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## ENVIRONMENTALIST PREACHES CONSERVATION AS CHAOS ENGULFS EASTERN CONGO



Uvira, Democratic Republic of Congo: With little more than a motorbike and a mission, Clement Kitambala has been spreading news about environmental issues in remote communities throughout the war-ravaged Democratic Republic of Congo.

Amid renewed fighting that has displaced more than 130,000, ongoing food crises and rampant sexual violence, his newsletter, *Tunza Mazingira* (“Conserve the Environment” in Swahili), has provided a steady voice for conservation. Mr Kitambala painstakingly distributes the newsletter in person, from village to village, on his motorbike.

Ned Meerdink, a graduate student from Wisconsin who is volunteering in Uvira as an Advocacy Project (AP) Peace Fellow, is working alongside Mr Kitambala at *Mutuelle Jeunesse Active* (MJA), a human rights organization that prints the newsletter. AP believes Mr Kitambala’s simple, effective model could be adapted by other community-based groups that lack access to internet technology.

“One of the key aspects of the journal is that Clement goes far and wide to distribute the newsletter among a wide audience, refusing to leave villagers out of the informational loop because of the remoteness of their villages, as is often the custom in Eastern Congo,” Mr Meerdink wrote in a recent blog.

The newsletter appears roughly every two months and the last printing ran to about 300 copies, Mr Meerdink said. MJA provides the equipment to format and produce the newsletter, and also

covers the cost of printing. Mr Meerdink is helping Mr Kitambala to create an online version of Tunza Mazingira and so expand his audience worldwide.

Environmental conservation is a tough sell in Eastern Congo, where fighting erupted in August between the Congolese army and Laurent Nkunda's National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP). The Amani Program, a Congolese government initiative to coordinate peace efforts, is now on the brink of collapse and people fear all-out war, Mr. Meerdink said.

Mr Kitambala's view is that environmental degradation will threaten the country regardless of whether peace is achieved. In the latest issue, he reviews tree-planting programs to decrease soil erosion in Uvira. Some houses are on the verge of falling off eroded cliffs, and many families are forced to rebuild their houses each year after floods during the rainy season.

Other recent articles have concerned the accumulation of litter close to the shores of Lake Tanganyika, which has been decreasing fishing yields; a call to revive a Saturday morning street-cleaning tradition; and the government's inability to provide electricity consistently.

"The organizations I am working with here all appreciate very much Clement's foresight and ability to look beyond the immediate conflict-based causes of struggle in Eastern Congo to the environmental problems which certainly have the potential to endure long after Congo has found the means to end the conflict," Mr. Meerdink said.

- Read the [blog](#) of Peace Fellow Ned Meerdink
- Read [Tunza Mazingira](#) online