

INFORMATION NOTE FOR HDP STAKEHOLDERS WORKING IN THE UVIRA TERRITORY

Period: August 2025

0. General Guidance

The Conflict Sensitivity Hub produces informational notes on context monitoring designed to help Humanitarian, Development, and Peace actors better integrate conflict sensitivity into their actions and organizational practices. Since the context in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo can change rapidly, these notes are most relevant and useful shortly after their publication. However, they remain useful in the long term for documenting changes in the context and for preserving a record of events that can inform a learning process. This brief aims to provide HDP actors with information on recent developments in the conflict context in the Uvira territory, South Kivu, so they can adapt their interventions to the context.

1. Brief Overview of the Context

The Uvira territory, located in South Kivu province in the DRC, is marked by chronic instability fueled by a complex combination of historical, political, ethnic, and security factors. Today, it faces a variety of recurring conflicts—including land disputes, intercommunal conflicts, political conflicts, power struggles, and those related to local governance—which undermine social cohesion, stability, and development.¹

Intercommunal land disputes persist in the Ruzizi Plain between Barundi and Banyamulenge herders and Bafuliiru farmers. As for intercommunal armed conflicts, they are particularly evident in the groupings located in the high and middle plateaus of Uvira, Fizi, and Itombwe. This area is characterized by intercommunal violence orchestrated by Banyamulenge self-defense militias and Mai-Mai factions belonging to various communities. Other, more visible conflicts are associated with access to and control of power, as well as with identity-based mobilization. These conflicts are particularly active among the Luberizi, Kakamba, Bijombo, and Kigoma groups.²

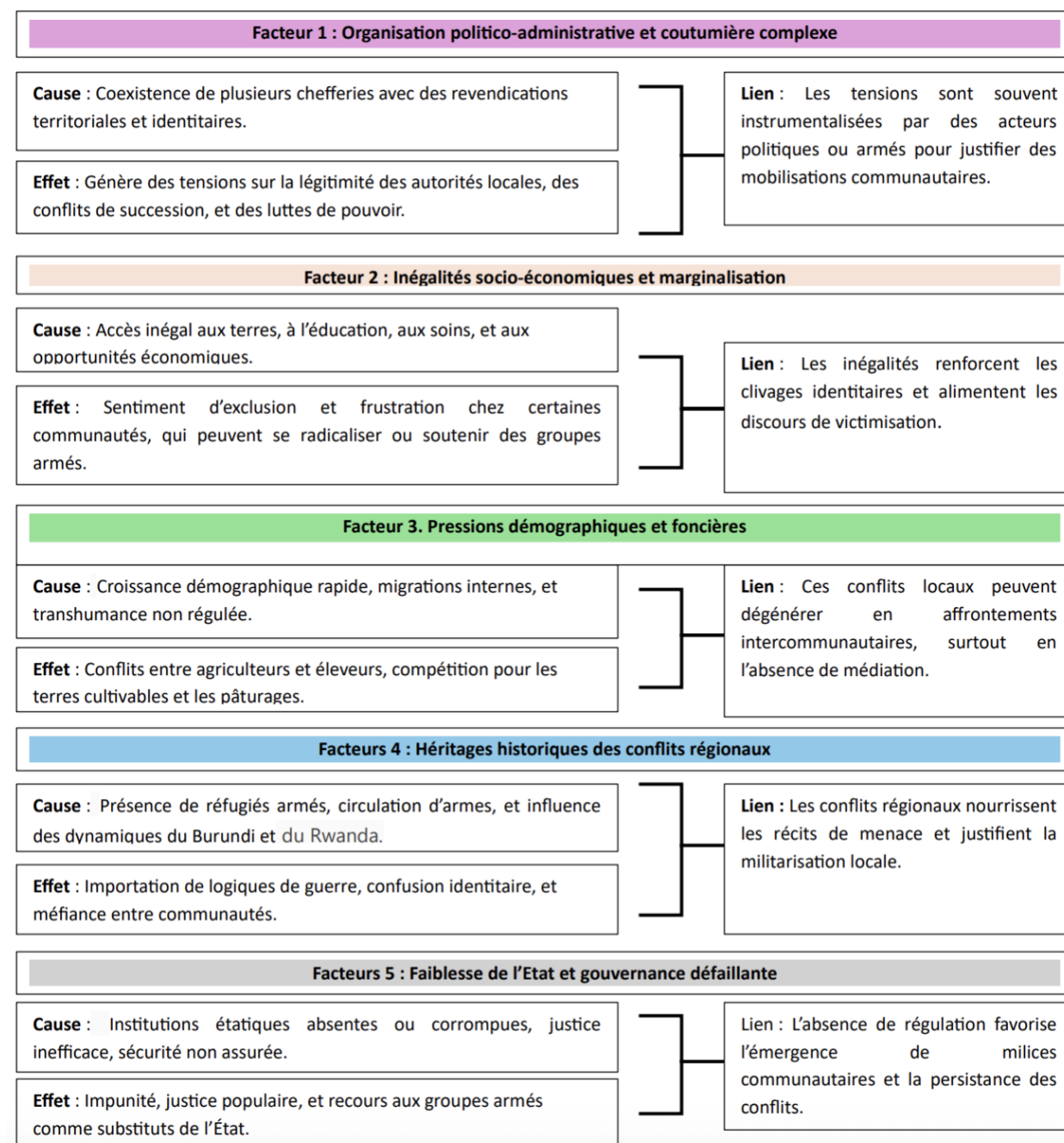
2. Description of the factors and causes (immediate and structural) of the conflicts

✓ Structural factors and causes of the conflicts

The factors contributing to conflicts in the Uvira territory span several areas of governance, social issues, and the economy.

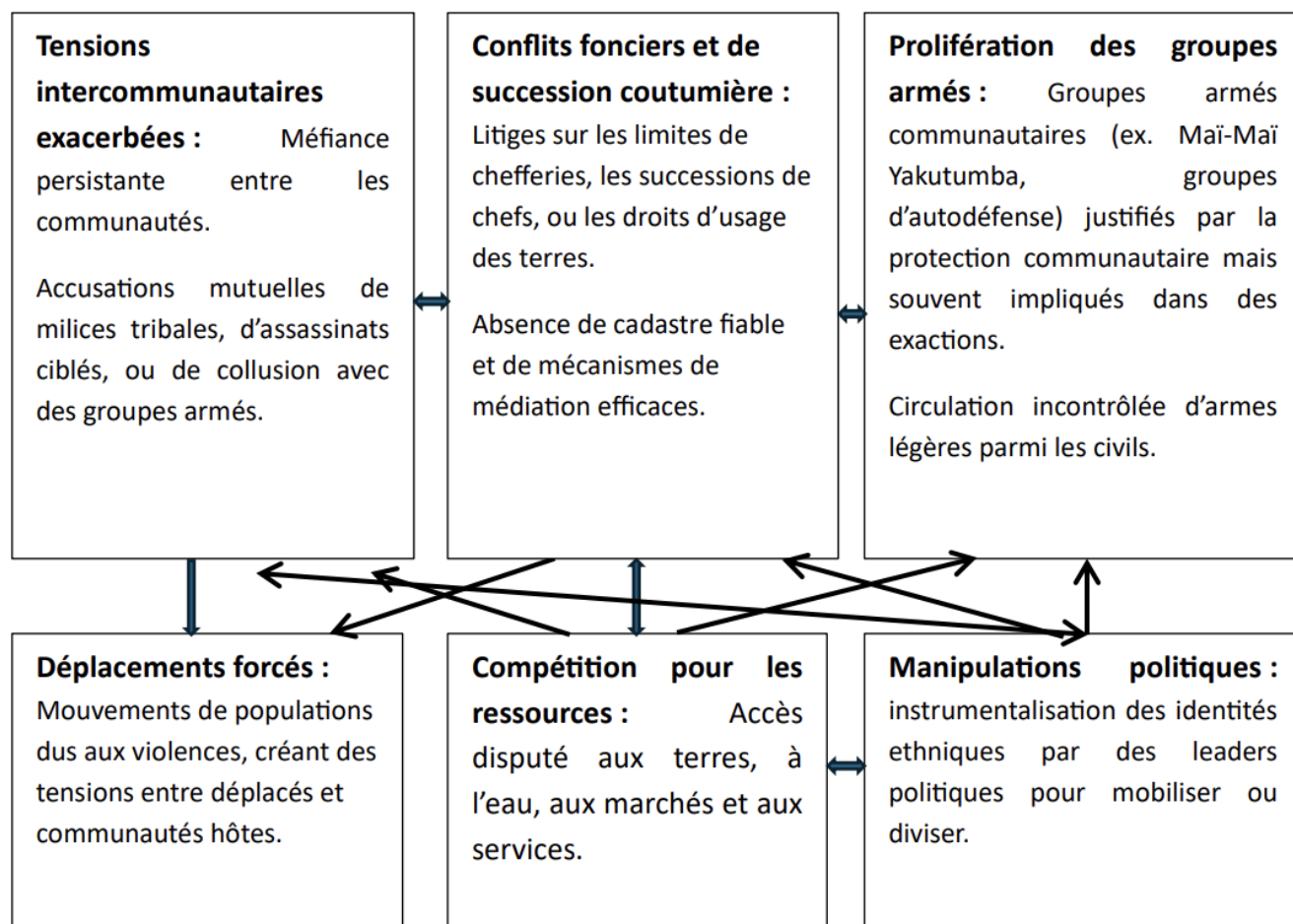
¹ <https://acp.cd/province/lactualisation-de-la-cartographie-des-conflits-au-centre-dun-atelier-organise-a-uvira>

² <https://cs-hub.org/app/uploads/2024/09/Note-de-synthese-des-conflits-dans-les-territoires-de-Fizi-Minembwe-et-Uvira-plaine-de-la-Ruzizi-Fevrier-2024.pdf>



✓ Underlying (Immediate) Factors and Causes

Related to the structural factors analyzed in the previous paragraph are underlying causes that trigger or intensify tensions and violence, driven by two main factors: competition for resources and political manipulation.



3. Description of the main actors and stakeholders in the conflicts

In the Uvira territory, several actors are involved in the conflicts, each with their own motivations and roles. Communities clash over land, political issues, or access to resources, sometimes using violence as a means of asserting their claims, which makes these communities both victims and actors in these conflicts. Armed groups also clash against the backdrop of community disputes and are often involved in violence, looting, and the exploitation of natural resources.

The authorities, for their part, attempt—notably through the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) and the Police Nationale Congolaise (PNC)—to ensure or restore security, manage conflicts, and implement public policies. However, they face challenges such as a lack of resources, corruption, and political influence.

- Community-based and foreign armed groups: Mai-Mai Yakutumba: a local armed group claiming to protect the Babembe, but involved in acts of predation; the Forces Nationales de Libération (FNL) — Burundian militias present in the Ruzizi Plain — and community self-defense groups, often linked to interethnic tensions (Bafuliiru, Barundi, Bavira, Banyamulenge).
- State actors: the FARDC and the PNC, sometimes accused of colluding with certain armed groups or of abuses against civilians and local political and administrative authorities, and involved in conflicts over power, customary succession, and land management.

- Chiefdoms and their customary authorities: These entities are at the heart of conflicts over succession, territorial boundaries, and customary legitimacy.
- Historically marginalized communities or those perceived as “outsiders”: The Barundi³ and the Banyamulenge are often perceived as non-indigenous, which limits their access to customary lands. They do not have access to all positions and are sometimes victims of stigmatization and exclusion in political and community discourse.
- Unemployed rural and urban youth who have limited access to quality education and vocational training. They are vulnerable to manipulation by armed groups or political leaders.
- Women in rural areas who have limited access to land, credit, and property. They are underrepresented in customary and political decision-making bodies.
- Internally displaced persons and refugees, victims of conflicts or natural disasters. They have precarious access to land, services, and protection.
- Small-scale farmers and herders who are often subject to land-use pressures, insecurity, and a lack of institutional support. There are frequent conflicts between farmers and herders, exacerbated by unregulated transhumance.
- Currently, armed conflicts are taking place in the Bijombo and Kalungwe areas, where Banyamulenge self-defense militias allied with the AFC/M23 are clashing with Mai-Mai armed groups of Banyindu and Bafuliru origin.
- The main actors in the conflicts in the Ruzizi Plain are the Bafuliru and Barundi communities, traditional authorities, political leaders, major concessionaires, and armed groups.⁴ The various communities, with the support of politicians and armed groups aligned with them, are fighting for political power, which paves the way for control over natural resources such as land and minerals.⁵

4. Changes in the Context and Dynamics of Conflicts

✓ Changes Regarding the Actors

- Armed groups from the Banyamulenge community, including the Twirwaneho, have joined the AFC/M23 and have stepped up attacks against FARDC and Wazalendo positions⁶ in the highlands of Uvira territory. These groups now act as auxiliary forces, bolstering the military and strategic capabilities of the AFC-M23.⁷
- While the FARDC and various armed groups were previously in conflict, they have now formed a coalition to fight the AFC/M23 rebellion. As in other territories of South Kivu, these armed groups are now fighting alongside the FARDC under the name Wazalendo while maintaining

³ The Barundi migrated to the Ruzizi Plain as early as the 18th century, in search of fertile land for livestock raising and agriculture. [The Barundi in the Ruzizi Plain: Migration, Settlement, and the Roots of Tension.](#)

⁴ “Mwenga Highlands – Ruzizi Plain” Region, South Kivu, D.R. Congo Search for Common Ground October 2014, page 6

⁵ Idem

⁶ “Patriots” or “Nationalists”

⁷ <https://actualite.cd/2025/01/09/sud-kivu-twirwaneho-et-red-tabara-deviennent-des-suppletifs-de-la-coalition-afc-m23>

their independence. However, trust between these armed partners—who were once enemies remains fragile. They have clashed on several occasions in the town of Uvira,⁸ as well as on the hills overlooking it.⁹

- The emergence of the AFC/M23 did not only lead to alliances between the FARDC and Wazalendo; it also sparked divisions: Joël Namunene Muganguzi, the leader of the armed group known as the Union of Forces for the Reconstruction of the Congo (UFRIC), which was part of Wazalendo, announced that his group was joining the AFC/M23 in order, he said, to bring an end to the current regime in Kinshasa.¹⁰
- Another armed group that had emerged from the FARDC-Wazalendo coalition left that alliance to join the AFC/M23. This was the Wazalendo Rushaba group, which pledged allegiance to the very rebellion it had previously been fighting. Following this defection, the Rushaba armed group reportedly allowed free passage to AFC/M23 fighters coming from Kaziba in Walungu Territory, who then took control of the villages of Rurambo and Kigarama, located in the Bafuliru chiefdom in the Uvira highlands.¹¹
- Since the AFC/M23's occupation of Bukavu, the Congolese government has designated the city of Uvira, as of February 2025, as the provisional capital of South Kivu Province.¹² This city is now a highly strategic location, as it serves as a major stronghold still holding South Kivu. If the M23 manages to take Uvira, there is a high risk of the M23/AFC expanding into Tanganyika Province, which could significantly destabilize Burundi.
- Amid this uncertainty, misunderstandings between the FARDC and the Wazalendo fighters have negatively characterized this redeployment. These two parties, allied against the AFC/M23 rebels, have established two parallel command structures, making operational military coordination difficult.¹³ To resolve this situation, since April 2025, Defense Minister GUY Kabombo Muadiamvita has placed the Wazalendo fighters under the direct command of the national coordinator of the Armed Defense Reserve (RAD).¹⁴
- Despite the communal tensions in the area, the allegiance of the two Wazalendo armed groups mentioned above—both from the Bafuliru community— to the AFC/M23 proves that inter-community tensions between the Bafuliru on one side and the Banyamulenge and Barundi on the other in Uvira territory may also revolve around issues of power and political positioning, and not solely around the identity-based dimension under which they are often perceived.

✓ **Changes in factors and causes**

⁸ <https://www.radiookapi.net/2025/05/02/actualite/securite/le-calme-revient-uvira-apres-des-accrochages-entre-les-fardc-et-les>

⁹ <https://kivutimes.com/uvira-affrontements-entre-fardc-et-wazalendo-une-tension-croissante/>

¹⁰ <https://labeur.info/est-de-la-rdc-pasteur-de-la-8e-cepac-et-chef-dun-groupe-arme-joel-namunene-decide-de-rejoindre-lafc-m23/>

¹¹ <https://actualite.cd/2025/03/13/rdc-dans-les-hauts-plateaux-duvira-lafcm23-prend-le-controle-des-villages-apres>

¹² <https://www.congoquotidien.com/2025/03/04/actualite-rdc-uvira-capitale-sudkivu/>

¹³ <https://www.radiookapi.net/2025/03/29/actualite/securite/difficile-cohabitation-entre-fardc-et-wazalendo-uvira-dans-un-contexte>

¹⁴ <https://www.radiookapi.net/2025/04/08/actualite/sciences/uvira-le-ministre-de-la-defense-place-les-wazalendo-sous-le>

- The emergence of hate speech is a factor that exacerbates conflicts in the Uvira region. Since the security unrest that occurred in February 2025, the city of Uvira has faced an alarming increase in rhetoric inciting tribal hatred.
- Social media, chat apps, and other digital platforms have become channels conducive to the spread of violent and discriminatory rhetoric. Even the provincial governor, who was temporarily relocated to Uvira, has been a victim of this.¹⁵

Easy access to small arms is also making conflicts increasingly violent in the Uvira territory.¹⁶ In this territory, AK-47 rifles are readily available, selling for between 25 and 35 U.S. dollars. Luberizi, Luvungi, Sange, and Mutarule—which share a border with Burundi—are the most affected areas.¹⁷ The illegal arms trade thus proves to be an accessible and viable alternative for some young people lacking other prospects.

Furthermore, the management of funds collected by the Wazalendo from operators supplying petroleum products appears to have been at the root of a climate of mistrust between certain Wazalendo members and the provincial authorities.¹⁸ To ease tensions, the provincial authorities of South Kivu, representatives of Wazalendo armed groups, provincial deputies, community leaders, and business operators met at the Uvira town hall to clarify the management of these funds.¹⁹

5. Impacts on the HDP Community

Types of Risk	Description	Mitigation / Required Sensitivity
Issue to humanitarian access	High level of militarization in the Uvira area: From Luvungi to the city of Uvira, numerous checkpoints have been set up by the Wazalendo and the FARDC, where payment is mandatory. To reach the city of Uvira from Luvungi, a budget of at least 100,000 FC would be required. ²⁰	- Negotiate access with the authorities through the Forum of International NGOs (FONGI) and the Humanitarian Affairs Coordination Office. - Strengthen partnerships with credible local organizations active in the intervention areas

¹⁵ <https://acp.cd/nation/uvira-les-menaces-de-mort-contre-le-gouverneur-condamnees-par-un-depute-provincial/>

¹⁶ <https://acp.cd/nation/sud-kivu-laces-facile-aux-armes-parmi-les-causes-des-conflits-a-uvira/>

¹⁷ https://aoav.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/AOAV-DRC-Burundi-Border-Assessment-Report-FINAL_fr.pdf

¹⁸ <https://kivutimes.com/uvira-autorites-provinciales-leaders-communautaires-et-wazalendo-enterrent-la-hache-de-guerre/>

¹⁹ <https://jambordc.info/uvira-autorites-civiles-militaires-et-leaders-communautaires-apaisent-leur-tension-pour-une-paix-durable/>

²⁰ Interview with a civil society activist and head of a community media outlet in Kiliba

Allegation of discriminating host in favor of displaced persons.	More than 1,466,485 displaced persons need assistance in Uvira Territory. ²¹ Some came from Bukavu and others from Fizi Territory. The latest group of displaced persons came from Walungu Territory due to the clashes in Kamanyola, Nyangezi, and Kaziba. ²²	- Take the host population into account in all assistance provided to displaced persons. - Provide sufficient information on the criteria and conditions for accessing aid.
Accusation that local residents are not being considered in the recruitment of NGOs.	Many people lack access to employment (high unemployment rate). This situation gives rise to expectations, demands, and accusations against NGOs.	- Prioritize the local workforce. - Adjust hiring policies and procedures to suit the context, allowing recruitment teams a certain degree of flexibility.
Unintentional collaboration with members of armed groups.	Given the presence of multiple armed groups in the villages where HDP actors operate, it can be difficult to identify members of these groups when they are neither armed nor in uniform.	- Thoroughly map stakeholders during the conflict analysis or its update to accurately identify local peace-building capacities or positive actors among community leaders who may, in turn, assist in identifying members of armed groups during the selection of collaborators.

²¹ <https://actualite.cd/2025/07/04/sud-kivu-plus-de-1-466-485-deplaces-en-besoin-dune-aide-humanitaire>

²² <https://actualite.cd/2025/07/02/uvira-plus-de-4017-deplaces-de-sange-confrontes-au-cholera-et-la-malnutrition>

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations complement the mitigation strategies mentioned above:

- Humanitarian actors should continue to engage in dialogue with provincial authorities in Uvira to determine the means and methods for delivering humanitarian aid to those in need—particularly the displaced—without putting staff and beneficiaries at risk.
- Work with community leaders to define the quota and criteria for identifying beneficiaries in the host community in order to avoid frustration and anger among the community.
- HDP actors should also increase the number of training sessions for government officials and awareness-raising sessions for community leaders on humanitarian principles, to prevent any misinterpretation or manipulation of their interventions in the field.
- HDP actors should further involve credible local organizations by strengthening partnerships with them to carry out interventions in the Uvira area,
- HDP actors should continue their efforts to promote local recruitment by establishing criteria that support this policy—notably by limiting the scope of job postings, specifying that the positions are intended for those based in the local communities, or by recruiting interns to ensure competitiveness for future openings.
- Conduct conflict analyses and update them, focusing on mapping the actors, their interests in the conflicts, and, above all, their relationships, to ensure that actions do not inadvertently benefit members of armed groups or harm their interests.

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