



Between legal norms and survival practices: the impact of human capital on forest management in the DRC

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the impact of human resource management (HRM) practices on the effectiveness of forest management in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The study data comes from on-site observation conducted as a four-month internship (March to June 2024) at the Directorate of Forest Management (DGF) and semi-structured interviews with 16 respondents from this department and the office of the Congolese Minister in charge of forests. The results indicate deficient HRM, characterized by disparities in the administrative and salary positions of civil servants responsible for forest management. These disparities fuel a sense of injustice among these civil servants and disconnect them from the challenges of sustainable forest management. The article calls for a (re)valuation of the forestry official to improve the Congolese ecological infrastructure.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2002, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) promulgated the forest code which was to constitute an institutional framework capable of supporting the sustainable management of its forests. The international actors behind the reform believed that the stability of the Congo required a rational management of its natural resources, including forests (Fournier and Karsenty, 2008; Trefon, 2009). They required the formalization of key economic sectors according to standardized formulas or programs provided by international engineering. Nevertheless, more than two decades later, this miracle recipe did not escape the "revenge of contexts" (Olivier de Sardan, 2021). Because, the application of this 'traveler model'¹ (Olivier de Sardan, 2021) has not allowed for a sustainable structuring of the timber sector in the DRC. Work on forest management in the DRC often highlights the administration's inability to apply the 2002 forestry code (Counsell, 2006; Trefon, 2008; Semiki, 2021; ERAIFT, 2019). Public officials are directly targeted for their role in illegal forest exploitation, a situation marked by lack of transparency, nepotism and corrupt practices (Trefon, 2008; Greenpeace, 2013, 2019 and 2020; Ibanda, 2019; IGF, 2022), which exacerbate environmental crime (Mashini, 2018; 2023). However, focusing solely on the internal determinants of these deviant behaviors of forestry officials offers a very limited vision of Congolese forest management. The professional practices of civil servants depend heavily on their external environment, like other human behaviours (Hondeghe and Parys, 2001: 75). This research aims to decipher the complex dynamics of forest management and exploitation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, focusing on the practical standards and real behaviors of forest officials at the heart of their interaction arenas. Far from a purely procedural analysis, our study questions the adjustments, arbitrations and strategies adopted by state agents in the face of the reality on the ground. The

¹ A traveller model is a "standard" solution, a public policy, a technical device or an organizational norm designed in a specific context (often the North or international institutions such as the UNDP or ARES) and that one tries to reproduce or "transplant" elsewhere (often in the countries of the South).

central issue can be formulated as follows: what are the logics of action and professional practices that the actors of the Congolese forest administration deploy when they are confronted with interactional dynamics with agents from other sovereign sectors of the State? To answer this question, the survey crystallized around the Forest Management Directorate (DGF), chosen as the preferred entry point and observation post for administrative flows. The data collection phase, spread from March to June 2024, favored a rigorous qualitative immersion. We mobilized, on the one hand, the technique of in situ observation to capture spontaneous interactions and bureaucratic routines and, on the other hand, individual semi-structured interviews to collect practice narratives and agent representations. The corpus thus constituted was the subject of a thematic content analysis, allowing to identify the structures of meaning and the behavioral regularities of the actors. The resulting article revolves around three major axes:

1. The epistemological positioning: It first returns to the specific insights provided by environmental criminology. This perspective constituted a real negotiation strategy for our entry into the field, allowing to legitimize the research object while defining the contours of our observation.
2. Methodological rigor: It meticulously traces the reflective path and stages of research, explaining the challenges related to data collection in a complex institutional environment.
3. The analysis of the results: Finally, the article presents a major partial result highlighting the correlations of cause and effect between human capital management (motivation, training, ethics) and the effectiveness of forest ecosystem governance. This analysis demonstrates that the ecological performance of the DRC is intrinsically linked to the quality of administrative governance and the working conditions of state agents.

I. CRIMINOLOGISTS AMONG THE FOREST OFFICIALS OF THE DGF

It should be emphasized that it is through the administrative authorization of the Secretary General for the Environment and Sustainable Development, taken in response to our request supported by the School of Criminology of the University of Kinshasa, that we were able to access the Forest Management Directorate (DGF) to create our land. Despite these administrative authorizations, our entry into this field was not automatic insofar as our presence in this professional environment seemed at least singular in the eyes of the staff in place. It is for the first time that this forest administration received researchers in criminology. Not establishing any link between forestry and criminology a priori, the DGF staff recommended us to turn to another technical entity of the Ministry of the Environment, Sustainable Development and New Climate Economy (MEDD-NEC), namely the Control and Verification Cell, CCV (formerly Control and Inspection Directorate). The CCV would constitute a place of predilection for the criminologist because it is indeed competent in criminal investigations in the forestry sector, following a presentation sheet available on <https://medd.gouv.cd/ccv/>. Access to the field of research, far from being an administrative formality, constitutes a crucial epistemological step that requires the researcher a real tactical pragmatism (Kienge-Kienge, 2012: 123). This phase, often informal and devoid of strict procedural rules, relies entirely on the researcher's ability to navigate in the arenas of power and to evaluate the sensitivities of the actors involved. The negotiation of this entry is not limited to a simple presentation of identity; it involves a staging of oneself and a reformulation of the object of study in order to make it intelligible, even acceptable, within the professional universe investigated. In our case, the entry into the Forest Management Directorate (DGF) required a prior backlash. The very term 'criminology' initially acted as a foil, because it was perceived by forestry officials solely under a repressive or police prism, thus generating mistrust and information retention. To dispel this confusion and establish a climate of mutual trust, we had to deploy a pedagogy of the discipline. We have thus presented criminology not as an instrument of denunciation, but as a comprehensive social science capable of analyzing the logics of action, structural constraints and organizational challenges faced by agents. By operating this semantic shift from «crime» to «management» and «real practices», we were able to transform the perception of our presence: from potential threat, the researcher became an attentive observer of bureaucratic realities. This clarification strategy was the cornerstone of our immersion, allowing a smooth integration and a release of speech from our interlocutors.

I.1. Criminology: object of an epistemological misunderstanding?

Entering the field at the Forest Management Directorate (DGF) immediately revealed a deep semantic confusion among our interlocutors. For administrative staff, the term 'criminology' refers almost exclusively to the repressive apparatus of the State. In order to dispel this ambiguity that was the subject of our first exchanges, it was imperative to distinguish two disciplines often confused in the collective imagination, although they share a common interest in the criminal phenomenon, its perpetrator and its victim: criminology and forensics.

A. Forensics: the science of material evidence

It should first be clarified that the categories of "crime" and "criminal" (including in the forestry sector) are not raw data of nature, but legal constructions. As highlighted by a rigorous analysis, it is the legal definition and judicial interpretation that transmute social behavior into offense. These abstractions constitute the heart of criminal law, which is based on technical investigations related to forensics. The latter can be defined as "the body of knowledge, scientific methods and laboratory techniques put at the service of criminal justice to establish material evidence of an offense and identify its perpetrators or accomplices" (Gassin, cited by C. Adam et al., 2014: 12). It is, in essence, the science of judicial truth. This truth is not an absolute restitution of the real, but a logical construction that Nyabirungu describes as «logic of the reasonable» (2007: 476). Consequently, the gap remaining between

this truth reconstructed by the evidence and the factual reality of the events constitutes the potential source of the miscarriage of justice. Essentially multidisciplinary and comparative, forensic science mobilizes basic sciences (legal medicine, toxicology, biology, ballistics) and advanced technologies (laser, infra-red, DNA) to materialize the principle of transfer of Edmond Locard. This fundamental premise is that «all contact leaves a trace». Forensics thus compares the clues taken from a crime scene with reference samples to link, in an irrefutable way, a suspect to a place or an object. However, forensics and the investigations that support it are a matter of law. They are only carried out by the State through criminologists (evidence technicians), who should not be confused either with criminalists (specialists in criminal law or criminal law), nor with criminologists who are specialists in criminology (Kienge-Kienge, 2021: 9).

B. The limits of the forensic approach in a forest environment

The scope of forensics, although essential for criminal proceedings, is extremely limited to grasp the complexity of forest management. It is strictly conditioned by the commission of an act already qualified as an offence under criminal law. However, it is possible that there are major violations that have not been criminalized in a given society or in a specific sector such as forestry. The sector is thus teeming with serious social or environmental violations that have not yet been formally criminalized by the legislator. Moreover, criminal justice, through its retributive prism, prioritizes the restoration of public order through punishment, often relegating the real victim (local communities or the ecosystem itself) to the background. Sometimes, these criminal investigations prove ineffective in providing satisfactory reparation to the real victim, because the criminal justice system sometimes ignores concrete prejudices in favor of repression. Forensic investigation seeks a culprit; it does not necessarily seek to understand systemic failures or ensure holistic redress. Hence the relevance and the imperative to open up to other alternatives, other types of social surveys and other ways of regulating social problems. If technical forensic investigations do not fall under criminology as a human science, what is the specificity of the latter? What does the criminologist actually deal with when he immerses himself in an administration like the DGF?

I.2. To the discovery of criminology

Criminology is not «the science that studies crime», or the «science of the criminal phenomenon» or even «the science that aims at the study of crime, criminal and criminality» (E. Yamarellos and G. Kellens, 1970). Criminology is rather the study of social problems and the way in which they are managed by the State and other social actors. According to Alvaro P. Pires (1995: 65), "criminology includes as objects: problem-situations or problematic behaviors, understood in the sense of 'which poses a problem for the social group', on the one hand, and forms of regulation, control, or social reaction, on the other." These forms of regulation, control or social reaction include everything related to the creation of laws, the functioning of justice (criminal, administrative, civil, professional, etc.), the penitentiary system and psychosocial intervention with people who have had trouble with (criminal) justice, criminal policy, alternative dispute resolution, public policies, history and analysis of relevant aspects of law, practices and institutions of social control, etc. To meet such a challenge, criminology opts for a descriptive posture. It is part of an interdisciplinary approach. It feeds on the fields, paradigms, approaches, theories, concepts, methods, etc. of other sciences. It is also characterized by its ethical dimension relying on empathy which allows to take into account the diversity of practices, actors, stakes and logics of action to be valued by the methods of management of social problems that it proposes. Contemporary criminology now asserts itself as a credible and robust alternative to criminal law, but also to the whole of state law from which it has managed to emancipate itself in order to forge its own epistemological identity. Formerly confined to the rank of auxiliary science of criminal law, it has made a major break to establish itself as an autonomous discipline, capable of questioning the very foundations of social regulation. This autonomy is not only theoretical; it is institutionally enacted by a progressive detachment from the Faculties of Law in favor of independent academic structures. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, this historical turning point is marked by the creation of Schools of criminology within universities, which organize specific teaching and research programs with their own diploma. «The School of Criminology at the University of Kinshasa (UNIKIN) embodies this academic maturity, by offering a framework for reflection that goes beyond simple exegesis of legal texts to embrace the complex analysis of social facts» (R. Kienge-Kienge & P. Pidika, 2025: 35, 37). Therefore, the field of investigation of criminology becomes universal. It is no longer limited to the study of blood crime or theft, but extends to all areas of social life, including those of the environment and forestry. These sectors are today saturated with "problematic situations" — conflicts of use, illicit exploitation, administrative deviations—which often escape the rigidity of state law and require innovative regulatory mechanisms.

It is here that criminology becomes an indispensable tool for specialists in these fields, as well as for managers and facilitators of public and private institutions. The criminological approach invites these actors to a profound reform of their modes of governance and problem solving. By mobilizing methods aimed at elucidation and the fine understanding of phenomena rather than simple repression, it allows institutions like the DGF to understand the roots of systemic failures. In summary, criminology proposes to forest decision-makers to move from a reactive and punitive management to a proactive and intelligent management, based on empirical knowledge of social interactions and action logics that govern the Congolese forest.

II. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND EMPIRICAL IMMERSION

II.1. Exploration as a basis for the choice of the Forest Management Directorate (FMD)

The establishment of a close conceptual link between criminology, environmental issues and forestry was the catalyst for our immersion within the Forest Management Directorate (DGF). Far from being arbitrary, the choice of this structure is the result of a rigorous exploratory phase conducted with a diverse panel: officials from the Ministry of the Environment, Sustainable Development and New Climate Economy (MEDD-NEC), independent experts and academics specialized in forestry governance. This preliminary step proves to be crucial in the research process, because "it allows the researcher to confront the relevance of his theoretical questioning with the tangible reality of social actors" (Marquet, J. et al., 2022: 47). Thanks to these first contacts, we were able to refine our initial issue and designate the DGF as the privileged observation post. This administration is, in essence, at the forefront of state interactions, remaining closer to the operators throughout the value chain of the forest-wood sector.

II.2. Organic architecture and focal observation

From an organic point of view, the DGF is structured around four pillars: forestry allocation and exploitation, industry, community forestry and statistics. However, our study focused on the divisions of allocation and exploitation as well as forest statistics, due to their centrality in the regulation of the sector. The first deals with the basic administrative acts (cutting permits, certificates of origin, phytosanitary certificates) guaranteeing the legal compliance of activities. The second centralizes data from operators and transversal services. In this regard, the role of external administrations such as the Central Bank of Congo (BCC), the Directorate-General of Customs and Excise (DGDA) and the Congolese Control Office (OCC) is theoretically crucial to ensure cross-traceability. Nevertheless, observation reveals a major aporia: in practice, interministerial collaboration is almost non-existent, plunging the DGF into an informational isolation detrimental to the reliability of national statistics.

II.3. Research posture and data collection techniques

Inscribed in a qualitative and inductive path, our approach is based on the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. The objective is to grasp the subjective meanings that agents attribute to their behaviors in order to build knowledge rooted in sensitive experience and observation of the real world (Poupart et al., 1983: 67; Creswell, 1998). Our observation was conducted "in open", in accordance with ethical requirements, after obtaining formal authorizations from the Human Resources Department of MEDD-NEC. This declared researcher status did not hinder the collection; on the contrary, the trust established during the negotiation phases allowed for a smooth integration. By adopting the posture of a complete observer (Gold, 1958), we were able to achieve an "integration in retreat", a privileged witness of daily practices without interfering in administrative action. In situ observation, defined as a prolonged stay on the very site of the action (Martineau, 2005: 6), allowed us to document infrastructures, work environment and informal interactions. This technique has been judiciously coupled with the semi-directive interview. The latter makes it possible to go beyond simple factual observation to generate a 'social discourse' revealing both the experience and the 'duty-to-be' of agents (Kienge Kienge, 2012: 119).

II.4. Thematic sampling and saturation

The empirical corpus is based on 16 in-depth interviews conducted with DGF officials and members of the Minister's Office. Although the initial sample was restricted to technicians, the evolution of the field imposed the inclusion of political actors, whose influence has systematically appeared in the speeches of the respondents as a determining factor of management practices. The size of this sample meets the principle of thematic saturation: "information is deemed sufficient when the data collected becomes repetitive and no longer provides new meaning to the understanding of the phenomenon" (Pires, 1997: 26). The thematic analysis of this rich material reveals a major impact of human resources management on the efficiency of forest management, a result that we propose to support in the following developments.

III. Human resources management, a major challenge for the sustainable management of Congolese forests

The deconstruction of administrative positions of civil servants constitutes an essential epistemological prerequisite for the analysis of forest management. Our original question, aimed at precisely identifying the state actors entrusted with the mission of forest management in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, was not limited to a simple organic census. It allowed a fundamental distinction to be made between the statutory identity of the agent (who he is under the law) and his professional conduct (what he actually does in the field). The analysis of our empirical materials reveals a deep heterogeneity of administrative positions within the Forest Management Directorate (FMD). Far from forming a homogeneous and stabilized body, the staff is fragmented into a multitude of categories: agents under status, contractual, new units (N.U.) or even agents in a situation of accumulation, each evolving in a different relationship to the institution. This stratification, often perceived as arbitrary, fuels a particularly acute sense of organizational injustice. The gap between the responsibilities exercised and the precariousness of the statutes generates frustrations that do not remain without consequences. This lack of statutory recognition has a negative impact on the quality of public forestry services. It results in an erosion of motivation, a disengagement from conservation objectives and, in some cases, the development of informal survival strategies that compromise the integrity of the forest management chain. In sum, the precariousness or inequity of administrative positions acts as a powerful performance inhibitor, transforming the bureaucratic structure into an arena where managing personal emergencies often takes precedence over the rigorous application of sustainable forest management standards.

III.1. The diversity of state actors in forest management

The data collected as part of this research shows that state actors of the DGF are found in multiple administrative statuses that we were able to group into three categories below:

1. Staff in a regular administrative situation: this category is composed of staff regularly registered on the list of employees of the Ministry of the Public Service, appointed to a grade and occupying a budgeted position within the DGF. These are 'career agents of the public services of the State' as defined by Article 1, paragraph 2 of Law No. 25/046 of 1 July 2025 amending and supplementing Law No. 16/013 of 15 July 2016 on the status of career public service employees in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This administrative staff receives the entirety of their remuneration composed of the basic salary, bonuses and any allowances, although modest.
2. Staff appointed and occupying non-budgeted posts: this category is composed of civil servants admitted under the statute through the granting of registration numbers, but who occupy non-budgeted posts so that they are partially paid (only the institutional bonus).
3. The so-called "new units" (NU) staff: this category includes people often recruited by public authorities other than those officially responsible for recruiting career agents of the public services of the DRC. They are integrated into the DGF in violation of the statutory procedures that require competition among applicants for budget-related positions in a given service.

This observation sheds light on the structural difficulties in terms of staff numbers within the DGF due to the surge of "new units" often recruited outside the legal channels, as highlighted in this interview excerpt with a DGF actor: « Officers come here at the pace of regime changes [policy], ministerial reshuffles, appointments of public service managers. They are usually recommended by new leaders who arrive in business. They are therefore not recruited on the basis of their qualifications ». The disorder in recruitment leads inexorably to a dysfunction of public administrations that receive these staff whose recruitment criteria leave something to be desired. This is the opinion of this DGF investigator: « Our division currently has a staff of 42 while the organic manager only plans 21. Despite this overrun, due to the influx of new units, there are only 26 agents who are operational and about ten of whom are mechanized. Some no longer come and others are even outside of Kinshasa ».

This result is in line with the scientific literature that places the mastery of public service staff at the heart of reforms of the Congolese public administration, often supported by international partners (Diumasumbu, 2008: 102-103; Mena (2022: 120). But very little progress is made according to some observers who correlate this assessment with the "regularization of the administrative situation", an informal recruitment practice that prioritizes tribal and political proximity rather than competence (Omelungi, 2025: 270). In the light of strict administrative legality, the so-called NU staff are devoid of the status of public official, for lack of a formal act of appointment and recognition by the Ministry of the Public Service. This statutory vacuum places them in a situation of legal precariousness where their belonging to the body of the State remains purely theoretical. However, this regulatory exclusion is confronted with a radically different reality on the ground. In the daily practice of the DGF, these agents are fully invested in the processes of regulation and forestry exploitation. They constantly interact with the loggers, who, relying on the appearance of legality and the effective exercise of public powers, perceive them as authentic agents of the State. We are here in the presence of the figure of the "de facto civil servant". Although their statutory position is not formalised, their operational involvement confers them social authority and practical legitimacy in the eyes of forest users. This duality between the absence of legal title and the effectiveness of the function creates a grey area where state action relies on actors whose legal responsibility remains difficult to engage, thus complicating the management and traceability of decisions within the timber sector.

III.2. The administrative and wage insecurity of state forest management actors

The administrative and wage insecurity of state actors in charge of forest management is also a result obtained within the framework of our research. This is a consequence of the result developed above. Our empirical data reveal that the heterogeneity of administrative statuses creates a situation of insecurity for many forest managers. It is an insecurity of their rights to be officially recognized as state officials and to benefit from the advantages associated with this quality. Indeed, despite the often criticized socio-professional conditions, the status of civil servant offers structuring advantages in terms of job stability in a context largely marked by increased unemployment. The pension scheme through the National Social Security Fund for State Public Employees (CNSSAP) and social benefits (paid leave/maternity, medical care, family allowances) constitute a pillar of stability for many Congolese who rush into the civil service.

The malaise that is settling within the DGF is first expressed by a cry of distress in the face of the lack of material recognition. The testimony of an agent «Nouvelle Unité» illustrates this situation of extreme vulnerability: « It has been since 2019 that I have been working here as a new unit, that is to say without registration or remuneration. This injustice discourages me. But I am obliged to come to work in order not to lose hope for a future job ». This perception of a deep injustice is widely shared. For a large part of the staff, the absence of financial compensation for the services provided to the State is seen as a breach of the social and administrative contract. Agents in the second category (those with a registration but not yet paid) are not spared by this precariousness. The analysis of data shows that the stagnation of their files in the Payroll Department of the Ministry of the Budget is often the consequence of a strategic networking deficit. Without levers of influence or political sponsorship to ensure administrative follow-up, "mechanization" (access to remuneration) becomes a distant horizon. It follows that access to salary in the Congolese public service is akin to a real obstacle course, hindered by structural budgetary constraints and an opacity of

bureaucratic processes, as noted by Moshonas et al. (2019). Paradoxically, access to remuneration (first category) is not enough to dispel the feeling of injustice. The low salaries allocated place civil servants in a paradoxical survival situation, as evidenced by this agent: "How to live, pay the rent, the children's schooling and ensure daily transport (5,000 FC) with a monthly salary of approximately 324,000 Congolese francs (or 110 USD in April 2024)?" This question highlights the abyssal gap between the cost of living and real purchasing power. In line with the work of Mulumeoderhwa (2017), it appears that the wage policy of the Congolese state, far from promoting professional development, paradoxically precariously affects those who are supposed to embody public authority. This observation corroborates the analysis of Moshonas et al. (2024) on the phenomenon of dehydration. The strategy of multiplying bonuses to compensate for the low basic salary has proved to be a structural failure. Instead of stabilizing the civil service, this system maintains income fragmentation and chronic financial insecurity. This situation inevitably pushes actors to seek alternative income, sometimes at the expense of professional ethics and rigor in the management of forest resources.

III.3. Disconnection from the challenges of forestry

The feeling of organizational injustice is not limited to financial frustration; it generates a real crisis of meaning that affects the professional commitment of agents. If this acuity is at its highest in the «new units», it contaminates all the layers of the Forest Management Directorate, creating a climate of generalized disinvestment. The following excerpt illustrates poignantly the break between the social aspirations of young executives and the reality of their precariousness: « When you work, it's to hope for a better life. As a young university student, I have many life projects that I must achieve. I have to stabilize and get married. But it seems difficult with the modest salary I receive. I am forced to still live with my parents. It's discouraging ». This testimony sheds light on the phenomenon of 'hindered social maturity'. For this young academic, work at the DGF no longer fulfills its function as a vector of social promotion or empowerment. The impossibility of leaving the parental home or founding a household transforms the status of executive of the State into a position of humiliating dependence. This gap between the symbolic prestige of function and real material poverty breaks the spring of intrinsic motivation. The analysis of our empirical materials confirms this trend: the majority of respondents express a deep fatigue. For many, presence in the workplace is no longer a commitment to the missions of the forest administration, but rather a default resilience strategy ('lack of better'). This observation of widespread demotivation resonates directly with the theories of public human resources management. As highlighted by Hondegheem and Parys: "In organizations that rely heavily on the human factor (such as public administrations), it is generally accepted that the proper functioning of the organization depends primarily on the quality and motivation of its employees. Motivated staff are of paramount importance in ensuring the quality of public service' (2001: 75). The application of this thesis to the DGF reveals a systemic risk for the Congolese forest. If the human factor is the driving force of the administration, its current demotivation transforms the public service into an 'empty shell' where agents, concerned about their own survival, can no longer effectively ensure surveillance.

CONCLUSION

The original ambition behind the creation of the Directorate of Forest Management (DGF) was to transpose, at the heart of the Congolese state apparatus, the paradigms of sustainable development enshrined at the 1992 Earth Summit, in order to make the forest a lever for economic growth reconciling ecological imperatives and social justice. However, the analysis produced in this article reveals a deep systemic gap, where the structural precariousness of public agents, exacerbated by iniquitous administrative statuses, irretrievably distances public action from these ideals of conservation. The paradox is striking: while the pace of deforestation is accelerating at an alarming rate, the contribution of forestry revenues to the national budget remains derisory, reflecting a massive loss of both ecological and financial resources to the detriment of the nation. This research has thus highlighted the decisive influence of human resources management on the overall effectiveness of forest governance, thereby demonstrating that the inability of the Congolese State to sustainably protect its forest area, the second green lung of the planet, is in no way a technical fatality or a lack of scientific knowledge. It rather stems from a systematic devaluation of the forestry official who, by weakening public institutions now reduced to "bureaucratic facades", broke the bond of trust and authority necessary for the regulation of the sector. It is therefore paradoxical to note that in the midst of a global climate crisis, this field agent remains the "outsider" of Congolese public policies, condemning successive reforms to failure due to lack of legitimacy and the atrophy of means of action. Therefore, the revaluation of human capital within the administration appears as the sine qua non guarantee of improving ecological infrastructure, because without a bold policy of salary and statutory dignity, the label "DRC, country solution" risks widening to become just a hollow slogan, disconnected from the realities of its ground keepers. The opening of this reflection project therefore calls for new investigations to deepen the understanding of the dynamics at work, notably through a criminology of interactions that would study how administrative precariousness promotes the emergence of 'practical standards' where the agent, for his own survival, is forced to negotiate his authority with the operator. In this perspective, a prolonged immersion on the sites of exploitation would allow to grasp with precision the passage from a crime of necessity to systemic corruptive practices firmly anchored in administrative routines. Simultaneously, a comparative analysis with other management models in the Congo Basin, such as that of Gabon, would offer the opportunity to verify whether a stabilization of the status of foresters correlates directly with an increase in public revenue and a reduction in illegal logging. This scientific

extension should also integrate the impact of the increasing digitization of traceability tools, in order to evaluate if these technical devices can really compensate for human weaknesses or if they are, in turn, hijacked by actors in search of alternative income. Finally, a sociological study dedicated to the figure of the "New Unity" would document the resilience or radicalization of these de facto civil servants, whose loyalty to the State is severely tested by years of waiting without mechanization, thus constituting an essential component for a holistic understanding of the crisis of the forest authority in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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