



The Political Economy of the Kaziba Chiefdom

(South Kivu, DRC)

Koen Vlassenroot and
Eric Batumike Banyanga

INSECURE LIVELIHOODS SERIES

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PUBLISHING

Editor: Koen Vlassenroot

Copy-editing: Lee Gillette

Designer: Marie Wynants, achttien.eu

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Ghent University, Belgium. 2024



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Introduction

The Kaziba chiefdom is part of the Walungu territory, in South Kivu province, Democratic Republic of Congo. It is located at about 55 kilometres from the provincial capital, Bukavu, and covers 192 square kilometres. Surrounded by mountains, the chiefdom is bordered by the Bafuliiru chiefdom (Uvira territory) to the east, the Luhwindja chiefdom (Mwenga territory) to the south, the Ngweshe Chiefdom (Walungu territory) to the north and the Lwindi and Burhinyi chiefdoms (Mwenga territory) to the west. In 2021, its population was estimated at 49,874 (Mukenge et al., 2021). The chiefdom is located within the Mitumba Mountains reaching peaks of up to 3,200 metres above sea level and giving it a particular geographic character. Most people are living in the Luzinzi River Valley and the plateaus located in the north.

This report examines Kaziba's key social, political, geographic, and economic features. It documents how its relatively small size, geographical isolation and lack of fertile soil have contributed to a high degree of both social cohesion and stability, but also to a lack of economic opportunities and development. Given the relatively low degree of soil fertility, agricultural production is mainly limited to subsistence farming. The discovery of gold deposits has offered a way out to part of its population but is also triggering competition and conflict between artisanal miners and mining cooperatives.

Methodologically, this report is based on qualitative fieldwork conducted in Kaziba in August and September 2024. Data was gathered through 19 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders including administrators, customary leaders, elected officials, civil society leaders, farmers, artisanal miners, church leaders, etc. To these interviews we added our field observations collected during our research in Kaziba. These observations have contributed to a better understanding of current dynamics and challenges in this chiefdom. In addition, reports and academic articles have been consulted.

The chiefdom's history

The Kaziba chiefdom is a small chiefdom, comprising 15 *groupements* and 58 villages (see table 1). The centre of Lwangunguku is the administrative capital and hosts the main education, health and other facilities. Kaziba's inhabitants are known as Bazibaziba, which in Mashi language means "those who close their eyes". The name refers to the reaction of the population to the theft by Mwami Kangere of his cousin's Mwihwa (cows in Mashi language), a crime which was considered unforgivable. In response, his subjects lowered their heads and closed their eyes, an act locally known as *Kuziba* (Unknown, 2019).

Before the arrival of colonialism, the chiefdom had been ruled by 11 different *bwami* (see table 2). Being a rather isolated chiefdom because of its mountainous character, it only attracted limited outside interest, to which its population often reacted with resistance. In 1904 and 1907, Belgian colonial forces organized two military expeditions that left Kaziba's population with collective trauma. A decree of the district commissioner of Kivu eventually recognized and formally integrated the chiefdom into the colonial political structures in 1929, when the chiefdom was under the reign of Mwami Majiri III N'Kaziba.

Table 1: *Groupements* and villages of the Kaziba chiefdom

GROUPEMENT	VILLAGE
BULUMBWA	Budaha, Bulumbwa, Burhurhu, Chitumbye, Mulaga
BUTUZI	Burhende, Butuzi, Centre Lwanguku, Kapunda, Nabiriga, Rugezi
CHIBANDA	Chibanda-Kakonzi, Chingali, Karwa, Kalemba, Kalambo, Mugogo, Nyunya, Kashiramo
CHIHUMBA	Chihumba, Mikumba
CHIRIMIRO	Chirimiro, Lukeshe, Mpako
KABEMBE	Bwegemerwa, Kabembe, Karhondo
KAHUNGWE	Kabuga, Kahungwe, Nshoko, Chimpwi
KASHANGA	Bubira, Kashanga
KASHOZI	Bushendeko, Kasheke, Kashozi, Kasigalire, Mufumbe
CHIBURHI	Kalemba, Karhungu, Mululi
LUKUBE	Chebe, Lukube
MUCHINGWA	Chirhala, Luvumbu, Muchingwa, Nachihase, Namikubi, Nkoma
MUHUMBA	Ihuku, Lubona, Njokandi
MULAMBI	Mulambi, Chitudu
NGANDO	Ludaho, Muherho, Mulondola, Ngando, Chitudu

Table 2: Genealogy of customary chiefs of Kaziba

NAME	REIGN	NAME	REIGN
KANGERE	1677–1701	MPWIJI MAJIRI II	1824–1860
NSHULILUJO	1701–1725	MUKENGE (MUHIRHIRA)	1860–1882
NGIRINGA	1725–1754	CHIMANYE I	1882–1906
NGWINA	1754–1770	MAJIRI III	1906–1936
CHIVULA WA CHIVULA	1770–1788	KABONWA II MUHIGIRHA	1936–1965
KARHENDE MAJIRI I	1788–1803	CHIMANYE II KABONWA	1965–2005
KARHENDE II	1804–1815	MAJIRI IV DIRK	2005–
KABONWA KA BIHEMBE	1816–1823		

Source: Kaziba Bami family tree monument, 2024.

Kaziba's population is predominantly Protestant. In 1922, an expedition of Swedish and Norwegian Pentecostals, which was aimed at opening a pentecostal mission in Congo, was the first to arrive in Kaziba. As part of a division of labour, Norwegian settlers instituted a pentecostal ministry in cooperation with local customary authorities. It was the start of a massive conversion to Protestantism of Kaziba's population. In 1958, a hospital was built and run by Norwegian missionaries (Mikaelsson, 2018), which would become known as Kaziba General Hospital. It has attracted villagers to settle nearby and has been an important contributing factor to the growth and urbanization of Kaziba's centre. Over the years, some of Kaziba's notables have taken up residence in Bukavu, where they have invested in local trading activities. Some of the proceeds from this trade were invested in Kaziba's infrastructure, which was an additional factor in its urbanization.

In 1977, the Communauté d'Eglises Chrétiennes en Afrique (CECA) settled in Kaziba and tried to establish a school, which was eventually transferred to the hill of Kahya, locally also known as Nairobi hill. However, CECA could never establish a real foothold, with only two churches operating.

In 1995, the Congolese Communauté des Eglises Libres de Pentecôte en Afrique (CELPA) was instituted, which took over all activities that were still in the hands of the Norwegian Congo Mission. Aided by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), CELPA developed a network of schools and institutions in several parts of Congo, including in Kaziba where it progressed into a dominant religious structure (Mikaelsson, 2018).

Like all other chiefdoms in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Kaziba chiefdom today is a decentralized territorial entity. For several decades, it has been known as an entity where security and stability reign. Even if a crisis of legitimacy arose between the Barhanga (a clan close to the Mwami) and the Banyacivula, who considered the Barhanga to be usurpers of the Mwami (Mugaruka, 2021), unlike in several other chiefdoms in Bushi, there is no evidence of customary power struggles in Kaziba since the reign of Mwami Kangere N'Nalwindi, who reigned from 1677 to 1701, up until the current Mwami Dirk Majiri IV. The Bazibaziba are a rather closed community that respect customary authority not because it imposes itself through its power

of coercion, but because it embodies sacred, spiritual and identity-related values. As could be witnessed at the marriage of current Mwami Dirk Majiri IV, in July 2024, there is a strong attachment of most Bazibaziba to their identity, of which the Mwami is considered the main guardian. Most, if not all, Bazibaziba felt a sense of responsibility for this wedding and contributed financially so that the Mwami's marriage could succeed.

Another reason for its relatively high level of stability are its strong social coherence and its geographical isolation and size. The Bazibaziba are distinguished from other Bashi by a more particular accent in the use of Mashi. Also less numerous, they identify each other easily. As one of our sources said: "Everyone knows everyone in Kaziba"¹. Our field research also shows that another contributing factor to this social cohesion and stability is a high degree of solidarity through the Syndicat d'Initiative de Kaziba (SIKA), which is a framework for settling disputes between all the Bazibaziba. The syndicate even plays a role in advocating security vis-à-vis the province's political and military authorities, with the aim of providing stability to the chiefdom. For example, when the *Interahamwe* (the predecessors of the Forces démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda, Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, FDLR) in 2000 destabilized much of the Walungu territory and were also becoming a source of insecurity along the road in Mushenyi and Nyafunze in Kaziba, syndicate leaders pleaded with state authorities to set up a local defence force made up of young Bazibaziba armed with firearms to protect their chiefdom. Until recently demobilized and reintegrated into society, these local defence units have never been a source of insecurity to the population, which according to local observers is thanks to the Mwami, who is seen as playing a very cohesive role in local society.

Kaziba has been the scene of large-scale violence during the Congo wars, though. In the second half of October 1996, the Kabila-led Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaïre (Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaïre, AFDL) and the Rwandan Patriotic Army committed several massacres, killing 130 civilians in Kaziba. Over 30 of them were assassinated in Kaziba's commercial centre and 11 in Cihumba

¹ Interview with local teacher, Kaziba, 2 September 2024.

where people had sought refuge (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2010). These atrocities went hand in hand with the looting of the hospital and shops and the destruction of the local hydroelectric plant. Many of the victims were buried in Kaziba town in a mass grave close to the Mennonite Church, which became a memorial place for Kaziba's population. In October 2021, for the first time, the massacres were commemorated and justice was asked for their victims. During the Second Congo War (1998–2003), the population again fell victim to killings, acts of violence and human rights abuses, this time committed by the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (Rally for Congolese Democracy, RCD).

Undisputed political leadership

During the Second Congo War, two prominent individuals from Kaziba, the then Mwami Chimanye II Kabonwa and a politician called Norbert Basengezi Katintima, openly expressed their support for the RCD rebel movement. From the start of the transition process in 2003 until his death in 2005, Mwami Chimanye was a member of the Congolese Senate, as part of the RCD component. Katintima, who had participated in the Conférence nationale souveraine and been a member of the Haut Conseil de la République - Parlement de Transition (HCR/PT) at the end of Mobutu's reign, was rewarded with the position of provincial governor between October 1998 and June 2002 by the RCD leadership. Katintima built his local power thanks to his political career at the national level. During the Transition Process (2003–2006), he was again a member of Parliament. He later became Minister of Agriculture and in 2015 he was appointed vice-president of the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), a position he would hold until June 2019. A few months before he resigned, he was sanctioned by the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) for actions or policies that undermined democratic processes or institutions in the DRC. As the department stated, "In his capacity as CENI Vice President, Katintima and other CENI officials under his direction, embezzled and misappropriated CENI operational funds, facilitating election delays" (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2019).

Today, Norbert Katintima remains the leading political authority in Kaziba and the chiefdom's political elite is largely built around Katintima's family circles. Thanks to his influence on the national political scene and the resources he

does not hesitate to mobilize in order to carry out development projects in the chiefdom, he has become *incontournable* in local politics and decision-making. For over 20 years, Katintima has decided who of the Bazibaziba could stand as a candidate in legislative elections. One of these candidates was Ombeni Nyakabinda, who was elected provincial deputy in 2006. Other elected candidates included the former deputy Zacharie Barhumana and his son Cokola Kantintima in 2018. In 2022, in preparation for the 2023 elections, he created his own political party, the Alliance des Nationalistes pour un Congo Émergent (ANCE). During the elections, for the first time in his political career, he was challenged in Kaziba, by Tonny Mukome, a young member of the Regroupement Politique Alliance des Forces Démocratiques du Congo et Alliés (AFDC-A). Mukome was a local influential political leader who stood as a candidate for the provincial Parliament without Katintima's blessing. During the 2023 electoral campaign, this led to tensions in Kaziba, as ANCE activists could not tolerate that a candidate from Kaziba but of a different political party could represent the Kaziba chiefdom. Mukome initiated his own Red Berets militants to face the ANCE supporters, which added fuel to the fire of an already violent electoral campaign. Both Mukome and his ANCE opponent Espoir Birhinjira, the son of the sister of Katintima's wife and originally part of the AFDC, eventually were elected provincial deputies and animosities dissipated even if some suspicion remained.

Another political rivalry is the one between Katintima and Noble Prize Winner Dennis Mukwege, who also originates from Kaziba. Local sources point at potential contention over the implementation of community projects in the chiefdom. During fieldwork, we were told by residents that Mukwege would like to build a stadium in Kaziba. Katintima, once he had learnt of Mukwege's intention, tried to undermine Mukwege and prevent him from threatening Katintima's legitimacy among the Bazibaziba. During the 2023 elections, Katintima rallied the Bazibaziba around the presidential candidate Félix Tshisekedi, knowing that with Mukwege, Kaziba had its favourite son as a presidential candidate. Katintima's ANCE also joined the Union sacrée, the union of political parties in Congo's Parliament that support President Tshisekedi.

An economy dominated by forestry activities

Kaziba faces multiple socio-economic challenges contributing to widespread poverty and food insecurity. It is an economically isolated chiefdom where agriculture is the main economic activity. However, the chiefdom struggles with poor soil fertility, low agricultural productivity, and the cultivation of crops not adapted to existing conditions (Murhomulume Kalalizi, 2014). Additionally, around 75% of the land is covered with non-native trees, such as pine and eucalyptus, which do not adapt well to the area's biophysical conditions (Aksanti et al., 2024), further reduce available arable land and limit agricultural productivity.

Kaziba is also faced with poor infrastructure, particularly roads, which hampers trade and access to markets. Consequently, many households rely on importing food from neighbouring regions, leading to high costs and contributing to existing levels of poverty. The local economy is fragile, with limited non-agricultural income sources; while men engage in small-scale livestock farming, artisanal crafts, and trading, these activities are insufficient to stabilize household incomes. As one respondent told us: "Local trade is rudimentary. There are no major warehouses. Apart from small flour depots, there are no major economic activities. It's only the plank trade that is the mainstay of the products exported here to Kaziba"².

The expansion of tree plantations for economic purposes, itself considered a dominant alternative to agricultural activities, highlights a pressing dilemma:

² Interview with a local leader, Kaziba, 1 September 2024.

while trees provide some income, they lead to a further depletion of agricultural land and compromise the chiefdom's food security. Nevertheless, households often convert their fields into tree plantations as a coping mechanism. Though tree cultivation provides some income – used for education, debt repayment, and food purchases – it is often inadequate to meet the population's food demands. One study notes that 81.7% of households experience food insecurity, with limited dietary diversity (Aksanti Ntasima et al., 2024).

Tree planting is not only a means of environmental protection but also a culturally significant economic activity representing a considerable part of the total timber production in South Kivu. While tree planting offers long-term profitability, it has led to increased tension between local foresters and farmers. Influential individuals in Kaziba prioritize investing in agroforestry over food agriculture due to its perceived economic benefits. One interviewee pointed out that for many Bazibaziba, cultivating trees rather than food crops is a way to accumulate wealth, often allowing them to improve their economic status: “Here, when wood is grown to the detriment of food crops, it is justified by the fact that forestry enables the Bazibaziba to afford Fuso trucks and become rich”³.

However, this shift has created local animosity, as farmers dependent on agri-food production argue that these tree plantations further reduce soil fertility. One local farmer emphasized that tree plantations limit food production, effectively harming poorer residents who rely on these crops for their livelihoods: “Tree plantations prevent poor people from getting food. Imagine someone in Bukavu planting trees on the edge of your field, which means that the poor people's fields no longer produce, even though they live off the produce”⁴.

Some agri-food farmers – often financially disadvantaged – feel powerless to prevent wealthy individuals from expanding tree plantations. This perceived economic marginalization has led some farmers to acts of resistance, including the vandalism of tree plantations. Local sources told us that

³ Interview with a local resident, Kaziba, 1 September 2024.

⁴ Interview with a school principal, Kaziba, 2 September 2024.

some plantations were set on fire, often during the dry season. Some of our respondents also explained that farmers and herders sometimes resort to these measures to reclaim fertile land and grazing areas, actions which have adverse effects on both the environment and forestry resources⁵.

In other cases, due to economic pressures, poor farmers have been compelled to abandon food crops entirely, replacing them with trees. This shift toward forestry has further contributed to a dependency on external food supplies. However, it was mentioned during interviews that many of the landowners engaged in agroforestry live outside Kaziba and are not directly impacted by the local food shortages their plantations exacerbate. This disconnect has further fuelled resistance among the local population, who feel economically marginalized by the influx of tree plantations.

⁵ Interview with a school principal, Kaziba, 2 September 2024.

Land conflicts

The attachment of the Bazibaziba to their land is deeply rooted in culture and tradition. Access to and use of land are not just matters of resources; these also have become issues of recurring tension. Land conflicts manifest in various forms, including familial disputes over inherited land distribution, tensions between large landholders and small farmers, and disputes between customary entities over territorial boundaries.

One of the primary types of land conflicts in Kaziba arises within families, often due to an unequal distribution of inherited land. Traditionally, customary lands were not meant to be sold, but with recent social changes, this practice has evolved. Today, it is common to buy and sell land even outside the family lineage, leading to conflicts primarily because of the financial implications this generates. A resident of Kaziba noted, “The land has already been sold, even though it was not supposed to be”, highlighting the complications related to the new dynamics of land ownership⁶.

In parallel, tensions are developing between large landholders and small farmers who lack arable land. These farmers see the occupation of large areas by concessions involved in the tree business as a form of land grabbing. This perception prompts some farmers to resist these practices, as explained by a teacher: “There may be other conflicts among people, but mainly, these are land conflicts between farmers fighting over land with large landholders.”⁷

⁶ Interview with a local resident, 1 September 2024.

⁷ Interview with school teacher, Kaziba, 3 September 2024.

Another type of land conflict lies in boundary disputes between the various *groupements* in Kaziba. These conflicts arise when *groupement* chiefs do not know the precise borders, leading to disputes over certain hills. Although concrete cases proved to be difficult to document, some interviewees mentioned several incidents in the past. When such disputes arise, the *groupement* chiefs often intervene to settle the matter and, in some cases, annex a contested village to the Kashozi *groupement*, which is located in the centre of the chiefdom. Consequently, a distant village can find itself attached to this *groupement* without sharing any borders with it.

Finally, there are conflicts between local customary authorities and their subjects. Historically, customary land belonged to the *mwami*, who had the right to grant or revoke it from his subjects according to customary rules. Traditionally, this *kalinzi* type of contract gave farmers the right to use the land in return for the payment of a tribute to the customary chief. Such a right is hereditary. However, customary chiefs sometimes take advantage of the lack of land security to dispossess farmers, especially when these lands are not backed by land titles. A civil society spokesperson mentioned, “The issue of *Kalinzi* has led the Baganda [collaborators of the customary chiefs] to engage in fraud, as land certification was verbal. However, with the support of NGOs like the Panzi Foundation, we secured 50 plots belonging to widowed women”⁸.

Such lack of land security emerges as the primary source of land conflicts in Kaziba, affecting various stakeholders and manifesting in different forms. These tensions underscore the need for reform and for better management of land resources to prevent future conflicts.

⁸ Interview with the spokesperson of the New Civil Society of the chiefdom of Kaziba, 1 September 2024.

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Gold as alternative livelihood and source of conflict

Gold extraction is relatively new to the Kaziba chiefdom. During the colonial era, no geological expeditions were conducted, and gold deposits have only been discovered by accident by herders in the 1990s (USAID, 2018). Today, as in neighbouring chiefdoms, the artisanal mining of gold has become a key livelihood for Kaziba's population. Several gold mining sites have developed into important revenue producing centres attracting considerable numbers of artisanal miners. In addition, gold production has contributed to the position of Kaziba as a gold trading hub and has become a key asset in local trading flows connecting mining sites in Kaziba and neighbouring chiefdoms to local markets and urban business elites. According to an official of the Service d'assistance et d'encadrement d'exploitation minière artisanale et à petite échelle (SAEEMAP), gold began to be exploited officially first in 2003 at the Changoboka site in the Kashozi *groupement*, in 2009 at the Butuzi site, and in 2012 at the Malindji site⁹. Twice a week, gold is being traded at Kaziba's market, some of it also originating from mining sites in the Luhwindja chiefdom.

Also, in contrast to other parts of the Kivu provinces and Ituri, security conditions in Kaziba's mining sites are much better guaranteed. Since the end of the Congo Wars, no armed groups have been operating in the chiefdom near or in its mining sites. In addition, a limited presence of state authorities

⁹ Interview with official of SAEEMAP, online, 28 October 2024.

(including state security forces) is observed and the often complex and exploitative taxation structures and acts of harassment observed elsewhere in the region are largely absent.

In contrast to other mining areas in South Kivu, little in-depth research on the scope and importance of gold mining in Kaziba exists though. Currently, gold is being extracted in the following locations: Madhira/ Butuzi, Malindji, Mbwega, Chinjubi and in the Luzinzi river. A field visit in 2018 estimated the gold production for visited sites at up to 100 grams per week on average (USAID report, 2018), although local sources could not confirm these estimates. Two cooperatives have been formally recognized through a Decree of the Minister of Mining: the *Coopérative Minière pour le Développement de Kaziba* (CMDK), created on 15 January 2015, and the *Kaziba Coopérative Minière* (KAZICOM), created in August 2017. Both cooperatives are allowed to exploit gold in *zones d'exploitation artisanale* (ZEA) or formally validated mining sites. Amongst their founding members customary chiefs and politicians are cited, some of whom are currently residing in Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu.

However, tensions in Kaziba's mining sector have been observed between artisanal miners and these two cooperatives. While according to the Congolese Mining Code all artisanal miners have to join cooperatives in order to be allowed to mine, very few of them in Kaziba have done so. According to a USAID assessment, less than 10% of miners also hold a *carte de creuseur* (formal permit), suggesting that most of the gold extraction in Kaziba is conducted informally (USAID, 2018). Miners show little trust in the cooperatives; they are considered structures mainly benefiting the interests of local elites, aiming to enforce a monopoly over the local gold trade, not defending the rights and benefits of the miners, etc. Also, as was observed by the same assessment, "Despite the presence of the customary chief (*chefferie*) in the cooperative, its management remains illegitimate in the eyes of the miners. The power of the management to 'force' miners to record their production is relatively weak" (USAID, 2018: 25). As a consequence, miners often try to directly sell their produce to local traders (*négociants*), who prefinance their activities in return for the selling of their produce.

Since 2019, the Rising Star mining company has been mining in Kaziba, in the Luzinzi river. This river flows through a vast fertile marshland that is crucial for local agricultural production. Traditionally guarded by the Mwami, it is on this plain that he galvanizes his people to engage in farming activities after the customary seed blessing ceremony known as *Mubandé*. Today, Rising Star mines gold in the river and swamp area alongside local informal gold miners, who consider the river to be a gift from God to the Bazibaziba. These miners, working with very basic equipment, now have to compete with a company that has advanced equipment and has access to granted exploitation concessions. This advances many of the young miners out of the swamps. In an area where livelihood opportunities are already scarce, losing this source of income might exacerbate poverty levels. As a result, some may turn to illegal exploitation of the marshlands, which could lead to the expansion of marshland beds. Such expansion increases the risk of landslides and destruction of agricultural plots, intensifying tensions between miners, local authorities, and farmers.

The semi-industrial mining activities of the company are also having a huge impact on local agricultural activities. Rising Star is being accused of sabotaging the drainage work carried out by an NGO for the benefit of farmers' fields, because their machines change the riverbed and cause the waters of the river to wash away farmers' crops during the rainy season. Farmers also claim not to have received any compensation associated with the use of the river despite the agreed terms of reference. A civil society member explains the resulting tension as follows: "This company does not contribute to the economy of the chiefdom, and what's more, civil society is denouncing their operations, which do not comply with our terms of reference. Our terms of reference stipulated that they would build the road to the IGOHWA mining site in the village of Bushendiko in the Kashozi Group. The Rising Star company was also expected to build health centres, as the chemicals used during mining activities can damage the health of local people, and to build schools and comply with environmental standards"¹⁰.

¹⁰ Interview with a local civil society leader, Kaziba, 31 August 2024.

Local sources also fear that the Mwami himself is protecting this company and is receiving dividends, not to the benefit of the community but to his personal advantage. While no proof of such an allegation could be found, a look at the chieftom's budget did not show any contribution received from this company. A local resident, however, told us, "There have been moments when the population has planned to rise up against this company, but as the chieftom has received financial resources from the company, it tries to quell popular resistance"¹¹. A commander of recently instituted local *Wazalendo* (see below) expressed to us his commitment to taking matters into his own hands and put pressure on the mining company to respect the agreed terms of reference. Based on such statements, there is reason to believe that there could be a more violent uprising if Rising Star does not manage to harmonize its views with the socio-political leaders of the chieftom.

¹¹ interview with a resident, Kaziba, 1 September 2024.

New forms of armed mobilization

During the Congo Wars, Kaziba was not faced with the proliferation of armed groups as much as other parts of South Kivu province. The main exception was the mobilization of a local defence group in response to rising insecurity as part of *Interahamwe* incursions in 2000 (see above). Since the formal end of the Congo Wars and the start of the transition process, in 2003, no real presence of armed groups in this chiefdom has been documented and the security context has remained rather stable.

The announcement of a reserve force by the Congolese state, which was confirmed by the passing of a law in 2023 stating that civilian volunteers could be included in a reserve force in case there is a need to defend the country's territorial integrity following an external threat or aggression, also had an impact in Kaziba. Under the banner of *Wazalendo*, a common name for all those groups claiming to act in defence of the territorial integrity of the DRC and against the presence of the M23 on Congolese soil, a self-defence movement was instituted made up of mainly male youngsters and adults. Most of these recruits continue their daily lives and provide security at night in the streets of Kaziba's villages. According to their commander, the group has more than 3,000 members, a figure that could not be verified and is believed to be a strong overestimation. The group is made up of farmers, motorcyclists, artisanal diggers, livestock breeders and so on. They do not impose security checkpoints or taxation in exchange for ensuring security, they simply live as ordinary citizens. They are said to collaborate with other *Wazalendo* groups, including those in Nyangezi, Uvira and Fizi, and consider themselves to be

part of the so-called southern defence zone of the *Wazalendo*, commanded by General Amuri Yakutumba in Fizi.

The self-proclaimed protection force lacks any substantial organizational framework and claims to be made up essentially of former demobilized recruits from the Kaziba chiefdom. Most of them state that they want to protect the population against Banyarwanda communities. Local rumours also point to the political aspirations of excluded local elites and the Bazibaziba's under-representation in the Congolese army as fuelling the current mobilization dynamic.

While the *Wazalendo* see themselves as responsible for maintaining security in the chiefdom, at the same time they have no confidence in Congo's formal political and military authorities, whom they believe to be "in league with the enemies of the republic". They refuse to take orders from local authorities and only accept the authority of the national Minister of Defence and the President of the Republic. As one of their commanders told us: "We only depend on the Presidency and the national ministry of defence. They have no orders to give us. Even the regional commander does not have one. The one who can give me the order is only General Yakutumba who is our leader here in our second operational zone".¹²

In the long run, such feelings of mistrust and the hybrid security landscape risk exacerbating the tensions in the chiefdom. In October 2024, the provincial member of Parliament Espoir Mugisho Birhenjira alerted the provincial government of the potential security risks of the *Wazalendo* presence in Kaziba and called for their urgent demobilization. The Mwami of Kaziba has also ordered the *Wazalendo* to stop operating in the chiefdom yet this demand so far has had limited impact.

¹² Interviewed, *Wazalendo* commander, Kaziba/Kashozi, 2 September 2024.

Conclusion

The Kaziba chiefdom is a rather isolated and undeveloped chiefdom. Despite its relatively stable security conditions, the chiefdom suffers from limited agricultural production due to poor soil quality and the dominance of wood concessions, and a lack of connectivity to the outside world. This explains the relatively high levels of food insecurity and poverty compared to neighbouring chiefdoms. Customary authorities remain the key guardians of the community and are largely supported by the Bazibaziba. At the same time a small yet powerful local political and economic elite has strong control over politics and society and has gained a monopoly over local economic production (mainly wood and gold) and trade.

Efforts by international and local organizations to support Kaziba have been limited. Unlike other areas in South Kivu, Kaziba has seen relatively little engagement from international NGOs. As a result, the area lacks infrastructure and sustained development interventions. Only a few projects have been implemented, such as those by the Panzi Foundation, which distributed livestock and small business funding to some households. Other initiatives included the FH's marshland development project, which for a short period of time helped farmers increase their production, and FAO's support for agricultural cooperatives. The Social Fund contributed by establishing schools, while GIZ has been involved in reforestation. Tearfund and the Panzi Foundation also offer legal and economic support, primarily through legal assistance to vulnerable groups.

Recently, as in most other parts of eastern DRC, the chiefdom witnessed a proliferation of local *Wazalendo*, composed of locally recruited former combatants and youngsters. While their appearance can be explained by the call for popular support in Kinshasa's fight against the M23, these *Wazalendo* risk becoming involved in local dynamics of conflict. This might particularly be the case in gold mining disputes. Their presence and growing influence might eventually also complicate the chiefdom's security governance in general.

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