demand, regulated wildlife production systems may provide an alternative to uncontrolled hunting in some areas. Promoting and investing in wildlife ranching and community-managed harvesting systems could reduce pressure on certain wildlife populations while supporting local livelihoods and food supply. Any expansion of these systems would require strong regulation, monitoring and enforcement to avoid further pressure on wildlife populations.
- **Valorisation of non-timber forest products:** DRC's extensive forests provide major opportunities to develop non-timber forest products as part of the country's wildlife economy. These include wild honey, mushrooms, medicinal plants, spices, fruits, nuts, natural oils, resins, fibres, caterpillars, and other edible insects that are already used by rural communities for food, medicine and income. If properly developed, these products could support community livelihoods, strengthen incentives for forest conservation, and create value chains that are less destructive than timber extraction, mining or unsustainable hunting. The opportunity lies in moving beyond informal and subsistence use toward structured value addition, including improved harvesting practices, processing, packaging, certification, branding and access to domestic, regional and international markets. DRC

could also position selected forest products as part of a broader "Congo Basin natural products" brand linked to biodiversity, traditional knowledge, sustainability and community benefit. However, this will require clear resource-use rights, sustainable harvesting guidelines, quality standards, market information, local enterprise support, and safeguards to ensure that commercialisation does not lead to overharvesting or exploitation of communities. Particular attention should also be given to women and youth, who are often central to the collection, processing and trade of forest products, and could benefit significantly from targeted skills development, finance and cooperative-based enterprise models.

- **Transboundary conservation and green investment:** The DRC shares ecosystems and wildlife populations with several neighbouring countries, creating opportunities for transboundary conservation initiatives. Joint management programmes can support the protection of migration corridors, forest landscapes, and shared wildlife populations. At the same time, international interest in biodiversity conservation and climate finance has increased funding opportunities for protected area management, ecological research, and conservation partnerships in the country.
- **Fisheries and aquaculture:** The country's rivers, lakes, and wetlands support extensive fisheries that are already important for food supply and employment. Expanding small-scale aquaculture, improving storage and cold-chain systems, and investing in fish processing could increase production, grow local value chains and reduce post-harvest losses. The sector would also then have the potential to create further employment in transport, trade, and processing.
- **Value chains and market access:** Most wildlife and forest products in the DRC are sold with little processing and pass through informal trade networks. This limits the income and employment generated from the sector and makes regulation difficult. Investments in local processing, storage facilities, certification systems, and transport infrastructure could help increase the value of products before export or sale in urban and/or regional markets. Improved traceability may also help the country access markets where sustainably sourced products receive higher prices.

- Figure 7 provides a graphic summary of the main opportunities for developing the wildlife economy in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It illustrates how these opportunities can contribute to biodiversity conservation, sustainable livelihoods and economic development.

1. Carbon and ecosystem finance

- Climate mitigation
- Conservation funding
- Long-term forest management

2. Community rights and natural resource governance

- Community forestry
- Benefit sharing
- Reduced conflicts

3. Value chains and market access

- Local processing
- Certification and traceability
- Higher incomes and revenues

4. Nature-based tourism

- Job creation
- Foreign exchange
- Infrastructure development
- Support for conservation

5. Regional cross-border tourism

- Longer stays
- More visitor spending
- Regional cooperation

6. Regulated wildlife use

- Sustainable protein
- Livelihoods and income
- Conservation incentives

7. Fisheries and aquaculture

- Food security
- Livelihoods and job creation
- Reduced post-harvest losses

8. Transboundary conservation and green investment

- Landscape conservation
- International partnerships
- Green jobs and investment

9. Coastal and marine nature-based tourism (Moanda)

- Tourism diversification
- Local livelihoods and incomes
- Marine and coastal conservation
- Community development

Challenges for the wildlife economy in DRC

- **The obsolescence or the lack of up-to-date data** on the state of natural resources (fauna and flora), as well as the related wildlife economy activities, constitutes a challenge in terms of economic valuation. This results in an inability to illustrate the value of these resources to governments as well as to the people living in and around protected areas.
- **The absence of a rigorous resource management policy, the non-enforcement of existing policies/ laws** in force leads to the unsustainable use of fauna and flora.
- **Conflict, insecurity, and displacement:** Armed conflict in eastern DRC continues to affect protected areas, tourism activities, and conservation operations. Insecurity discourages long-term investment, limits access to some conservation areas, and increases the costs of park management and tourism development. Conflict has also displaced many communities living near protected areas, further complicating natural resource management and increasing pressure on surrounding landscapes.
- **Infrastructure constraints:** Poor infrastructure remains one of the main barriers to the development of the wildlife economy in the DRC. Many protected areas and resource-rich regions are difficult to access due to poor road conditions, weak transport networks, limited electricity supply, and inadequate tourism and processing facilities. These constraints increase operating costs, reduce market access, and limit tourism growth in areas with significant biodiversity potential.
- **Mining in the DRC presents a multifaceted challenge** that extends beyond its immediate environmental and economic implications. While the extraction of minerals fuels the country's economy, it also exacts a toll on the environment and the related wildlife economy, posing significant threats to biodiversity and ecological balance.

Conclusion

The DRC has great potential of having a vibrant wildlife economy, especially with its high biodiversity and endemic species which allows for the diversification of activities. To ensure long term sustainability of the wildlife economy in the DRC there is a need for all stakeholders to collaborate and invest in the conservation and effective management of natural

resources, which form the asset base of the wildlife economy. Embracing cultural knowledge in value addition will also ensure the participation of local people and help them see how they can benefit from the wildlife economy. The development of a national strategy for the wildlife economy in the DRC will help unlock the wildlife economy potential in the country and build a long-term sustainable resilient strategy for the country especially for marginalised communities that surround key biodiversity areas. Additionally, creating a conducive enabling business environment and investing in infrastructure and capacity building can, over time, serve to attract investors and boost activities such as ecotourism, which has significant potential.



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