Challenges to state-building
As the DRC gradually emerged from an outright conflict situation towards a fragile post-conflict one, a host of international partners embarked on a vast state-building and reform exercise. Security, poverty reduction, improved governance and rule of law, macroeconomic management and the physical rehabilitation of infrastructure have been the principal objectives. But despite the significant amounts of international funding, the talent and strategic thinking of international experts and consultants, and even with the stated commitment of political leaders to embrace change, there is little tangible evidence of success. On the contrary, the evaluation of reform and reconstruction is resoundingly negative. International partners and Congolese authorities are handicapped by incoherence and the constraints of their respective political systems.

Both categories of stakeholders share responsibility in failing to implement meaningful change. Reform can be summarized as a mosaic of disconnected, uncoordinated and fragmented initiatives that have not contributed to improving the well-being of ordinary people. Congo’s bilateral and multilateral international partners have no master plan for reform. They do not share a common vision and often implement contradictory programs. The aborted decentralization process, reform of the public service sector and unsatisfactory progress in security sector reform are examples. Congolese authorities deliberately obstruct reform efforts to maintain their positions of relative power. Many quite simply do not want change.

Ordinary Congolese also have dubious attitudes towards change. ‘The devil we know is less terrifying than the one we don’t know’ is a commonly expressed belief. Votes for President Kabila in the 2011 presidential elections reflect this sentiment. Reform policies superficially respond to symptoms without addressing the root causes of problems such as the violence that emerges from deeply entrenched historical factors, social imbalances, institutional weakness, corruption and diverging perceptions of the need for change. Reform failure in the Congo testifies to both the complicated power relations underpinning Congolese politics and society and the ambiguity that characterizes international idealism.

Poverty indicators (such as education, health, food security, condition of women and children) and vulnerability indicators (mainly physical security) are catastrophic. In some cases, they have even declined in reverse proportion to the initiatives designed, funded, implemented and evaluated by Congo’s international partners. Life expectancy at birth, in comparison to international standards, is extremely low (forty-five years). An official government report on the status of the Millennium Development Goals does not present a positive forecast. Of the thirteen goals and sub-goals, the country has ‘no chance’ of reaching targets for six goals and only ‘limited chance’ of reaching the others (République démocratique du Congo 2010: 22). Numerous development and humanitarian efforts have generated undesirable side effects. In the eastern provinces, most notably but not exclusively, significant amounts of euros and dollars spent on humanitarian assistance have been wasted. United Nations reports testify to this reality, as do humanitarian actors (Vircoulon 2010; Marriage 2006).

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is systematically condemned by well-respected international monitoring sources. Notable examples are the Fund for Peace’s Failed States Index, the World Bank’s Doing Business in Africa annual assessment, the OECD’s Human
Development Indicators, and Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index. A telling statistic comes from the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO): fifty per cent of the Congolese population is undernourished.

Political scientists have a fairly clear understanding of why states collapse and what constitutes state failure. The now classic criteria emphasize poor economic performance, political and institutional dysfunction, inability to guarantee security and law and order and unmet social expectations (Zartman 1995: 5-11). National governments in failed states, in other words, are unable to exercise legitimate control over their territory. Sophisticated concepts of state failure, however, do not diminish the trauma of hunger, disease, displacement and violence. This is the lived reality of millions of ordinary Africans. But political scientists and development experts do not know how to go about rebuilding failed states. The social challenge of re-inventing and improving state-society relations is enormous because there are between forty and sixty failed or collapsed states; nearly one billion people live in them (Ghani and Lockhart 2008: 3).

Activists, academics and policy makers agree that we are just starting to grasp the complexities and motivations – and paradoxically the disincentives – for state reconstruction. For some, the international community’s interest in state-building is based on humanitarian, development and security concerns, as well as colonial guilt. This is reflected in the Western liberal discourse advocated in Europe and America. For others, China, for example, state-building is important for trade and commerce. There is also an emerging neo-conservative agenda advocating that state-building is a fundamental security priority in the wake of 11 September because failed states breed chaos, terrorism and conflict. This position is advocated by influential American policy makers: ‘Weak and failed states and the chaos they nurture will inevitably harm USA security and the global economy that provides the basis for American prosperity’ (Eizenstat et al. 2005: 134). Another interpretation, a cynical one, focuses on the logic of deliberately reproducing state dysfunctionality and continued dependence on external aid. The aim is to sustain ‘a series of failed states in which the international donor community will be able to dictate policy and exercise control long into the foreseeable future’ (Hilary 2008). Congo/Zaire’s long history of external intervention, pillaging and resource wars gives some credence to this interpretation. Nonetheless, while some external actors may benefit from disarray in the Congo, most others pay a very high price of dysfunctionality in terms of transactions costs and lost opportunities.

**Aid inefficiency**
Attempts to fit economic progress and development into a linear system, as proposed by liberal economists fifty years ago, proved unsuccessful. Their deterministic approach underestimated the hybrid and historically entrenched process of state formation in Africa, which, according to Bayart’s much more nuanced analysis ‘has been an utterly haphazard and even confused process’ (Bayart 2000: 246). Recent failures in international state-building efforts, be they in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia or Congo, prove that imported templates – one-size-fits-all – do not always work. Standardized peace kits put together by United Nations agencies, the Bretton Woods institutions and the world’s big donors are not automatic panaceas. A strong contingent of international experts will not necessarily guarantee success despite their sophisticated work plans and project cycle management strategies.

Templates tend to be strategically irrelevant, exported by donors and applied thoughtlessly to nations that differ politically, economically and culturally. The basic elements of these standardized peace kits include peacekeeping forces and logistical support, a new constitution, institution building, governance programs, transitional justice and media and civil society.
capacity-building. This approach has proven to be largely unsuccessful because state-building strategies tend to mask the importance of political culture and deeply entrenched sources of tension, hatred, distrust, ethnicity, violence and conflict. Conversely, external counsel has helped some African countries recover from destruction: Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Ghana, for example.

Aid inefficiency has been under scrutiny for many years. Two important books have stimulated fresh debate about how aid, in addition to not helping countries develop, in fact contributes to underdevelopment and despotism. David Easterly’s *The White Man’s Burden: Why the West’s efforts to aid the rest have done so much ill and so little good* (2006) is a harsh critique of development strategies. Much of his analysis applies perfectly to Congo’s present situation: there are sound policies but inadequate implementation strategies (ibid: 2006: 6), aid experts desperately want ‘to disbelieve the bad government explanation for poverty’ (ibid 2006: 42), there is insistence on the part of international financial institutions to ‘transform bad government’ instead of boycotting it (ibid 2006: 151), the West engages in ‘coddling awful gangsters who just call themselves a government’ (ibid 2006: 153). Easterly also refers to the ‘aspiration to a utopian blueprint’ (ibid 2006: 367) which in Congo can be translated as the ambitious (but ambiguous) reform package designed by foreign partners who paradoxically never agreed upon a master plan.

In her immediately influential book, Dambisa Moyo argued that development aid has sabotaged social capital, disrupted African financial initiatives and exacerbated corruption. Some of her observations based on the whole of the African continent have resonance in Congo: politics, not development priorities, dictate aid agendas; organizing elections is confused with fostering democracy; aid supports corrupt leaders instead of helping poor people and civil society is undermined by making corrupt leaders accountable to donors and not to citizens. Although evidence from the Congo is compelling, Moyo’s thesis is excessive because there are counter examples where external assistance has correlated with some improved state function.

Development practitioners and aid experts themselves are now conceding defeat. A former World Bank spokesperson describes how ‘some of the best economists in the world worked hard on Africa’s problems, to little avail’ (Calderisi 2006: 164). He condemns donors with the assertion: ‘aid is both ineffective and demeaning, large amounts of it have simply been wasted. Even aid agencies have acknowledged repeatedly that there is greater pressure to commit money grandly than to spend it wisely’ (ibid 2006: 167). A critique of recent European strategies emphasizes the gap between donor priorities and those of beneficiaries and the perverse effects that aid has by institutionalizing corruption and buttressing incumbents (Delcourt 2008: 8-9). The capacity of outside actors to bring about positive change is also questioned by OECD experts who claim that ‘the processes of state-building are largely domestically driven and international state-building assistance has only a limited role to play (OECD 2008: 13). An important strategic document for poverty reduction in the Congo is unequivocal in this view: Congo’s dependency on foreign aid is a major obstacle to development (République démocratique du Congo 2006: 102). This is an argument that has been made for all of Africa. According to another ‘anti-aid’ expert, ‘dependency on aid from foreign donors has undermined the development of the basic institutions needed to govern and the vital link of accountability between state and citizen’ (Glennie 2008: 5-6). Like Moyo, he also argues that as a consequence of aid, some people have gained but many more have suffered (ibid 2008: 5) and ‘the consensus that some would like us to think exists on aid and growth is an illusion’ (ibid 2008: 83). Others have argued that state reconstruction efforts
suffer because solutions tend to be perceived as being technical and not political (Anderson 2005). Humanitarian assistance is not immune to this kind of lucid evaluation. In her *Not breaking the rules, not playing the game*, Zoë Marriage gives resonance to an example of understated hypocrisy: ‘the optimism conveyed by the objectives of assistance is combined with an expectation of failure…’ (Marriage 2006: 7).

A recent trend in trying to reverse years of state-building failure and aid inefficiency entails focusing on governance issues and making aid recipient countries accountable to donors and their citizens (Joseph and Gillies 2009). While this trend makes sense in theory, there is little evidence to suggest that it could work in a context as complicated as that of DRC. The assessment is shared by former USAID deputy administrator Carol Lancaster: ‘We are pretty sure the $1.6 billion in aid the United States has provided Democratic Republic of Congo since 1960 has failed to produce lasting positive development results, mainly because of the political context of corruption, incapacity, and conflict’ (Lancaster 2009: 33). The rate of return on public development aid is clearly not commensurate with the amounts of money invested. It is more likely to be commensurate on its embeddedness in the political and cultural environment. As Englebert and Tull point out, trying to inculcate a culture of good governance and accountability does not sufficiently integrate an unforgiving state-building flaw. ‘Whereas donors tend to see reconstruction as a new beginning after the crisis of failure, African elites more often see it as an ongoing competition for power and resources, facilitated by power-sharing agreements, increases in foreign aid, and lax international oversight’ (2008: 121).

‘Bringing the state back in’ is part of the Congo reform roadmap, a discrete trend that emerged in the early years of Kabila rule when the West worked towards legitimizing him. The distain for the Congo state felt by many international experts and project managers is only now, gradually, being reconsidered. The current implicit strategy is to rehabilitate the state at all costs, with or without Congolese involvement. The negative side effects of policies designed in the early 1990s, notably the ‘delegitimisation’ of state power (Bongeli 2008: 119), are still being felt. When Mobutu outlived his usefulness to his Western backers after the collapse of the Soviet Union, international partners abruptly withdrew support for the Zairian state. They channeled their aid through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations agencies. This gave birth to a project approach aimed at replacing a state considered to be corrupt and inefficient.

The project approach suffers from a number of problems. Congolese stakeholders are marginalized from the project cycle decision making process (notably identification and implementation) and qualified civil servants leave their administrations for better paid work in internationally funded projects. This translated into a series of projects that are not cost efficient, not viable and locally inappropriate. Project success continues to be evaluated in terms of amounts of money spent, rather than in results. The necessity to spend donor money according to a project calendar (‘absorption capacity’ in project cycle management jargon) is surreal in DRC. This requirement, combined with an abysmal lack of pertinence, led one European Union expert to describe the Congo as a ‘vast cemetery of projects’.

The project approach upon which much of the reform agenda is based necessitates working with competent Congolese. These focal points, resource people and project coordinators play an interesting but dubious role. While they often say ‘the receiving hand is underneath the hand that gives’, they transform what may appear as a situation of dependency into a situation of subtle pre-eminence. Donors, international governmental agencies and NGOs sometimes
become dependant on these Congolese state-sponsored reform intermediaries who use their positions of relative power to address their own agendas.

Projects continue to be sidetracked by those who feel vulnerable to the prospect of real reform or change. Even the most talented technical experts can become entangled in the Congo’s Byzantine web of vested interests. The plan to integrate civil society stakeholders in implementing projects has also failed due to the dominance of state actors. Indeed, civil society actors have been powerless to combat the Congo state’s resistance to change. International partners recognize the limitations of the project approach and have thought about alternatives. One of these is direct budgetary support to state institutions, but this approach has also encountered operational problems.

**Reform or masquerade?**
Masquerade refers to situations of disguise and concealment where actors make a show of being what they are not, where they can be both themselves and their opposites. Hypocrisy and the art of the unsaid are key characteristics of masquerade. People wear masks and pretend not to recognize who is behind the masks surrounding them. But in fact everyone knows – or thinks they know – who the others really are. Masquerade is a process of jesting through dramatic situations or dealing with complex social relations with levity. It hides the true human nature of personal and political intrigue. Masquerade is largely synonymous with the hidden agendas of these protagonists who have mutated into reform avatars (Trefon 2011). They are the forces that are contributing to the definition of Congo’s still uncertain process of becoming.

In the arena of Congolese politics and international relations, masquerade is played out by local actors to obscure, dissipate or camouflage their real objectives. International partners play the same game for similar reasons. Acting behind the mask of impunity exonerates reform protagonists from their official responsibilities. Because the system has institutionalized the multiplication of intermediaries, when things go wrong, it is never anyone’s fault. Congolese authorities cunningly smother reform initiatives but without completely suffocating them. The twofold objective is to keep them alive (for funding, to maintain tolerable relations with foreign partners or to stay on board as part of a process). At the same time, they maneuver to slow down, block or sabotage reform. An astute Congo observer has labeled this strategy “‘personally fruitful’ stagnation” (Prunier 2009: 315). Congolese authorities have indeed been remarkably brilliant in manipulating an international system that contributes to foreign aid policy becoming ensnared in domestic politics. Mamadou Diouf (2002: 23) translates this subtlety as: ‘fish cannot approve a budget for the purchase of fishhooks’. This puts into question the common assumption that international aid policy is based on rational and comprehensive decision-making strategies.

Were real reform to take place, many Congolese authorities, civil servants and NGO representatives would outgrow their usefulness. They would see their capacity to benefit from commissions and other forms of corruption diminish. Many international experts, advisors and consultants would also be out of work. They play the game of working for reform while making sure to not cut off the branch upon which they sit. In an analysis of emerging governance patterns and identity, Raeymaekers (2007) interpreted Congolese resistance to change through the paradox: ‘everything must change if we want to stay the same’. This is a fine example of trompe l’oeil. Trickery, mediation and rejection – key concepts in Bayart’s analysis of extraversion – are thus applicable to the relations between Congolese and the West. A history of colonial humiliation and dictatorship has helped Congolese learn to devise
pragmatic modes of manipulation, communication, negotiation and accommodation to guarantee perpetually shifting patterns of domination.

The absence or sluggishness of reform is reminiscent of Mobutu’s strategies of *ouverture politique* announced in 1990. This situation can be explained in part by the fact that the massive presence of international development efforts has taken the burden of responsibility off the Congolese government. Instead of being accountable to the people, the government reassigns the abstract notion of accountability to its international partners. The role of the United Nations peacekeeping mission is one concrete example of this form of exoneration. The same situation applies to the World Health Organization which has assumed public health responsibilities, international environmental NGOs that struggle to manage Congo’s rich natural heritage or churches that provide primary education. In the short term, political incumbents benefit from this substitution.

Reform policies sometimes make sense at a theoretical level. Successful implementation is elusive, however, largely because of the absence of a reliable and motivated administrative structure. A fundamental error in the overall reform process is the expected implication of Congolese administrative services. Implementation of reform policies depends on the commitment and effectiveness of a competent, honest and motivated cadre of civil servants (Trefon 2010). But after decades of state collapse, Congo’s public service sector is unable to cope with even minimal service provision – and even less with contributing to or managing reform. Administrative reform is an externally-driven objective that has not taken Congolese work practices and ethics into consideration. These latter are largely incompatible with Western perceptions and operational logic. Ordinary Congolese have lost respect for civil servants who they see as predators, not service providers. Most civil servants have not appropriated the need for reform and have succeeded in resisting change. International efforts aimed at transforming Congolese administrations have been largely unsuccessful, essentially for the same reasons that explain failure in other reform efforts.

State structures that have been targeted for reform, including administrative services, often do not even exist or are so weak that reforming them is impossible. The new international partnership with Congo is tantamount to trying to stitch patches on a very tattered cloth. There is pomp and ceremony, conferences and workshops, signatures of official letters of intent and budget allocation – but little poverty reduction or increased well-being. A disproportionate percentage of international funding remains in Kinshasa, feeding into corrupt and inefficient governance and patronage networks.

Many reform and reconstruction strategies are condemned by the absence of maintenance budgets or follow-up policies. They are also condemned because foreign driven initiatives rarely take into account local knowledge and know-how. According to James C. Scott (1998: 6) ‘designed or planned social order is necessarily schematic; it always ignores essential features of any real, functioning social order’. Scott’s analysis of ‘the indispensable role of practical knowledge, informal processes, and improvisation in the face of unpredictability’ (ibid 1998: 6) is a valuable lesson for reform experts working in Congo.

Masquerade also takes the form of the manipulation of anticipation: promises are made, team leaders are appointed, working groups are put together, committees are nominated and deadlines are set. Many international partners have fallen into the trap of their Congolese counterparts who give lip service to the need to reform but who in fact have designed clever strategies of resistance. Englebert and Tull’s assessment of African political elites in general
applies perfectly to those of Congo: ‘[They] share neither the diagnosis of failure nor the objectives set out by the foreign promoters of reconstruction policies. Instead, they seek to maximize the benefits accruing to them from these policies, as well as from ongoing political instability’ (Englebert and Tull 2008: 110-111).

Strategies of resistance exist at the highest levels of the state, throughout the administrative structures and also at the project implementation level. They include splitting hairs on details while masking real issues, addressing peripheral – not central – issues and side-tracking (organizing a meeting while deliberately omitting to invite the main stakeholders, for example). Masquerade also takes the form of going through the motions by being physically present and visible instead of being productive or efficient. As in other societies, working and being at work are two distinct realities. Private sector investors have understood these subtleties and tend to be circumspect in their relations with the Congolese. This explains why the enabling conditions the Bretton Woods institutions have tried so hard to establish have failed to attract international private capital with the exception of natural resource extraction.

Humanitarian aid delivery is a concrete example of masquerade. DRC remains one of the world’s worst humanitarian crises. Violence, population displacement, rape of women, men and children, and the collapse of public health services prevail. Mortality rates are significantly higher than the sub-Saharan African average. Most deaths are due to easily preventable or curable conditions, such as malaria, diarrhea, pneumonia, malnutrition and neonatal problems. These are all by-products of a collapsed health care system. The increasing role of NGOs (alongside UN agencies and bi- and multilateral agencies such as the EU’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid) is a notable trend in humanitarian aid over the past twenty years.

Humanitarian activities now include institutional support, combating the recruitment of child soldiers, aid coordination, non-governmental diplomacy and tracking the illegal exportation of natural resources. Despite what could potentially be a positive trend, humanitarian aid delivery suffers from serious handicaps, making it in many instances inefficient or counterproductive. These handicaps include: (i) excessive subcontracting whereby NGOs assume the role of donors, (ii) competition and rivalry between aid agencies, (iii) diverging perceptions of priorities and application methods between local and international partners, (iv) distribution of humanitarian aid for political purposes, (v) absence of reliable local partners and absorption capacity and (vi) serious logistical shortcomings. As in other sectors targeted for reform, the main obstacle of humanitarian aid delivery is the absence of a master plan based on consensus. Humanitarian aid can also have direct tragic consequences. In late 2009, thousands of Hutu civilians were attacked by Congolese national army troops when they sought health care offered by Doctors Without Borders. An estimated sixty-two civilians were killed in North Kivu areas controlled by rebel Hutus from the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR). Doctors Without Borders said that their services were used as ‘bait’ for army forces to retaliate against civilians who were perceived as being FDLR sympathizers.

The United States and Britain participated in the masquerade by supporting Congo’s enemies during the worst episodes of the Congo wars. Rwanda’s intervention in the Congo (and Uganda’s to a lesser extent) and its impacts on security, the economy and social morale has been devastating. Washington and London were aware of the conditions leading up to the 1994 Rwanda genocide but chose not to act. Following the Rwanda genocide, President Clinton and Prime Minister Blair embraced Rwandan President Kagame as a peace-builder with a good governance discourse. They provided him with massive financial and diplomatic
support, allowing him and his proxies to exploit people, land and minerals. Kagame justified the Rwandan presence in eastern DRC by arguing that Hutu forces operating in the Congo constituted a security threat. This security argument, although not exactly false, veiled the far more pragmatic explanation: Rwanda’s unabashed plundering of Congo’s gold, diamonds, coltan and other minerals. Despite the ostensible rapprochement between Kinshasa and Kigali and waning Anglo-American support for Kagame, ongoing Rwandan intervention continues to seriously undermine Congolese security and development.

Other examples of masquerade pertain to human rights and justice. Rule of law is poorly respected in DRC. It is one of the least free countries in the world, according to Freedom House. For the UN’s ‘Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women’, the promotion of women’s human rights and gender equality is not seen as a priority. Freedom of expression is extremely limited. Journalists live under constant threat; intimidation is part of a strategy to censure the coverage of conflict and human rights violations.

Rule of law and improved human rights conditions are predicated on reform of the justice system. This was identified as one of the international community’s main objectives in 2002. One of the main problems of validating the 2011 presidential election results was the fact that the magistrates that sit on the Supreme Court were hand-pinched by Kabila. When it came to validating the results, the question of legality versus legitimacy came to the fore. With less than one percent of the budget devoted to justice, the sector has been forced to finance itself, like other administrative services. Justice consequently goes to the highest bidder. Congolese, like many other Africans, comment: ‘why pay a lawyer when I can buy a judge?’

Reform actions during the transitional government include: (i) the abolition of the Cour d’ordre militaire (infamous for its death penalties), (ii) the creation of tribunals for business and commerce, (iii) a new military penal code, (iv) new statutes for magistrates, (v) corruption and sexual violence are now listed as penal infractions and (vi) prison reform has been elaborated. Since the ratification of the 2005 constitution, three broad reform avenues are being pursued: (i) restructuring of the entire legal system (ii) setting up specialized legal departments (such as administrative and business tribunals, appellate courts, Supreme court, etc.) and (iii) drafting a new penal code. Cooperation between the international community and the Ministry of Justice is ongoing but progress remains slow due to an absence of political will and financial resources. As many propositions go against deep-rooted practices, reform of the legal system can be summarized as change without improvement (Vircoulon 2009).

**Overwhelming obstacles**

Engineering reform and reconstruction in Congo is handicapped by a cluster of real obstacles and overwhelming challenges. The crisis is historically entrenched, politically entangled and socially complex. It is conceptually difficult to know where to start and financially impossible to address all the challenges at the same time. Some Congolese authorities and international experts argue that the most important priority is resolving the problems of security, putting reform of the army and police on the top of the list. Others argue that without tackling the problems of governance and high-level institutionalized corruption, all reform efforts will be meaningless. Other voices claim that a revolution of mentality is needed, making rehabilitation of the education system a prerequisite. Similar claims could be made for infrastructure, macroeconomic control or health. But there is no shared vision. There is no mutually acceptable master plan. On the contrary, there are too many plans, resulting in a blatant absence of harmonization amongst donors and Congolese authorities. The overall context of
mistrust and suspicion and the tendency to address specific agendas before responding to common goals is both cause and consequence of this one step forward two steps back situation.

Competition is a major obstacle to reform and is rife at three different levels: between international partners themselves, between international partners and Congolese actors, and between Congolese authorities. The result is an unmanageable political context and a series of fragmented and frequently contradictory actions and strategies. Competition between international partners in the media sector is one example. According to Marie-Soleil Frère (2009), it suffers from opposing ideologies and incompatible institutional and methodological formatting. Another example is way that the Belgian Technical Cooperation and the United Nations Development Program ended up at loggerheads with respect to their efforts to reform the public service provision sector. In the security sector, there is the problem of parallel hierarchies that contribute to competition and ineffectiveness. Moreover, as pointed out by Hoebeke et al. (2009), competition between donors results from an even more complex, and tragic, set of conditions. They argue that it is part of a deliberately orchestrated strategy by the Congolese government to destabilize external coordination. Indeed, some high-ranking Congolese derive significant wealth and power by perpetuating low intensity conflict in the eastern provinces. Their conclusion is that the systematic organization of insecurity is more profitable than the organization of security.

At the second level, the role and mandate of the UN peacekeeping mission is a good example of competition between foreign actors and the Congolese government. The UN considers that the security situation does not permit a withdrawal of forces. The government, for reasons of sovereignty and internal political consumption, say that they have the security situation under control. The decentralization debate is an example of the third level of competition. The central government has not moved ahead with decentralization for reasons ranging from unwillingness to transfer financial resources and political control to some of the provinces wanting to move ahead to achieve greater autonomy. The fragile nature of the ruling government coalition, partisan politicking and power seeking strategies also testify to the internecine competition at the national level.

Jockeying for power and competition exists within the international community’s big institutions too. At the European Commission level, for instance, foreign policy is divided between different external relations clusters, each of which has Congo desks or experts. Discussions on Congo between experts from the EuropeAid Cooperation Office, the Directorate-General for Development or the European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Office testify to fragmentation and institutional haggling. A similar situation exists within United Nations structures such as MONUSCO: greater priority was given to the electoral and political units than those devoted to humanitarian aid for example (Autessere 2010: 218).

Still another level of competition is the one that exists between high ranking Congolese authorities and their administrative services. This is a common hierarchical problem worldwide and exists in Western democracies as well as in failed states. Nonetheless, the nature of state crisis in Congo, notably with respect to human resource management, exacerbates this problem. Absenteeism, privatization of the public work space, inadequate office material, recruitment strategies or the lack of satisfactory salaries are a few examples of factors that weaken the chain of command. Even if authorities appropriate the logic of reform, they do not always have the means to incite their staff to implement directives.
Engineering reform and reconstruction is also handicapped by an equally impressive number of socially constructed obstacles. Extending deadlines and the perpetual redefinition of priorities and negotiating the means to implement them is an example. Many attitudes and behaviors that govern patron-client and social relationships in Congo escape Western development logic. Congolese construct their identities according to social and cultural patterns that are not necessarily conducive to state-building priorities, which again, help explain their failure. The importance of witchcraft and the invisible world is the most remarkable example (De Boeck 2004). There is also a wide gap between Western and Congolese perceptions of well-being. Politics in Congo, moreover, is ethnic. Nonetheless, for reasons of pseudo political correctness, or the inability of development experts to comprehend it, this powerful reality is rarely explicitly woven into the complex web of reform. Extreme secrecy, discrete but constant surveillance, wielding social capital in deal-making, reliance on the extended family, perceptions of personal honor and occupying spaces of real or perceived power with little concern for achieving results are further examples. The manipulation of rumor is another contrivance that often escapes western development logic. It can be used for political advantage or can serve as a powerful leveling mechanism (White 2004). These attitudes and behaviors help Congolese mask reality and hide the truth in their dealings with reform or development experts. While feigning a simulacrum of dependency, Congolese influence and often control their foreign partners.

**Bibliography**


About the author
Theodore Trefon (Ph.D. Boston University) is a Congo affairs analyst specializing in the politics of state-society relations. He has devoted the past 25 years to Congo as a researcher, lecturer, project manager and consultant. Contributing editor to the Review of African Political Economy and adjunct professor of international relations at Boston University Brussels, he heads the contemporary history section of the Belgian Royal Museum for Central Africa.

1 Extraversion refers to the historically entrenched ‘formalities of action which have constantly recurred in Africa’s relations with the rest of the world throughout the 20th century’ (Bayart 2000: 254-255).