

# CRITICALLY EXAMINE THE DIAMOND CURSE AS THE BEDROCK OF CIVIL WARS AND ETHNIC CONFLICTS AROUND THE WORLD

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## ABSTRACT

The diamond curse refers to the paradox that countries endowed with an abundance of diamond resources often fail to grow as rapidly as those without such a resource, especially when they have weak governments thus making them prone to conflicts. The African continent typifies this situation, in that its economic growth lags behind the rest of the world in spite of its abundance of natural resources in particular diamond. Diamond producing countries in Africa include: Sierra Leone, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Botswana, Namibia, and the Republic of South Africa. Amongst these countries, we will do a selective identification of those that are prone to civil wars and ethnic conflicts as a result of the exploitation of diamond resource and they include; Sierra Leone, Angola and the DRC. Botswana, on the other hand, being one of the largest producers of diamond has greatly evolved in terms of good governance and has turned diamond resource into a blessing rather than a curse. Therefore, this assertion that diamond exploitation being the bedrock of civil wars and ethnic conflicts in the world can be nounced in the sense that there are other factors that contribute to civil wars and ethnic conflicts apart from diamond exploration, exploitation and production. These may include; poverty, human rights violations, bad and ineffective Governance and corruption, economic inequality, ethnic marginalization and the proliferation of small arms.

**Keywords:** Diamond curse, civil wars and ethnic conflicts.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the 1960s, the African continent, especially those countries in sub-Saharan Africa have often come to the spotlight in terms of protracted civil wars and ethnic conflicts, some of them related to the exploration, exploitation and production of natural mineral resources such as diamond. African countries such as Burundi, Rwanda, Kenya, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda are rife in civil wars and ethnic conflicts. The abundance of natural mineral resources such as oil, gas, timber, transboundary water resources, wood, logs of war, diamond, gold etc rather than being a source of blessing is rather seen as a curse in most sub-Saharan African countries because of poor management. The diamond curse is a well-known phenomenon in political and economic literature and posits that the exploration and exploitation of diamond leads to civil unrest and conflict in diamond-rich countries. It's therefore very necessary to x-ray this in order to gain a deeper insight and understanding of the relationship between diamond and conflict in diamond endowed countries like Sierra Leone, Angola and the DRC. It's also necessary to underscore the fact that the diamond trade itself isn't inherently corrupt and damaging. It provides jobs, income and economic growth to countries that responsibly and transparently manage them for the general good of its citizens.

## THE HISTORICAL AND SECTORAL OVERVIEW OF THE DIAMOND INDUSTRY

To have a vivid and comprehensive approach in this historical and Sectoral overview, it's necessary and vital not to be shortsighted to limit oneself exclusively to diamond resource because this wouldn't capture the true and real picture of the curse. In another perspective, the other natural resources like oil, gas, minerals, timber, transboundary water resources, wood, logs of war etc are equally of vital significance. I will single out transboundary water resources here because of its significance and importance since it traverses so many boundaries involving more than a single country. The Great Lakes for example, is shared by Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya and Rwanda. The fishermen crosses from one side of the lake to the other during fishing and this causes confrontation among the fishermen from different states because it's very difficult to distinctively demarcate the boundary of one country to another on water. Therefore, a good governance policy is needed to mitigate the situation of constant conflict. Another

example is the Twin River that serves Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. When the Turkish government increases the construction of dams upstream, the other user countries of the same Twin River downstream suffers from shortage of water for irrigation of their farms to feed their large populations. The River Nile too, is another example serving Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt(Egypt dictating the activities on the Nile).

The case of Cameroon and Nigeria over the River Benue that flows into Nigeria and empties its waters into Port Harcourt in Nigeria. Natural resources that span across boundaries isn't the responsibility of a single state to manage but the collaboration of all the states having a stake in the said resource. Is this the case? The answer is far-fetched as the reverse is most often observed; lack of collaboration, cooperation, poor management and governance leading to confrontation.

### ***Sierra Leone***

Sierra Leone is a country plagued by political instability and conflict for many years. The country is Rich in diamond and this has been identified as one of the causes of conflict. The diamond industry in Sierra Leone is controlled by illegal groups, who use the profits to fund their activities. The government has been unable to control the illegal diamond trade, and this has led to the proliferation of armed groups. One of such group is the Revolutionary United Front.<sup>1</sup> The RUF was formed in the 1990s, and its main objective was to overthrow the government. The group was mainly funded by the illegal diamond trade and it used the profits to purchase arms and recruit fighters especially teenagers. The RUF was notorious and responsible for many atrocities including the amputation of limbs and the use of child soldiers condemned by International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The diamond curse in Sierra Leone has led to corruption and a lack of accountability. This has drastically eroded public trust in the government as it has severally being criticize for condoning and abetting illegal diamond trade which largely contributes to political instability in the country.

### ***Angola***

Angola is amongst the largest producers of diamond in the world and this industry has been the major source of revenue for the Angolan government. However, the diamond exploitation has equally been a major source of conflict and political instability because of poor, bad and

unaccountable management. During the civil wars in Angola that lasted from 1975 to 2002, the diamond industry was used to fund the conflict. Both the government and armed groups used the proceeds from diamond trade to purchase weapons and fund their activities. The industry equally led to the displacement of the Communities as mining companies took over their land. In Angola as well as in Sierra Leone, diamond exploitation has led to widespread corruption and unaccountability. The ruling party; The People's Movement for the liberation of Angola<sup>ii</sup> has been largely accused for mismanagement of diamond funds.

### ***The Democratic Republic of Congo***

The DRC is the third example, virtually fueled in part by the country's large mineral wealth including diamond, gold and coltan. Armed groups like the M23, the "Bayamulenges" and "Bayawandas" as well as the national army has been implicated in the illegal exploitation of these resources that has helped to fund the ongoing crisis in the DRC.

## **UNDERLYING CAUSES**

These causes can be grouped into two major groups which are Internal and External causes

### ***Internal Factors***

Among the internal causes of the diamond curse, same as the resource curse, is weak institutions. Weak government's institutions usually pave the way for rent-seeking behaviors among top government officials and elitist class to syphoned proceeds especially rents from diamond exploitation. Lack of political freedom and democracy, exacerbated by poorly organized and managed elections that serve as window dressing with a high level of abstention and voter apathy (CAR and DRC). Bad fiscal policies and growing level of corruption. Greatly exacerbated by the poor geographic, demographic and public health features.

### ***External Factors***

The externalities inherent in diamond exploitation include: Past colonial legacy of exploration, exploitation, production and mismanagement through rent-seeking behaviors; the volatility of natural resource management, especially resource revenue that are often diverted into private pockets; declining terms of trade that drastically affects the producing states, and power

imbalance between the sub-Saharan state producing diamond and the extractive multinational companies.

## **TURNING THE DIAMOND CURSE INTO A BLESSING**

The diamond curse in those countries cited supra can be turned around through the following ways: Reasonable time should be allotted to the preparatory phase before the consignment for diamond are authorized for exploitation; regulating compulsory Consultative dialogues with all stakeholders in the above preparatory phase before extraction; taking practical and structural measures to combat corruption; properly regulating Land and Property rights, not leaving out the rule of law with the establishment of an effective and credible judicial system in the country's concerned.

## **CONCLUSION**

The diamond curse in most sub-Saharan African countries is a natural source (bedrock) of most civil wars and ethnic conflicts as has been exemplified in the cases of Sierra Leone, Angola and the DRC. However, civil wars and ethnic conflicts can't be exclusively limited to diamond resource exploitation and mismanagement alone, as other parameters like poverty, human rights violations, bad governance and corruption, inequality, ethnic marginalization and the proliferation of small arms are equally responsible, though the presence of natural resource can quickly exacerbate the situation.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### ***To The Government***

The speedily putting into place of a genuine, suitable and sustainable governance policy with the consent of all the stakeholders; the compulsory elaboration of the Consultative dialogues involving all stakeholders in the exploitation chain; government to take structural and practical measures to combat corruption in all its forms.

### ***To The Legislator***

The legislator should enact firm laws on Land and Property Rights; they should equally enact laws that enshrine the rule of law and the genuine independence of the judiciary thus ensuring an effective, impartial and credible judicial system.

### ***To The Local Communities***

They should be ready to cooperate and collaborate with both the government and the multinational companies; they should take active part in all the Consultative dialogues and meetings to make their stakes and Challenges known to both the government and the multinational companies.

### ***To Multinational Companies***

They must make an environmental impact assessment studies to ensure that the attendant hazards linked to exploitation are mitigated on the environment; they must respect in its entirety the corporate social responsibility towards the communities; and they must be transparent, fair and genuine in their dealings with the locals.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> Often abbreviated as RUF.

<sup>ii</sup> Often abbreviated as MPLA.

