



MILITARY REGIMES AND THE DEPLETION OF AFRICA'S GREEN POLITICAL THINKING: THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been subjected to a long history of atrocious military regimes. Since colonial rule, the Congolese have experienced large-scale brutality of armed forces which sought to control their natural landscape endowed with minerals and other habitats. In the processes of militarising natural spaces, green political thinking which encompasses ecological welfare, inclusive participation and distribution of resources has undergone significant changes. This article argues that military regimes in the DRC have depleted the natural environment by releasing toxic materials during combat operations. Widespread killings, human displacement and marginalisation have detached human and non-human elements, thus affecting custodianship and reproduction of indigenous environmentalism. Despite these hostilities, there has been insignificant attention to how increased military power disrupt green political thinking in the DRC. The main objective of this qualitative study was to explore historical and contemporary perspectives on military regimes and how they have diverted green political thinking in the DRC. Through the lens of Green Political Thinking, this qualitative study used secondary data to analyse the literature. This study found that military regimes in the DRC have eroded community-based participation and institutions to foster Africa's green political thinking. Contemporary military operations have not only unlocked the potential of air and marine forces but also exacerbated their depletion, which had been preserved by local communities. In principle, the state is gravitating towards eco-friendly economic structures; however, political will and financial resources remain concentrated on the survival of military regimes. The findings suggest that the realisation of SDGs is severely undermined by hard and soft power vested in military regimes. Internal conflicts in the DRC are also fuelled by domestic and international actors whose political and economic ambitions undermine sustainable ecological practices. The article is divided into six sections: introduction, literature review, methodology, findings of the study, policy gaps, and opportunities for enhanced participation in green political thinking.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The DRC has endured a history of animosities emanating from brutal military regimes. The colonial reign of King Leopold subjected the Congolese populace to widespread coercive military power, leading not only to the erosion of livelihoods but also to the degradation of the natural environment. Political and economic interests of the colonial rule motivated militarisation in the DRC. In pre-colonial Congo, traditional legitimacy enabled indigenous communities to interact with the natural environment, thereby establishing spiritual, intellectual, and social connections with it. Between the periods of exploration, conquest and ultimately total control of the DRC's indigenous lands, military force was used to ensure compliance. Traditional leadership and cultural elements were severely eroded by Western belief systems. Having used coercive force and instilled fear among local groups, the authorities severely affected cultural practices, including ecological intelligence.¹ Traditional leadership had the capacity to influence resource sharing and to pass laws of restraint that protected various tree and animal species from being grossly exploited for commercial purposes.

Having displaced indigenous groups and nullified customary rights, traditional governance was repealed and replaced by Euro-governance institutions. These institutions denied indigenous groups territorial sovereignty of natural landscapes, taking over land ownership of key areas revered for reciprocal relations between humans and non-human elements. The adverse effects resulted in poor natural resources management, increased corruption and elite networks. The pursuit of monetary gains sacrificed the relationship between local communities and the natural environment, resulting in unprecedented practices such as deforestation.² Moreover, the marginalization of local communities

¹ Solomon Lartey, 'Exploring the consequences of colonization on indigenous Africa communities and their cultural practices: The dark reflection of events' (2024) <384092667_Exploring_the_Consequences_of_Colonization_on_Indigenous_African_Communities_and_Their_Cultural_Practices_The_Dark_Reflection_of_Events> accessed 19 April 2026.

² Eliezer Majambu, Salomon Mampeta Wabasa, Camille Welepele Elatre, Laurence Boutinot and Symphorien Ongolo, 'Can traditional authority improve the governance of forestland

persists amidst a new wave of environmentalism. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) stress the urgency to reinforce climate action. SDG 13 ‘calls for urgent action to combat climate action and its impacts’.³ This global call exerts pressure on states to consider the resurgence of green political thinking, which provides a paradigm shift for the state that has historically undermined planetary responsibilities. This has led to increasing resistance towards traditional military regimes, which through the deployment of soft and hard power have contributed to the depletion of the natural world.

The rise of clean energy, carbon free markets have become synonymous with green politics to support preservation and sustainability of the natural environment. As a result, earlier contributions to green political thinking are crucial to understanding how politics and economics shape relationships with the natural environment. Intensified by other pressures such as decolonial movements, African countries have seen the revival of indigenous environmentalism. In the case of the DRC, local communities are seeking inclusive structural transformation which can integrate cultural practices in environmental politics. Despite these advances, increased military force in the DRC threatens green political thinking and transition towards renewable energy and decarbonized economic markets.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Historical perspectives of militarisation and green politics in Africa

Experiences of Africa’s military regimes are well-documented. A body of academic work has widely discussed implications of military rule in social landscapes, politics and economics. Colonialism and imperialism have been cited as key drivers of militarism in Africa. Military studies argue that Africa has inherited structures or operational models of the colonial rule.

and sustainability? Case study from the Congo (DRC)’ 8 *Land Use and Social Issues* <<https://doi.org/10.3390/land8050074>> accessed 20 April 2026

³ United Nations, ‘The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)’ <https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/202009/SDG%20Resource%20Document_Targets%20Overview.pdf> accessed 22 June 2026

Therefore, military rule has been imperialistic, seeking dominance and suppression of local communities to advance interests of colonial masters. Endemic prejudice and brutalities against their subordinates, absolute loyalty and reverence to national armies are defining elements of Africa's military systems. Efforts to dismantle imperialism from African military regimes have been very challenging and therefore continuities persist in the post-independent states.⁴

The wave of democracy has in many African countries been running concurrently with oppressive regimes. Although the prominence of democracy saw the decline of militarism, *endemic of coups* persisted, brutal force by the police and national armies continued to interfere with opportunities to enable equal distribution of common goods⁵. Similarly, K'Akumu argues that the advent of new democracies in Africa has seen the entrenchment of militarization to reinforce political power, especially in areas where public services have been compromised. By militarizing public services, political administrations in Africa are able to forcefully reconfigure public perceptions of government, thus aligning them to interests of political leadership.⁶ With the emergence of political imperatives, there are tendencies of reproducing imperialism in areas of climate change and environmental welfare.⁷ The ideas, practices and decision-making opportunities of Africa's local communities have been denied and therefore cannot fully shape thought processes of green politics. It is within complex social and political relations that military regimes continue to undermine green political ideas amidst calls for climate action and carbon-free ecosystems.

⁴ Emmanuel C Ogbonna, Olusoji A Odeyemi and Adebukola O Ayoola, 'The colonial origins of African military and its implications for African politics' in Abidde. O. Sabella and Kumah-Abiwu Felix (eds) *The political impact of African military leaders* (Springer International Publishing 2023).

⁵ Oluyemi, A. Opeoluwa, 'Militarisation of democracy and the resurgence of military coups in Africa' (2024) 7 *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review* 92.

⁶ OA K'Akumu, 'The rise of the militarised state? African development militarism, public works projects, and Praetorian Politics in Kenya' (2025) 51 *Armed Forces and Society* 123

⁷ Madzimure Edwick, 'How militarism has impoverished the African continent, placing it at the epicentre of the climate crisis' (Women's International league for peace and freedom, 2022) <<https://reliefweb.int/report/zimbabwe/climate-insecurity-how-militarism-has-impoverished-african-continent-placing-it-epicentre-climate-crisis>>accessed 04 April 2026

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Green political thinking

Green political thinking is a collective of ideologies which sought to respond to policy, political and economic processes that have advanced anthropocentrism. With increased prominence in the 1970s, it is an advocacy movement against human domination over non-human elements. Central to green political thinking is the view that nature has intrinsic value which is not reliant on human validation or modification for its own survival. It argues that rapid industrialization has resulted in environmental depletion, leading to an ecological crisis.⁸ Green theories assert that human and non-human units can be co-dependent. Because humans possess moral or ethical conviction, they can provide care and encourage behaviour that protects the natural environment.⁹ In the wake of climate change, green political thinking reinforces ideas that nature itself is capacitated to restore the environment. Due to global pressures demanding transitions to renewable energy and climate change adaptation, there is recognition that the natural world is endowed with non-human elements and intrinsic forces to counter environmental depletion. Mc Laughlin argues that natural resources such as rainforests, oceans and earth atmosphere are natural emissions sinks, enabling the reduction of carbon footprint.¹⁰ Based on these propositions, green political thinking is not only about countering the self-centeredness of humans, but it also seeks to encourage reformed behaviour that acknowledges intrinsic value and rights of non-human elements.

⁸ Solomon Kolawole Awe and Muhydeen Adekunle Adedoja, A, 'Green political ideology as an imperative for a sustainable society' (2020) 6 *International Journal of Advanced Academic Research* 13.

⁹ Vincent Andrew, 'Green political theory' in Richard Bellamy and Andrew Mason (eds) *Political Concepts* (Manchester University Press 2018)

¹⁰ Alex McLaughlin, 'Global egalitarianism and climate change: against integrationism' (Critical Review of International social and political philosophy 2024) <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230.2024.2356993> accessed 10 May 2026

2.2.2 Militarisation

Traditionally, militarisation has been concerned with deliberate processes to prepare a societal group for war or a conflict. It is a transformational process that influences a culture of violence or coercive force. Supporting institutions and materials are normally empowered by the country's political will to reproduce violent outbreaks.¹¹ With the assumption of power, military regimes have been reported to be a threat to social justice, undermining human rights, deepening ethnic conflicts and marginalization from state resources. While military takeovers may to a certain extent support national stability and security, they tend to be politicized. They invalidate dissenting views, intimidating and forcing communities to subordinate. In response to dissenting views, military regimes have subjected communities to mass-killings and displacement.¹² Totalitarian or autocratic regimes prioritise military objectives over the welfare of the natural environment.

Historically the depletion of the natural environment has been exacerbated by state military actors. However, research indicates that green militarization also relies on private military forces and sophisticated technologies sourced to confine the natural environment and limit interactions with human elements.¹³ With increasing biodiversity loss, marginalization of community members from environmental stewardship and economic benefits resulting from the commercialization of the natural environment, scholars and policymakers are calling for demilitarised practices. There is a call for non-violent measures to preserve the natural environment in which local communities can also participate. Scholars advocating for demilitarization argue that deep rooted historical inequalities have resulted in citizens largely gravitating towards their own

¹¹ A Bickford, 'Militaries and militarization, Anthropology of'. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Elsevier 2015)< <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.12210-X>> accessed 13 June 2026

¹² Pranav Kushwaha, 'The long-term political and social impacts of military takeovers on emerging democracies' (Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur 2025) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/390582741_The_Long-Term_Political_and_Social_Impacts_of_Military_Takeovers_on_Emerging_Democracies> accessed 06 June 2026.

¹³ Elizabeth Lunstrum, 'Green militarisation: Anti-poaching efforts and the spatial contours of Kruger National Park' (2014) *104 Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 816

survival and withdrawal from moral obligation to care for the natural environment. Syndicates which have identified commercial markets for natural resources rely on local networks to disrupt harmony between local communities and the natural environment.¹⁴

While political ecology and geography studies focus on contexts of nature conservation where endangered species are threatened by humans seeking economic survival, there is also growing literature responding to militaries also contribute to those threats. In the case of the DRC, militarized regimes are becoming more concerned with power and dominance over the natural environment to access air, land and marine resources for economic viability, particularly in clean energy and carbon-free solutions.

2.3 Militarisation and green political thinking in colonial DRC

Early literature on ecological studies held man accountable for the depletion of the natural environment and regarded human-centered approaches as anthropocentric due to their disregard of biodiversity, relations between human and non-human elements. Not only has mankind eroded the natural environment but it has also dominated political systems which sought to entrench ideologies about the natural environment. This idea of armed conflicts being anthropocentric is asserted in war studies. Clark refers to wars as a *human-affair*. This is due to the intent of wars to cause large-scale destruction which normally leads to human fatalities. When war is seen as a crime against humanity, it has been anthropocentric as it has largely accounted only for fatalities of human bodies. Despite horrors that non-human elements are subjected to in armed conflicts, there has been inadequate accountability for those injustices.¹⁵

Studies indicate that prior to the hostilities of the colonial regime, indigenous communities had a meaningful relationship with the natural environment. The DRC is home to the Mbuti, Baka, Bantwa and Bambuti

¹⁴ Elizabeth Lunstrum, Francis Masše, Ivan Ashaba, Anwesh Dutta, Esther Marijnen, Tafadzwa Mushonga and Frank Matose, 'Demilitarising conservation' (2025) 115 *Annals of the Association of Geographers* 2525.

¹⁵ Janine Clark, 'War, ontology and bodies: beyond human-centred approaches' (2025) 19 *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 609.

groups which are regarded to be indigenous to the country. The cultural identities and overall livelihood of these indigenous groups are deeply rooted in their relationship with non-living components of the natural environment. Historically, these indigenous groups have related to their physical environment with great reverence, enabling generational sustainability. The Ituri forest has, for example, exuded parental qualities as it has been able to provide food for the Bambuti people in the Northeastern region of the DRC. Referring to the forest as ‘mother’ and ‘father’, this indigenous group deeply appreciates what the forest can provide including food, clothing and shelter. They are deeply convicted of their actions in the forest, believing that human actions can pose threat and disturb its sacredness.¹⁶ The survival of their economics, politics and religion continues to rely on the forest, thus collective efforts to protect it.¹⁷

In the case of militarized political systems and how they relate to the environment, anthropocentrism remains deeply entrenched. The pursuit of political power and dominance over resources is at the heart of the DRC’s military regimes. Whether legitimate or illegitimate, political power is bestowed on individuals who in their quest for economic success have sacrificed not only human lives but also those that are non-human. In the DRC, military regimes have compromised green political thinking to support economic models with little conviction on how business processes affect the environment. Force Publique was an extension of colonial hostilities with intent to content power bestowed onto humans. The brutal red rubber system in the Congo Free State during the colonial period served the business interests of the colonial regime, not of the environment. The development of *African agents* as argued by Gordon conditioned Congolese to exercise armed violence in their local communities, removing them from ethical behaviour that was sensitive to human lives and the natural environment they occupied. It exercised

¹⁶ James Birx, ‘Mbuti Pygmies’ in *Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (Sage Publications 2007) <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412952453.n586> accessed 21 June 2026.

¹⁷ Mark Mosko, ‘The symbols of “Forest”: A structural analysis of Mbuti Culture and Social Organization’ (1987) 89 *American Anthropological Association* 896

armed response to erode the African agency needed to support green political thinking and harmony of the natural environment.¹⁸

The intersection between the military and economic exploitation relied on indigenous communities' rejection of their own customs and influencing others to follow suit. Like elsewhere in Africa, the rubber boom coincided with the conquest of colonial regimes, leading African communities to surrender their territories. With forced labour and coercion, local communities had to submit to the demands of atrocious economic markets. The traditional leadership and other prominent community leaders had to reinforce rubber quotas and when they failed to meet them, they were equally punished. Moreover, territorial control was given to extractive companies and as a result ownership rights were transferred to them.¹⁹ Based on these views, indigenous communities surrendered not only ownership but rights, responsibilities and cultural customs which supported the well-being of the environment. They were detached from participatory governance structures rooted in their own traditional leadership systems. With the collapse of traditional leadership, personal and communal convictions, communities depleted ecosystems of the natural environment.

The extractive processes were carried out with complete disregard of plants where latex that rubber was extracted from. Trees and vines would be tapped to release latex. When they could no longer produce latex, they would either be entirely abandoned or returned to attempt reproduction again.²⁰ So even when there was resistance to economic models, a volatile political climate which relied on military force suppressed any opposition. African communities greatly relied on taboos to guide standard norms of how communities related to their natural environment. They restrained the killing or eating of some animals. In other cultural groups, it was

¹⁸ David Gordon, 'Precursors to red rubber: violence in the Congo Free State' (2017) 236 *Past & Present* 133.

¹⁹ Sara Lowes and Eduardo Montero, 'Blood rubber: The effects of labor coercion on institutions and culture in the DRC' (Yale University 2017) https://economics.yale.edu/sites/default/files/lowes_montero_rubbertv2_jmp.pdf, accessed 24 April 2026.

²⁰ Robert Harms, 'The end of the red rubber: A reassessment' (1975) 16 *The Journal of African History* 73

forbidden for children to be taken to certain areas,²¹ thus reinforcing survival of non-human elements. These taboos were futuristic in the sense that they enabled the preservation of the natural environment for future generations. Therefore, concepts of sustainability, circularity and environmental stewardship have long been entrenched in African traditions. In contrast, the intent of militarization in the DRC was to counter regenerative processes encouraged by local communities.

2.4 Post-independence militarization and green political thinking

In post-independent DRC, efforts were made to reverse colonial implications which negatively affected local communities. Mobutu Sese Seko's regime lured Congolese into *Authenticité* (Authenticity), an African-centered ideology that encouraged the country to restore self-determination. As a political movement, *Authenticité* recognized the dominance of western influence over economic structures and ownership rights. These policies also supported transfer ownership of business corporations to indigenous communities. There was emphasis on cultural shifts, which entailed accentuating national pride in indigenous names, heritage and traditional arts.²² While these efforts were meaningful, they did not encourage deep integration of African thoughts in areas of environment and economic models. Critics of *Authenticité* have also noted how it has reproduced violence of preceding colonial regimes. Vieira argues that Mobutu had inspired a new tide of change to reconcile local communities with their pre-colonial structures. However, these ideals could not be materialized as the movement became rhetorical.²³ So, while there was political will to uproot the influence of colonialism, militarisation made possibilities of changing a far-removed ambition.

²¹ Ikechukwu A Kanu and Ejikemeuwa J Ndubisi, 'African taboos as guardians of the environment: A dialogue in indigenous environmentalism' (2022) 3 *An African Journal of Contemporary Research* 16

²² Kenneth Adelman, 'The recourse to authenticity and negritude in Zaire' (1975) 13 *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 134

²³ Lazure Vieira, 'Precolonial imaginaries and colonial legacies in Mobutu's "Authentic" Zaire' in Kalu K and Falola (eds) *Exploitation and Misrule in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* T (Palgrave Macmillian Cham 2018).

While Mobutu's brutal political regime was in the first Congo war, internal conflicts persisted. The second Congo war resulted not only in the loss of human lives, but also the destruction of forests. The consequences of eroding green political ideologies during the second Congo stem from large scale destruction by armed groups. The guerilla warfare drew in nine African countries with at least 25-armed groups in the DRC. A study on environmental consequences of the second Congo war found that the loss of collective agency among local communities intensified. The survival of the natural environment and its intrinsic value was not so important to be preserved. Faced with a choice of self- and reclaiming the natural environment, communities chose the survival of humanity over environmental welfare.²⁴

One of the most defining systematic animosities of the Second Congo war was the recruitment and deployment of child soldiers in armed conflicts. When Laurent-Désiré Kabila returned to mainstream politics in the 1990s, he relied on *kadogos* for military force to overthrow Mobutu's presidency. In an interview with former child soldiers, Bodineau's study revealed that there is fluidity to the DRC's youth population when forced or voluntarily support political trajectories. As respondents, many of the former child soldiers disclosed that they were forcefully recruited into the military. Undergoing intense military training in the DRC encompasses the detachment of children from social values. The removal of the *civilian spirit* meant that children were expected to embody courage, free from any *awareness of danger and fear*. The respondent revealed that in the military, there were no children, indicating common responsibilities of different generations.²⁵

Based on these experiences, the children were removed from moral convictions and environmental stewardship. The sacredness of natural environment as encouraged by indigenous communities became severely undermined. In addition, these children were on equal footing with adults

²⁴ Jocelyn Kelly, Danielle Roth, Taylor Burl, Michelle Olakkengil, Michael Vanrooyen, 'Exposure to violent conflict and environmental conservation behaviors in the northern Democratic Republic of Congo' (2022) 44 *Population and Environment* 248

²⁵ Sylvie Bodineau, 'From child soldiers to struggling citizens' in Michelle Bameka, Jastine Barret, Mohamed Kamara, Karl Hanson, Mark Drumbl (eds) *Children and Violence* (Routledge 2025).

and therefore efforts to reprimand or correct behaviour were insignificant. Preceding generations could afford to influence the transitions of children into adulthood, shaping citizens who were conscious of indigenous environmentalism as a common good. However, the inclusion of children in the military resulted in barriers to support the reawakening of indigenous environmentalism.

The second Congo war deepened ethnic cleavages which greatly undermined social cohesion.²⁶ With a grip of political radicalism, military groups in the DRC were aligned to ethnic interests than the environment as a common good. For example, the enduring hostilities between the Hutu and the Tutsi groups greatly relied on traditional military operations to unleash armed strikes. At the root of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, there was an ethnic strife between the Hutu and Tutsi which continues to haunt the eastern DRC. The Hutus backed the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) while the 23 March Movement (M23) military group was given political support by the Tutsis. The continuities of grievances between the two ethnic groups are sustained by both the Congolese and Rwandan governments and have largely caused political alignments as military attacks ensued. These government-backed military alliances are also concerned about economic gains that rely on the exploitation of mineral resources from the natural environment²⁷. Political radicalism driven by ethnic conflicts in two of the devastating Congo wars, emerged as a contributing factor towards the depreciation of green political ideologies. The quest for political dominance that underpinned ethnic rivalries undermined reverence for the natural environment. Because ethnic groups are concerned with countering dominance of their rivals, they invest in collective military support with disregard for the environment of those that they conflict with. Governments support political radicalism in the Eastern DRC and have been reluctant to

²⁶ Jocelyn Kelly, Danielle Roth, Taylor Burl, Michelle Olakkengil, Michael Vanrooyen, 'Exposure to violent conflict and environmental conservation behaviors in the northern Democratic Republic of Congo' (2022) 44 *Population and Environment* 248

²⁷ Christopher Davey, 'Rwanda genocide: 30 years on, why Tutsis are at the centre of DR Congo's conflict' (The Conversation 2024) <<https://theconversation.com/rwanda-genocide-30-years-on-why-tutsis-are-at-the-centre-of-dr-congos-conflict-226457>> accessed 05 May 2026.

genuinely commit to holding insurgent groups accountable for environmental injustices.

Succeeding his father as the state president, Joseph Kabila's presidency continued to undermine ownership and local voices concerning the welfare of the natural environment. Despite the adoption of the new constitution in 2005 with an environmental clause during his presidency, Joseph Kabila continued to deploy military force to override green ideologies and practices that were indigenous to local communities. With business interests in the country's Mangrove Marine Park, Kabila unlawfully appropriated land for commercial use. He was able to generate income from his personal farming projects. The military presence became important to securitise the area, fueling endemic corruption and economic ties benefiting political elites.²⁸ This resulted in marginalization of local communities from their land and customs that they have relied on to promote environmental stewardship. He embodied anthropocentrism supported by military force.

2.5 The return of green political thinking and militarization

The surge of green politics has been motivated by global concerns of climate change and environmental depletion. The adoption of 17 SDGs in 2015 emphasise concerted efforts towards climate action. Globally, concerns have been raised that military regimes compromise meaningful pathways to meet the 2°C target to limit increased temperature.²⁹ In 2016, the DRC formally endorsed the SDG goals, indicating its commitment to actively pursuing them. This has created room for green political thinking to thrive, positioning environmental rights at the heart of social, political and economic landscapes.

There is a global call for a transition towards new economic models and energy ecosystems which are eco-friendly and can reduce carbon

²⁸ Josephine Moulds and Sonia Rolley, 'Violent reprisals after DRC whistleblowers discover profiteering in protected land' (The Guardian 2025) <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/nov/11/violent-reprisals-after-drc-whistleblowers-discover-profiteering-in-protected-land>> accessed 09 May 2026

²⁹ Neta Crawford, 'The contribution of armed forces and war to climate change' (2025) 8 *One Earth* <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oneear.2025.101458> accessed 22 June 2026.

emissions. Emerging literature reconciles with earlier theories, emphasizing concerns of the capitalization of the natural environment. Due to exploitation, the intrinsic value of the natural environment has depreciated. As a result, there is pressure exerted on governments to integrate green ideologies to promote environmental sustainability. Although there had been efforts made to reconfigure political and economic systems for the restoration of depleted natural environments, the 2016 Paris Agreement marked a global shift towards ideologies of green political thinking. Without exception, the Congolese state is anticipated to encourage green growth, thus shifting away from economic models and energy ecosystems causing distortions in the natural environment

Green political thinking argues that the environment cannot be served last. Therefore, the dominance of individual interests that have been entrenched in free economic markets can no longer be upheld if the natural environment is to be restored. Not only is the DRC expected to transition towards clean energy systems and carbon-free markets, but it is also highly revered for its enormous potential to unlock green growth in other countries. The country has entered bilateral and multilateral partnerships to stimulate infant economies and respond to climate neutrality and environmental stewardship.

Notably, it is President Felix Tshisekedi's political administration that has undergone unprecedented changes in relation to green political thinking in the DRC. While Tshisekedi's presidency has seen the passing of legislative policies to encourage equal distribution of natural resources, it has not been able to uproot legacies of militarized political landscapes.

As a signatory of the 2016 Paris Climate Agreement, the Congolese government has been more embracing of bottom-up approaches to enable inclusive participation. However, the country is also caught in regional insecurities perpetuated by transnational military networks. With common colonial histories that have undermined green political thinking, army groups from neighbouring countries like Rwanda and Uganda are embroiled in internal conflicts of the DRC. Timber smuggling is commonly facilitated by military officials who in their professional capacities create informal networks to enable informal trade between

countries.³⁰ These military groups provide illegal logging concessions where trees are cut off for economic viability of timber and charcoal. Thus, it can be argued that interests of environmental institutions and military groups are competing for the dominance of the natural environment. While the DRC is a signatory to treaties encouraging green political thinking to underpin the rise of green ecosystems, it remains deeply challenged by other competing interests that are prioritized by national government. Transnational actors whose interests are vested in economic and military power compromised efforts to advance green political thinking.

The return of green political thinking has also seen the proliferation of indigenous environmentalism. In the DRC, indigenous environmentalism is supported by recent legal frameworks to empower local ownership of green political ideologies. The 2022 Law on Indigenous People has been positively recognized for its potential to empower customary rights of marginalized groups such as the Baka, Batwa and Bambuti people. The legislation provides for *local communities' forest concessions* (CFCLs) which entitle indigenous groups with property rights.³¹ Supported by the country's rule of law, it is anticipated that indigenous communities will be empowered by custodianship of their physical and intellectual properties.

It is worth noting that militarisation in the DRC largely affects regions that are endowed with mineral wealth or are key areas of government institutions. In these areas, there are significant disruptions of social cohesion which is a crucial enabler of participatory processes in green political thinking. Despite being severely threatened by intensifying armed conflicts, Moleka argues that the rise of IKS encourages green political thinking. In response to persisting legacies of deforestation, biodiversity loss and their adverse effects on climate conditions,

³⁰ Musinguzi Blanshe, 'Big men', an ugly history, and the ruthless Congo Basin timber smuggling business' The Africa Report (2024) <<https://www.theafricareport.com/341912/big-men-an-ugly-history-and-the-ruthless-congo-basin-timber-smuggling-business/>> accessed 27 April 2026.

³¹ Lassana Koné, 'Land rights of indigenous peoples in the Democratic Republic of Congo: "First Come, Last Served"' in William Nikolakis (ed), *Land Rights Now* (Cambridge University Press 2025).

marginalized communities are increasingly initiating grassroots programs to encourage green political thinking. Contrary to militarization, they are promoting practices that see nature as a significant partner to support water security, circularity in agriculture and energy sectors. Amidst global preoccupations with carbon sequestration, these community-based groups are also encouraging afforestation to build resilient emissions' sinks.³² Based on these views, it is evident that there is persistence of green political thinking in these areas, but they are interrupted by conflicting interests of armed conflicts in the country. Even when green political ideologies persist in these areas, resources from government are limited due to national concerns about ongoing conflicts in the country. The revival of green political ideologies is taking place amidst the emergence of other contextual realities competing for prioritisation, undermining efforts to reconcile values, principles and ecological welfare in the DRC. These considerations are discussed below.

2.5.1 Internationalisation of military attacks and green politics

Given the adverse effects of internal conflicts that continue to have a firm grip on the DRC, global efforts have converged to encourage long-lasting peace. The DRC is home to peacekeeping missions to support peace in the eastern region. While there is a consensus to not resort to armed responses, peacekeeping missions in the DRC have relied on military equipments to counter dominance of non-state military groups. Peacekeeping missions like the Southern African Development Community in the Democratic Republic of Congo (SAMIDRC) and the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) now known as United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission (MONUSCO) have been primarily concerned with the protection of civilians, peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance.

While peacekeeping missions are still exerting minimal coercive force, there are growing tendencies to gravitate towards armed attacks. Southern African Development Community (SADC) Mutual Pact of 2003 invoke

³² Pitshou Moleka, 'Climate resilience through grassroots innovation: Empowering Congolese communities to adapt to environmental change (2024). 1*World Journal of Pharmaceutical and healthcare research* 15

armed attacks in an event when regional peace is being threatened. Article 6 of the mutual pact explicitly states that any threat *shall be met with immediate collective action*. In an event when national security of a member state is compromised, the regional body shall collectively respond to threats *in any manner it deems appropriate*³³. Recent discourses indicate that the deployment of military support in the DRC is now beginning to reinforce the SADC Mutual Pact, shifting away from traditional peacekeeping missions towards the inclusion of coercive force when security of one member state is threatened. Svicevic & Bradley argue that Southern African Development Community (SADC)'s military support in the DRC has gone beyond traditional peacekeeping. Given the escalation of military attacks by the M23, the regional body has now advanced towards collective self-defense which now enables armed responses from the regional body. Furthermore, they raise propositions that while the armed conflicts in the DRC have been internal, they have now progressed towards an International Armed Conflict (IAC) with Rwanda showing dissent towards SADC's approach and since invested in air force to combat any national threats.³⁴ Despite having signed the ceasefire with the DRC, Rwanda has over the years revived coercive military approaches in the DRC. Rwanda undermined SAMIDRC when the state capacitated the Rwanda Defence Force (RDF) to back up M23.³⁵ The ongoing conflicts between state and non-state armies carry potential of proliferating military operations which are recognized as contributing carbon emitters.

MONUSCO has a history of using sophisticated military technologies to combat military strikes by notable armed groups operating in the DRC

³³ Southern African Development Community (SADC), 'SADC Mutual Pact' (2003) <SADC Mutual Defence Pact 2003 | SADC> accessed 01 June 2026.

³⁴ Marth Bradley and Marko Svicevic, 'Collective self-defense and thee internationalization of armed conflicts in Eastern DRC' (Articles of Ward 2024) <https://lieber.westpoint.edu/collective-self-defense-internationalization-armed-conflicts-eastern-drc/>. Date accessed 24 May 2026.

³⁵ Talemwa Jotham, 'How Rwanda undermined the Multi-National SADC's peacekeeping mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo' (Atlas Institute for International Affairs 2025) <How Rwanda Undermined the Multi-National SADC's Peacekeeping Mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo | Atlas Institute for International Affairs> accessed 11 May 2026.

like the M23, FDLR and Lord Resistance Army (LRA). These include aerial vehicles for distant airstrikes and other technologies to support increased remote.³⁶ The internationalization of armed conflicts in the DRC poses threats not only to the livelihood of human communities but also to the entire environment. Carbon emissions from surface ground are also accumulated when international actors use sophisticated technologies.

The use of air force is threatening the DRC's commitments to clean air policies. As a signatory of the Climate & Clean Air Coalition since 2017, the DRC has contradicted its ambitions to tackle air toxins, contributing to pollution and climate change. Even when international actors are compromising the natural environment, there are inadequate opportunities for communities or civil society to engage governments concerning military injustices. Multi-lateral agreements are not bottom-up approaches therefore, they disable communities to participate in green political thinking.³⁷ Because institutions or organised groups which hold governments accountable for depleting green political ideas are undermined, these injustices by state and international military actors continue to be detriments to the well-being of the natural environment.

2.5.2. The rise and securitization of maritime economies

Besides inland and air forces, military attacks in the DRC extend into marine ecosystems. For example, both the Rwandan and Congolese governments have identified potential of methane extraction from the Lake Kivu to expand energy grids. In an academic inquiry, Tofield-Pasche revealed that the concentration of methane deposits in Lake Kivu is an exception, with no other lake having recorded such significant deposits. At least 45km³ of the methane deposits can be viable for energy production and diversify power grids in the region.³⁸

³⁶ Sandra Andrews, 'Drones in the DRC: A case study for future deployment in UN Peacekeeping' (2017) 10 *The Stanford Journal of Science, Technology, and Society* 1

³⁷ Ikechukwu A Kanu and Ejikemeuwa J Ndubisi, 'African taboos as guardians of the environment: A dialogue in indigenous environmentalism' (2022) 3 *An African Journal of Contemporary Research* 16

³⁸ Matacha Tofield-Pasche, 'Rwanda extracts methane from Lake Kivu for electricity. How it work (The Conversation 2020)< <https://theconversation.com/rwanda-extracts-methane-from-lake-kivu-for-electricity-how-it-works-133952> > accessed 09 May 2026.

While methane extraction from Lake Kivu is argued to be meaningful due to its ability to remove carbon emissions from the water, local communities have raised ownership and unconsented control of the area. Pipelines used in extraction have been extended to parts of the river accessed by local communities for farming, thus reducing opportunities for their survival. To counter political dissent, illegal fishing and entrance into the river, the military has been deployed to remove local communities who have expressed concerns of not benefitting from energy projects in Lake Kivu.³⁹ While extraction and securitization of waters of the Lake Kivu is largely initiated by Rwanda and consistent with Doughty's arguments, they can induce conflict spillover effects into Congolese communities. Like in other sectors of production, maritime economies within borders of the DRC and Rwanda are integrating military forces to suppress dissenting perspectives. Revolts against these emerging maritime economies and practices are silenced by intimidation and coercive force attached to military regimes.

The coastlines becoming transportation routes for multinational corporations and political elites with vested interests in illegal logging are also extracting financial gains for political elites. With bureaucratic facilitation, business corporations unlawfully own forests in the DRC. They generate revenue that does not benefit local communities. Any voice of dissent from the public and civil society has been met with military force which advance serious crimes like intimidation, murder and rape.⁴⁰

2.5.3 Resource-bartering approach

The prominence of trading resources for infrastructure has become synonymous with transactional arrangements between African and developed countries. With urgency to improve domestic infrastructure African countries have resorted to trading in their minerals for large-scale infrastructural projects carried out by developed nations. In what Mostert

³⁹ Kristin Doughty, 'Carceral Repair' (2020) 2 *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 19

⁴⁰ Josephine Moulds and Sonia Rolley, 'Violent reprisals after DRC whistleblowers discover profiteering in protected land' (The Guardian 2025) <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/nov/11/violent-reprisals-after-drc-whistleblowers-discover-profiteering-in-protected-land>> accessed 09 May 2026

and Field call a *resource-bartering approach*, there are now recurrences of trading in resources for security. In a discourse concerning the development of economic and military partnerships between the DRC and the United States (U.S), they argue that these agreements have implications on social and environmental benefits. With the provision of military oversight, the U.S seeks to encourage peace between the DRC and Rwanda in exchange of minerals to support economic interests. Amidst supply-chain bottlenecks of minerals needed for renewable energy and carbon-free markets, the U.S government is asserting strong presence in many African countries including the DRC.⁴¹ While in such instances military support is transactional without coercion, it is being exchanged to the DRC in complex multilateral agreements which as argued earlier, tend to disregard views and experiences of local communities and how they relate to the natural environment.

2.5.4. Mounting military expenditure

Green political thinking is not only undermined by the actual operations of the military but also compromised in countries where military expenditure is prioritized over environmental welfare. When the state diverts state resources including revenues towards military services, environmental degradation emanates from increased operations. With weak governance structures, the state can interfere and influence diversion of state funds to secure military resources, thus leaving other key areas without any significant fiscal supp. With improved military technologies which consume large quantities of fossil fuels, the environment becomes vulnerable to depletion (Asongu & Ndour, 2023).

With tensions and differences in approaching domestic conflicts, the Congolese government has expressed discontent with international peacekeeping missions. For example, in the case of MONUSCO, the Tshisekedi administration has expressed dissatisfaction, thus pressure to see the withdrawal of the peacekeeping mission. To compensate for the withdrawal of military resources, the country seeks to capacitate the

⁴¹ Hanri Mostert and Tracy-Lynn Field, 'Africa's minerals are being bartered for security: why it's a bad idea' (The Conversation 2025) <<https://theconversation.com/africas-minerals-are-being-bartered-for-security-why-its-a-bad-idea-260594>. >accessed 08 June 2026.

national army so that it can take over some of the responsibilities previously exercised by peacekeeping missions.⁴²Capacitating the national army has resulted in increased expenditure, with more military equipments being secured. According to a study on Africa and military expenditure, the DRC is amongst the highest-ranking countries relying on increased expenditure to expand its military capabilities. Following the occupation of Goma by M23 in early 2025, the Congolese government is amassing sophisticated military technologies, thus the increase of drones to support national intelligence and precision strikes.⁴³

The security of military capabilities in the DRC also has implications on power relations which influence fiscal decisions.⁴⁴Despite revenue shortfalls, the state has indicated its priorities, making military capabilities more important than other key areas of public service. With more political power vested in the military and less accountability, military force exacerbate environment injustices.⁴⁵

Debates central to fiscal policies argue that tax revenues have immense potential to support green political thinking. This is largely due to a diversified tax base which induces revenue streams by imposing penalties on entities causing environmental pollution. Commonly business sectors incur high production costs when there is an effective taxation system that

⁴² Paul Nantyula, 'Understanding the Democratic Republic of Congo's push for MONUSCO's departure', (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2024) < [Understanding the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Push for MONUSCO's Departure – Africa Center](#)> accessed 06 May 2026.

⁴³ Patrick Kenyette, 'DR Congo acquiring Wing Long II drones' (Military Africa 2025) <<https://www.military.africa/2025/04/dr-congo-acquiring-wing-loong-ii-drones/>>accessed 04 Ma 2026.

⁴⁴ Nan Tian, 'Military spending in the DRC and South Sudan rose fastest in the world: society ends up paying the price' (The Conversation 2024)< <https://theconversation.com/military-spending-in-drc-and-south-sudan-rose-fastest-in-the-world-society-ends-up-paying-the-price-234317>>accessed 04 May 2026.

⁴⁵ Nan Tian and Xiao Liang, 'Rebalancing military spending towards achievable sustainable development' (2025) SIPRI Research Policy Paper < https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/rpp_2025_11_milex_sdgs_3.pdf >accessed 08 June 2026.

imposes penalties for carbon emissions.⁴⁶Based on these findings, environmental depletion can therefore be significantly reduced when the state has put in place functioning tax regimes to encourage corrective behaviour. However, in the case of the DRC, these systems are formally established but with serious limitations due to state corruption and political interference.

Even when contemporary institutions are established to support green political thinking in the DRC, their geographical placements are undermined by militarized conflicts. For example, pollution, natural resources extraction and deforestation taxes are meant to increase revenues for the state. However, reports indicate that revenue institutions are deeply threatened in the eastern DRC where military regimes are largely concentrated. These institutions are forcefully displaced and as a result, government cannot collect revenues to support green political ideologies.⁴⁷Ideally environmental taxes are meant to penalize polluters and others deepening environmental injustices. So, while tax regimes have potential to collect financial resources and correct anthropocentric behaviour, they are limited by an environment prone to military attacks.

2.5.5. Economic survival and green political thinking

Given the economic hardships in the DRC, local communities are compelled to exhaust opportunities given in both formal and informal economic sectors to alleviate the scourge of poverty and unemployment. While history of forced labour in military regimes persist in the DRC, there is also the rise of 'voluntary recruitment' whereby children consent to join armed conflicts. Considering their economic deficits and limited employment opportunities, they surrender to work given by military

⁴⁶ Gildas Dohba Dinga and Gisele Mah, 'Environmental sustainability in South Africa. Does fiscal policy matter? (Kabale University 2025) <https://library.kad.ac.ug/Record/doaj-art-23e30f79de004a198bc1f1362c796f7e?...> Accessed 03 June 2026

⁴⁷ Sonia Rolley, 'Congo faces rising military costs, tax shortfall in revised 'combat budget' (Reuters 2025) <<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/congo-faces-rising-military-costs-tax-shortfall-revised-combat-budget-2025-05-27/>>accessed 03 May 2025

regimes. Scholars argue that in the absence of robust labour markets and economic opportunities, children voluntarily agree to join armies.⁴⁸

In the North Kivu region, eroded social cohesion has resulted in child-headed families where children provide for their families following the displacement or death of senior family members. Both female and male children are enticed by monetary incentives, leading them to join armed forces and therefore assume work that contradicts with environmental welfare. Not only are these incentives prevalent with non-state military groups, but they are also found in the national army.

Taking into consideration, Haupt's inquiry into DRC's forced child labour practices, militarization in the DRC has led to disruption of social cohesion and efforts to attain common goods for society. Children who assume military responsibilities disregard social relations with others.⁴⁹ If these social experiences are reflected upon through the lens of green political thinking, then minor citizens are conditioned to embody anthropocentrism of militarization, thus breaking generational influence over environmental interests.

While government has abolished recruitment of under-aged youth populations and is consistent with its legislative frameworks in that regard,⁵⁰ military incentives in the army compel unemployed youth to take opportunities in the army. The announcement by government that salaries of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC)

⁴⁸ Alexandra Blackwell, Yvonne Agengo, Daniel Ozoukou, Julia Wendt, Alice Nigane, Paradis Goana, Bertin Kanani and Kathryn Falb, 'Drivers of 'voluntary' recruitment and challenges for families with adolescents engaged with armed groups: Qualitative insights from Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of Congo' (2023) 24 *PLOS Glob Public Health* 3

⁴⁹ Naomi Haupt, 'Ending the exploitation cycle of child soldiers in Africa'(Institute of Security Studies, 2024)< <https://futures.issafrica.org/blog/2024/Ending-the-exploitation-cycle-of-child-soldiers-in-Africa>. > accessed 09 June 2026.

⁵⁰ United Nations, 'DRC: Thousands of children face escalating violence and exploitation amidst intensifying conflict' (United Nations 2024) <<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/en/drc-thousands-of-children-face-escalating-violence-and-exploitation-amid-intensifying-conflict>. >accessed 09 June 2026.

would double is a pulling factor in the military.⁵¹ Although green political ideologies carry benefits for the Congolese communities, they are outweighed by economic incentives in the military. In comparison to other labour markets, the military enjoys greater soft power to secure human labour. By consenting to incentives, members of the national army are also agreeing to duties and responsibilities that are assigned to them. Thus, even when members of the army are personally convicted about environmental injustices, their responsibilities and duties in their line of work override individual choices.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is imperative as it logically outlines and justifies the research process. The research method, problem, aim and objectives should be clearly communicated. These components should then be aligned to the chosen research design. Research design can be qualitative, quantitative or mixed method. Furthermore, under the research methodology the research should justify sampling, and techniques of data collection.⁵²

The qualitative research method has been applied to carry out this study. Commonly the qualitative research method is interpretative with intent to understand subjective realities. It takes into consideration emotions, interactions, perceptions and social experiences of the selected population.⁵³ As a qualitative study this research considers lived experiences of the Congolese people, the prominence of military regimes and the erosion of green ideologies in the DRC.

Despite growing debates around green politics in the DRC, there has been insufficient attention given to the intersection of the military regimes and the erosion of green political thinking. Responding to the research problem, this study argues that there have been inadequate discourses on

⁵¹ Sonia Rolley, 'Congo faces rising military costs, tax shortfall in revised 'combat budget' (Reuters 2025) <<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/congo-faces-rising-military-costs-tax-shortfall-revised-combat-budget-2025-05-27/>> accessed 03 May 2025

⁵² Swaroopani K, 'An study of research methodology' (2022) 9 *International Journal of Scientific Research in Science, Engineering and Technology* 537

⁵³ Weng Marc Lim, 'What is qualitative research? An overview and guidelines. 33 *Australasian Marketing Journal* 2.

how national interests and military regimes all interact to widen a pool of factors that deplete green political thinking. The research aim is to explore social experiences of the military regimes and their interactions with green political thinking in the DRC.

The study adopted the interpretivist research paradigm. This approach deeply appreciates subjective reality and interpretation of social experiences and realities in a particular setting.⁵⁴ The choice of this paradigm is justified by the exploratory need to deeply understand how military regimes have influence change in green political thinking. The social experiences of the Congolese people are being studied through the lens of green political thinking to relate their values, knowledge and livelihood in their natural environment.

Secondary data was collected to enrich an understanding of historical and contemporary experiences, policy and regulatory frameworks in the context of militarization and their implications on perceptions of green politics in the DRC.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Inconsistent with sustainable development agenda

The continuation of militarization in the DRC is inconsistent with climate action goals. This is due to reliance on fossil fuels to power military weapons. As a result, local populations are prone to poor air quality which is directly induced by carbon emissions during military operations. Not only are military regimes inconsistent with SDG 13 promoting climate action, but they also tend to undermine other SDGs. Displacing human populations denies communities opportunities to contribute towards environmental stewardship. SDG 10 which advocates overall political inclusion, is severely constrained by military regimes deepening ethnic cleavages. As a result, there are tendencies of not only leading the destruction of the natural environment occupied by ethnic populations seen as rivals but also overpowering them to be excluded from political participation. The destruction of public infrastructure in the eastern region

⁵⁴ Nasrin Pervin and Mahani Mokhtar, 'The Interpretivist research paradigm: A subjective notion of a social context' (2022) 11 International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development 419.

denies communities the opportunity to realise SDG 9 which focuses on the establishment of resilient infrastructure to unlock innovation and industrialization. It is also evident that other public services like healthcare, education and revenue systems are hindered which all deny the country's realisation of SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent work and Economic Growth).

4.2 Physical, cultural and spiritual detachments as deterrents of green political thinking

In colonial DRC, the military regime subjected locals to the depletion of green political thinking. They detached human communities from physical, cultural and spiritual connections with non-human elements in the environment. When communities surrendered to military power, they became increasingly invested in economic interests of the colonial rule which disregarded pre-existing norms interwoven in environmental welfare. There were also disruptions to generational transfer of green political thinking eroded by military regimes.

While early post-independence political administrations sought to empower communities by promoting Afrocentric ideologies to restore cultural identities and practices, they have also undermined environmental practices. Corruption and centralized political power became vital to generate revenues meant for political elites and not the environment. The brutalities of the national armies deepened insecurities which removed community-based groups from green political thinking. As a result, environmental injustices continued and without legislative powers, communities could not act in the interest of their physical surroundings. Thousands of children face escalating violence and exploitation amidst intensifying conflict continue to choose economic survival over cultural and spiritual interests vested in the natural environment.

4.3 Disruptions of indigenous knowledge systems, human and non-human interactions

Community-based systems have always endorsed reciprocal relationships with the natural environment. There was a generational mandate to reinforce protection and sustainability. Laws of restraint, sacredness

attached to the natural environments deeply convicted behavioral patterns, enabling limited disruptions and environmental depletion. Consistent with green political thinking, community-based projects encouraged the intrinsic value of the natural environment. Man as a rational creature could restrict environmental harm, thus assuming guardianship of the natural environment. In contrast, the Congolese populace assuming military ranks and participating in illegal logging concessions embodied anthropocentric behaviour continues, without reverence for environmental welfare. These disruptions are continuing, despite policy efforts to uphold generational education concerning the welfare of the environment.

4.4 Continuity of coercive force and marginalisation

Military regimes have exerted coercive force to maximise economic production. In such processes, green political thinking became compromised, with local communities shifting away from indigenous environmentalism towards the prevalence of individualism propounded by economic markets. In the wake of carbon-free markets, military regimes are found in extractive processes for monetary gains. Much to the exclusion of local communities, state and non-state military groups are extracting minerals or embarking on large-scale deforestation with reliance on coercive power.

5. POLICY GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCED PARTICIPATION IN GREEN POLITICAL THINKING

Although the DRC is a signatory of international treaties encouraging bottom-up approaches to reinforce green political thinking, these are not equally distributed, especially in the eastern region torn by conflict. There is lack of political will to have resilient institutions for inclusive participation. The National Adaptation Plan (NAP), Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), and the National Climate Policy are key policies meant to stimulate green political ideologies. In conflict-free areas, inclusive participation and strong advocacy for green political thinking may raise awareness concerning environmental injustices in the eastern DRC. Green political thinking in other areas may also promote

indigenous practices to be referenced to when designing models that cater for local histories. Although local experiences may vary, green political thinking in a certain jurisdiction may have some commonalities in comparison to exogenous ideas with little or no experience like that of the Congolese people.

The Land-Use Planning Law of 2025 carries potential to encourage customary rights and inclusive participation in green political ideologies. While the principle of the Free Prior and Informed Consent may be highly complex in sites occupied by non-state military groups, national military regimes should be better committed to it as a human-rights based approach. This may alleviate injustices propelled by bureaucratic military systems in the national army which have regulated the natural environment without inclusion of local communities. Reforms in the national army must be sensitive to customary rights, ethical considerations and hold state its entities accountable for any inconsistencies such as illegal logging and extraction of natural resources.

National budgets should allocate funds to encourage literacy on indigenous environmentalism. Despite constraints of the conflict in the DRC, government should still invest in climate literacy. Innovative solutions should induce educational research that integrates IKS to inform climate and environmental literacy. Digital programs and policies may encourage the survival of green political ideologies in a volatile environment prone to population displacement and the erosion of social cohesion. In cases where the youth is empowered by digital infrastructure and resources, there should be increased engagements to underscore discourses on customary rights and the significance of green political thinking. Reintegration of former child soldiers should entail programs that promote indigenous environmentalism.

With national interests aligned to carbon-free markets, the DRC should be fully committed to good governance and endogenous efforts tailored for combating systematic corruption which has enabled military regimes to source minerals and other natural elements. For example, the rise of digital traceability systems in the DRC should not only be prioritized in mining but also be dispersed in other key areas where natural resources are being illegally extracted. Efforts to develop the recent timber

traceability systems should be ongoing. Corporations relying on illegal logging should be held accountable by functional systems.

Communities should be involved early in circular approaches for purposes of information sharing and decision-making processes. It is important that citizens are well-informed about implications of marine solutions for their livelihood. Separation of powers should enable the rule of law and the civil society in the DRC to protect rights of local communities, encourage information-sharing and inclusion in decision-making, especially with emerging circular approaches such as those in marine ecosystems. This would enable early detection of potential hazards to both human and non-human elements

6. CONCLUSION

Green political thinking carries immense potential to unlock indigenous environmentalism in the DRC. Historical perspectives revealed that communities in the DRC are endowed with indigenous knowledge to support environmental stewardship and emerging imperatives such as carbon sequestration. However, the rise of military regimes in the DRC have utilized both soft and hard power to erode green political thinking. This has resulted in the normalization of environmental injustices. These regimes have not only taken away ownership of the physical terrains belonging to the Congolese people but have also undermined their green political thinking. As a result, there is minimal social agency in green political thinking. With rapid expansion of green political ideologies, top-down models informing green political ideologies are still rigid and perpetuating serious unfreedoms, inhibiting inclusive participation. They are further worsened by increasing political power vested in state and non-state military forces. While there are many systematic failures which contribute to the DRC's unfulfillment of SDG goals, overwhelming military power vested in military regimes impair progress of those not only directed towards environmental stability but also those calling for overall sustainability.