



Vacuum Governance in Eastern DRC

**UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL,
ECONOMIC AND SECURITY
DYNAMICS OF SHABUNDA**

**Godefroid Muzalia, César Muhigirwa, Faustin Walemba,
Daniel Mulenda and Sinkis Kisakati**

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The Insecure Livelihoods Series publishes independent and field-driven information and analysis on the complexity of conflict and security in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Its reports are based on independent, non-partisan and collaborative research.

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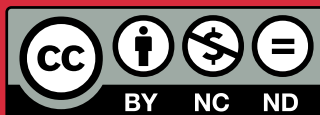
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Executive Summary

This report investigates the social and security dynamics in Shabunda territory (Democratic Republic of the Congo). Located in westernmost South Kivu province and bordering Maniema province, Shabunda is an isolated, enclaved region that has known high levels of insecurity consequent to the activities of residual armed groups known collectively as the Raia Mutomboki. While the isolated situation of Shabunda territory fosters a persistent and polymorphous insecurity, it also enables, as demonstrated in this report, the deployment of local governance systems involving state and non-state actors in the daily management of local political power and access to resources as well as in conflicts around these issues. This, in turn, creates a space of opportunity that contributes to broader transformations of the rural landscape, which this report conceptualises as a form of ‘vacuum governance’.

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Glossary

AFDL	Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaïre
ALIR	Armée de libération du Rwanda
CEBECO	Communauté des églises baptistes au Congo
CNKI	Comité national du Kivu
COBELMIN	Compagnie belge d'entreprises minières
DDR	Désarmement, démobilisation et réintégration
Ex-FAR	Ex-Forces armées Rwandaises
FARDC	Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo
FDLR	Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda
FPR	Front patriotique rwandais
FSK	Fond social du Kivu
IDHE	Innovation pour les droits humains et l'environnement
MOSHA	Mutuelle des originaires de Shabunda
MSF-H	Médecins sans Frontières/ Hollande
QIP	Projet à impact rapide
RCD	Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie
RM	Raia Mutomboki
SAAK	Société agricole auxiliaire du Kivu
SAKIMA	Société aurifère du Kivu-Maniema
CEFAKI	Société de chemin de fer du Kivu

Shabunda is one of eight sub-provincial administrative units, called “territoires”, of South Kivu province.¹ Located in the western part of the province, Shabunda territory borders the province of Maniema. With 25,412 square kilometres, Shabunda is the largest, least accessible by road, and least populated territory in South Kivu province. Shabunda, like the entire region, has experienced an unstable security context since the second half of the 1990s. However, it has received less attention from the Congolese government and from humanitarian and peacebuilding NGOs, which are otherwise very active in eastern DRC. This report attributes this exception to the fact that Shabunda is an isolated area, described by some as a “forgotten territory”², and pays particular attention to the socio-economic and security dynamics that develop in the context of this enclavement. The research was conducted by a team of six people working in three areas: the Bakisi chieftaincy, the Wakabango I chieftaincy and the city of Bukavu. In the Bakisi, semi-structured interviews were conducted along two geographic axes: Nyalubemba-Kigulube and Kigulube-Nzovu, while in the Wakabango I, the researchers focused on the Shabunda-Centre-Kalole axis via Penekusu. The researchers interviewed a variety of actors, including representatives of local authorities, mining operators, ex-combatants, economic operators, security personnel, and local residents. Field data was supplemented by archival data, mostly from Bukavu, as well as some of the rare scholarly works available on Shabunda.

¹ Kalehe, Kabare, Walungu, Idjwi, Fizi, Uvira, Mwenga and Shabunda.

² Bukavu-based representatives from Shabunda often call their territoire a “forgotten territory”.

Research axes were not chosen randomly. Kigulube is the seat of the Bakisi chieftaincy at the intersection of two key road axes. It has experienced several violent dynamics since the second half of the 1990s until today. Kigulube was used as a refuge by Rwandan armed groups and their dependents in 1998 and experienced intense activity by Mai-Mai armed groups too. Nzovu is a former mining hub of the *Société Minière du Kivu*, leading all the way into a central ecological corridor of the Kahuzi Biega National Park. This makes it a strategic location for local and foreign armed groups that have operated in the area, as they could feed on poaching and mining resources. The third axis, mainly Kalole, has seen the birth and spread of the Raia Mutumboki (RM). These groups have seriously affected the social, political, economic and security landscape of the area. The central argument of this report is that, just as Shabunda's isolation provides an enclosed spatial set-up that favours insecurity, this configuration also favours the deployment of a more or less fragmented local governance, which contributes to the establishment of unregulated business by a constellation of domestic and foreign actors. All this has contributed to a reshaping of the rural landscape in the form of a "fissured isolation" insofar as the Shabunda is open to outside interference, while the Congolese state is mainly absent.

This report is divided into four sections. After this introductory section, the first section outlines the recent history of Shabunda. The second section presents the territory's current situation and links its isolated nature to the rise of difficult-to-govern spaces. The third section describes the economic, security and humanitarian dynamics of the territory and re-examines the Raia Mutumboki phenomenon and questions the prospects of demobilization. The fourth section analyses Shabunda's fissured isolation before reaching a conclusion that includes new perspectives for research on the region.

A brief glance at recent history

Shabunda has often been a strategic location during past armed conflicts in the region at different times, as evidenced by recent history. This was the case in the colonial context as well as during the Congolese crisis of the 1960s, the rebellions of the 1990s, and the emergence of new armed groups after the Inter-Congolese Dialogue held in South Africa (2002), which was an important landmark in the DRC's peace process.

2.1. The colonial context

The Berlin Conference of 1885 had given the Kingdom of Belgium permission to effectively occupy the Congo basin in the name of fighting the slave traders, whose largest trading centre was in Nyangwe, in what is now Maniema province (Lebigre 1980). Shabunda territory was one of the crossing points for Arabs and Arabized people who were involved in the slave trade. Justified in an apparent fight against slavery, Commander Crone, a German military officer, created the post of Shabunda (today the city of Shabunda) in 1904 (Kisala 2006). But once the Arabs and Arabized were subdued, Shabunda lost its strategic position. The arrival of mining companies in the area later then drew the colonial administration's attention back to Shabunda.

2.2. The 1960s rebellions

A week after its independence was proclaimed on 30 June 1960, the newly formed Democratic Republic of the Congo sank into chaos. By 1964, a rebellion led by Pierre Mulele had engulfed Kwilu area, in the west of the country,

the *Simba* rebels led by Gaston Soumialot moved into Kivu from Uvira (Ndaywel è Nziem 1998), with the help of local commanders like Marandura and Bidalira (Mugisho 1999). In August 1964, troops of the *Armée Populaire de Libération* also occupied Shabunda (Iyananio 2015). The rebellion was defeated in 1965, but some *Simba* rebels remained in the area, specifically in the Wakabango I chieftaincy (Ikama grouping), until 1985.³ The *Simba* rebels perpetrated violence in this part of South Kivu and got involved in political rivalries over control of local power between the Banyikama and Banankuku. This period of crisis did yet not significantly impact the social, political and economic context in Shabunda. This may be explained by the fact that they were short-lived conflicts. The National Road 2 (NR2) and Provincial Road (PR) 502 (Burhale-Shabunda) were still (more or less) accessible and Shabunda was still one of South Kivu's agricultural baskets. The territory supplied Bukavu mainly with rice (Buchekuderhwa 2005), groundnuts and palm oil. In the early 1990s, the RN2 and RP502 became inaccessible. Shabunda territory became isolated, helping the spread of insecurity in an enclaved space, which would then result in the emergence of scattered poles of militarized power since the second half of the 1990s.

2.3. The 1990s, genocide in Rwanda and rebellion in Zaïre

The historicization of prevailing insecurity in Shabunda requires a reminder of the socio-political context in neighbouring Rwanda that led to the 1994 genocide. At the time, the “Hutu” regime of President Habyarimana in Rwanda was facing the “Tutsi-led” rebellion of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), based out of neighbouring Uganda in a conflict that was both political and ethnic. On 6 April 1994, the plane of Rwandan President Habyarimana was shot down in circumstances that remain unclear to this day. Immediately after the death of the president, the country descended into extreme violence: the Genocide of the Tutsi genocide on the one hand, and the intensification of war between the PF and the *ex-Forces Armées Rwandaises (ex-FAR)* on the other (Smith 2004). In June 1994, the RPF defeated the ex-FAR and took

³ In 1985, Charles Mwando Nsimba (then-governor of South Kivu) managed to get several “gang leaders” opposed to Mobutu's regime to surrender. Only Laurent-Désiré Kabila, Nathanël Mbumba and Sylvestre Lwecha resisted him at the time.

power in Kigali, with the mostly Tutsi RPF military leadership taking control effectively. Fearing retaliation, the stalwarts of the genocidal regime went into exile. It is in this context that a huge human tide poured into the east of then-Zaïre. Several refugee camps were set up along the Rwandan and Burundian borders (Luvungi, Hongo, Nyamirangwe, INERA, Kashusha, etc.). Yet these vast humanitarian sanctuaries (Tressier 2005) also became the cradle for counter-rebellions against Burundi and Rwanda. Made of civilians and armed militia alike, these camps were all close to the borders with these two countries, and thus considered a threat by Kigali and Bujumbura and the main arguments used to justify intervention in 1996. In September 1996, the Burundian, Rwandan and Ugandan armies joined the military campaign led by the *Alliance des forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo/Zaïre* (AFDL) rebellion against Mobutu. The first attacks in the Kivu region resulted in the dismantling of all refugee camps, during which refugees were forcibly repatriated to Rwanda while others were slaughtered. Survivors, including elements of the *ex-Forces armées rwandaises* and the *interahamwe* (genocidaire militia), scattered across the forests, particularly in Shabunda territory. Insecurity dynamics that still prevail in the territory today date back to this period.

In late September 1999, when the DRC was facing yet another rebellion led by the *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie* (RCD), the leaders of the ex-FAR and interahamwe had already set up a new armed group: the *Armée pour la Libération du Rwanda* (ALiR), out of which the *Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda* (FDLR) was later formed. This rebellion was based in Nzovu, in Shabunda territory. During the same period, numerous local armed groups opposed to the RCD emerged, known collectively as Mai-Mai (Vlassenroot 2002). In South Kivu, the most important Mai-Mai movement was formed in Bunyakiri before establishing its headquarters in Lulingu, in Shabunda territory. This phase of the war was characterized by shifting alliances between Mai-Mai and Rwandan Hutu militia, but also by difficult coexistence between local populations and refugees. The ever-increasing insecurity in the region (not only in Shabunda) pushed the “international community” to bring the belligerents to the negotiating table. A first peace agreement was signed in Lusaka on 10 July 1999 but was never implemented due to a lack of Congolese government buy-in.

2.4. After Sun City... the law of the jungle?

In 2001, President Laurent-Désiré Kabila was assassinated in Kinshasa. His death accelerated the peace process initiated with the Lusaka Agreement: for the first time, significant developments seemed possible. Negotiations resumed in 2002 in the form of an “Inter-Congolese dialogue” organized in South Africa. The so-called Global and Inclusive Agreement resulting from this dialogue officially put an end to the war. The Mai-Mai based in Shabunda, who had allied themselves with Rwandan Hutu militia, also joined the peace process, causing the FDLR to lose significant support. But the vacuum left

by the Mai-Mai quickly turned to the advantage of the Rwandan Hutu militia. The FDLR became very mobile from 2003 onwards and controlled the entire Nyambembe/Lulingu area, referred to as Kigali II. They set up two main structures to ensure a militarized management of their power space: the liaison office and the “mixed commission”.

The liaison office was run by “Commander Safari” (an alias) and consisted of a dozen commanders whose task was to control revenue-generating activities in Nyambembe; to link up with FDLR established in Walikale in North Kivu; to organize resistance in case of an attack on the refugee camps; and to collect the “war effort” taxes. The “mixed commission” was composed by the head of the liaison office and his advisors, and the local chief of Nyambembe and his advisors. Its mission was to solve disputes between refugees and the local population, including in cases of killing, rape, human-rights violations, debts, land conflicts, etc. The commission did not succeed in fulfilling its mission, and the ever-increasing deterioration of the security situation in the region would lead to the very first emergence of the Raia Mutomboki 2005.

This section offers a snapshot of current dynamics in Shabunda territory. It is organized into three parts. The first describes Shabunda “isolated” situation as a forest area and the demographic profile of the territory. The second section explains why one national member of parliament once called an “eldorado lost in a jungle”.⁴ The last section then discusses the of this isolation on the area’s political management.

3.1. A vast isolated forest territory

The literature on the accessibility and seclusion of rural areas in Africa identifies three characteristic features of rural areas: “population dispersal, relative lack of economic and administrative infrastructure [...] and dependence on the transport system” (Yesguer 2009). Shabunda territory fits this description perfectly.

3.1.1. POPULATION DYNAMICS

Shabunda territory is a very large, sparsely populated forest area. There are no reliable demographic data for the area. The population figures published by the Civil Registry of Shabunda in 2021 range at exactly 1,501,217 inhabitants, representing 59 per km², while the 2020 data from the Provincial Health Division believes the area is home to 754,960 inhabitants, representing 29.9 per km². Overall, the territory is considered underpopulated, particularly because since the resurgence of the Raia Mutomboki around 2011, many

⁴ Interview #17, Kinshasa, 16 July 2021.

families have fled violence and insecurity to seek refuge in Walungu area or Maniema province.⁵ Most inhabitants of Shabunda live in villages lined up along the main road that links the city of Bukavu to Shabunda town via Burhale (Walungu territory). The table below provides an overview of these scattered villages.

Table 1. Administrative sub-divisions (Matenda, not dated)

CHIEFDOMS	SURFACE AREA	GROUPINGS	CHIEF TOWN OF THE GROUPING	NUMBER OF VILLAGES
BAKISI	17 432 Km2	Bachunga	Mapimo	45
		Northern Bamuguba	Lulingu	83
		Southern Bamuguba	Kigulube	144
		Bangoma	Matili	46
		Bagabo	Mutunda 1	34
		Baliga	Mulungu	102
		Beigala	Kikamba	41
WAKABANGO I	7784 Km2	Bastabyale	Kalole	4
		Batali	Mulongo	36
		Ikama-Kasanza	Lwatamba	127
		Nkulu	Penekusu	74

⁵ Interview #17, cited above.

The territory of Shabunda is composed of two chieftaincies, Bakisi and Wakabango I. These two entities have a total of 11 groupings. The seat of Bakisi is located in Shabunda-Centre in the Bangoma grouping, while that of Wakabango I is located in Kalole in the Basitabyale grouping. Each chieftaincy is headed by a Mwami who commands customary power. In addition to this traditional power, there is a territorial administrator who represents and enforces state power in Shabunda. However, the dispersal of villages and poor road access make effective government administration of this area highly difficult.

3.1.2. INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION

Infrastructure is essential to connect rural areas and deploy state power. However, in Shabunda, the Congolese state is struggling to impose itself. Most parts of Shabunda lack road infrastructure, schools, hospitals, etc. In terms of transport, Shabunda is simply “inaccessible”, with PR502 that connects Burhale to Shabunda being in very advanced state of degradation, even motorcycles struggle to pass. However, Shabunda’s enclavement is rather a “fissured isolation” as the area is still very accessible by air, such as small and old Antonov An-2s or An-14s aircraft that have survived the Cold War. The most recent reports list approximately 13 flights per week between Bukavu and Shabunda, or an average of 52 flights per month.⁶ The territory has airstrips that mostly operate mineral goods flights via Bukavu towards other, “unknown” places, but hardly facilitate access to the area for provincial administrators or the population.

⁶ Interview #3, Bukavu, 12 April 2021.

Table 2: Operational airstrips in Shabunda territory⁷

N°	AERODROME OF	GROUPING	CHIEFDOM	OBSERVATION
1	Tchambogo	Northern Bamuguba	Bakisi	Private 19th CEBECO
2	Tchonka	Northern Bamuguba	Bakisi	Private SAKIMA
3	Tchamombe	Baliga	Bakisi	State
4	Katanti	Batchunga	Bakisi	Private 19th CEBECO
5	Nzovu	Southern Bamuguba	Bakisi	Private SAKIMA
6	Kakozi	Southern Bamuguba	Bakisi	Private 19th CEBECO Not operational
7	Kabilu	Beyigala	Bakisi	Private Not operational
8	Nyalukungu	Nkulu	Wakabango I	Private population
9	Lusenge	Nkulu	Wakabango I	Chieftdom
10	Kitindi	Ikama-Kasanza	Wakabango I	Private population
11	Namoya/ Salamabila	Batali	Wakabango I	State

This type of air transport is not accessible to most local populations who live in extreme poverty. A round-trip ticket can cost up to USD 500 per passenger for a 32-minute flight: a real luxury. Only traders involved in the mineral trade and political actors can afford to fly to the area, while others have no other option than to resort to a new category of transporters: the *sukumeurs*. Derived from the Swahili verb *kusukuma*, which means to push, the French

⁷ As per sources inside the civil aviation administration in Kavumu. Information confirmed by Interview #3. Namoya and Salamabila are currently managed from Maniema but technically belong to South Kivu.

term *sukumeurs* literally means “those who push”, in this case motorcycles or bicycles. *Sukumeur* refers to a new private transportation category: bicycle transporters of goods. In order to overcome the isolation, young *sukumeurs*, many of whom come from Maniema province, load goods and other belongings of their clients onto bicycles that they push over long distances, as there is no other way to transport them. The heavily loaded bicycle (sometimes up to ten bags of cement, or 500 kg) is pushed by two to three people to its destination. The *sukumeurs* transport all kinds of goods: fuel, building materials, food, etc., and actively participate in the transformation of the rural landscape of Shabunda. It is partly thanks to them that places like Kigulube and Katchungu are experiencing a certain “rurbanization”. The *sukumeurs* have become so indispensable that, according to a former Raia Mutomboki combatant, these new transporters are very rarely attacked and maintain good relations with armed groups. While this, and small payments, ease their safe passage, they still have to pay other taxes to chieftaincy or government officials. Dealing with this form of predatory local governance has become part of “being on the road”.⁸

3.2. Shabunda, an ungovernable space?

During a broadcast debate in Bukavu, a political analyst referred to the provincial governor as mere “governor of the city of Bukavu” and not of the province of South Kivu.⁹ At the same time, he criticized the fact that the governor had never visited Shabunda, calling him “disconnected from the realities of his constituents”. Indeed, the absence of state authority is most noticeable in Shabunda and the population has little choice but to take charge of their daily lives. Two major factors favour the emergence of such an “ungovernable space”. One is the dispute over customary power and the other is the persistence of armed group activities, mainly conducted by the Raia Mutomboki. As to the former, it is necessary to mention that with the war that kicked off since 1996, the main customary authorities left to settle either in Kinshasa or in Bukavu, where they hold political positions and conduct economic activities. In Shabunda, they have installed interim customary authorities who are more concerned with reaping the benefits

⁸ Interview #2, Isezya, 18 March 2021.

⁹ Radio Maendeleo, Peace and development program, April 2021.

of mining than with managing the day-to-day life of their entities, as this interview excerpt from the Bakisi chieftaincy shows:

Mwami Auguste Mopipi was involved in the resistance against the RCD. When the rebels occupied Shabunda, he fled. And since he left for Kinshasa in 1999, he has returned only twice for short visits. He handed over customary power to his brother Paul Mopipi, who is not able to deal with conflicts between clans around the mines. He is content with the small royalties he receives from business dredging gold on the Ulindi River, and that is it.¹⁰

In Wakabango I, the remote management of the chieftaincy is contested. Although he joined the RCD in 1999, Mwami Raymond Moligi Mabanze from Wakabango I – who consequently did not face threats like his counterpart in Bakisi – preferred to run the chieftaincy from Bukavu for security reasons. According to his supporters, this choice was justified insofar as some of his rivals based in the Nkulu and Ikama-Kasanza groupings had joined the Mai-Mai and therefore could have threatened the him. After Raymond's death on 26 October 2007, his successors Damson Moligi, Abeli Moligi (known as "Kidyaba") and Marcel Moligi also ran the chiefdom from Bukavu, as does the current regent, Eric Moligi Mabanze. The vacuum left by customary chiefs who have deserted their chieftaincies is not helping. In this vacant space, other forms of local governance are emerging, headed by armed actors and interim authorities struggling for legitimacy. A fringe of this new political elite is also using this local governance as an opportunity to demand administrative reforms, claiming that the institution of the chieftaincy has failed in Shabunda. However, whether in Bakisi or Wakabango I, the incompetence of the Bami is not the only reason for this failure. It also has to do with the multiple conflicts within customary power (Kisakati 2013). In Bakisi, this issue is known as to the "conflict between the 3 and the 4 groupings".¹¹

¹⁰ Interview #18, Bukavu, 16 October 2021.

¹¹ The Bakisi collectivity consists of 7 groupings that local "geopolitics" classify into two blocks: those of "ntata" (the mountains; to the east) and those of "malinga" (the plain; to the west). These include the groupings of Northern Bamuguba, Southern Bamuguba and Balinga for the "ntata" and the groupings of Bachunga, Beigala, Bangoma and Bagabo for the "malinga". The "ntata" groupings are in favor of maintaining the chiefdom, while the "malinga" groupings would like to move to the sector. This is the dominant aspect of the antagonisms known as the "conflict between the Three and Four groupings", which is also called the "Three-Four Conflict".

In Wakabango I, intra-community conflict exists in the grouping of Ikama-Kasanza, where the Raia Mutomboki originally came from. It is for these reasons certain political elites would like to see far-reaching administrative reforms and advocate for the transformation of chieftaincies into sectors, which would depart from hereditary to politically appointed leadership.¹²

Beyond customary governance, the fragmentation of the Raia Mutomboki must also be taken into account to explain the persistence of armed politics in the area. Shortly after the first popular uprisings that formed the first wave of the Raia Mutomboki in Shabunda in 2005, and had it resurge in 2011, the rebellion experienced internal frictions (in terms of communities and clans) that led to the evolution of several branches (see below and in chapter three). This fragmentation would later contribute to the demise of most factions that operated in Shabunda territory but was based first of all on divisions between the Wakabango I and Bakisi chieftaincies as well as conflicts within the chieftaincies. Armed group commanders among the Raia Mutomboki usually identified with particular groupings and factions emerged on the basis of clan membership. Two major wings thus marked the period between 2010 and 2015. On the one hand, the Raia Mutomboki of northern Bamuguba (with Eyadema Mugugu and Juriste Kikuni) and on the other hand those of southern Bamuguba (with Ngandu Lundimu and Donat Kengwa). In the meantime, these factions further split into what each of them calls their *eneyoyetu* ("our space"), thereby reducing the space of chieftaincy and state control. As a result, large parts of Shabunda are not governed.

A provincial official justified the State's withdrawal on the basis that "the territory is isolated" anyways. However, the presence of provincial services such as the *Division des Mines* is a fact, which fuels the feeling among some members of the local elite in Shabunda that state authorities indeed wanted the area to be isolated, since it would benefit a small handful of political and economic operators based in Bukavu. In 2007, the latter reportedly suggested "you don't maintain a path that leads to an empty field." In fact,

¹² While both the chiefdom and the sector are decentralized entities, the difference between the two lies in the way power is acquired. In the chiefdom, succession is governed by custom, whereas in the sector the chief is designated by the political authority.

paths used by Shabunda farmers to access their fields are not maintained. Most are overgrown with grass and change direction at any time. For the Shabunda elites, this statement was serious though. It suggested that provincial authorities had no plans to open up Shabunda territory. The PR502's impracticability has now been politicized and integrated into arguments by some political actors from Shabunda to demand the partition of South Kivu province and the establishment of Shabunda as an autonomous province under the slogan of "Elila".

3.3. A territory in perpetual search of autonomy

Shabunda territory alone covers 25,216 km² of the 64,851 km² of South Kivu province, and thus just slightly less than Rwanda (26,338 km²) or Burundi (27,834 km²). The administration of this immense territory has often been a headache for provincial authorities. While the western part of the territory is oriented towards Maniema, the eastern part is oriented towards South Kivu but hardly connected to the rest of the province. According to a "notable" of the region¹³, Shabunda elites have always campaigned for a provincial redistribution that would allow for a good capitalization of the human and natural resources in the territory. This is why, as soon as the country gained independence, Barega elites in Shabunda and neighbouring Mwenga were involved in promoting the "Elila district". This district was created in 1961 on an essentially ethnopolitical basis. It was supposed to include the territories of Mwenga and Shabunda, as well as Pangi in Maniema, all of which were predominantly Rega (Willame 1964). Yet, the equivocal attitude of the national MP representing Shabunda, François Mopipi (the then-Mwami) unmade this project and Shabunda eventually became a mere territory within Central (now: South) Kivu and Maniema, two provinces that had just been created by the law of 14 August 1962. Shabunda was then declared a "disputed territory" and was to be ruled by Kinshasa.¹⁴ In the end, a referendum held in May 1965 attributed Shabunda to Central Kivu, but tensions remained. In the meantime, Central Kivu was later integrated into the larger entity known as "Grand" Kivu, comprising present-day South Kivu, North Kivu and Maniema until the late 1970s.

¹³ Interview #5, Bukavu, 15 April 2021.

¹⁴ Interview #6, Bukavu, 20 April 2021.

In 1978, a proposal was made by Kinshasa to split South Kivu into five sub-regions, including the Shabunda sub-region. The latter included four rural areas: Kigulube, Shabunda, Kingombe and Byunkutu.¹⁵ The proposal was submitted to the State Commissioner in charge of the Interior and Decentralization on 10 May 1978 but was rejected. Later in 1994, believing that Shabunda territory was too large to be properly managed from Bukavu, members of the *Mutuelle des Originaires de Shabunda* (MOSHA) based in Kinshasa initiated a petition for the creation of a new province to cover this area. This political project was known as “Ulindi” but failed as the cycle of wars began in the early and mid-1990s, first caused by the influx of Rwandan refugees and then continued in the form of political turmoil with the AFDL rebellion. Currently, Shabunda’s fight for autonomy is being rekindled as a quest for the creation of an independent Elila province.¹⁶ This project is supported by a significant portion of the Barega elite as well as a certain number of Raia Mutomboki factions.

¹⁵ MOSHA petition addressed to the Minister of the Interior, Mwando Nsimba for the creation of Ulindi Province in 1994.

¹⁶ Muzalia et al. (forthcoming) *Reactivation of autonomist aspirations in the territories of Fizi, Kalehe and in the “Elila space” in South Kivu: The examples of Minembe, Bunyakiri and Bulega*.

4 |

The Raia Mutomboki: from “liberators” to bandits?

The initial emergence of the Raia Mutomboki dates back to 2005 following massacres in the village of Kyoka, Wakabango I, by the FDLR (Stearns et al. 2013). The FDLR had looted and massacred twelve people in a mining site. These massacres followed others in Kakalanga and Luidi-Sud where twenty-six people were killed. The Raia Mutomboki, led by Jean Musumbu Muchecho, successfully expelled the FDLR elements from tWakabango I. The area was then relatively peaceful until 2011. In the meantime, the largest FDLR stronghold had relocated to Nyambembe in a village commonly called *Chez Bernard* until the FDLR and their dependents renamed it *Makutano*.¹⁷ The Raia Mutomboki of Jean Musumbu Muchecho, having more or less achieved their objective, observed a truce between 2005 and 2008 and went dormant. During this period, national army (FARDC) elements posted in the area committed abuses against civilians.

The Raia Mutomboki then gradually reactivated in the wake of the Goma Peace Conference (Stearns et al. 2013), a conference initiated by the Congolese authorities with the aim of pacifying the east of the country. Several armed groups were reactivated at this time in order to be invited to participate in the conference. Meanwhile, by 2010, FDLR activities had resumed in the area too. Several villages in the Baliga, Bamuguba Nord and Bamuguba Sud groupings were severely affected by insecurity, which FARDC and MONUSCO joint

¹⁷ “Makutano” means “meeting”. The place was so named because it hosted Hutu refugees from several territories in South and North Kivu after the dismantling of the refugee camps by AFDL troops in 1996.

military operations were unable to stop. All this contributed to the resurgence of the Raia Mutomboki in December 2011. The new Raia Mutomboki then became part of broader social dynamics. During a meeting held on *Avenue de l'Hippodrome* in Bukavu, Shabunda elites, including interim Mwami Jean-Paul Mupipi, decided to support the resistance. The Bami, the guardians of the Rega culture, thus agreed to mobilize the Barega's mystical and cultural elements in favour of the Raia Mutomboki's fight (Musamba 2021).

More virulent than the Raia Mutomboki of 2005, the generation of 2011 succeeded in chasing the FDLR not only out of Wakabango I, but from the entire Shabunda territory. In sequence, the label "Raia Mutomboki" was exported and adopted by other armed groups operating in South Kivu that had nothing to do with the conflict between the FDLR and the Raia Mutomboki in Shabunda. Moreover, some factions were given the revamped denomination of "Raia Mukombozi", meaning "liberating citizens", by the population. But this legitimacy was short-lived. First signs of internal fragmentation occurred in 2013, when the Raia Mutomboki committed the first abuses that led to its perception as a group of "stalker-liberators", as is the case with many other armed groups operating in eastern DRC too. In early 2013, four franchises were active within the Raia Mutomboki: the first was linked to the original group created by Musumbu in 2005; the second was led by Juriste Kikuni who had his headquarters in Nduma in northern Shabunda; the third operated in South Walikale where it eventually joined Mai-Mai Kifuafula; and the fourth, led by Donat Kengwa, was deployed in eastern Shabunda (Vogel 2014). All of these factions committed violence against the population. It was in response to this fragmentation and in an attempt to restructure the movement that a short-lived coalition was formed in 2013, which took the name Coalition Raia Mukombozi under the leadership of Daniel Meshe, Ngandu Lundimu and Sisawa were among the main leaders.

However, from 2014 onwards, the new coalition began to crumble, so that to date there are no longer any structured armed groups in Shabunda territory. With Daniel Meshe's surrender on 19 November 2013, the Coalition Raia Mukombozi came to an end. The following year, in December 2014, Juriste Kikuni joined the demobilization process. Six years later, in September 2020, Ngandu and his combatants decided to join a DDR process too. They

participated in the Murhesa consultations¹⁸ and signed a cease-fire agreement adopted on that occasion. While waiting for their reintegration, the combatants were received in a transit camp in Nyamunyunye. However, in 2021, the combatants returned to the forest after having waited in vain for a government-led DDR programme. Since then, the groups operating in Shabunda have become more like rival armed bands rather than resistance forces pursuing a specific political objective. Three reasons can explain this grim end for the Raia Mutomboki: first, their emergence was essentially an ad hoc response to a community security problem exemplified by the FDLR; second, in its war strategy, the Raia Mutomboki had mobilized elements of the Rega culture which they later betrayed; and third, Shabunda did no longer face any grave external armed threat as Kalehe and Fizi territories do (Verweijen et al. 2021, Bouvy et al. 2020).

4.1. A unique response to a particular security context

Unlike the dynamics of resistance in Fizi and Kalehe territories, which are more or less part of a long-term history (the Simba rebels in Fizi and the Batiri and Bangilima uprisings in North Kivu), the Raia Mutomboki were formed as an ad hoc response to the insecurity in Shabunda after the Sun City dialogue in South Africa. Back then, the group had presented itself as an effective alternative to the military operations that had failed to restore peace in Shabunda. The Barega thought that after the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, the security situation would change for the better, but this was not the case. On the contrary, the Mai-Mai who were based in Lulingu joined the Sun City process, leaving the area not only to FDLR, who had been responsible for serious insecurity in the area, but also to the FARDC, who were just a little less unpopular thanks to consistent civilian locally known as “harassment”. It was these specific problems of insecurity that the Raia Mutomboki aimed to resolve. Once this was done, they were faced with the need to rethink their fight. In order to survive beyond the success of the 2011, the Raia Mutomboki

¹⁸ Organized from 14 to 16 September 2020, the Murhesa consultations brought together representatives of more than 70 groups active in eastern DRC. These consultations were part of the DDRCS process and resulted in a cease-fire agreement that was never implemented. Several combatants who had already expressed their intention to demobilize went back to armed groups.

tried to establish a political branch. Several Shabunda elites based in Kinshasa, Bukavu, Shabunda-Centre and Kigulube had been asked to help give meaning to this political project. But according to the head of the *Lusu Lega* mutuality in Shabunda, the context of the post-Congolese dialogue made such a step inappropriate. The elders were content to reframe the objectives of the rebellion by formulating more or less political and economic demands, the main focus of which was the rehabilitation of the Bukavu-Burhale-Shabunda road (PR502) and the regulation of the local artisanal mining sector so that Shabunda's minerals could contribute to local development. But these notables did not provide the Raia Mutomboki with the support they expected, as this former rebel commander states:

The notables have not realized that we (Raia Mutomboki) are a force capable of influencing provincial politics and that it is not by writing memoranda that they are going to get the road, let alone the Province of Ulindi. The Bashi are not willing to give it to us. We have to force them.¹⁹

4.2. The mobilization of mystico-religious elements of Rega culture

To defeat the FDLR in 2010, the Raia Mutomboki resorted to magics already been used by Musumbu in the 2000s, known as “dawa” and common to Mai-Mai groups. The Raia Mutomboki distinguished themselves invoking the strongest and main spirit in Rega culture, *Kimbilikiti*.²⁰ According to several sources,

it was this forest djinn who was the ‘commander in chief’ of military operations. He validated the fetishes, decided the days of attacks and even names of military operations to be conducted against the FDLR”.²¹

¹⁹ Interview #8, Isezya, 19 March 2020.

²⁰ The most famous mythical figure among the Barega, Kimbilikiti is particularly involved in the circumcision of young people and the rite of passage. A kind of “civilizing djinn”, he is the main character of the Bwami, the initiation society of all the Barega (including those of Shabunda). He thus plays a very important role in society.

²¹ Interview #2, cited above.

The reactivation of the Raia Mutomboki after the Goma Conference thus had a specific purpose validated by *kimbilikiti*. However, this cultural approach to armed resistance may have contributed to the fragmentation. Theoretically, because the resistance was rooted in the Rega cultural and religious universe, it was understood that the Raia Mutomboki elements would return to civilian life as soon as the problem against which the Bami (customary authority) had invoked *kimbilikiti* (commander in chief of the armed group) in the first place, was resolved.²² But faction leaders developed their own independent *dawa*, moving away from the customary practices of the Bwami (term used to describe the institution of customary chieftaincy exercised by the college of chiefs altogether). This “fetish democratization” contributed to the fragmentation of the Raia Mutomboki, because as soon as a combatant believed himself to be endowed with a more powerful *dawa* than the others, he relied on the combatants in his clan and created his own faction. All these factions were then respectively named after their leaders providing the respective *dawa* (see table below).

4.3. The role of mining and other resources

Armed groups operating in eastern DRC are often involved in illegal revenue-generating activities, including mining. In a territory with significant deposits of coltan, cassiterite, gold, wolframite etc., it did not take long for “militarized mining” to take root (Verweijen 2016). Since 1999, the so-called ecological corridor of the Kahuzi Biega National Park was invaded by armed actors, mainly the FDLR, involved in mining activities and poaching. The same logic was applied by the Mai-Mai Padiri on the Nzovu-Swiza-Lulingu axis. After the withdrawal of the Mai-Mai Padiri from the area in 2003 and the expulsion of the FDLR by the Raia Mutomboki in 2011, the latter also became interested in minerals. This economic factor also played a role in the gradual weakening and the fragmentation of the movement, as the following testimony shows:

²² The original idea behind the mystical figure of *kimbilikiti* was that he would only intervene in the lives of humans to provide solutions to specific problems. Once these solutions were found, he would withdraw and let the Barga return to their routine.

Initially, the Raia Mutomboki were not directly involved in mining. Instead, they demanded war effort from the mine operators in exchange for security. When the dredging came in, some of the Raia Mutomboki militiamen became security guards for the operators. This distracted them from their initial fight (...).²³

While the Raia Mutomboki were already interacting with mine operators prior to 2013, from 2014 onwards the arrival of several operators, mainly Chinese and Indian, in the region, contributed to a situation where some factions were called upon to secure the equipment and sites managed by these newcomers, who were perceived locally as “conquistadores”. In an attempt to maintain control over the RM and the Ulindi “gold reiver”, to quote the title of a remarkable Global Witness report on Shabunda (Global Witness 2016), some Chinese operators (Kunhou Mining) have collaborated with, and entered into arrangements with, several Raia Mutomboki factions, including some previously opposed to each other. This explains why the direct benefits of mining have helped some combatants to demobilize but not others.

4.4. Specificities of armed mobilisation in Shabunda

Unlike other active hotbeds of violence in South Kivu, Shabunda territory is isolated and far from the DRC’s borders with neighbouring Rwanda and Burundi. Hence, it is not subject to as much external pressure as other areas, such as Uvira and Fizi. The latter has become the crossroads of several insecure local and regional dynamics, linked to the presence of foreign armed groups in the mountains near the borders (Verweijen et al. 2020). In fact, Shabunda does not offer anchor points for long-term conflict dynamics as is the case in Kalehe and Fizi, where, beyond the security issue, the intertwining of land and identity issues constitutes the basis for cyclical conflict. Hence, deprived of an external enemy and unable to find any other relevant reason to continue the resistance, the Raia Mutomboki have been forced into agony. The following below shows what remains of the previously vast Raia Mutomboki movement.

²³ Interview #4, Isezya, 19 March 2020.

Table 3: Residual armed groups in Shabunda territory²⁴

DENOMINATION	LEADER	LOCATION
RM Sengi	Sengi Lusambta	Wakabango I, Basitanyale
FPP (Force populaire pour la paix)	Ngandu Lundimu alias Baleine	Bamuguba Sud, Kisenya
RM Charles Quint	Mutuza Madiadia alias Charles Quint	Baliga, Mulungu
RM Kabala	Kabala Musumbu	Wakabango I, Batali
Mai-Mai Makindu	Makindu Makintoshe	Wakabango I, Nkulu
RM Kazimoto	Kazimoti Ankus	Bamuguba Nord, Nyabembe
RM Kimbalanga	Kimbalanga Sadiki	Bamuguba Sud, Ikuti

The groups listed in this table no longer have the posture of large, organised armed groups. It is increasingly difficult to account for their numbers or to accurately locate their positions. Their objectives are no longer clearly defined. Finally, Kinshasa does not perceive them as direct threat. With this fragmentation, a propensity for self-demobilization has developed among combatants. It should be noted, however, that self-demobilized combatants do not surrender their weapons, either because they do not have any (since it is often the case that a weapon is used by more than one person), or because they simply did not want to. Ex-combatants thus find themselves in several villages where and their lives resemble a mixture of peasantry and banditry. Some pursue banditry while being teachers in primary or secondary schools, shopkeepers or actors in civil society organizations, etc. The very concept of self-demobilization is challenged by this ambiguity. This is why one informant preferred to speak of “relocating the combatant from the forest to the villages.”²⁵ One could also analyse this phenomenon as a disappearance of the spiritual and actual border between the forest, understood as a place of rebellion, and the village, the natural living space of the peasant.

²⁴ Source: data collected in Isezya, Penekusu, Lusenge, Shabunda-Centre, Kigulube.

²⁵ Interview #5, cited above.

When asked about the need to join a DDR process, a self-demobilized respondent said, “sisi ni raia, bata tu démobiliser juu twende wapi?”²⁶ Another of the self-demobilized was more specific: “We are Raia, the people, not the military. We are not armed against the state, but just to ensure our own security”.²⁷ The existence of a functional ambivalence in the behavior of these self-proclaimed liberators is clearly expressed in this statement. As a result, the extension of guerrilla warfare into the village has forced the broader population to experience insecurity on a daily basis. Shabunda thus presents a particularity in this dynamic of circular return, describing the pendular and constant movement of combatants between civilian and military life (Vlassenroot et al. 2020). Linked to that, the use of 12-gauge weapons for hunting long predates recent militarization of the area. Hence, circulation of small arms and light weapons in the context of armed resistance has only added to the arsenal that already existed. Some of the self-demobilized keep their weapons for “practical use, not to abuse them and cause disorder”.²⁸ This ambiguous self-demobilization has resulted in the emergence of “rural gangs”. Some former Raia Mutomboki who later provided security for the Chinese dredge miners are now hiding among the population with their weapons. The most violent of these groups is called “Bana Israel” and operates around Penekusu and Lusenge. Some of the other groups are engaged in robbery in their areas of influence.²⁹

²⁶ “We are civilians, if we are demobilized, where will we go?”

²⁷ Interview #2, cited above.

²⁸ Interview #2, cited above.

²⁹ Interview #16, Penekusu, 20 April 2021.

5 |

“Fissured isolation” and contrasting opportunities

While Shabunda’s major constraint to development is its isolation, it is also true that this lack of access offers contrasting opportunities to different categories of social, political and economic actors who operate in the area. Mining operators can work outside the gaze of the state, while small traders walk long distances to maintain their economic activity. As for humanitarians, though, they are very reluctant engage.

5.1. A favourable context for unregulated mining?

Since the colonial era (as early as the 1920s), minerals have been sourced from Shabunda. Two major mining companies were very active in the area: the *Compagnie belge d’entreprises minières* (COBELMIN) and the *Comité national du Kivu* (CNKi). COBELMIN was based in Bamuguba-Nord grouping. Most of its infrastructure (a hydroelectric power station, a hospital and various other social facilities) was built in Lulingu. The CNKi operated in the Bamuguba-Sud and Baliga groupings. Its main hub was Nzovu (M’Beku 1982).

These companies participated in the overall rural development in mining areas. For example, the CNKi created auxiliary companies including the *Société Agricole Auxiliaire du Kivu* (SAAK), which was involved in agricultural activities, the *Société de Chemin de Fer du Kivu* (CEFAKI), which was involved in road and rail construction, and the *Fond Social du Kivu* (FSK), which was involved in schooling and health care (Kibande 1987). All these companies were operational and left traces that survived colonization. The ruins of these

companies can still be seen, such as houses of colonial officials, buildings that once housed the hospital in Nzovu, and rundown premises that still house some functional primary and secondary schools today. By the early 1980s, the mining sector in Zaïre had moved towards a state of collapse and the prestigious mining companies of the colonial era were failing one after the other. In his article on the dislocation of the mining sector in Katanga, Rubbers gives an explanation valid for other former colonial companies meanwhile nationalised: “from the beginning of the 1980s, the public company (*Gécamines*) became the victim of predation by officials of the regime in power, who drained the company’s working capital” (Rubbers 2004).

In the meantime, informal and clandestine exploitation were on the rise. In 1982, Mobutu decided to liberalize the exploitation and sale of minerals, opening the mining sector to literally anyone (Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers 2003). This contributed to the emergence of a new class of wealthy traders. The involvement of individuals in the mining sector also opened a new era in the exploitation of mineral resources in Shabunda territory. Rivers such as Ulindi, Lugulu, Elila, Mulombo, Lwamini and others got systematically invaded by artisanal miners. Ten years later, in the early 1990s, Mobutu’s Zaire was economically weakened and stuck in an aporetic democratization process. In 1996, it sank into a cycle of war that facilitated the opening of the Congolese mining area to foreign ventures. Ever since the beginning of the wars that plagued the country between 1996 and 2003, armed groups opposed to what they identified as a Rwandan invasion had settled in Lulingu. The choice of this location was no accident: it is the former hub of COBELMIN. The Mai-Mai who came from Bunyakiri and were commanded by Padiri Bulenda were involved in mining there. Between 2003 and 2011, the FDLR also invaded mining areas in Shabunda territory (Vlassenroot & Marchal 2003). If its “natural” isolation has provided a favourable context for the emergence of armed actors first, it also helped some of the shadier semi-industrial mining companies to operate a lucrative business of dredges throughout the territory (COSOC-GL 2015). according to a church official, the uncontrolled exploitation of minerals in Shabunda territory strongly intensified with the arrival of the first suction dredges operating the rivers in search for alluvial gold. While this development is dated around 2010, some observers reported that

it is difficult to say exactly when the first dredges arrived in Shabunda. It was one of our followers who saw a boat on the Ulindi River who came to inform us. Then we learned that this equipment that came from Kisangani was equipped with a kind of suction pump, made to extract sand from the riverbed.³⁰

While it is true that the first dredges came from the former Orientale Province, subsequent ones have come from all over the DRC, as described in a recent report (COSOC-GL 2015). The level of performance of this new equipment appealed to Shabunda-based miners, who immediately began manufacturing dredges locally too. According to a civil society official, Shabunda has already 300 locally manufactured dredges deployed on the Ulindi and Lugulu rivers.³¹ Of all these, the Chinese have been the most predatory. Kunhou Mining, a Chinese company, arrived in Shabunda in 2014 and was involved in semi-industrial operation using dredges with bucket chains. Global Witness' 2016 report details what appears to be the most savage exploitation in Shabunda's mining history, to the point that in 2015, Kunhou was forced to leave Shabunda.

Kunhou's withdrawal did not put an end to dredge mining, nor did it pave the way for formalisation, even though a slow process of validating clean mining sites has begun (Bubala 2020). Between 2016 and 2018, 61 mines out of an estimated 350 had been covered. A few Congolese businessmen gathered in mining cooperatives but operate dredges on the Ulindi and Elila rivers. The predation is built around four categories of actors. First, there are the dredge owners. These are generally outsiders who form alliances with local clan leaders claiming to be the "owners of riverbanks" of a watercourse targeted for exploitation. In return for dividends, these "owners of riverbanks" guarantee access to the riverbed for the dredgers. Third, there is always a faction of Raia Mutomboki, who offer security services in exchange for grams of gold, the amount of which varies according to the rate of production. Finally, various specialized state services are involved in mineral exploitation: *Direction Générale des Recettes Administratives et Domaniales* (DGRAD); *Direction Provinciale de Mobilisation et d'Encadrement des Recettes*

³⁰ Interview #7, Bukavu, 20 April 2021.

³¹ Interview #11, Bukavu, 20 April 2021.

(DPMER); *Direction Générale des Impôts* (DGI); and the chieftaincy, which collect taxes. The collaboration between these actors as follows:

This is not about the state or armed groups, it's about gold! It is our common denominator. The operators need us to secure their equipment, we need the gold to meet our needs, the state needs access to the operators to collect taxes. We have to work together.³²

Managing mutual interest around mining revenues in Shabunda has little to do with state practice. State agents involved are perceived as “freebooters” who roam the Shabunda forest in search of their own fortune, and not in the service of the state. For a prominent person interviewed in Bukavu, this system of predation, like the territory's isolation, is therefore an intended project and maintained by state authorities.

5.2. The plight of small itinerant traders

The isolation of the territory is beneficial to artisanal miners and clandestine mining companies, but it hurts small traders. They have to walk hundreds of kilometres to sell their goods. However, the existence of this itinerant trade is not new in Shabunda territory. According to information gathered in Isezya, this activity has always been carried out by Shi merchants, most of whom came from Bukavu. These merchants specialise in the supply of basic necessities such as salt, sugar, matches, second-hand goods, and other goods:

The old Bashi [merchants] traded from village to village and sometimes from door to door. They would travel the road with their goods on their heads. Today, some of them are big traders and notables in Bukavu. Some even go to Dubai and others to China to look for merchandise. Others have settled in Shabunda, where the Bashi control almost all the trade (...) The new itinerant [traders] take many risks. Not only do they no longer have a road, but they also have to cross areas infested by armed groups. It's not easy.³³

Itinerant trade between Bukavu and Shabunda via PR502 has always existed, but the context has changed. In the 1980s, although few vehicles still arrived

³² Interview #11, cited above.

³³ Interview #2, cited above.

in Kigulube, itinerant traders and smugglers usually reached Kankinda, 70 km from Bukavu. The rest of the journey was on foot, but the environment was generally safe. Merchants always enjoyed local hospitality and could spend the night either at the Baraza (the large straw hut where elders gathered in the evening to exchange and settle disputes) or in the homes of bachelors. Since the beginning of the wars, traders have become increasingly involved in the supply of foodstuffs and in mineral trafficking and are therefore exposed to armed politics and order-making. Checkpoint are part of that and exist in both army- and armed group-controlled areas and in more or less regular intervals between Kishadu and Kigulube, a distance of about 80 km. The itinerant traders who operate on this route are required to pay roadblock taxes of at least 500 Congolese francs per checkpoint for the “right to pass”, in cash or in kind.³⁴ Very often, their goods are confiscated too. The fact that itinerant traders are suffocated by those taxes contributes to the increase in the price of basic goods and thus directly impacts the cost of living in Shabunda territory. Once known as a regional food basket, Shabunda is now experiencing food insecurity. Moreover, due to road impracticability, agricultural activities have been abandoned in favour of artisanal gold mining, which requires little effort to transport.

5.3. A discouraging context for humanitarianians

While isolation benefits some, it is a real headache for humanitarian organizations aiming to work in the area. The following testimony summarises the resulting problems and frustrations:

Humanitarians prefer to work in accessible areas such as Uvira, Kalehe, Bukavu, where they can operate safely and from where they can easily evacuate their staff in times of crisis. Shabunda does not meet these conditions [...]. We are therefore condemned to suffer. We cannot force the whites to come on foot. Malteser International tried to build a road, but our authorities were unable to finish it. It is sad!³⁵

³⁴ Interview #10, Isezya, 19 March 2021.

³⁵ Interview #20, Kalole, 7 April 2020.

Having observed the need to re-link Shabunda with Bukavu, the NGO Malteser International undertook the rehabilitation of the road section linking Mayimongi to Kigulube (approximately 64 km) on the PR502. By 15 February 2008, Malteser International had thus made it possible to access several communities that had been condemned by isolation and to revive some health centres in the area. But the lack of appropriation of the work by the provincial authority and the population led to a rapid return to the status quo. Apart from Malteser, a few bold humanitarian organisations make an effort from time to time to brave the road impracticability in Shabunda. This is the case of *Médecins sans Frontières-Holland* (MSF-H), which was involved in the rehabilitation of a few health centres located in extremely difficult-to-reach villages such as Tusisi, Mungembe and Kalole between 2003 and 2008. According to an informant,

MSF-H well deserves to be called “without borders”! In the most critical moments, they have been with us. For a while, their actions here had given hope to families affected by all kinds of diseases. Their agents went through impracticable tracks with their motorcycles, which they were sometimes obliged to leave on the road [...] They were simply brave!³⁶

The information collected in Bamuguba-Sud praises the “boldness” with which this organization has invested in these difficult areas. Since its withdrawal from the area in 2009, MSF-H’s work has been regretted by the population. Ever since, clinic owners made it difficult for people to access primary health care. To treat malaria in a child aged 0 to 5 years, parents must pay between 35,000 and 50,000 Congolese francs; for a child aged 6 to 15 years, they must pay between 45,000 and 70,000 Congolese francs. An adult has to pay between 60,000 and 150,000 Congolese francs. For a very poor population, mainly made up of unemployed people and subsistence farmers, these amounts are hardly manageable. Pregnant women have to travel miles to access medical care for child delivery, exposing themselves to potentially fatal risks.³⁷

This context of isolation also affects education. Almost all the schools inherited from colonial mining companies are in ruins (Kamitonko Primary School,

³⁶ Interview #11, cited above.

³⁷ Interview #5, 18 March 2020.

Kamakobola Primary School, Tuendele Institute, Luyuyu Institute, etc.). Initiatives taken by churches (CEBECO) and local development organisations to rehabilitate some schools have failed completely because it is difficult to get building materials into the area. Even some “experienced” organizations have not been able to overcome these challenges. This is the case, for example, of *Innovation pour les droits de l'homme et l'environnement* (IDHE), a non-profit organization based in Bukavu. This organization received two grants to work in Shabunda between 2012 and 2014: one from the World Bank (approximately 1 million USD) to build nine schools, and another from MONUSCO for a QIP (approximately 100,000 USD) to build a vocational training centre for demobilized, unemployed youth and vulnerable women. Despite this funding, several projects initiated by IDHE remain unfinished to this day.

If the mission of IDHE was not accomplished, it is only because working in Shabunda made it particularly difficult. All building materials were purchased in Bukavu (340 km away) and flown to the sites, including planks, even though Shabunda is one vast forest. Long before IDHE, the NGO FHI, which was involved in supporting the agricultural sector in Shabunda territory, experienced the same difficulty. One of the reasons put forward by some humanitarian actors for the failure of their interventions in Shabunda is the fact that it is isolated, although this argument is in fact debatable. Indeed, a religious congregation based in Kasongo diocese, for example, has been involved since April 2022 in development activities at the local level and benefit from private funding granted by an unsuccessful candidate of the 2018 legislative elections. However, these nuns have managed to rehabilitate some bridges on the PR502 between Benyampombo and Shabunda-Centre without resorting to wood from Bukavu as FHI did for example. To date, international NGOs are no longer present. Only ACTED, a French NGO, is still active in the area, but it already reduced its staff, perhaps foreshadowing its withdrawal from the area. Local NGOs operating in the area are thus on their own.

Conclusions and perspectives

This report focused on Shabunda's social, economic and security dynamics with a particular focus on the area's isolation leading to an enclaved form of development as if it was a kind of governance in a vacuum. While Shabunda is isolated and thus mostly side-lined by post-conflict initiatives, the territory's isolation is fissured and permeable, creating a fragmented space of highly contrasting opportunities, depending on the position and power of the various actors involved. For actors in the mining sector, this fissured isolation provides a suitable context for the deployment of predation practices, "out of sight" of the state, which is itself poorly deployed. For humanitarian actors, however, it makes interventions extremely complicated. For itinerant traders and the population, it is daily hardship in a climate of permanent insecurity and "harassment" at the hands of security forces and of the Raia Mutomboki, many of whom have self-demobilized and currently lead a life at the intersection of banditry and ordinary peasant activities. An effective response to this fragile context will require the rehabilitation of key roads such as the NR2 and the PR502 and, of course, the redeployment of legitimate state authority in the area. In the meantime, people learned to reinvent the everyday. For example, the *sukumeurs* manage to connect towns and villages with their bicycles and thus participate in supplying the territory with food and other goods. Moreover, the spaces for negotiation between armed groups, army units, mining operators, road users and local authorities have entrenched new forms of local governance, whereby daily life is regulated within the enclave. All of this contributes to the changes in the rural landscape of Shabunda, which is increasingly operating in a vacuum.

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