

Marginalization, discrimination and vulnerability indigenous peoples in the Republic of Congo

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Abstract :

This study aims to explain the situation of indigenous peoples in the Republic of Congo. In addition to documentary research, the study was supported by structured and group interviews with indigenous peoples, local and administrative authorities in 28 villages. The results of the surveys show that, for more than a decade, Congo has demonstrated its commitment to promoting the rights of indigenous peoples in accordance with relevant international standards by adopting important legislative, political and administrative measures. Numerous instruments of international human rights law have been adopted and integrated into the national legal framework. However, and despite this desire to lift indigenous peoples out of this precarious situation, they continue to be discriminated against and marginalized, compared to the Bantu. They face serious violations of their fundamental rights. This situation is greatly exacerbated in very remote areas. With regard to housing conditions, education, and access to health services, inequalities and violence perpetrated against them remain a constant problem. Testimonies relating to violations of the rights of indigenous populations have been reported by associations, the communities themselves and by the press.

Keywords : Marginalization, discrimination, vulnerability, indigenous peoples, Republic of Congo.

Jel classification codes : J15, J71, I32.

1. Introduction

The historical trajectory of indigenous peoples in the Republic of Congo has been marked by a long-standing pattern of systemic exclusion and marginalization. Over the course of decades, these communities have endured widespread discrimination that has profoundly affected every dimension of their daily lives. Although recent years have seen expressions of

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political will aimed at improving the conditions of indigenous populations, the tangible implementation of concrete and timely actions has remained inconsistent and insufficient. These delays present a significant barrier to the realization of the fundamental principle of equality and the full enjoyment of citizenship and associated rights for indigenous groups.

The foundational principles of international human rights law—namely, liberty, equality, and the prohibition of discrimination—are directly relevant to the situation of indigenous peoples. Discrimination, which is a multidimensional and pervasive phenomenon, results in the denial of basic rights for these populations. It manifests not only through institutional and systemic rejection but also in social and interpersonal contexts, where indigenous individuals and communities often face humiliation, exclusion, and various forms of subjugation. This discrimination operates on both individual and collective levels, severely undermining their dignity and quality of life.

In the Congolese legal framework, the term "Indigenous populations" is formally defined by Law No. 05-2011 of February 25, 2011, a landmark piece of legislation that seeks to establish legal recognition and protection for these vulnerable communities. According to Article 1 of this law, indigenous populations are identified based on distinct cultural identities, unique ways of life, and heightened social and economic vulnerability in comparison to the broader national population. Importantly, the use of the historically pejorative term "pygmy" is explicitly prohibited and is classified as a punishable offense of insult under the Penal Code, further reinforcing the commitment to respect and dignity.

The enactment of Law No. 05-2011 marked a historic and progressive development, not only for the Republic of Congo but also for the African continent as a whole, as it became the first African country to adopt a specific national law focused on the rights of indigenous peoples. This legal achievement was a response to both national realities and international obligations, including those outlined in key human rights instruments. Nevertheless, the actual enjoyment and enforcement of the rights enshrined in this law remain deeply inadequate. The gap between legal recognition and practical implementation is evident, as the state continues to face significant challenges in mainstreaming indigenous issues into national development policies and ensuring that legal protections are effectively applied on the ground.

These shortcomings are particularly evident in three essential domains : access to health services, education, and housing. Indigenous populations remain disproportionately affected by inadequate infrastructure, cultural and linguistic barriers, and lack of targeted programs that address their specific needs. The persistent vulnerabilities they face in these areas

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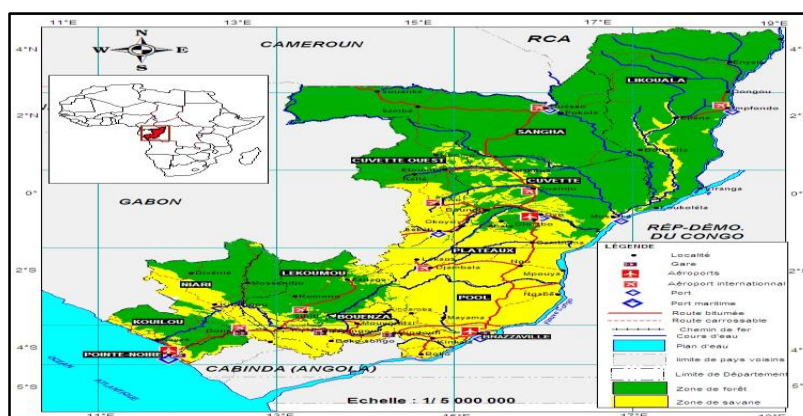
underscore the structural nature of their exclusion and highlight the need for urgent and sustained intervention.

This research therefore seeks to critically examine the lived realities of indigenous communities in the Republic of Congo, with a focus on their marginalization in the realms of healthcare, education, and housing. The central problem may be articulated through the following guiding questions :

- To what extent do indigenous peoples in Congo continue to experience marginalization, discrimination, and vulnerability in accessing health, education, and housing services?
- What legal and institutional frameworks currently exist to protect and promote the rights of indigenous populations in the Republic of Congo ?
- What political and policy-related challenges must be overcome to ensure the effective implementation of these rights ?

The Republic of Congo, as shown in Figure 1, is a Central African nation strategically located along the Equator. Its territory spans both the northern and southern hemispheres, lying between latitudes 4° North and 5° South, and longitudes 11° to 19° East. The country encompasses an area of approximately 342,000 square kilometers. It shares borders with Cameroon and the Central African Republic to the north, Gabon to the west, Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to the south and east, respectively. Its western edge includes a 170-kilometer stretch of Atlantic coastline, providing maritime access to the Gulf of Guinea.

Figure 1. Map of the Republic of Congo



Source : Ndey ngandzo hp (2019), the plantation economy in Republic of Congo, p. 21

2. Methodology :

This study employed two main data collection methods : documentary research and a field survey. The documentary research was conducted through consultations in local libraries and supplemented by relevant online sources. The fieldwork combined direct observations with structured individual and group interviews, targeting key informants such as indigenous community members, neighborhood leaders, and local government representatives. In addition, a household questionnaire survey was administered in 28 selected localities. These villages were chosen based on specific criteria, including the size of the indigenous population, village accessibility, and proximity to indigenous settlement camps. The collected data were processed using Sphinx and Excel software, enabling the generation of tables and graphical representations to support the analysis.

3. Results :

3.1 Historical presence and origins of indigenous peoples :

Indigenous peoples—historically referred to as “Pygmies” or “Négrilles”—are widely acknowledged as the earliest known inhabitants of what is now the Republic of Congo. Their settlement predates that of the Bantu populations and is supported by substantial archaeological and historical evidence. According to Auger (2008), prehistoric human activity in the region is confirmed by the discovery of Stone Age tools in the savannahs near Boko and in the caves of the Niari Valley. Additional artifacts, including ceramics and iron slag, have been found in areas such as Tala-Tala, Sembé, Nouabalé-Ndoki, and Cabosse in the northern parts of the country, further attesting to a long-standing indigenous presence (Auger, 2008; Ndinga Mbo, 2011). These findings align with oral histories and cultural practices preserved among contemporary Mbenga and Aka communities.

Between the 1st and 19th centuries CE, Bantu groups, fleeing the ravages of the transatlantic slave trade, migrated into regions inhabited by indigenous peoples. Over time, these Bantu populations established social and economic dominance, often institutionalizing hierarchical relations through mythologized kinship structures that reinforced subjugation and dependency (Ndinga Mbo, 2011).

The precise origins of Congo’s indigenous peoples remain debated. While some theories propose an origin in Kenya—sometimes referred to as the cradle of humanity—others suggest a connection to the Nile’s source region. Classical texts refer to their presence: Herodotus wrote of such communities in the 5th century BCE, and Aristotle, in *History of Animals*, mentioned their existence in the marshes of Upper Egypt. Loung JL, cited by Mengho (1990), argued for a likely origin in the Upper Nile region. However, contemporary anthropological

consensus situates their cultural and demographic nucleus within the dense equatorial forests of Central Africa, spanning modern-day Gabon, northern Congo, southern Cameroon, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

3.2 Ethnolinguistic diversity and geographic distribution :

The term “indigenous peoples” encompasses a broad spectrum of ethnolinguistic communities, each with distinct identities, cultural practices, and languages. These groups are not confined to Congo’s national borders; many are also present in neighboring Central African countries, reflecting longstanding transboundary affiliations.

In the southwest, particularly in Kouilou, Niari, Bouenza, and Lékoumou, the Babongo constitute the primary indigenous group. Their presence also extends into southeastern Gabon (UNESCO, 2010). In the Pool region—especially in Vindza, Kimba, Mayama, and Kindamba—the Babis reside, closely related to the Bagyeli of southern Cameroon.

In central Congo, the Batéké Plateaux (districts of Ngo, Lékana, and Gamboma) are home to the Atswa or Batcha. These communities share historical and cultural connections with the Batcha or Cwa people of the DRC’s central regions and with the Twa of Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda (Bahuchet, 2014). In Cuvette-Ouest, the Bakola reside in Mbomo and are ethnically related to Gabonese groups such as the Bibayak and Mambenga.

Farther north, in the departments of Sangha and Likouala, groups such as the Mikayas, Mbenzeles, and Baka are found. The term “Baka,” meaning “those who live in trees or leaves,” refers to communities living in the Ndoki Valley and beyond, whose presence stretches across borders into Cameroon and the Central African Republic, especially in the Lobaye region (Lewis, 2000).

Collectively, these communities are referred to as the Bambenga in northern Congo and the Babongo in the south. However, these terms are not exhaustive, and the use of the word “Pygmy”—rooted in the Greek *pygmaios*, meaning “a man of small stature”—is contested due to its pejorative and colonial implications (Hewlett, 2014).

3.3 Settlement and territorial distribution :

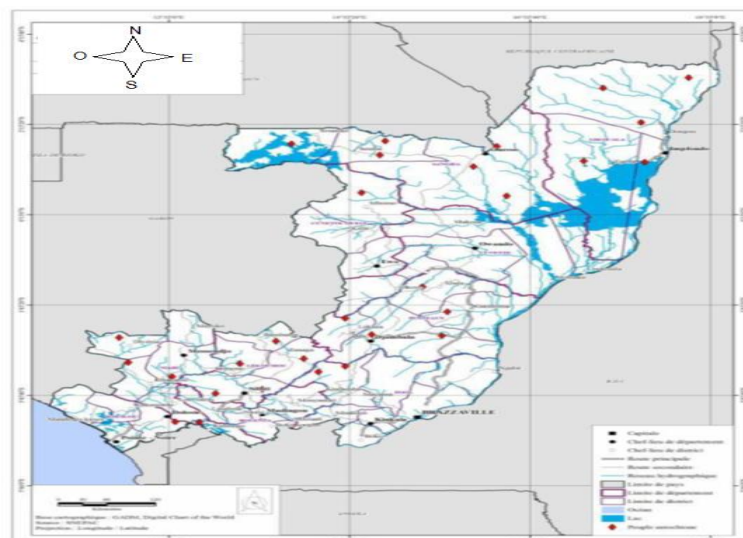
Indigenous populations in the Republic of Congo are present in nine of the nation’s twelve administrative departments. These include :

- **Northern regions:** Likouala and Sangha

- **Northwest:** Western Cuvette
- **Central region:** Plateaux
- **Southern regions:** Lékoumou, Niari, Pool, Bouenza, and Kouilou

These communities generally inhabit forest margins or isolated forest camps and lead either semi-nomadic or sedentary lifestyles. Often located on the periphery of Bantu villages or deep within forested zones, their geographic isolation exacerbates their socio-economic marginalization. Despite their extensive territorial spread and deep historical roots, indigenous peoples represent only about 1.2% of Congo's total population, with the highest concentrations observed in the departments of Likouala, Lékoumou, and Sangha (RGPH, 2007).

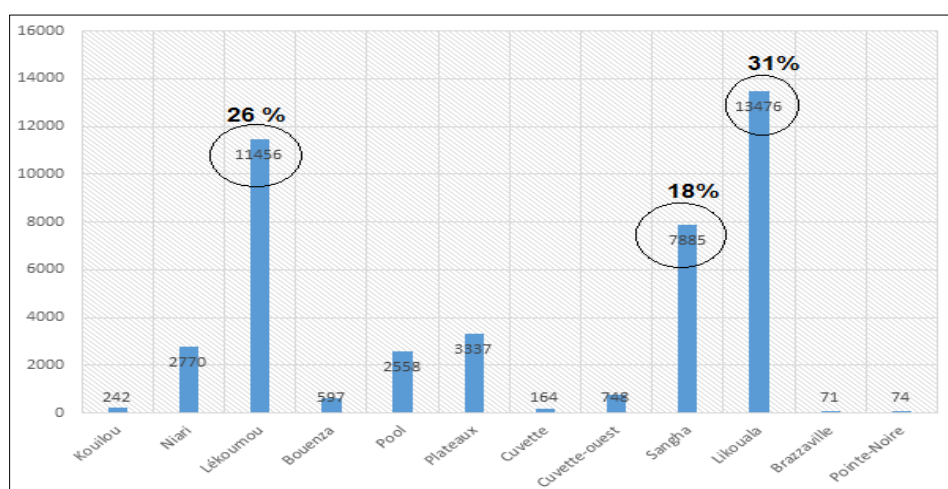
Figure 2. Location of indigenous populations in the territory of the Republic of Congo



Source : ITOUA YOYO AMBIANZI, 2008, Basic Education Support Project (PRAEBASE)

Reliable demographic data on indigenous peoples in the Republic of Congo remain limited due to the absence of disaggregated statistics. According to the 2007 General Population and Housing Census (RGPH), indigenous communities represent approximately 1.2% of the national population, estimated at 3.7 million at the time. Their presence spans the entire country, but they are disproportionately concentrated in three departments: Likouala (31%), Lékoumou (26%), and Sangha (18%), reflecting significant regional disparities in distribution.

Figure 3. Distribution of indigenous peoples by department of Congo



Source : (RGPH, 2007)

4. Situation of marginalization, discrimination and vulnerability of indigenous peoples in the Republic of Congo

Indigenous peoples (IPs) are a component of the Congolese population. However, for a long time, they have been victims of marginalization, discrimination, and inhuman and degrading treatment compared to the rest of the population. We analyze the perception of this situation from the perspective of access to health services, housing, and education.

4.1 Access to health services :

The health sector is also one of the sectors where access remains limited and discrimination is still palpable, despite the efforts made by the authorities and its technical and financial partners. The health situation of indigenous populations is undesirable and is deteriorating as they abandon the pharmacopoeia culture once used by their ancestors. With eyes and hopes now turned towards modern medicine, the same observations made by the OCDH 21 years ago remain. Due to non-assistance, cases of death continue in indigenous communities. The evaluation document of interventions aimed at improving the quality of life of indigenous populations indicates that the infant and child mortality rate for the entire population is 117‰, while in indigenous communities it is twice as high, or >250‰. Not all the provisions mentioned in "Title V" of Law No. 05-2011 on social and health services are observed on the ground.

Furthermore, although indigenous people manage to obtain treatment in health centers where one exists, such as in Zoulabouth, the payment for care and medication constitutes a

barrier limiting the efforts made by the government and its partners. It should also be noted that some health centers are not as regularly supplied with medication.

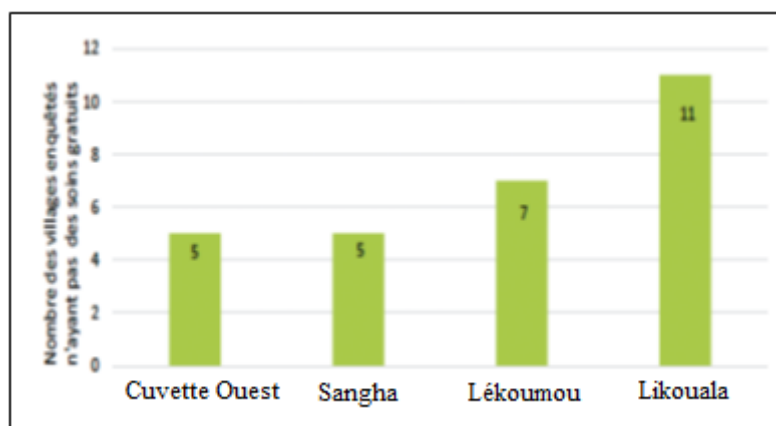
The lack of health infrastructure in indigenous villages and camps prevents them from enjoying their right to health equally with the rest of the Congolese population.

In Kabo, for example, for almost seven (7) years, community centers in indigenous communities were not visible, nor was medical and social assistance. Several endemic and contagious diseases (leprosy, malaria, tuberculosis, etc.) were killing indigenous children. Indigenous people are increasingly giving up modern medicine because of the cost of consultation fees and prescriptions. This requirement is perceived by indigenous people, whose financial income is very low.

In Bomassa, for example, although the health center is no longer functioning properly, due to the taxation of medical care, local people no longer attend the center. Many suffer from leprosy and lung diseases.

Indigenous women do not give birth primarily at health centers, but at home, with the help of a traditional midwife. At health centers, the bill is considered expensive, and Indigenous women are still not well received. Lack of financial resources and discrimination are a serious obstacle, which motivates contempt for modern medicine and supports the use of traditional medicine. The latter sometimes proves powerless in the face of new forms of diseases that are developing and threatening Indigenous people, especially children. These include hernias, appendicitis, yaws, etc. However, vaccination campaigns and timely medical assistance are all actions that must be intensified.

Figure 4. Lack of effective medical care in four departments of Congo



Source : Our investigation

Regarding indigenous women and girls, Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, through her study, reveals the following :

« I held separate meetings with indigenous women who explained their situation and that of indigenous girls. Among the issues raised were lack of access to sexual and reproductive health care, sexual violence, early marriage, high maternal and infant mortality rates, and food insecurity. Since there are generally no water facilities in their communities, this further increases their burden of fetching water and caring for children who fall ill due to lack of clean water. Several of them spoke of how Bantu men abandon pregnant indigenous girls without support. Health care services should be more accessible and designed to be more sensitive to gender and cultural differences. They also requested that the government drill more boreholes so they can have access to water. Their knowledge of traditional medicinal plants should also be encouraged and promoted. »

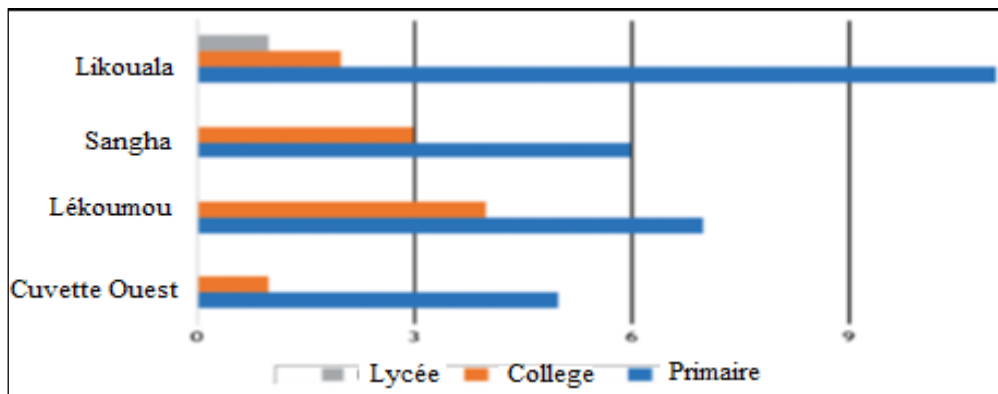
« Indigenous women told me that most of them give birth at home, either by choice or because of the distance to the nearest hospital. I met two indigenous women from Ngatongo who told me they had each lost a child after giving birth at home due to an infection caused by a community midwife using dirty instruments. UNFPA reports that 99.8% of indigenous women give birth at home or in the forest, and 65% give birth without prior prenatal care. »

4. 2 Schooling and education situation :

Education is one of the sectors that has seen some success in indigenous communities, not only due to the involvement of United Nations agencies and other international organizations, but also thanks to public education policies. UNICEF, WFP, IPHD, the Ministry of Social Affairs, etc. are implementing encouraging initiatives (school canteens and ORA schools), although unevenly distributed, to boost the education of indigenous children. However, it should be noted that the weight of history pursues indigenous populations even in the education sector. At school, they still face discrimination and intimidation from their Bantu neighbors, and continue to have very limited access to education. This is because very few schools exist, and for those that do exist, we are witnessing a phagocytosis by the Bantus. To this day, there are villages where there are zero indigenous children in school. This is the case, for example, of the village of Mapati, located 25 kilometers from Sibiti. In this locality with a high concentration of indigenous people, no indigenous children attend school at the moment. Several people interviewed on this subject testified that the indigenous children who attended school ended up fleeing in the middle of the school year. In the Cuvette-Ouest department, specifically in the Mbomo sub-prefecture about 763 km from Brazzaville, indigenous children from the villages of Mbandza, Olloba, Mbomadzoko and Mbomo-centre are abandoned to their sad fate. "Our children run away from school because "provocations", said a native woman in Ollémé. In Dongou, the student Jérémie ESSIPO was beaten by his teacher in order to force his father to pay school fees.

The figure below provides information on the evolution of the situation of indigenous populations over six years in the field of education. The following trends were observed in the four departments.

Figure 5. The evolution of the situation of indigenous populations over six years in the field of education



Source: Our investigation

The schooling of indigenous children is encouraged, among other things, by the School Canteen and ORA Schools Program: IPHD, an American NGO, WFP and UNICEF support the schooling of indigenous children. In Lékoumou, for example, in the village of Ingolo II, the mission counted 146 indigenous children enrolled in primary school compared to 42 children from the dominant community (Bantu). 86% of respondents stated that this enthusiasm is motivated by a system of providing children with food and school kits by UNICEF and IPHD. The ORA (Observe, Reflect, and Act) schools, a Cameroonian experiment brought to Congo, constitute an educational system that aims to be appropriate for semi-nomadic life. These are establishments specific to indigenous children. Indigenous children in the localities of Kabo and Enyelé, in Sangha and Likouala respectively, benefit from special treatment thanks to UNICEF support through the ORA program. This support is intended to restore indigenous students from nursery and primary schools. This program promotes the retention of indigenous students. However, these initiatives, unevenly distributed, unfortunately prove insufficient to guarantee indigenous people the right to quality education and equal opportunities.

Figure 6. View of an ORA (Observe, Reflect and Act) school in Enyelé,



Source : shooting, Ndey Ngandzo HP, 2022

According to Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz (October 2019), eight years after the adoption of Law No. ⁵⁻²⁰¹¹, illiteracy remains widespread in Indigenous communities. UNFPA reports that 65% of Indigenous children aged 12 to 16 do not attend school, compared to the national average of 39%. This is explained by a lack of financial resources as the main reason for the interruption of attendance and academic progress. Out of necessity, teachers are often recruited through parental contributions, which most Indigenous families cannot afford. School supplies and uniforms for a single child can represent several weeks of work.

4.3 Housing or accommodation situation :

In most villages, housing has not yet completely evolved, except for indigenous workers, who benefit from modern housing provided by logging companies.

The traditional habitat of indigenous peoples, called "Mongoulou," is distinctive in its structure, made primarily of curved sticks covered with leaves. The construction of "Mongoulou" is a collective activity, also requiring the participation of women and children. The arrangement of the huts obeys relationships that put the hut of the eldest member of the family group in the foreground, then, in order, the other huts.

Indeed, for more than half a century, the transformation of habitat in indigenous villages has been carried out by replacing huts with mud, brick, and plank huts, built in community villages. This initiative, which is a result of political will, has not yet succeeded in completely transforming the habitat of indigenous populations, some of whom continue to live in the forest.

The policy implemented in 1970 in the Likouala department is exemplary, but unfortunately, it has not received funding for the promotion of indigenous housing. Since that time, public authorities and local populations have been working to stimulate this momentum of housing

transformation and to respond to the great desire of indigenous peoples to leave the forest and integrate into the villages.

Figure 7. Some forms of housing of indigenous peoples in the Republic of Congo



Source : Shooting, PH Ndey Ngandzo (2022)

5. Legal framework of the different policies of indigenous peoples in Republic of Congo

Over the past two decades, the Republic of Congo has undertaken significant formal commitments to advance the rights of indigenous peoples. The most emblematic of these efforts is the adoption of Law No. 5-2011 on the Promotion and Protection of Indigenous Peoples' Rights, passed on February 25, 2011. This legislation marked a historic milestone, as it was the first law on indigenous peoples adopted in Africa. It provides for an extensive catalogue of rights, including civil and political liberties, access to education, healthcare, land tenure security, environmental protections, and cultural preservation. Furthermore, it explicitly prohibits all forms of discrimination in employment and guarantees indigenous peoples the right to self-determination and meaningful participation in political, social, and economic life (République du Congo, 2011; Hewlett, 2014).

To translate these commitments into practice, the government also developed a National Action Plan (NAP) intended to implement the law's provisions. The NAP prioritized areas such as improving school enrollment and health outcomes, increasing civil registration among indigenous populations, promoting indigenous languages, ensuring food security, and securing access to land and natural resources (UNICEF, 2014). Complementary programs such as the Lisungi Social Safety Net Project were launched to improve service delivery to

vulnerable groups, including indigenous peoples, through income-generating activities, sensitization campaigns, and grievance mechanisms (World Bank, 2021).

However, despite these ambitious frameworks, implementation remains uneven and largely symbolic. One of the most critical shortcomings lies in the absence of implementing decrees, rendering the law inoperative in many respects (OCDH, 2018). Furthermore, administrative fragmentation and insufficient inter-ministerial coordination have severely impeded policy coherence. Institutions mandated to implement indigenous rights often operate with unclear responsibilities and lack the resources needed to effect change. Civil society reports, including those from the Observatoire Congolais des Droits de l'Homme (OCDH), have consistently documented widespread neglect, forced labor, arbitrary arrests, and systematic exclusion of indigenous peoples from development planning (OCDH, 2018; Lewis, 2000).

There is also a fundamental disjunction between policy design and indigenous realities. Many development programs are conceived and executed using top-down approaches that ignore the socio-cultural specificities of indigenous groups. As a result, well-meaning interventions such as resettlement schemes have inadvertently undermined traditional livelihoods and led to further marginalization (Hewlett, 2014 ; Bahuchet, 2014). Participation of indigenous peoples in planning and monitoring remains minimal, undermining the legitimacy and effectiveness of policy interventions.

A further obstacle is the lack of disaggregated data and reliable demographic information on indigenous communities. To date, no national database specifically identifies or monitors the living conditions of indigenous peoples, despite repeated calls from UNICEF and other stakeholders. This data vacuum makes it difficult to assess needs, evaluate the impact of interventions, and develop targeted policies (UNICEF, 2014 ; RGPH, 2007). As UNICEF notes, the sociocultural and anthropological dimensions of indigenous life in Congo are often overlooked in favor of generic, quantitative measures.

Institutionally, a decree issued in July 2017 reassigned responsibility for indigenous affairs from the Ministry of Social Affairs to the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights and established a Directorate-General for the Promotion of Indigenous Peoples, with regional branches in 11 departments. While the reform was designed to consolidate oversight and streamline coordination, its practical impact has been limited. Many of the structures remain underfunded, and implementation efforts are fragmented, particularly between central and local government levels (UNESCO, 2010; Ndinga Mbo, 2011).

Moving forward, Congo's indigenous policy architecture must be restructured to prioritize participation, cultural sensitivity, and evidence-based planning. The ratification of ILO Convention No. 169 would further align Congo's domestic framework with international standards and reinforce its commitment to indigenous rights (ILO, 1989). Concrete investments in inclusive education, culturally adapted healthcare, land titling programs, and

legal aid are needed. Moreover, the establishment of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms is essential to ensure transparency, accountability, and impact.

In conclusion, although the Republic of Congo has laid the legal and institutional groundwork to protect indigenous rights, the implementation deficit remains significant. Weak governance, chronic underfunding, and insufficient political will have prevented these measures from delivering meaningful change. Without urgent, coordinated, and sustained efforts, indigenous communities in Congo will continue to suffer from poverty, exclusion, and cultural erosion, despite the formal recognition of their rights (Hewlett, 2014; OCDH, 2018; UNICEF, 2014).

6. Conclusion

Although the Republic of Congo is a signatory to numerous international human rights treaties and a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, the country's political rhetoric concerning indigenous peoples remains profoundly disconnected from the lived realities of these communities. Despite the formal recognition of indigenous rights—most notably through the adoption of Law No. 5-2011 on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Populations—the situation on the ground remains deeply troubling. Nearly a decade after the law's promulgation, its implementation has been marked by limited progress, systemic neglect, and the persistence of severe rights violations.

The living conditions of indigenous peoples continue to reflect extreme levels of socioeconomic vulnerability, characterized by chronic poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, lack of access to health care, and insecure land tenure. This precariousness is not only the consequence of historical exclusion and marginalization but also a direct result of ongoing institutional failures and entrenched structural discrimination. The Congolese state has fallen dramatically short of its own commitments, with many provisions of Law No. 5-2011 remaining largely symbolic due to the absence of concrete implementing measures, operational budgets, and political leadership.

It is important to acknowledge the efforts that have been made—such as the establishment of a National Action Plan, occasional awareness campaigns, and pilot programs like the Lisungi Social Safety Net. However, these interventions have proven to be sporadic, underfunded, and fragmented. They have failed to bring about transformative change in the daily lives of indigenous populations, who still experience routine violations of their civil, political, social, and economic rights.

Numerous field reports produced by civil society organizations, national human rights commissions, and international institutions—as well as independent academic studies—converge on the same grim findings: indigenous peoples in the Republic of Congo continue to endure widespread marginalization, discrimination, and social invisibility. They are frequently excluded from decision-making processes, denied basic services, subjected to derogatory treatment, and left out of national development strategies. In many areas, they lack birth registration, which prevents access to citizenship rights and public services, and are relegated to the peripheries of society, both geographically and politically.

The gap between legal recognition and practical realization of rights is stark. In effect, the implementation of Law No. 5-2011 can be regarded as a failure, not only due to the inaction of the state but also because of the absence of political will and lack of accountability mechanisms. Discrimination against indigenous communities remains either overt, through exclusionary practices and policies, or covert, manifested through the institutional indifference and inertia of public authorities. Whether through neglect or intent, the result is the same : the systematic denial of dignity, identity, and agency to thousands of Congolese citizens who are indigenous.

To address this deep-rooted injustice, there must be an honest reckoning with the structural barriers that have hindered the law's implementation. The Republic of Congo must go beyond declarations and enact genuine reforms that prioritize participatory governance, culturally appropriate public services, and inclusive development planning. Without such transformative action, the formal legal framework will remain hollow, and indigenous peoples will continue to be sidelined in the national narrative and policy landscape.

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