

Brief of conflicts in the Tanganyika province, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Introduction

This briefing note summarises existing studies on conflicts in Tanganyika Province. It focuses on the nature, causes, actors and dynamics of these conflicts. The aim of this note is to provide background information for humanitarian, development and peace (HDP) actors on conflicts in the province.

Conflict profile

The documents consulted (see Appendix) show that the conflicts in the province are multi-dimensional and intertwined. These conflicts centre mainly on control of natural resources and land, pitting, amongst others, farmers against herders, but also large concessionaires (who are believed to have been close to influential politicians during Joseph Kabila's reign) against smallholder farmers. The significance of land in these conflicts is confirmed by a UNICEF study, which states that "land ownership is regarded as a form of power in its own right. Access to land is granted through leasing in return for the payment of seasonal customary fees."¹ It should be noted that for many communities, particularly in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), land is intrinsically linked to their cultural and historical identity. Land is both a source of power and identity, a factor in survival and a driver of violent conflicts.² As such, land-related conflicts also revolve around power and identity. For example, there are several conflicts within ruling families relating to the succession of customary power. These power struggles between local chiefs and within ruling families stem from what is perceived as an unequal distribution of dividends, taxes and customary land royalties amongst members of the same ruling family. Many land disputes are also associated with the boundaries of land (fields and concessions), or even the geographical boundaries of villages. Cases of poor land governance or land management deemed arbitrary are also cited (the granting of land by customary chiefs to the highest bidders at the expense of smallholders). Furthermore, the fact that the Twa (ethnic groups commonly referred to as Pygmies in Central Africa, of which the Twa form one of the main groups) suffer from discrimination.³ This

¹ UNICEF, Analysis of the dynamics of inter- and intra-community conflicts, Nyunzu territory, District of

Tanganyika, North Katanga, October 2014, p. 7.

² Rift Valley Institute, PSRP Briefing 14 (2016). 'Not Just a Question of Land': Land Disputes and Conflicts in Eastern Congo, p.6.
<https://riftvalley.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Pas-juste-une-question-de-terres-par-Gillian-Mathys-et-Koen-Vlassenroot-RVI-PSRP-Briefing-Projet-Usalama-2016.pdf>

³ IRC (2017), 'A Silent Crisis in the Congo: The Bantu and the Twa in Tanganyika'. The Pygmies were the original inhabitants of the DRC, making a living as nomadic hunter-gatherers in areas on the fringes of the savannahs and forests in 'A Silent Crisis in the Congo: The Bantu and the Twa in Tanganyika', pp. 5–6.

systemic bias limits their access to land and exacerbates Twa–Bantu relations. In this regard, the Twa’s refusal to pay rent to Bantu land chiefs, as well as land grabs and expropriations by large concessionaires and politicians, are manifestations of these conflicts. Access to land and resources is therefore the main driver of conflict, even if the manifestations of these conflicts may vary.

Agriculture is the province’s main economic activity. The discovery of mineral deposits in certain areas (mainly in Nyunzu, Manono and Kongolo) and the resulting industrial or artisanal mining activities are reducing arable land or encroaching on forests (which are favourable for hunting). This tension fuels long-standing conflicts over boundaries and access to land between traditional chiefs and landowners, and between the Twa and the Bantu. These conflicts pit several groups against one another: traditional chiefs against one another; gold panners against traditional chiefs; mining companies against local communities.⁴ These conflicts over minerals are much more prevalent north of the Lukuga River in Nyunzu territory, where the Twas claim to be “prepared to attack any Bantu wishing to extract minerals within the area under their jurisdiction or influence”⁵ and thus take on an identity-related dimension. In Manono, these conflicts also pit artisanal miners against law enforcement officers (the FARDC and the police), as the artisanal miners operate on land granted to foreign companies in the area by the central government. These companies use the FARDC and the police to forcibly evict them.⁶ It should be noted that competition between industrial and artisanal miners, the lack of specific areas designated for artisanal mining, and the negative impacts of both industrial and artisanal mining on local communities are all issues that fuel conflicts over access to resources in Tanganyika Province.

Following humanitarian interventions, leadership conflicts broke out between local village chiefs and the block leaders of resettlement camps (internal displaced persons affected by the conflicts between the Twa and the Bantu, who had chosen to be resettled in other villages rather than return to their villages of origin).⁷ These conflicts often pit host communities against internally displaced persons (IDPs). Furthermore, as mentioned above, the reports and documents consulted also highlight conflicts between the Twa and the Bantu that are linked to a sense of discrimination and exclusion of the Twa from local and provincial governing bodies. Finally, other conflicts centre on water for fishing in the Kabalo territory⁸ and the discovery of gold deposits in the Mundi Mountains on the border between the Kongolo and Nyunzu territories. Leadership conflicts that could be described as political also exist at the provincial executive level. These conflicts stem from the

⁴ UNICEF, Op.cit., p5.

⁵ UNICEF, In-depth study on the dynamics of inter- and intra-community conflicts, p. 26.

⁶ Mineral Concessions: Avoiding Conflict in DR Congo’s Mining Heartland (2020), Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/rpt/africa/democratic-republic-congo/290-mineral-concessions-avoiding-conflict-dr-congos-mining-heartland>

⁷ IOM et al., Report on the Context Analysis for the project ‘Promoting sustainable solutions for populations affected by displacement in Tanganyika Province’, December 2022 to January 2023, p. 7.

⁸ Focus group discussion held in Kabalo, RSFA Project, Alert-Save the Children-Concern Consortium, in March 2022.

political positioning and balance of power between the political parties belonging to the ‘Sacred Union’ (a political platform comprising all political parties supporting President Félix Tshisekedi) and those of the former FCC-CASH coalition.⁹

The cause of conflicts

Structural causes of conflicts¹⁰

The documents and reports consulted show that the structural causes of the conflicts are as follows. Firstly, poor governance encapsulates corruption, nepotism, miscarriages of justice, impunity, and the abuse of power by certain state officials. In Moba, for example, law enforcement and security personnel from the ANR and the FARDC are frequently cited in cases of harassment of the population, exemplified by: the erection of illegal roadblocks, the proliferation of checkpoints and the imposition of illegal taxes. Furthermore, other reports highlight the low numbers (or even absence) of security forces (police and army) in certain areas (for example, along the Kasanganyemba route), which encourages the proliferation of militias and armed groups. Secondly, the dual nature of land law (a phenomenon also linked to poor governance) is another root cause of many conflicts. This dual system stems from the fact that land allocation is governed by customary practices on the one hand, and by bodies authorised by law (the land registry) on the other. Many conflicts arise from the fact that state authorities recognise only “property” titles issued by the land registry. The application of these two systems creates contradictions regarding land allocation when the land registry grants land already occupied by local communities. As mentioned above, some traditional chiefs grant land to the highest bidders to the detriment of previous occupants, leading to forced displacement or eviction, affecting both the Twas and the Bantu. This disjointed system is unsuitable and exclusive; it benefits only the wealthy, the educated or the best-informed groups who can use the registration procedure to their advantage to obtain valid title deeds in accordance with the law. Among those who profit from this system are traditional chiefs, who often own extensive estates (cultivated under a sharecropping system).¹¹

Immediate causes

⁹ The FCC (Common Front for the Congo) political coalition was an electoral platform during the 2018 elections. It comprised of a range of political parties whose moral authority lay with the former President of the Republic, Joseph Kabila. CASH (Cap pour le Changement) was also an electoral platform comprising the UNC (Union for the Congolese Nation, led by Vital Kamerhe) and the UDPS, led by the current President, Félix Tshisekedi). The FCC-CASH coalition was formed during the country’s first democratic transition; it represented a form of coalition governance between the two political platforms following the 2018 elections, which saw Félix declared the winner by a landslide.

¹⁰ OIM et al., Op.cit., p3-9.

¹¹ African Journal on Land Policy and Geospatial Sciences (2020), ‘Dualism in the Land Tenure System in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Practices, Deviations and Sources of Conflict’. In most rural areas of the country, the land tenure system is characterised by legal dualism. This means that the state’s modern written law coexists with traditional customary law. This dual system creates legal loopholes and contradictions that are the source of numerous crises.

- Widespread and acute poverty: Difficult access to land for part of the population (particularly the Twas) fuels poverty in the province. Customary taxes, combined with a lack of access to land, pose a threat to agricultural production and exacerbate vulnerability and poverty¹² in several areas of the province. Bantu traditional chiefs also levy similar taxes on the proceeds of hunting, fishing and artisanal mining (which mainly affect the Twas).¹³ This not only exacerbates the Twas' sense of mistrust and exclusion, but also deepens their poverty, grievances, and penchant towards violence. Furthermore, this low level of production – the immediate cause of poverty and conflict – is also attributable to agricultural diseases and large mammals, which reduce yields in the agricultural sector. Mosaic diseases affect cassava tubers and the *Spodoptera frugiperda* caterpillar by attacking maize leaves,¹⁴ combined with the presence of large mammals and crop flooding, increase the pressure on land in Kabalo, Kalemie, Nyunzu and Manono. People affected by flooding and large mammals are fleeing these areas for land considered favourable for agriculture. These natural disasters exacerbate the pressure on arable land and fuels land disputes. Furthermore, the ongoing insecurity linked to the proliferation of militias and armed groups in several localities also contributes to the disruption of economic activities. In September 2020, a deadly robbery brought economic activity to a standstill in the mining town of Misisi, located north-west of Kalemie. This incident particularly affected the import-export sector, notably the trade in locally produced gold. The Federation of Enterprises of Congo (FEC) has called on the authorities to ensure the safety of residents and secure the roads leading to Misisi.¹⁵
- Perceived discrimination against the Twa by the Bantu. Most reports indicate that the discrimination experienced by the Twa, and the prevailing sense of mistrust between the two communities, are major causes of conflict. This feeling is exacerbated by the level of poverty among the Twa. The dire poverty drives some to steal crops from Bantu fields, as well as cases of gender-based violence resulting in Twa girls becoming pregnant by Bantu boys who subsequently abandon them. This sense of discrimination is reinforced by numerous cases of judgements considered biased because they were handed down by Bantu judges. Furthermore, the fact that Twa boys are not accepted by Bantu girls are all factors that heighten the sense of mistrust between the two communities and exacerbate the dynamics of the conflicts. However, it would appear that prior to the outbreak of the 2012 conflicts, the Twas and the Bantu lived in perfect harmony. Some studies highlight that the rise in activism by a handful of Twa civil society organisations (CSOs) has fuelled their demands for respect for their rights.¹⁶ Furthermore, the manipulation of identity, hate speech for political ends, and the lack of alternatives and sustainable resilience for those

¹² Focus group discussion held in Kabalo as part of an evaluation for an RSFA project proposal in February 2022.

¹³ IRC (2017), 'A Silent Crisis in the Congo: The Bantu and the Twa in Tanganyika' p. 6.

¹⁴ Famine Early Warning Systems Network, DRC, Perspectives for health security, February-September 2017, p3.

¹⁵ https://www.radiookapi.net/2020/09/29/actualite/economie/tanganyika-paralysie-des-activites-economiques-misisi?utm_source

¹⁶ IRC, Op. Cit. p 8.

who have been resettled are all immediate causes of the conflicts that have been ongoing in Tanganyika Province for years.

Factors that aggravate the conflict

According to the documents consulted, the factors exacerbating the dynamics of the conflicts in the various territories of Tanganyika Province are as follows: the scarcity of arable land, rapid population growth linked to the resettlement of people in certain areas, the Twas' failure to recognize customary authority, the unequal distribution of war booty between the Twas and the Bantu, and the failure to fulfil the promises made to the Twas during the coalition war between the Twas and the Bantu against the Bakata-Katanga, commonly known as the War of Secession.¹⁷ It is worth noting that the Twas are obliged to pay levies to both local chiefs and the leaders of the Bakata-Katanga militias in Nyunzu. Kalemie and Moba, on the other hand, only pay to the local chiefs. Furthermore, the documents consulted also show that certain humanitarian interventions are not conflict sensitive. The perceived targeting of beneficiaries by humanitarian actors has reinforced feelings of mistrust and exclusion and has become a source of tension between Twa and Bantu beneficiaries. For example, the targeting of beneficiaries is often a source of tension between HDP actors and local communities, as the criteria for beneficiary vulnerability are not always perceived in the same way by humanitarian workers and local populations. The bringing in of humanitarian staff and casual labour, and the fact that job vacancies are advertised locally but the selection process takes place outside the area, also exacerbates conflicts. Other conflicts arise over the choice of suppliers for NFI/AME (Non-Food Items/Essential Household Items) and food fairs.¹⁸ In Moba, for example, the targeting of HDP activities in a way that excluded certain groups helped to exacerbate pre-existing divisions between the Twas and the Bantu, thereby creating frustration on both sides.¹⁹ With regard to relations between internally displaced persons and host families, the documents consulted show that there is a very real risk of tension between the two parties following incidents of theft observed in the fields of the local population.²⁰ Furthermore, the presence of large numbers of internally displaced persons in host families lacking resources is another factor that fuels tensions between the displaced persons and their host families.

Triggering factors

The following triggers of conflict are frequently cited in the literature:

¹⁷ CDJP, Declaration of Peace at the Nyunzu Peace Forum, organised by CDJP from 8–10 December 2015, pp. 1–2.

¹⁸ UNICEF, Op. Cit, p27.

¹⁹ SFCG, Op.Cit, p 8.

²⁰ Report of the Inter-agency Mission to Update Figures on Population Movements in the Nyunzu and Kabalo Territories, September 9-21, 2019, p. 4.

- The appointment of village chiefs from outside the ruling families and without regard for traditional customs and practices;
- The illegal sale of land by local chiefs;
- Land grabs and dispossession by local chiefs and certain local authorities;
- Human rights abuses, cases of kidnapping, targeted killings of certain Twas by the Bishambuke group of the Fuliro community, and arbitrary arrests by local chiefs;
- The FARDC and the ANR;
- The use of humanitarian aid by local chiefs to exert influence.

Conflict actors

The main parties involved in the conflicts are: the Twa and Bantu chiefs, village and community leaders, Decentralized Territorial Entities (ETD) leaders, territorial and provincial authorities, certain politicians at provincial and national level, community leaders, landowners, foreign and national artisanal and industrial miners, armed groups, youth organisations, civil society, state service personnel (FARDC, ANR), and certain international and national NGOs. According to the documents consulted, certain politicians are accused of fuelling hate speech and manipulating young people into joining self-defence groups and armed militias. In Moba, studies show that state officials abuse their power when interacting with the population and are also accused of being a threat to peace.²¹

Several distinctive features with regards to relationships, interests and motivations of the actors are emerging. It would appear that most of the actors involved in the conflicts mentioned above (notably traditional landowners and foreign mining operators) enjoy a degree of impunity and protection from politicians at national level; they derive enormous benefit from this context of tension or the status quo, allowing them to illegally exploit mining concessions and enrich themselves unlawfully. Furthermore, analyses also show that certain traditional and land chiefs (just like armed groups) collect illegal taxes and levies and carry out these activities with complete impunity. Armed militias, such as Apa na Pale, Bakata Katanga and others, also have economic interests (although some, such as Bakata Katanga, also have political motivations such as secession). Enrichment and the lure of easy money are motivations common to all these actors.²² The documents consulted prove that the majority of actors are seeking political and/or economic standing (the two being closely linked).

Local Twas leaders seek power to gain access to resources and inclusion within governance structures at all levels. Civil society actors, including national and international organisations, are

²¹ SFCG, *Conflicts Scan*, Tuendelee Pamoja II, September 2019, p6.

²² *Ibid*, p6-7.

also cited as contributors to the conflicts due to the way their interventions are perceived. Indeed, the perception of humanitarian aid, particularly amongst young people, is very negative. Youth believe that HDP/NGO actors are there to exploit the vulnerability of populations or communities. In Moba, for example, young people feel excluded from HDP interventions and believe that international NGOs are present in the area to line their own pockets. They are even said to have organised campaigns to mobilise the population against supporting the irrigation works of the Tuendelele Pamoja Phase II project.²³ In other territories, young people take a more nuanced view of this perception. They believe that HDP actors should make efforts to recruit locally to create employment opportunities and thus enable them to access resources. In the districts of Kalemie, Nyunzu, Kabalo and Manono, for example, young people are pressing for recruitment, whilst HDP stakeholders believe that their low level of education prevents them from being competitive.²⁴

Recent dynamiques

Until January 2025, the province of Tanganyika had been experiencing a relative lull in some territories. However, since May 2022, there has been a resurgence of Twa-Bantu conflicts in several territories within the province. For example, the security situation has deteriorated in the Kalemie territory, particularly along the Kasanga–Nyemba route.²⁵ In the Lubamba village of the Nyunzu territory, a dispute between a member of the Twa community and a Bantu family escalated into a clash involving several members of both communities. These skirmishes led to the death of a member of the Twa community and the burning down of an entire Bantu village by the Twas in retaliation.²⁶ In December 2024, in the area commonly known as the ‘triangle of death’²⁷, that is, between the territories of Manono, Pweto and Moba, several incursions by Bakata Katanga militiamen were reported. These incursions and the burning of houses in the territory of Moba led to the displacement of more than 4,000 people to neighbouring villages.²⁸ It should be noted that several murders during that month of December were also attributed to these militiamen in the territory of Moba. The latest reports from early January 2025 detail the murder of the deputy head nurse at the Kasenga Nganyi health centre, in the Kansimba health zone, Moba territory. According to the Tanganyika Civil Protection Coordination Unit,²⁹ this murder is also attributed to the Bakata Katanga militia.

²³ Tanganyika : l’axe Kalemie-Moba en proie à l’activisme des miliciens Twa et Bantou, Radio Okapi (2023). <https://www.radiookapi.net/2023/03/13/actualite/securite/tanganyika-laxe-kalemie-moba-en-proie-lactivisme-des-miliciens-twa-et>

²⁴ Development plan of Tanganyika province, 2023-2027, p.38.

²⁵ Tanganyika : La province de nouveau plongée dans des conflits entre Twa et Bantous - Scoop RDC (2022).

²⁶ www.radiookapi.net/2024/12/15/actualite/securite/tanganyika-un-mort-et-un-village-incendie

²⁷ Actualité Sécurité RDC | Tanganyika : Retour des déplacés dans le territoire de Moba après les violences des Bakata Katanga - Le Congo au quotidien (2025).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ The Tanganyika Civil Protection Coordination Office, contacted by telephone whilst this note was being written.

Whilst the structural causes of the conflicts have not been resolved, local structures (Twa and Bantu leaders, HDP stakeholders, and the Tanganyika P-DDRCS programme) have organized several initiatives involving dialogue, round-table discussions and other capacity-building workshops on conflict transformation. From September 29-30, 2023, the P-DDRCS programme, in partnership with the NGO PACT, organised an inter-community dialogue for peace and social cohesion between the two communities. According to the reports and documents consulted, certain members of the Twa and Bantu armed groups are said to have expressed a willingness to lay down their arms and join the P-DDRCS process, in order to enable their respective localities to regain security and peace. Furthermore, some Twa militiamen are also said to have 'left the bush' due to difficult living conditions, mainly along the Kasanga–Nyemba route.³⁰

Among the latest developments in the conflict dynamics is the death of the militia leader Apa na Pale ri Kasongo in Nyunzu territory on 10 February 2024.³¹ According to local sources, Amuri Kasongo is said to have made an incursion into the Luliya mining site (operated by Chinese investors), which led the FARDC to intervene. It should be emphasised that this militia leader had been spreading terror in the Bakalanga group in Nyunzu territory. Faced with this situation, sources report that the Chinese investors evacuated the Luliya mining site, fearing reprisals from the Hapa na Pale militiamen following the death of their leader.³² The documents and reports consulted reveal strained relations between IDPs and host families over access to water and land. According to the reports, in some villages, certain host families are demanding that the displaced and resettled people be relocated once again from their villages.

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³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Tanganyika : les FARDC tuent le chef de la milice Hapa na Pale (mediacongo.net)

³² Idem.

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