

# An Era of Change: Recognizing the Success of the Democratic Republic of Congo



President Joseph Kabila and his wife Olive at the Francophone Summit in Kinshasa in 2012

BY  
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**A** revolution — marked by prosperity and an economic boom — is taking place throughout the Democratic Republic of Congo. Throughout Kinshasa, its capital city, the signs of economic growth are abundant. Massive buildings under construction, freshly paved roads and an overall sense of prosperity are signaling a long-awaited change.

After a tenuous period of civil war and relentless meddling from its neighbor, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo has shown a resilience to survive, and thrive, as it aspires to become one of the next superpowers in Central Africa.

A nation with approximately \$24 trillion in natural resources, the Democratic Republic of Congo, under the leadership of President Joseph Kabila and Prime Minister Augustin Matata Ponyo Mapon, has followed a laudable framework in recent years to alleviate poverty, decrease civil strife and improve welfare for its populace of 75 million.

The Democratic Republic of Congo achieved a growth rate of 8.3% in 2012, following impressive growth of 7% the previous year. Inflation, which hovered dangerously around 50% prior to Prime Minister Ponyo's intervention, decreased to a respectable 3% last year. In 2014, the growth rate is expected to rise to double digits — a full year ahead of analysts' predictions.

"I want to assure you this country is in the process of changing," the Prime Minister states. "I'm convinced the question of development is mainly an issue of governance and leadership."

Indeed, under Prime Minister Ponyo's tenure, the nation is achieving unprecedented growth and stability. Through key reforms, such as easing the cost of doing business, the private sector is thriving. By reducing the time and cost of acquiring a business permit and taking a hardline approach against corruption, Kinshasa, along with the rest of the country, is enjoying a period of massive growth.

According to Eustache Ouayoro, the World Bank country director for the Democratic Republic of Congo, these recent economic developments show that the nation can "soon emerge and finally begin a new era of development."

Despite these positive developments, rebel skirmishes in Goma threatened to disrupt the nation's peace. Rwanda, suspected by global leaders and institutions as the malignant force behind the disruption in the Democratic Republic of Congo, has been weary of the multinational treaty that was signed under the auspices of the United Nations.

Developing the region, both economically and socially, is seen as a key step to building and maintaining long-term peace. According to U.N. Secretary-

UN Photo/J. Carrier



President Kabila addresses the general debate of the sixty-seventh session of the U. N. General Assembly

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General Ban Ki-moon, "Education and healthcare are part of the broader infrastructure of development that can bring economic progress and hope to the region. The peace deal aims to address the roots, the fundamental underlying causes of this crisis. The intervention brigade, which shall be deployed soon in accordance with the Security Council Resolution 2098, will address all this violence and will try its best to protect human life, human rights and human dignity."

### Global Recognition of Development

In recognition of these strides, Dr. Jim Yong Kim, president of the World Bank,

pledged \$1.2 billion in funding towards economic growth and rehabilitation in the Democratic Republic of Congo and \$1 billion to the Great Lakes region, which includes the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania.

"For us, it's not so much a gamble as it is a commitment up front that the kind of development we're talking about — energy, agriculture, healthcare, trade — these are the things that are at the root of the conflict in the first place," Dr. Kim says. These funds will specifically help jump-start cross-border trade, energy development projects, and infrastructure growth and rehabilitation programs to lift parts of the region out of poverty.

"We made extraordinary efforts to



In Lubumbashi, Prime Minister Ponyo receives nine locomotives with World Bank support

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Augustin Matata Ponyo Mapon  
Prime Minister, Democratic Republic of Congo

secure an additional \$1 billion in funding because we believe this can be a major contributor to a lasting peace in the Great Lakes region,” says Dr. Kim. “This funding will help revitalize economic development, create jobs and improve the lives of people who have suffered for far too long. Now the leaders of the Great Lakes region, by restarting economic activity and improving livelihoods in border areas, can boost confidence, building economies and give new opportunities for millions of people.”

In calling for peace in the region

through a solution focused on development, the World Bank sees the new financing pledge as the first step to helping alleviate the larger, more macro issues that are leading to conflict.

According to Mary Robinson, the former president of Ireland and currently the U.N. special envoy to the Great Lakes Region of Central Africa, “There is a fresh change to do some more than just attend to the consequences of conflict. There is a chance to resolve its underlying causes and to stop it for good. If this new attempt is to succeed where others have fallen short, there

must be optimism and courage in place of cynicism. The governments and the people of this region, and the international community, must believe once again that peace can be achieved.”

### A Look at Prime Minister Ponyo's Tenure

A champion of reform, Prime Minister Ponyo is not your typical politician. Known for beginning his workday at 5:30 A.M., the former minister of finance and oft-lauded technocrat is adamant about bringing change to the Democratic Republic of Congo. While his economic



achievements alone distinguish him as a reformer and astute leader, he has vowed to help develop the country's business environment while addressing its social needs.

The current administration's development framework, referred to as the *golden trilogy*, focuses on leadership, good policies and good governance. Prime Minister Ponyo's strategy provides an extensive blueprint not only for the Democratic Republic of Congo, but also for the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa.

"Building a strategic vision for long-term development requires sound political leadership, tireless reform efforts aimed at reinforcing the quality of the administration and vital institutions, and adhering to the rules and practices of good governance regarding our natural resources," asserts Prime Minister Ponyo.

In his second year as Prime Minister, Ponyo is expanding his work to increase social welfare within the Democratic Republic of Congo. Under his multiyear plan, the government has launched a \$300 million program devoted to healthcare and education.

With a special focus on improving the transportation situation in Kinshasa, the nation's bustling capital and largest city, the Office of the Prime Minister has ordered 300 buses and is continually looking to bring efficiency and technological advances to help the nation develop a more robust transportation policy in its main cities.

As Prime Minister Ponyo evolves his leadership to focus on the many areas of opportunity for the nation, his reputation as a hardline reformer and string of past successes gives confidence to the nation's many stakeholders.

### Future Growth and Development

Known for its reputation as one of world's greatest resource-rich nations, the Democratic Republic of Congo has begun to diversify its economy through major investments in agriculture and sustainable energy.

In the last month, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Africa



Prime Minister Ponyo (Front row, second from left), President Kabila (Front row, center) and DRC governors at an annual meeting in Kananga in March

The Grand Inga Dam, a centerpiece of the series of hydroelectric dams, will be able to produce twice the generating capacity of the world's most powerful hydroelectric plant, China's Three Gorges Dam.

announced a major push to develop hydroelectric power plants on the Congo River. The Grand Inga Dam, a centerpiece of the series of hydroelectric dams, will be able to produce twice the generating capacity of the world's most powerful hydroelectric plant, China's Three Gorges Dam.

The initial phase of the project, set to begin in October 2015, will cost \$9 billion and will have a generating capacity of 4,800 megawatts. The later phases of the project include several dams, which together will generate 40,000 megawatts and will be able to provide energy throughout Africa and Europe.

The World Bank states that the project will "catalyze large-scale benefits to improve access to infrastructure services."

As the Democratic Republic of Congo continues to develop under the leadership of President Kabila and Prime Minister

Ponyo, the nation's many successes are beginning to receive recognition from the international community. While many obstacles remain, both internally and externally to the country's ultimate growth as an African superpower, the steps taken today illustrate the commitment to succeed.

Through the United Nations peace process, improvement of the business climate and development of the nation's social sectors, Prime Minister Ponyo has marked his first year of national leadership with an ability to execute and achieve the goals necessary to bring progress.

As financing and recognition from the World Bank and international partners continue to strengthen the Democratic Republic of Congo, they reaffirm the leadership that is driving change and helping the nation to arise and enter a new, prosperous era. ■