

Social Science in Humanitarian Action

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Key considerations: the context of North Kivu province, DRC

This brief summarises key considerations about the context of North Kivu province in relation to the outbreak of Ebola in the DRC, August 2018. The province of North Kivu has six territories: Beni, Lubero, Masisi, Nyiragongo, Rutshuru, Walikale. At the time of writing, cases of Ebola had been positively confirmed in Beni territory, and cases were also under investigation in Lubero territory and in the neighbouring Ituri province.

This brief focuses specifically on the *Grand Nord* (Great North): the Beni and Lubero territories of northern North Kivu that are the epicentre of the outbreak. Further participatory enquiry should be undertaken with the affected populations, but given ongoing transmission, conveying key considerations and immediate recommendations have been prioritised.

This brief is based on a rapid review of existing published and grey literature, professional ethnographic research in DRC, personal communication with administrative and health officials and practitioners in the country, and experience of previous Ebola outbreaks. The brief was developed by Juliet Bedford with support from colleagues at Harvard University and Anthrologica.

Additional inputs were provided by colleagues from the Congo Research Group, CNRS-MNHN Paris, Danish Institute for International Studies, Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, Institut Pasteur, Institute of Development Studies, London School of Economics, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, New York University, Réseau Anthropologie des Epidémies Emergentes, Rikolto, Social Science Research Council, Universität Bayreuth, University of Basel, University of Florida, University of Ghent, University of Melbourne and University of Sussex. The briefing is the responsibility of the Social Science in Humanitarian Action Platform.

For further details on the issues contained in this brief and for contact details of associations and networks active in the *Grand Nord*, please contact Juliet Bedford (julietbedford@anthrologica.com).

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Key recommendations

Politicisation, insecurity and cross-border movements

- **Political neutrality** – It is imperative that the political neutrality of the Ebola response is emphasised consistently at all levels. There is significant risk that the outbreak and the response will become politicised and that factions at both the national and provincial level may use it according to their own agendas. Careful negotiation and diplomacy will be needed to mitigate this risk. The highly politicised nature of the area should not be underestimated, both in terms of the relations between Kinshasa and the *Grand Nord* (as an opposition stronghold), and the fragmented relations between factions within the province. This context will influence all response interactions. Negotiating with the different actors will require a high level of diplomacy and sensitivity.
- **Armed groups** – The ADF (Allied Democratic Forces) operate in the *Grand Nord* in addition to multiple 'Faux ADF' and other armed groups. It is important to negotiate access to the areas that are under the control of armed groups to facilitate the movement of response teams, provide information, undertake response activities including surveillance and contact tracing, and secure the safe passage of community members accessing services.
- **Affiliations** – Some local associations, political figures, and officers from the national army (*Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo*, FARDC) with whom the response will need to interact have covert relationships with armed groups around the area. These should not be openly discussed, but responders (both at the strategic level and on the ground) must be aware of these as potential issues.
- **Local associations** – Given the nature of the conflict, responders in the *Grand Nord* should not be affiliated with Banyarwanda (Congolesse speakers of Kinyarwanda). Interventions in Beni and Lubero territories must use local associations from the *Grand Nord* and not from the *Petit Nord* (the area of North Kivu which includes Goma and the territories of Nyragongo, Walikale, Masisi and Rutshuru). Most ongoing humanitarian interventions and social science research focuses on the *Petit Nord*. Organisations there can be good assets for preventing the spread of Ebola to the *Petit Nord* but may be less equipped to navigate the different social, security and political dynamics of the *Grand Nord*.
- **Cross border movements** – Cross-border trade is critically important, and robust response mechanisms must therefore be established on both sides of the border, e.g. at Bundibugyo. Cross-border measures will require the involvement of the Ugandan authorities. IOM has recently completed a participatory mapping of people's movements across borders in this geographical area. This is a useful resource for response planners.¹
- **Security** – Given the security situation, alignment between the Ebola response and UN peacekeeping mission MONUSCO (*Mission de l'Organisation des Nations unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo*) will be complicated and it will be important for the Ebola response to differentiate itself from MONUSCO. To lower the security risk, responders should not be explicitly linked to the UN (e.g. travelling in UN vehicles). In addition to agency-specific identification, it is recommended that clear visual markers are used to quickly and easily distinguish personnel and vehicles associated with the Ebola response. Communities must be mobilised through local organisations to recognise an Ebola response worker. (NB: Armed groups in the area often try to access army uniforms or other markers that conceal their identity and which they can adopt to appear trustworthy. Be aware that markers that identify Ebola responders may also be misappropriated and a mechanism for safeguarding access to such markers should be established).

Engaging local associations

The *Grand Nord* has robust local associations that are able to mobilise the population and disseminate information quickly, and these present excellent partners for the Ebola response. Directly engaging local associations and authorities will be critical for the success of the response, but the response should also be aware of relying on those in formal authority and should ensure that social mobilisation and community engagement works through a wide range of influencers at different levels. Please contact Juliet Bedford (julietbedford@anthrologica.com) for further information and contact details for the following associations.

- **Church** – The Church as an establishment can be highly politicised, but it is an important vehicle with reach and legitimacy and can also be an asset for logistical operations, particularly as they are involved with the delivery of healthcare.² The Protestant Church (*Eglise de Christ du Congo*, ECC), the Catholic Church (primarily in Butembo) and Pentacostal churches (under the umbrella Communauté des Eglises de Pentecôte en Afrique Centrale, CEPAC) should be engaged. Pastors should be enabled to cascade information to their congregations.
- **Cultural associations** – *Kyaghanda-Yira* presents itself as a Nande cultural association. It is split into various branches that span the political spectrum, and is organised throughout Beni and Lubero territories as well as cross-border into Uganda (primarily, Kasese). This association plays key mobilisation roles and will be an important mechanism for engaging communities. Although a Nande association, the Beni branch includes members of minority ethnic groups.
- **Association of business owners** – *Fédération des Entreprises du Congo* (FEC) is the association of large business owners. It is a national association with branches throughout the country. The Beni and Butembo branches, which operate separately, should be directly engaged. Both branches include cross-border traders that have a financial interest in ensuring the safe transit of goods and therefore the rapid containment of Ebola. FEC offices are organised as an umbrella structure, so the Beni and Butembo chapters can disseminate information to sub-offices throughout both territories. The Goma branch of FEC should also be engaged.
- **Civil Society** – In Congo, there is a national organisation called 'Civil Society'. This is not a grouping of independent local non-governmental organisations, but rather a vertically structured association. The organisation has a pro-government political bias and again is organised into branches. Both the Beni and Butembo branches should be engaged.

- **Farmers organisations** – There are numerous organisations of farmers in the area which have wide reach and should be engaged in disseminating information to their members. These include SYDIP, LOFEPACO, COOCENKI, APADER) should be involved.
- **Local leaders** – In Beni, local governance structures have been weakened by mass violence and killings. Ready-made authority mechanisms and trusted networks have been removed over the past four years, which makes engagement more difficult. Relations need to be built with the Mayor and Governor. The Mayor of Beni city is well-networked throughout the territory and is aligned with a pro-government party. This presents an opportunity for the response to develop constructive links between Beni and Kinshasa. It is also important to include leaders from other ethnic groups in the response including Vuba (Bambuba-Kisiki), Batangti, and Batalinga (Watalinga Chefferie) leaders.

Accessing armed groups

- **Engaging armed groups** – As highly mobile actors in the province, members of the armed militias must directly receive key information about the virus, its symptoms, transmission, protection and prevention measures, vaccination and treatment. Information pamphlets could be dropped in remote areas using MONUSCO logistics (e.g. helicopters) and it may be possible for established networks on the ground (including research colleagues) to distribute IEC materials to combatants. For security reasons, please contact Juliet Bedford (julietbedford@anthrologica.com) for details.
- **Amnesty** – It is possible that the threat of arrest may prevent members of armed groups from seeking care or allowing the safe passage of others. This must be discussed locally and appropriate solutions must be agreed on, such as implementing a negotiated amnesty for combatants who bring their fighters to care centres during the outbreak. ADF will require political guarantees from Kinshasa and Kampala.

Language and communication

- **Local Swahili** – Although meetings with leaders can be conducted in French, local Swahili should be the operational language for all community engagement and information materials. Local Swahili is different from 'proper' (Tanzanian or Kenyan) Swahili. In the past, many international agencies have produced materials in 'proper' Swahili, and consequently they were not well accepted by communities in the *Grand Nord* who queried some of the language used. It is important to translate all information into a form of Swahili that can be understood at the community level. Other local languages should not be overlooked in information exchange with affected populations, and in Butembo, for example, Kinande can be used.
- **Translation support** – The *Institut de Recherche Intégrée* (IRI) based at *Université Chrétienne Bilingue du Congo* is a research institute that has expressed interest in helping with any translation needs for printed or social media materials for the Ebola response. It has previously been involved in land mapping and conflict mitigation projects. Please contact Juliet Bedford (julietbedford@anthrologica.com) for details.
- **Visual communication** – Literacy levels are low. Nationally, 64% of women cannot read, making verbal and visual communication particularly important.
- **Social media** – Social media platforms are used widely across the *Grand Nord*, primarily WhatsApp and Facebook. GIFs with key information on Ebola prevention, transmission, symptoms, care and vaccination should be created and disseminated via these platforms. Gifs (Graphic Image Formats) are compressed images shown rapidly to look like short videos but require minimal bandwidth.
- **Local radio** – Local radio has wide coverage and reach across the province and is reported to be the most popular and feasible means of conveying and receiving information. The potential of community radio networks should be maximised and Radio Moto and Radio Graben should be engaged. MONUSCO has confirmed its radio station (Radio Okepi) can be used. Despite the complex and potentially negative associations communities have with MONUSCO, Radio Okepi is not perceived to be the 'voice of the mission', rather it operates with independent journalists and has a broad audience as a legitimate news outlet.³
- **Other media** – Other media outlets that should be used to disseminate key information include Beni-Lubero Online and the printed papers *Rafiki* and *Les Coulisses*.

Immediate outbreak context: the *Grand Nord* (Beni and Lubero territories)

Beni and Lubero territories make up the *Grand Nord* of North Kivu Province. The area presents a difficult context for intervention. The political opposition has a base in the *Grand Nord*. It is a commercial and trading hub with transit routes throughout eastern Congo and significant cross-border linkages into Uganda that extend throughout East Africa and beyond. Active armed groups are engaged in ongoing kidnapping and killing of civilians.

Political and economic context

- **Porous borders** – The *Grand Nord* is well known for its lucrative cross-border trade routes.⁴ Demographics and insecurity enhance the porous nature of these borders: the area's majority Nande population are cross-border cousins to the Ugandan Bakondjo, and the multiple armed groups active in the *Grand Nord* regularly cross the Congo-Uganda border. The main crossing is at Kasindi. Other population movements occur between Kyavinyonge and Isango (via Lake Edouard). Members of armed groups and their support networks regularly cross the border at Kasindi, Nobili and Mumbiri (Ruwenzori sector), Bundibugyo (Watalinga Chefferie), and just east of Kainama along the border of Ituri. The frequent border crossings increase the risk of transnational spread of Ebola.
- **Political opposition stronghold** – The *Grand Nord* is a stronghold of political opposition (including the RCD/K-ML and DCF/N parties). During the Second Congo War (1998-2003), the *Grand Nord* was administered by the RCD/K-ML rebellion (now a political party) and residual networks linked with the RCD/K-ML still operate. The head of the RCD/K-ML (Mbusa Nyamwisi) is no longer in the country, but his cause remains popular within the *Grand Nord*.
- **Commercial centre, transnational trade, and parallel markets** – Beni city (Beni territory) and Butembo (Lubero territory) are key commercial centres and trading hubs in eastern Congo. The main border crossing at Kasindi, on the Congo-Uganda border, is a major import-export center. Imported merchandise is unloaded and repackaged in Beni and Butembo for transport to Bunia (Ituri) and Goma. Imports and exports transit through Uganda and Kenya. Business people from this area regularly travel to Dubai, Hong Kong, Jakarta, and sometimes to Europe to sell exported goods and purchase merchandise for import. An estimated 60% of trade in North Kivu province passes through the *Grand Nord*, and the Kasindi border (southeast Beni territory, Ruwenzori sector) is the second most lucrative border in all of Congo. This makes the parallel markets and criminal networks in the area politically and economically important at both local and national levels. The timber trade is particularly important in the *Grand Nord* and many young men find employment in this industry. FARDC officers have been involved in trafficking products including valuable timber, sometimes in conjunction with armed groups.⁵

Insecurity dynamics

Much of the *Grand Nord* is part of Virunga National Park, which is occupied by armed groups and difficult for security services, humanitarian workers, or health professionals to access. Many armed groups maintain extensive domestic and transnational connections, including with local authorities and certain officers in the national army. Groups fragment, new coalitions are formed and there is a severe lack of transparency in positioning, affiliations and underlying motivations.

- **Killings and active insecurity** – Prior to 2010, the *Grand Nord* had a reputation for being relatively stable. Starting in 2010, a wave of kidnappings resulted in over 800 disappearances (forced recruitment into armed groups). A series of violent massacres which began in 2013 and escalated in 2014, continue in ad hoc form to date. At least 1,000 civilians have been killed since 2014 and tens of thousands have been displaced.⁶ The security situation in Beni territory remains highly volatile. The killings in the *Grand Nord* involve multiple armed groups and political interests, and different groups often join together to carry out operations. There has been evidence of FARDC involvement in supporting killings.⁷ The majority of the kidnapping and killings have occurred along the major road (*Route Nationale no 4*) running from Beni through Oicha to Eringeti (reaching the border of Ituri). Epicentres of violence include the Bambuba-Kisiki *groupement* and the Mayangose area (Boikenne *localité*, on the outskirts of Beni town). This insecurity follows the launch of Operation Sukola I (January 2014) which continues until today. Sukola I officially targeted the ADF but also had consequences for Congolese armed groups and local authorities. Some attacks in the area have targeted FARDC and MONUSCO, particularly from 2016 onwards (see below).
- **Implications for health zones** – Many civilians fled areas north and east of Oicha following the onset of the violence. Many of the healthcare professionals in Beni's *Centres de Santé*, particularly those east of the Beni-Eringeti road (*Route Nationale no 4*) can no longer operate in this area.
- **Recent events** – In June 2018, the Kivu Security Tracker reported more than 140 armed groups were active in North and South Kivu. Mapping shows a marked clustering of violent events around and to the south of Beni (see up-to-date maps at <https://kivusecurity.org/map>). Since March, there has been a concentration of events that accounted for 25% of violent incidents in the whole of Kivu. Violence in June 2018 included 72 violent deaths (down 12% compared with May 2018), 59 abductions and 58 kidnappings (up 54%) and 62 clashes between belligerents (up 77%).⁸ In July there were multiple attacks against the FARDC, and kidnapping and ransom of civilians. On 6 August, 6 people were killed at Matiba (east of Beni-Oicha road) and on 7 August, 14 were killed at Tubameme near Mayangose.⁹
- **ADF** – The Allied Democratic Forces is a Ugandan armed group formed in 1995 on Islamist principles. ADF crossed into Congo (Beni territory) and joined with the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU). ADF and NALU were merged until 2007 when NALU demobilised. ADF remains one of the most active but complex groups in Beni Territory and uses religion (Salafi doctrine) to maintain order within camps and mobilise combatants.^{10,11} It has strong links with local political authorities, economic figures, resource industries and other armed groups in Beni and into Butembo. MONUSCO, local residents and combatants, and international researchers have documented evidence of its opportunistic connections to armed actors linked with the political

opposition. It is fiercely predatory, but since Sukola I, its organisational structure is uncertain and the group is fragmented throughout Bambuba-Kisiki, Kainama and Mwalika areas.

- **‘Faux ADF’ (False ADF) and the clandestine nature of violence** – In Beni, it is common for armed groups and their backers to conceal their activities and remain anonymous. Various armed groups use ‘ADF’ as a pseudonym to conduct operations and violence.¹² These include national army officers who are involved in organising kidnappings or civilian killings and who may disguise themselves as ADF during operations, Congolese mafia-like organisations and armed groups often formed along ethnic lines. The local affiliation of these groups makes them no less predatory: they are involved in kidnapping, killings, and ransoming civilians (sometimes in conjunction with other political figures or the ADF). They are financed by politicians and receive weapons from parallel networks in the national army. This results from the long history of ADF (and previously, NALU) embedment in the area and the linkages between them and Congolese interests. Key bases include areas of Virunga national park: Mwalika, Rwenzori Sector, Bambuba-Kisiki, Mayangose, and the area around Kainama. Some parallel networks in FARDC also assume ‘ADF’ as a pseudonym to conceal their activities. Other local armed groups also position themselves as Islamist networks, further clouding distinctions between these groups and the true ADF.¹³
- **Mayi Mayi Kilalo** – Mayi Mayi Kilalo is currently the largest identified armed group in the area of the Ebola outbreak. It formed as a branch of the Corps du Christ movement, and was responsible for the 2016 attack on the MONUSCO headquarters in Butembo.
- **FARDC** – The national army is not cohesive. Various parallel networks within FARDC can collaborate with different armed groups. It has been reported that some FARDC units disguise themselves as ADF to kidnap and ransom civilians. There is also a clear divide between ‘Congolese’ officers and Banyarwanda officers within the FARDC. A number of attacks against the FARDC appear to be targeted specifically against Banyarwanda officers. The FARDC maintains bases throughout Beni, including a major centre at Nyaleke (Beni-Kasindi road) and established a new base in Mangina in October 2017. In January 2018, the FARDC launched a new offensive against the ADF, Usalama 2 and the number of troops in Beni territory has risen significantly.
- **Cross-border movement** – Armed groups in the *Grand Nord* are networked with those in Ituri and the *Petit Nord*. All traverse the Congo-Uganda border. Key crossings are at Bundibugyo (Watalinga *chefferie*), just east of Kainama, Nobili, and Kasindi. The border throughout Ruwenzori sector and Watalinga *chefferie* is porous (as discussed above).
- **MONUSCO** – *Mission de l’Organisation des Nations unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo* (MONUSCO) is the UN peacekeeping force in the DRC, operating there since 1999. It has a military branch, the Force Intervention Brigade, that actively supports the FARDC militarily and is based in Beni. MONUSCO has been the target of attacks by both the true (*vrai*) and false (*faux*) ADF. In late 2017 violence flared significantly with a large attack on MONUSCO at Semuliki in Beni territory in which 15 peacekeepers were killed, making it the deadliest attack on peacekeeping forces in the last two decades.¹⁴ MONUSCO has significant logistical capacity, but given the security situation and tense relations with the population, alignment between the Ebola response and MONUSCO will be complicated.

Social and demographic details

- **Ethnicity** – The *Grand Nord* has a different ethnic makeup, political history, social cleavages, and insecurity dynamics from the better-known *Petit Nord* (southern North Kivu).¹⁵ The population is majority Nande who are cross-border cousins to the Ugandan Bakondjo. Beni territory also includes minority groups: Vuba (Bambuba-Kisiki *groupement*), Batangi (Beni-Mbau), Batalinga (Watalinga *chefferie*), and Bapakombe (Mayangose, just on the outskirts of Beni town,). Lubero territory (including Butembo) is nearly all Nande. Ethnic labels should be treated with caution as their meaning and importance can vary, and armed group leaders can magnify ethnic tensions as a recruitment tactic.
- **Key socio-political divides** – The Nande, the majority population of the *Grand Nord*, are highly distrustful of the Banyarwanda (Kinyarwanda-speaking Congolese) and local militias mobilise against Banyarwanda influence in politics and the military.
- **Language** – Four main languages are spoken in the *Grand Nord*. A local dialect of Swahili (NB. not Kenyan or Tanzanian Swahili) is the most common language and is spoken by at least 80% of the population. Kinande is widely spoken in Butembo (Lubero territory). French is spoken by the well-educated minority and government officials. Lingala is used by the national army, which has a strong presence in Beni.
- **Religion** – The majority of the population in North Kivu are Christian. Although there is also an important Muslim minority, there is no religious tension between Muslim and Christian communities in the *Grand Nord*.¹⁶ There is a divide between the Catholic Church (primarily in Lubero) and some Protestant churches in Beni. The institutional capacity of the Catholic, Protestant and Pentecostal churches makes them particularly powerful, including in political processes.^{17,18} They exert great influence and have substantial reach into communities across the region.¹⁹ The majority of the population combine customary spiritual beliefs and practices with Christianity or Islam. There are many secret societies and religious sects. Spiritual beliefs and modes of sorcery and the implications they have to violence and conflict is complex, but may heighten tensions in the context of Ebola and the perception and fear of the virus.^{20,21,22,23}
- **Land disputes and food insecurity** – In Beni territory (particularly areas north and east of Oicha) a further divide separates ‘migrant Nande’, who moved to Beni territory from neighboring Lubero territory, from the ‘original populations’ of Beni that include minority groups (Vuba, Bapakombe, Batalinga, Batangi) and native Nande. Many of the migrant Nande have been targeted in the recent violence and killings to enable local authorities to reclaim access to farming land. In areas of southern Lubero territory (unaffected by Ebola at the time of writing) another set of conflicts exists between Nande and Hutu regarding access to land. Due to the presence of the militia groups to the north of Beni, agriculture in the area around Mangina was an important source of food for the city, but now that access is largely cut off due to the Ebola outbreak, fears of escalating food insecurity in the city have been reported.

Overview: North Kivu Province

North Kivu borders the Congolese provinces of Ituri to the north, Tshopo to the northwest, Maniema to the southwest, and South Kivu to the south. To the east, it borders the countries of Uganda and Rwanda.

Urban centres, health system and the election

- **Urban centres** – Goma is the provincial capital of North Kivu (estimated population of 1.5 million, although figures vary) located on the northern shore of Lake Kivu, adjacent to the Rwandan city of Rubavu (Gisenyi). Butembo (80km from the epicentre of the outbreak) and Beni city (30km from the epicentre of the outbreak) are the second and third largest cities in the province.
- **Health system** – North Kivu Province has 27 health zones (*zones de santé*) organised around the general referral hospital in Goma. At the time of writing, five health zones in Beni had been affected by the Ebola outbreak (Beni, Oicha, Mbalako and Musienene), one health zone in Lubero territory (Butembo), and two health zones in Ituri Province (Mandima and Mambasa). Health zones are subdivided into smaller health areas (*aires de santé*) organised around health centres (*centres de santé*) and may also contain one or more smaller health posts (*postes de santé*). As elsewhere in the DRC, health structures are weak, resources are limited, health workers are often under-skilled and the quality of care is generally low. It is difficult for the population to access care due to both financial and non-financial barriers (including distance from household to point of service delivery and conflict). There is a lack of essential drugs and a reliance on informal user fees to help cover staff salaries, operational costs, and health zone management.²⁴ The ongoing conflict has had a detrimental impact on access to healthcare, and the health system is fragmented and politicised with recent attacks reported on pharmacies (most recently in July in Kabasewa, a town 60km from Beni) and hospitals (for example, the 2016 Oicha hospital attack, around 55km from Beni).
- **Elections** – The presidential, provincial and legislative elections have been continuously postponed since December 2016. At the time of writing, elections were scheduled for 23 December 2018. In an already tense political climate, the risk of increased political violence and insecurity in the lead up to the election is high and could further destabilise the region.²⁵ Kabila's announcement (8 August) that he will not run for president heightens the uncertainty within the political climate.

Humanitarian situation

- **Refugees** – Insecurity has resulted in both cross-border refugee movement and internally displaced people (IDPs). Uganda continues to host over 240,000 Congolese refugees, many of whom came from North Kivu.²⁶ Residents of some camps in Uganda describe the potential for ongoing recruitment for armed groups in Congo.
- **IDPs** – North Kivu hosts over one million IDPs, the greatest number in any province.²⁷ Most IDPs are sheltered in host communities, particularly in Beni city, Oicha, and around Kasindi near the Ugandan border. In January 2018, it was reported that over 18,000 people in Beni Territory had almost no access to humanitarian assistance due to security constraints. Since mid-March, approximately 4,200 newly displaced people have arrived in Beni Territory, but displacement and return movements happen concurrently across the territory.²⁸
- **Humanitarian workers** – Ongoing insecurity threatens the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Between January and March 2018, three abductions of humanitarian workers were reported (two of whom were released), and two Congolese aid workers were killed in Rutshuru territory in Virunga National Park.²⁹

Infrastructure

- **Road network** – North Kivu has a road network, but it is in poor condition. The main trunk roads that transect Beni territory span from Beni northward to Eringeti at the Ituri border (*Route Nationale no 4*) and connect Beni and Butembo (*Route Nationale 2*), Mangina (the epicentre of the Ebola outbreak) and Mambasa. Motorcycle taxi drivers (*motards*) connect urban centres and transport people, goods and information, helping to maintain social networks. Regular minibuses also connect the main urban centres across the region. Roadblocks maintained by civil authorities, armed rebel militias and some national army officers can make travel difficult and dangerous, and road users are 'taxed' at a rate of once every 20 km travelled (see interactive map at <http://ipisresearch.be/publication/everything-moves-will-taxed-political-economy-roadblocks-north-south-kivu/>).³⁰ There are flights between Beni and Kinshasa, Beni and Goma, Butembo and Goma, Goma and Kinshasa. Across the border from Goma, the Rwanda town of Gisenyi is connected by road to Kigali.
- **Phone network and internet** – Mobile phone network (Airtel, Orange, Vodacom, Tigo) coverage is variable across the province. Mobile phones can serve as a security mechanism and early warning system although they are also used to coordinate attacks and demand ransoms etc. Mobile phones are an important, if informal, way of building and maintaining social networks, conveying information and transferring money. Some users report to access the internet via their mobile phone, but also use internet cafes in the cities. Mobile phones have the potential to mitigate social inequalities, political conflict and safety concerns, but meaningful use is limited due to practical reasons including patchy network coverage and limited access to electricity to charge phones (many rely on generator-charger shops to charge their phones).^{31,32} It should be noted that armed groups may view mobile phones with deep suspicion and have confiscated devices from community workers.³³
- **Water and electricity** – There is a lack of basic infrastructure across the province including electricity and running water. People often have to travel great distances to collect drinking water and many collect rainwater to drink. The population of North Kivu relies almost exclusively on wood-based fuels for their energy needs. In urban areas, households purchase wood from the market, but in rural areas, women are responsible for collecting firewood. Due to the pressure that deforestation has put on local ecosystems, they often have to search in areas far from their communities and are vulnerable to violence and rape whilst

undertaking this daily domestic task. Some households and businesses produce their own electricity with engine-generators and solar panels. The Rutshuru Hydroelectric Power Station (operational since 2015) provides some electricity to Rutshuru Territory.

Demography

- **Gender and gender-based violence** – Customary gendered roles and relations have been challenged by the chronic lack of stability. There is little income-generating work available, and many women have assumed the role of providing for their households through farming, petty trading and other informal opportunities.³⁴ Rates of sexual and gender-based violence are high in North Kivu. Sexual violence may occur opportunistically (e.g. when women leave the home to collect firewood or water) and as a 'weapon of war', used to intimidate and subjugate local populations. The trauma and/or stigma experienced by victims of sexual violence, as well as their relatives can be extreme, to such a degree that it is impossible for some women to reintegrate into their families or communities.^{35,36}
- **Youth** – The DRC has a young population, with nearly 42% of the population under the age of 15 years, and 62% under the age of 25 years.³⁷ Conflict and displacement have disrupted schools, and the number of children attending both primary and secondary education is low. The abduction and recruitment of children as child soldiers has been well reported. It has also been reported that some youth joined armed groups as they perceived an opportunity for social mobility and prestige.^{38,39,40,41,42}
- **Topography and climate** – The geography of Nord-Kivu is varied. Terrain is rugged, consisting of plains, plateaus and mountain ranges with the altitude ranging from under 800m to over 5,000m. Vegetation includes savannahs in the plains of Semliki and Rutshuru, shrub in the lava plain north of Lake Kivu, mountainous rainforests in the Ruwenzori and Virunga ranges and equatorial forests in the Lubero, Masisi, Walikale and Beni territories. The province contains two large lakes, Lake Edouard (2,150 km²), which is an important source of food and income for fishing communities, and Lake Kivu (2,700 km²), which has diminished in biodiversity since the introduction of Nile tilapia by colonial authorities. Seasonality varies throughout the province: some territories, like Rutshuru, have dry and rainy seasons, while others, like Nyiragongo, have rain throughout the year. The rainy seasons in Beni are typically March-May and July-November and average rainfall in the province is 1,000–2,000 mm per year.⁴³ The province also contains several national parks (Kahuzi Biega, Maiko) and the oldest park in Africa, the UNESCO World Heritage site Virunga National Park which is home to mountain gorillas and two active volcanoes Nyiragongo (3470m) and Nyamulagira (3056m), which last erupted in 2002 sending molten rock flow towards Goma. The park covers 7,900Km², more than 10% of the province.

Contacts

If you have a direct request concerning the response to Ebola in the DRC, regarding a brief, tools, additional technical expertise or remote analysis, or should you like to be considered for the network of advisers, please contact us.

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