

# Bukavu: City report

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**Please note:**

The results presented in this report are based on data collected in 2022-2023. They do not take into account new developments resulting from the new social order brought about by the control of the city of Bukavu by rebels from the Alliance Fleuve Congo/Mouvement du 23 Mars (AFC/M23) since February 2025. This new development in the political context may be the subject of future studies.

**Abstract**

Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), was founded in 1900 by Belgian colonists. It has expanded from 3km<sup>2</sup> to 60km<sup>2</sup>, with a population of approximately 1.25 million. In the 1950s, the city was a model of segregated urban planning, with separate neighbourhoods for white and black residents. After independence in 1960, Bukavu experienced demographic changes and urban decay, worsened by the influx of refugees following the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Rural insecurity and a war economy driven by mineral resources and trade led to informal construction and deteriorating living conditions. Outside the city centre, most neighbourhoods house low-income populations, with informal settlements growing, due to displacement caused by armed conflicts. To understand this situation, the report applies the ACRC's holistic framework for analysing urban development in Africa, which has three integrated components – politics, systems and development domains. Politically, despite national stability since 2006, local governance remains marked by clientelism and inefficiency. The central government maintains control over provinces, despite their legal autonomy. Bukavu elites, influential in Kinshasa, can act as mediators but often pursue personal interests. The report recommends promoting reforms to improve services and governance, leveraging semi-autonomous mechanisms within the city's authorities for development, and supporting local civil society to pressure urban authorities for greater accountability. This approach can drive urban growth and align policies with citizens' needs.

**Keywords:** Urban development, political settlements, domain, system, governance, civil society, accountability, Bukavu, South-Kivu, DRC

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## 1. Introduction

Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), was founded in 1900 by Belgian colonists (Ulungabo, 2014). Its surface area grew from 3km<sup>2</sup> to 58.26km<sup>2</sup>, then to 60km<sup>2</sup> after independence, with an estimated population today of 1,369,430. Divided into three *communes* (administrative subdivisions) and 20 neighbourhoods, Bukavu was a model of urban segregation in the 1950s, as a result of Belgian colonisation, which distinguished between white and black neighbourhoods. With the independence of the DRC in 1960, the city underwent a transformation of its racial composition and a gradual urban deterioration, aggravated by the influx of refugees from the Rwandan genocide in 1994 (Vwima, 2014). Rural insecurity, combined with economic opportunities linked to the conflict economy (mineral resources) and commercial imports, has fuelled informal construction and a deterioration in living conditions in the city.

**Figure 1: Map showing the geographic location of Bukavu**

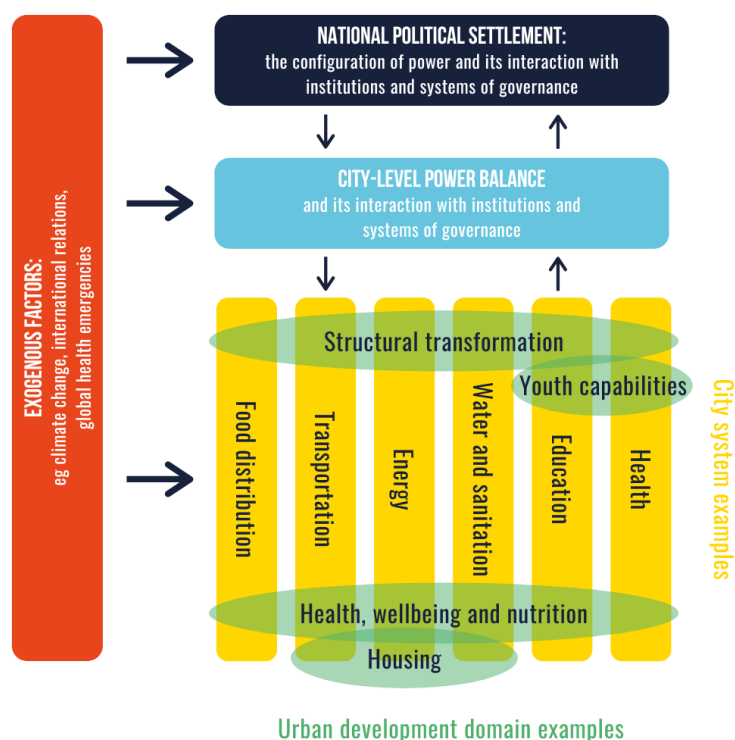


With the exception of the city centre, all the neighbourhoods and surrounding areas are home to low-income and precarious populations. A number of informal settlements have developed as a result of displacement caused by ongoing armed conflict. Clientelism and inefficiency within the various urban systems and sectors hamper effective management and the provision of adequate public services to meet the city's needs. In addition, the population is expected to triple by 2050, making the city vulnerable to serious risks of urban dysfunction and further deterioration in living conditions (Nyenyezi et al., 2021).

To deepen understanding of the situation of the city from an inclusive and sustainable urban development perspective, the report applies the African Cities Research Consortium (ACRC)'s holistic analytical framework for urban development in Africa, which is structured around three integrated components: politics, systems and development domains (see Figure 2). The politics component uses political settlement theory to model the configuration of power at national and city levels, and then analyses how these configurations of power influence (and are influenced by) urban development processes in the city. The systems component examines the functioning of the main urban systems (made up of physical infrastructures and groups of people organised in various ways) that support and/or enhance urban life from a political economy perspective. The development domains component looks at certain fields of discourse, policy and practice that have formed around complex and intersystemic

development challenges in the city. It analyses how the actors involved in these fields (political, bureaucratic, professional and grassroots) collaborate and/or compete for power. The diagram below illustrates how these three components fit together.

**Figure 2: ACRC's conceptual framework**



Two major characteristics of the city of Bukavu are this report's points of departure. Firstly, sociopolitical analysis of Bukavu in relation to the national political settlement in the DRC shows that, despite various challenges, the relative national political stability since the first elections in 2006 has provided an important basis for the city's development. However, this development remains difficult to promote in a context where elections, often rigged, are decisive for access to power at the urban level and where clientelism dominates governance. Provinces and cities enjoy *de jure* autonomy, but very little *de facto* autonomy, as the central government seeks to maintain its control over these entities for political reasons (ibid).

Secondly, despite its control over Bukavu, the central government has to take account of certain interests specific to sub-groups in the city. These interests are crucial to electoral outcomes and securing the flow of benefits of all kinds (political, mining, and so on) from the local level, in a manner that is advantageous to the central government.

This gives these sub-groups in the city some room for manoeuvre. Furthermore, the presence of elites from Bukavu in important bodies in the capital (the first lady, chief of staff to the president of the republic, president of the national assembly, budget minister, outgoing president of the senate, and so on) provides an opportunity to influence the political agenda in favour of this city. In other words, the province of South Kivu in general, and Bukavu in particular, are among the territorial entities capable of playing the role of kingmaker in the DRC and represent a national source of income. This often benefits Bukavu's influential elites, referred to here as "intermediary elites", who act as mediators between Bukavu and Kinshasa, often pursuing their own interests. It is conceivable that such influence could be used to promote urban and provincial development within a national context where power over territorial development often remains effectively centralised (Namegabe, 2008), but how can this be achieved?

On this point, it is worth recalling Mayrargue and Toulabor's (2009) argument that it is ineffective to focus exclusively on reforming the state, democracy, elections and administrative functioning in contexts where powerful actors frequently manage to hijack institutions, sometimes legally, in the service of private interests. Hence the need to adopt an approach that comprehends power through the articulation of public participation and expression, beyond the discourse on political institutions and their actors (*ibid*). Mayrargue and Toulabor stress the importance of looking at "politics from below", which makes it possible to grasp the point of view of ordinary and informal interactions and, above all, the pressures exerted by citizens that can compel elites to act in favour of local development (Bayart et al., 2017). More specifically, in the context of the city of Bukavu, where Kinshasa imposes its norms on the functioning of the city and province despite their *de jure* autonomy, we argue in favour of supporting local civil society, so that it may exert constant pressure on the urban and provincial authorities, while developing and supporting localised forms of urban reform driven by urban coalitions. This pressure and these dynamics of urban change could force the intermediary elites to respond to the needs of the population and improve public services (Otayek, 2009).

However, the situation in Bukavu is very particular, in that the actions of the municipal and provincial authorities depend heavily on the orders of the Kinshasa-based intermediary elites, on whom they depended to be elected or appointed. Meanwhile, these intermediary elites show no obvious willingness to adopt effective policies to provide appropriate public services to the people of Bukavu. From this point of view, and contrary to the literature on local participation (Gazibo and Thiriot, 2009), the pressure exerted on local and provincial authorities is not enough. This is why we argue that the pressure exerted by civil society on municipal and provincial authorities must also be aimed at enabling them to resist the demands of intermediary elites based in Kinshasa. In this way, the mobilisation of civil society can strengthen local autonomy and encourage municipal and provincial authorities to adopt policies that are more in line with the interests of citizens, despite the constraints imposed by the central government through its intermediaries. In this sense the active involvement of citizens

and local organisations is essential to improving governance and living conditions in Bukavu.

In a context where civil society remains a dynamic player and new forms of social mobilisation (Otayek, 2009) are vigorously emerging, the case of Bukavu shows that the challenge of citizen participation can be articulated, both in terms of pressure on and legitimisation of municipal authorities. Pressure is necessary because, like all elected or appointed officials, these authorities must constantly be reminded of their duty to be accountable to the local population. Legitimisation is just as crucial because, being heavily dependent on intermediary elites, political will alone does not suffice to fulfil their mission towards the population. Civil society needs convincing arguments to persuade intermediary elites that they have no choice but to serve the population, given the pressure exerted on them. This pressure could thus enable urban elites to use their manoeuvring space for the benefit of the population. Indeed, as this report shows, although they are closely dependent on Kinshasa, Bukavu's elites have sometimes managed to create mechanisms for managing and capturing resources that are beyond Kinshasa's control, thus making Bukavu a semi-autonomous space. This report argues that it is possible to take advantage of this practice (De Herdt and Olivier de Sardan, 2015) to promote the city's development.

This argument is supported by data from several reports relating to the four workstreams of the ACRC Bukavu project. These reports are very detailed, and for the purposes of this synthesis report, their content is summarised and at times simplified. We therefore address six main points: 1) an overview of political settlement in the DRC; 2) the political dynamics of Bukavu within this political settlement; 3) a brief analysis of urban systems and their impact on local governance; 4) a presentation of areas specific to Bukavu; 5) an analysis of the political economy of development in Bukavu, highlighting Kinshasa's control and local agency; and, finally, 6) the implications for future research and interventions.

## **2. Overview of the political settlement in the DRC**

The sections below examine: 1) the political settlement; 2) its emergence and consolidation; 3) governance and challenges; and 4) a conclusion.

### **2.1. Political settlement in the DRC**

To understand urban development and the prospects for reform in Bukavu, it is essential to understand who holds power and how it is exercised. Power dynamics at the city level do not take place in a vacuum; they are typically influenced by what we call the country's "political settlement". A political settlement is a common agreement or understanding between the powerful groups in a society concerning the basic rules (or institutions) of the political and economic game. By offering these groups the possibility of acquiring an acceptable minimum level of benefits, it prevents society from descending into all-out war. These rules create opportunities or advantages for "insider" groups, often to the exclusion of "outsiders". Political settlement can be



analysed in various ways, but we focus on two main dimensions: the configuration of power and its social foundation.

The configuration of power describes the relative strength of groups loyal to the leader (collectively referred to as the “leader’s bloc”) compared to groups that oppose the leader or are only conditionally loyal to him or her. In simple terms, when the leader’s bloc is strong, we say that power is “concentrated”. Conversely, when the leader’s bloc is weak, we say that power is “dispersed”. The concentration of power, in interaction with other variables, shapes the government’s ability to design and implement decisive and coherent urban development policies.

The social foundation describes the breadth and depth of the groups that are “insiders” in the political settlement. When a relatively large proportion of the population are “insiders”, we speak of a “broad” or “inclusive” arrangement. Conversely, when only a small number of the population are insiders, the political settlement is described as “narrow”. The social foundation, in interaction with other variables, will influence the degree of commitment of the governing elites to an “inclusive” urban development policy.

The current political settlement in the DRC can be described as “narrow-dispersed”. Most political analyses to date have focused on the national rather than the sub-national scale. In this section, we analyse how this political settlement has historically shaped urban development in Bukavu and influences the city’s prospects for reform.

The current political settlement in the DRC stems from the elections of 30 December 2018, which led to the investiture of Félix Tshisekedi on 24 January 2019. Despite this victory, the outgoing coalition, the *Front Commun pour le Congo* (FCC; Common Front for the Congo), retained its parliamentary majority, forcing Tshisekedi to form a coalition with his platform, *Cap pour le Changement* (CACH; Setting Course for Change). This situation generated tensions and redefined alliances, notably marked by the 27 January 2021 motion of censure against the prime minister from the FCC-CACH coalition. This political settlement was considered to have been “resolved” by an agreement between the influential groups, consolidated around the president and a broad government coalition. In Bukavu, a strategic city in South Kivu, this balance was influenced by national political transformations, redefining local alliances and power players (Mikaso et al., 2022).

This first section shows how Bukavu is a crucial issue in the national political settlement because of its role as a centre of political mobilisation. It also shows how control of the city enables local elites to influence political negotiations at a central level. Power dynamics in Bukavu are marked by ethnic, political, geographic and professional divisions. The political arrangements since 2006 show how these divisions influence the formation of the provincial government. The interconnection between local and national elites, with strong representation from South Kivu in the central government, illustrates the continuity of Kinshasa’s influence over the province and how it maintains control through the integration of actors at all levels.



## 2.2. Emergence and consolidation

The DRC's current political settlement dates back to 2018, when the country experienced a political shift following the presidential, legislative and provincial elections of 30 December 2018. These elections resulted in a political change marked by the contested victory of the current Congolese president, Félix Tshisekedi, who was sworn in on 24 January 2019, despite challenges (Nyenyezi, 2020). The outgoing president's coalition, the FCC, had won the majority of seats in the national assembly, senate and provincial assemblies in the 2018 elections, and thus the new president was forced to join forces with the FCC in a coalition with his own platform, CACH (Mikaso et al., 2022).

Félix Tshisekedi was criticised for being a puppet of former president Joseph Kabila, who had been in power since 17 January 2001, and after two years of a difficult coalition, Tshisekedi set out to detach himself from the former regime and succeeded in forming a single coalition to govern the country. The tensions that emerged in July 2020 within the coalition between the Kabila and Tshisekedi factions, concerning various appointments in the army and to the constitutional court, marked the end of the two regimes' political cohabitation. The final rupture occurred on 27 January 2021, when members of the national assembly voted massively in favour of a no-confidence motion (367 votes out of 382), bringing down the prime minister and his FCC-CACH government (Batumike and Nyenyezi, 2023).

The political settlement that has since been consolidated in the DRC can be described as "resolved", because the current regime has established a substantial agreement on the basic rules of the political game between the most influential groups. The regime has consolidated itself around a political system where, de facto, power is concentrated around the president of the republic, who forms and leads a relatively broad and coherent government coalition. Since the 1960s, under the presidencies of Kasa-Vubu, Mobutu, Laurent-Désiré Kabila and Joseph Kabila, ruling coalitions have formed around the president, incorporating various influential elites and leaders, including political party, regional and ethnic leaders. These actors, allied to the president, form the ruling coalition.

During Joseph Kabila's 18 years in power, the balance of power in Bukavu was aligned with that in Kinshasa, due to the national desire to maintain control over the provinces. With the arrival of Félix Tshisekedi in 2019, this balance has adapted to the changes that have taken place in Kinshasa. These changes have accelerated the redefinition of alliances and the repositioning of the city's elites, redefining who the power players are, based on the new rules of the political and economic game (Nyenyezi, 2020).

The influential groups at the national level are divided into three blocs: the leader's bloc (LB), the conditional loyalty bloc (CLB) and the opposition bloc (OB). The LB comprises President Tshisekedi, his family, members of his tribe, leaders of his party, *Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social* (UDPS; Union for Democracy and Social Progress), religious leaders of the revivalist churches and close allies. Their loyalty is guaranteed

by appointments and material benefits. This bloc plays a crucial role in consolidating power around the president. The CLB is made up of allied political parties, traditional chiefs, sociocultural movements and part of civil society. Their loyalty depends on their participation in power and the benefits derived from it. Examples include Vital Kamerhe's UNC and other members of the *Union Sacrée de la Nation* (USN; Sacred Union for the Nation) coalition. The OB brings together opposition parties, certain civil society organisations and influential players such as Denis Mukwege, winner of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize. These groups actively oppose the current regime and criticise current governance practices. Estimates of the size of the various blocs are based on election results, opinion polls and demographic statistics. For example, the Baluba represent a significant proportion of the Congolese population and form an important base for the LB. The opposition parties and certain civil society groups form the OB, while the CLB is made up of groups whose loyalties fluctuate according to political advantages and appointments.

In terms of external factors, foreign military support, although significant, has not played a decisive role in maintaining the political settlement in the DRC. It is true that United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), cooperation with countries such as Burundi, and the regional forces of the East African Community (EAC) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) are providing significant assistance. However, the centralisation of power and the distance between the conflict zones and the capital mean that these conflicts can be managed without compromising overall political stability. Foreign financial and technical aid is also substantial. The DRC receives financial and technical support from the Bretton Woods institutions and other international partners, which is essential for stabilising the economy and supporting government reforms. Given this dependence, national policies aim to ensure the autonomy of the political settlement, drawing on the country's economic potential and its abundant natural resources.

### 2.3. Governance and challenges

From a governance perspective, decentralisation (Melmoth, 2007), introduced by the 2006 Constitution and fully implemented in 2016, was designed to provide provinces with resources for effective management. However, the low rate of implementation of provincial budgets and disparities in the distribution of resources have hampered these efforts. The provinces of Kinshasa, Haut-Katanga and Kongo-Central receive preferential treatment in the allocation of resources, reflecting the state's desire to minimise the risk of conflict in these strategically important regions.

Since 2019, a number of reforms have been introduced, including free primary education and the 145 Territories Development Project (*Projet de Développement des 145 Territoires*). These initiatives aim to improve the living conditions of the population and legitimise the state. However, challenges persist in terms of governance, corruption and the management of public resources. Materialistic, clientelist co-optation remains a key strategy for maintaining power. This includes appointment of directors of public enterprises, co-optation of traditional chiefs, awarding public contracts in a non-

compliant manner (direct contracting rather than public tender offers) and private donation of public funds. These practices help to stabilise the political settlement by rallying influential leaders, but they prevent any break with the problematic practices of previous regimes.

The DRC has a semi-presidential political system, in which political power is accessed through elections, coalitions and political arrangements. However, beyond formal considerations, it is essential to understand how power actually works. Political elites see politics as a means of enriching themselves and consolidating their power, often resorting to clientelistic practices to maintain their position. The examples of salary increase for national assembly representatives (GEC, 2022), “gifts”, such as vehicles or financial support (United Nations and Radio Okapi, 2021), and judicial pressure exerted on certain leaders (HRW, 2023; Malukisa, 2024) all illustrate how the political arena works in the DRC. These practices reinforce the legitimacy of the government in power, while maintaining a balance between the various political factions

It is also worth highlighting the presence of a significant number of elites from South Kivu in the central government since 2019. Between 2019 and 2024, seven ministers (Labour and Social Security, Infrastructure, National Budget, Decentralisation and Customary Affairs, Rural Development, National Economy, Scientific Research) were part of the Sama Lukonde II government (out of a total of 58 ministers and deputy ministers). The president of the senate, the second vice-president of the national assembly and the first lady of the republic are also from South Kivu. In 2024, in addition to the first lady, the president of the national assembly, the chief of staff to the president of the republic and four ministers also come from this province.

On the one hand, this overrepresentation of South Kivu in the national government is linked to the political weight of political parties, the position of leaders in strategic decision-making groups, preexisting alliances between majority parties and social relations. This is one of the reasons why South Kivu differs from other provinces. Firstly, the political parties chaired by the leaders of South Kivu, namely the ADFC and the UNC, are respectively the second and third largest parties in the National Assembly (ICEAPEM and CCESP, 2025: 29). Secondly, the two major political leaders of South Kivu (Vital Kamerhe and Bahati Lukwebo) sit on the Presidium of the Sacred Union of the Nation (*Présidium de l'Union Sacrée de la Nation*), a high-level body that takes the country's major political decisions and is made up of six individuals in addition to the president of the republic. The Presidium creates, designs, coordinates and guides the Sacred Union of the Nation. Thirdly, it should also be noted that the current position of South Kivu is based on the alliance between Vital Kamerhe and Félix Tshisekedi under the CACH agreement. This pre-electoral alliance between two opposition political leaders at the time determined the privileged position of Kamerhe's UNC in power sharing, even after the 2018 elections. Fourthly, and finally, the particularity of South Kivu's position in current governance is based on social, sociological and religious relationships. From a sociological point of view, the first lady comes from South Kivu, from the tribe allied with the head of state. From a religious perspective, the current

cabinet director of the president of the republic, Anthony Nkinzo Kamole, is not only from South Kivu, but above all is a religious leader within the church (*Centre Missionnaire Philadelphie de Kinshasa*; Philadelphia of Kinshasa Missionary Centre) attended by Félix Tshisekedi.

All of the above influences choices made by the elites running the province of South Kivu and the city of Bukavu. In other words, the power of the leaders of certain parties represented in the government in Kinshasa allows them to impose themselves on the choice of political leaders within the province, taking into account various divisions. On the other hand, this intermingling of the elites of Kinshasa and Bukavu may mean that at a certain point the distinction between the provincial and national elites and their policies becomes blurred. In fact, in South Kivu, certain individuals, referred to as intermediate elites, belong to both the national and provincial elites. These intermediary elites seemingly manage the province of South Kivu and the city of Bukavu from Kinshasa where they reside, dictating policy through their own intermediaries, most of whom are members of the political parties they lead, and often from the same ethnic group or family. The local elites are appointed by these party leaders at national level, thus strengthening Kinshasa's hold on the province of South Kivu and on the dynamics of the city of Bukavu. This situation makes it very difficult to promote the city's development.

## 2.4. Conclusion

The real mode of governance in the DRC goes beyond formal structures: it includes informal practices and personal transactions that determine access to power and resources. Political appointments, the awarding of public contracts and the pursuit of personal ends through government action are all practices that shape effective governance. Reliance by political elites on these practices to stabilise their power reinforces corruption, mismanagement and institutional fragmentation. Despite persistent challenges around governance and corruption, the government enjoys the support of the international financial system and development resources, which also help to stabilise the political situation. It goes without saying that the outcome of the forthcoming elections and development initiatives will be crucial in determining the evolution of the country's political settlement, on the autonomy, governance and the wellbeing of the Congolese people rest.

The political settlement in the DRC is marked by a consolidation around President Tshisekedi, supported by strategic alliances (with the LB, the CLB and, in particular, the Sacred Union for the Nation). Despite persistent governance challenges and corruption scandals, the government enjoys the support of the international development and financial systems, which help to stabilise the political situation. Power dynamics in the DRC show that the stability of the political settlement is based on strategic alliances and co-optation practices, but the situation also raises questions about the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of these arrangements. Efforts to strengthen governance and fight corruption will be essential to improve conditions and meet the aspirations of the Congolese people.

### 3. Bukavu in the DRC's political settlement

In the DRC, a city is defined as an urban area of at least 100,000 inhabitants, with public facilities and economic and social infrastructure, and recognised by a decree of the prime minister (Nyenyezi et al., 2021). The 2006 Constitution stipulates that the city is a decentralised territorial entity (DTE) with legal personality and autonomous management. However, the decentralisation process remains incomplete, with only four of the 12 planned laws enacted, resulting in a lack of direction and inconsistency between the laws and their implementation. Although provinces and cities are supposed to have legal, financial and political autonomy, in practice cities do not exercise this autonomy, due to the political and financial dependence imposed by the central government. Mechanisms such as the illegal requirement that provincial taxes be deposited to the central government for redistribution rather than retained at the source for use by regional authorities that collected them, the minister of the interior's power of sanction, and the informal control exercised by the intermediary elites, allow for centralised, or at times provincial, control over the city. Major decisions are taken in Kinshasa, limiting the manoeuvring room of local authorities. The courts with jurisdiction over the provincial authorities and over the Ministry of the Interior, which exercise a degree of unofficial oversight, are also based in Kinshasa. This centralisation encourages a clientelist logic and destabilises local governance, allowing Kinshasa to continue to capture the power and resources of the DTEs. Systemic power dynamics subject DTEs such as the city to policies dictated by the central government and prevent them from developing autonomous policies. So, despite its theoretical autonomy, Bukavu remains dependent on the national political framework. The city also suffers from malfunctions in several urban systems that fail to provide the goods and services expected of them.

The second point will highlight the complexity of the distribution of power in Bukavu, which cannot be understood without an in-depth knowledge of the ethnic, political, geographic and professional and other divisions within South Kivu province, of which it is the capital. From the point of view of access to power, several major political divisions exist within the province. These divisions delineate groups of individuals who tend to act together and whom political leaders try to capture and use to assert themselves or gain access to power. To understand access to power in the city of Bukavu, it is essential to take account of these different divisions within the province as a whole. We propose to analyse them in two categories: 1) divisions relevant to the distribution of power, and 2) divisions independent of the distribution of power.

#### 3.1. Relevant divisions and access to power

It is possible to identify three divisions that play an important role in claiming and gaining access to power in the province of South Kivu, and that have a strong impact on access to power in the city of Bukavu. These are 1) ethnicity, 2) geographical location, and 3) membership of a political party/majority. The ethnic divide is based on the existence of several ethnic groups in South Kivu, such as the Bashi, Bahavu,

Balega, Bafuliru, Babembe, Banyamulenge, Bavira, Barundi, Banyindu, Babwari, Basanzi, Batembo, Barongeronge, Babuyu and Bahutu. As far as the distribution of power in South Kivu and Bukavu is concerned, there are two ethnic blocs: the Bashi and Bahavu, on the one hand, and the other ethnic groups, on the other. Allied with the Bahavu, the Bashi ethnic group are considered to be dominant in the political arena. The other ethnic groups, while not acting formally as a coalition, assert that they should be allowed to exercise leadership of the province and the city, and/or be given significant representation in the political institutions and in the provincial and urban administration.

Demands and compromises for the representation of all local ethnic groups in provincial and urban governance are almost constant, and fuel political manoeuvring, sometimes leading to political conflict. In 2006, informal power-sharing and management agreements in South Kivu, often referred to as the *Accords de La Roche*, were signed in Bukavu between these blocs to provide for ethnic representation in provincial government during the 2006-11 legislature. The geopolitical analysis carried out at the La Roche conference divided the province of South Kivu into four zones: the Kabare-Walungu zone, territory of the Bashi; the Kalehe-Idjwi zone, territory of the Bahavu (Kalehe and Idjwi), Batembo and Barongeronge; the Mwenga-Shabunda zone, territory of the Barega; and the Fizi-Uvira zone, territory of the Babembe, Bafuliro, Bavira, Babuyu and Banyamulenge. Although the political and social dynamics in these different zones remain complex, not least because of the problems of cohabitation between the ethnic groups, this subdivision has nevertheless made it possible to address the issue of powersharing through an agreed geopolitics. In addition to the consensus on the geopolitical subdivision, the stakeholders agreed that the provincial governor would come from the Kabare-Walungu zone, the vice-governor from the Mwenga-Shabunda zone, the president of the provincial assembly from the Uvira-Fizi zone and the vice-president of the provincial assembly from the Kalehe-Idjwi zone. These La Roche agreements were fully respected during the 2006 elections. During the subsequent legislatures (2011-16; the transition of 2017-18; 2018-23), these agreements continued to serve as a reference but were not strictly applied. Powersharing has been more influenced by the weight of the political parties.

The question of geographical axes is very important in the way power is claimed and distributed in the province of South Kivu. In the case of the governor, for example, they must be a Mushi from the northern axis of the province, with a vice-governor from the southern axis (the Lega area and surroundings). Apart from the geographical representation of the two ethnic groups, this divide also demonstrates the subdivisions linked to the ethnic subgroups and their geographical locations. For example, among the Bashi, there are several subdivisions, such as Kabare-Ngweshe, the Kalehe-Idjwi and Luhwinja-Burhinyi-Kaziba. In reality, there is simultaneous consideration of the ethnic divide and the geographic or territorial divide.

Finally, as far as the political divide is concerned, membership of a political party or a ruling majority is a means of establishing oneself in the political arena of South Kivu



province and in the city of Bukavu. The characteristics of the political divide at the provincial level perfectly match those at the national level. Politically, the party and coalition in power in Kinshasa have always had the last word when it comes to access to power in South Kivu and Bukavu. At present, these parties are mainly the UDPS, CACH coalition and USN. As for the opposition parties, they are struggling to gain access to positions of power in South Kivu and Bukavu.

The relationship between these divisions and power is based on three characteristics: firstly, to understand access to power in the province, it is often necessary to consider these various divisions as a whole. Secondly, the legitimacy of top political leaders is drawn from the ethnic divides, whether in the city of Bukavu, in the province, or in Kinshasa. Lastly, in Kinshasa, the elites of South Kivu province and Bukavu have to combine both ethnic and regional divisions to be able to assert themselves politically at a national level. The co-optation of these elites is facilitated by the fact that they represent, or claim to represent, a large ethnic and geographical section of the population of South Kivu province, thus constituting a significant reservoir of votes for the regime in power. This is why the combination of ethnic and political divisions is crucial for access to power.

The geographical divide loses its relevance at the provincial level insofar as it is always part of the ethnic divide. In other words, within the province, ethnic divisions are always superimposed on geographical divisions, because the ethnic groups (tribes) are located in specific geographical areas.

### 3.2. Divisions independent of the distribution of power

Secondly, we can define four divisions which are independent of the distribution of power – although they may sometimes play a role: 1) the churches; 2) civil society organisations; 3) traditional chiefs; and 4) major economic operators. As far as the churches are concerned, they are considered to be a political force in their own right, as they have the capacity to mobilise the population for or against the government in power. In the past, this mobilisation has contributed in contradictory ways to the legitimisation and downfall of certain regimes (for example, those of Mobutu and Kabila). Although the Protestant church has the capacity to mobilise the population, it is less powerful than the Catholic church, whose political positions are fairly overt and whose voice is unified. The Catholic church in Bukavu adopts clear political positions through the episcopal letters of the Archbishop of Bukavu. It is therefore easy to understand why, whenever a regime is in power, it seeks to co-opt the church. In addition to this autonomous thrust of the Catholic church, there is a coalition of local Protestant churches called the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC), but it is not openly political. It operates more in cooperation with the government in power and tries not to enter into open criticism or confrontation.

As for civil society organisations, South Kivu and Bukavu in particular have a long history of political and social struggle, during which civil society has played an important role in resisting successive regimes (Rugusha, 2005). We deliberately draw a



distinction here between the churches and civil society because, although the churches are part of civil society and have joined it in demonstrations in the past, they are two different blocs – at least from the point of view of those in power and their relations with them. While the churches are more strategic and much more targeted in their actions, the other civil society organisations (coordination offices, NGOs, associative movements, citizens' movements, youth associations, women's organisations) are often involved in all areas of political demands: governance, human rights, transparency, public services, and so on. They often present themselves in opposition to the ruling powers, claiming to be on the side of the people. The various authorities at the provincial and national levels are therefore obliged to take them into account, both for their impact on public opinion and for their possible acts of resistance. But, at the same time, it is a fairly fragmented bloc, with different factions and groups competing fiercely with one another, and sometimes influenced by the interests of those in power.

Customary chiefs represent the province's ethnic groups and head the customary entities known as *chefferies* (chiefdoms), established by the Constitution as decentralised territorial entities. Due to persistent insecurity in rural areas, most of South Kivu's customary chiefs live in the city of Bukavu, where they influence politics and social dynamics through their symbolic position vis-à-vis the natives of their cultural areas. It is true, however, that customary power has been gradually eroded, for various reasons, since the colonial period. Grasping the legitimacy of these chiefs, all state authorities have long sought to diminish customary power as much as possible, through various strategies. For example, the law considers them to be agents of the state, ranking below the administrators of the territories of their *chefferies*. In practice, however, the legitimacy and power of certain customary chiefs is so strong that administrators are obliged to work with them as equals, or even to negotiate power. When not otherwise co-opted, some of these customary chiefs are elected, in violation of the law and with the complicity of political parties, as members of the provincial or national assembly. Others seem to have lost their legitimacy after being supplanted by autochthonous national elites who have invested heavily in their communities. In any case, having the support of these traditional chiefs remains a necessary asset from a political and economic point of view. This bloc is fairly cohesive, as the different factions or groups that make it up engage in only moderate competition with each other. They have also formed a coalition, the *Association des Bami du Sud-Kivu* (COBASKI; Association of the Bamis of South-Kivu).

Finally, the major economic operators are often linked to the interests of the ruling elites in the province and in Kinshasa for their own economic interests: tax exemption for goods, access to public contracts, access to dividends from public-private partnership policies, securing their investments, and so on. These economic elites also provide financial or moral support to the various political elites in exchange for certain services or simply as a preventive measure. Over the last two decades, many of these economic elites have become directly involved in politics by being elected as provincial or national assembly members. But this bloc is less cohesive, consisting of actors motivated by individual interests, who seek to use their presence in the local and

national political arena to gain access to resources and secure their investments. Divided into powerful political parties, these elites are in constant competition with each other.

It is very important to distinguish these divisions, because unlike those described in the first point, they are not always aligned with the interests of the regime in power. Civil society, influential religious groups and organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce enjoy significant autonomy from the city's mayor, the provincial governor and even national institutions. These groups often act according to their material or ideological interests. They voice criticism and create independent initiatives of support or opposition without necessarily following the regime's directives. In the absence of an effective political opposition, they act as a counterweight to the mayor and the provincial government.

This category of actors' criticism of the city's poor management, particularly in terms of road infrastructure, waste management, illegal contracts and embezzlement, has resulted in the destitution and replacement of Bukavu's mayor on three occasions. With a diverse and active civil society, pressure is being put on the authorities to take action against dysfunctional urban systems. For example, in 2017, a civil society petition<sup>1</sup> led to the replacement of a mayor of the city because of his inability to deal with urban problems (insalubrity, dispossession of public spaces, urban insecurity and so on); similarly, in 2020, a denunciation made by civil society led the provincial governor to suspend the mayor of the city of Bukavu<sup>2</sup> for the same reasons as his predecessor.

The Catholic church is also a powerful player in the political game. Catholic leadership is vital to the stability of the province and the city. On several occasions, the archbishop of Bukavu has been asked to mediate in urban and provincial political crises, including when the provincial governor, Théo Ngwabidje, was pitted against the provincial assembly of South Kivu from 2021 to 2023. It is therefore clear that the city of Bukavu cannot be governed without taking into account the positions of civil society and the Catholic church.

In reality, the influence of these independent players does not fundamentally determine the rules of the political game or the distribution of resources in the province. Nevertheless, in certain circumstances, their influence has increased through temporary coalitions with traditional chiefs and churches to challenge the governance practices of the mayor of Bukavu or the provincial governor.

### 3.3. Conclusion

This section illustrates how the distribution and negotiation of power in Bukavu is caught in a partisan trap, allowing Kinshasa to maintain its control over the province

<sup>1</sup> NDSCI, Lucha, Filimbi et al. (2020). "Petition against the mayor of the city of Bukavu, DRC". Available at: [www.change.org/p/yogolelomustgo-petition-contre-le-maire-de-la-ville-de-bukavu-en-rdc](https://www.change.org/p/yogolelomustgo-petition-contre-le-maire-de-la-ville-de-bukavu-en-rdc) (accessed 18 August 2025).

<sup>2</sup> In 2020, the mayor of Bukavu was suspended by the governor for administrative and financial mismanagement and illicit sales of state land.

through political elites based in both the capital and the province. The city's leaders have limited leeway to implement effective governance policies from the ground up. Major decisions are often taken in Kinshasa. Despite the current rhetoric aimed at challenging the Kinshasa-based leaders of South Kivu origin, in particular provincial-level authorities, the influence of the central government remains omnipresent in the management of the province. The courts (such as the constitutional court and the *Conseil d'État*) that have jurisdiction to judge the provincial authorities or their actions are based in Kinshasa. The Ministry of the Interior, which exercises de facto authority over the provincial government without any legal basis, also supervises the provincial assembly and the provincial government, and is based in Kinshasa. The ministry has often issued directives, summoned governors and assembly members to Kinshasa, prevented plenary sessions aimed at dismissing the governor and implemented other measures of parliamentary control.

Despite the province's dependence on the central government and the political structures that allow the capital to maintain its control, local actors in the province retain a degree of autonomy. At provincial level, it is possible for local leaders to distance themselves from the influence of the capital by putting in place powersharing arrangements that help to maintain the province's stability, while taking account of complex political, ethnic and geopolitical dynamics. To understand how power is accessed and exercised in the province, it is essential to recognise how local elites manage their relationship with the central government to strengthen their own position, both within the province and in the capital. This also means taking into account the distinctive sociological realities of the province, including inter-ethnic relations. The ability of provincial actors to manoeuvre highlights the semi-autonomous nature of the region, which emerges from the interaction between local elites and the central government. These local actors often act as intermediaries between the central government and the province, and their role can provide opportunities for concrete development initiatives. It is at this level that significant actions for inclusive development can take shape.

#### **4. Summary of urban systems in Bukavu**

Urban systems are defined as bounded forms of physical infrastructure and/or organisational structures concerned with the provision of specific goods/services in urban areas. Operating on a city-wide scale, they have clearly defined material and/or social objectives and are, in most cases, supported by at least one designated physical infrastructure and managed by one or more organisations. In general, it is impossible to imagine a city functioning and maintaining itself without the systems that constitute it. Six systems were the subject of our study in Bukavu. They are: water; healthcare; transport; food distribution; waste management and sanitation<sup>3</sup>; and law and order. Our summary of these systems<sup>4</sup> is structured around 1) the challenges of urban

<sup>3</sup> While waste management and sanitation are two separate systems, in the DRC they are linked and form a single system under the same regulatory authority.

<sup>4</sup> Each of these systems has been the subject of a detailed report and an analytical summary.

governance in Bukavu and 2) the operation of urban services, before moving onto 3) a conclusion.

#### 4.1. Challenges of urban governance in Bukavu

**Rapid, disorganised urbanisation:** An analysis of urban systems in Bukavu highlights a complex set of dynamics, in which the interaction between political actors, physical infrastructure and social practices shapes urban life. These systems, such as water, health, transport, waste management and security, are largely influenced by political and economic factors, while at the same time they face structural challenges inherited from the city's historical evolution and the limits of governance policies. Founded at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a military post, Bukavu has undergone several demographic and economic transformations. These changes have led to rapid urbanisation, exacerbated by internal migration linked to insecurity and the boom in economic opportunities. However, this urbanisation has been accompanied by a deterioration in infrastructure and disorderly growth, creating inequalities in access to basic services. Informal construction, particularly on unsuitable land, such as riverbanks or slopes, has increased the risk of flooding and landslides, contributing to a deterioration of the urban environment.

**Inequalities in the provision of public services:** There are profound inequalities in the provision of and access to public services. These systems, whether related to water supply, health, waste management or transport, often operate in a fragmented and inefficient manner, due to a lack of coordination between public and private players, on the one hand, and internal fragmentation, on the other. For example, as well as a lack of coordination within public bodies themselves, the education sector is characterised by a multiplicity of school networks, managed almost autonomously, and in the absence of clearly delineated school zones. This fragmentation is exacerbated by the limited capacity of local authorities to manage these systems autonomously, their power being largely subordinate to the central state. Although the 2006 Constitution and Electoral Law introduced principles of decentralisation, the implementation of these reforms has been hampered by the absence of regular local elections and by constant interference from the central government. This centralisation of power prevents local authorities from having the resources and autonomy they need to respond effectively to residents' needs.

**Lack of infrastructure funding and management:** The challenges faced by urban systems in Bukavu are also the result of a chronic lack of infrastructure funding and management. Local tax revenues, which should be funding urban services, are insufficient and poorly allocated. Municipal authorities, often appointed by the central government, focus on short-term political interests, leading to inefficient management of resources. Budgetary decisions are also influenced by political considerations, which undermines the fair and equitable allocation of resources needed to manage public services.

**Inadequate physical infrastructure:** The inadequacy of physical infrastructure, including water supply, sewerage and transport networks, adds to the difficulties faced by residents and users. Water supply is particularly problematic, with obsolete infrastructure that is ill-suited to rapid population growth. Access to water is often irregular, exacerbating the already difficult living conditions of many families. Waste management is also a major problem, with an accumulation of rubbish in the streets and a lack of effective collection systems, leading to health risks. The health sector also suffers from structural weaknesses, including a lack of resources and lack of appropriate infrastructure, under-equipped public establishments and a lack of coherent health policies between levels of government. The transport system, inefficient and congested, is marked by a lack of urban planning and organised public transport, forcing residents to turn to informal means of transport, which are often inadequate and dangerous.

**Developmentalist ideologies and neoliberalism:** The management of urban systems in Bukavu is also influenced by developmentalist ideologies, such as modernism and neoliberalism. These ideologies have shaped the expectations of local authorities and private players, often favouring technical solutions without taking into account local social and economic realities. The rapid urbanisation of Bukavu was conceived within a modernist framework, failing to take into account the environmental and social consequences of urban expansion. Neoliberalism has also favoured a management of urban resources that, while seeking efficiency, neglects the social needs of vulnerable populations. The negative external effects of these policies, such as inadequate water supply and poor waste management, exacerbate pollution and unhealthy living conditions, which, in turn, impact quality of life and transport infrastructure.

**Increased social and economic tensions:** Finally, the authorities' inability to manage these urban systems effectively is contributing to increased social and economic tensions in the city. Inequalities in access to essential services are creating rifts between different sections of the population, generating frustration and mistrust towards public institutions. In the absence of effective decentralisation and transparent management of resources, these tensions are likely to multiply, further undermining Bukavu's urban systems. So, while Bukavu reflects the challenges typical of developing cities, it also illustrates the urgent need for more inclusive, transparent and decentralised urban governance capable of meeting the actual needs of the population.

#### 4.2. Malfunctioning urban services

Bukavu's urban systems suffer from a number of dysfunctions, and political interference is one of the most striking causes. This interference is not only the result of electoral calculations, but also a practice in which the political players themselves, or those close to them, play a direct role in the management of urban systems. This leads to a loss of security and reliability in urban services, as they are strongly influenced by political dynamics. Our research has shown that the health sector, where the state has delegated the management of healthcare to private players and religious denominations, is a revealing example of this phenomenon. Around 85% of the sector

is controlled by these private players, while only 15% remains under the direct management of the state. Political interference can be seen in the support given by politicians to informal health structures which employ unqualified staff and operate without the approval of the provincial health inspectorate. These structures, which are generally private, are protected by the influence of politicians in the provinces and in Kinshasa. The latter go so far as to instruct the provincial health inspectorate to approve these facilities, despite their irregularities. This has a real impact on the quality of care.

**Informal management of pharmacies and health facilities:** The pharmaceutical sector in Bukavu also illustrates the negative impact of political interference. Most of the city's pharmacies are run by unqualified individuals and sell medicines without requiring a prescription. De facto, these places are more like "drug shops" than a serious component of a healthcare system. Several attempts to close down non-compliant establishments have been unsuccessful because of their political protection. This phenomenon is not isolated and affects all the other urban systems in the city.

**The judicial system under pressure:** Another system where political interference is rife is the justice system. In Bukavu, as throughout the country, the independence of the judiciary from the executive is largely compromised. Article 151 of the Constitution stipulates that the executive may not issue injunctions to magistrates in the exercise of their jurisdiction, nor hinder the course of justice, nor oppose the execution of a court decision. The Congolese legislature has therefore reaffirmed its desire to allow all citizens to have recourse to the courts without having to fear that interference from other powers might prevent them from winning their cases. However, this provision is far from respected. In Bukavu, as in all Congolese towns, interference by the executive and legislative powers has become the rule, and the separation of powers has become the exception. In the city of Bukavu, provincial and national assembly members, political players and military officers constantly appear in court cases, circumventing the rules and obstructing justice. If you want to drive in Bukavu without proof of insurance, a driver's licence or ownership papers, it is sufficient to say that the car belongs to a colonel or an influential political player. A number of legal cases, including ones relating to the traditional regulation of people, goods, economic and social transactions, and so on, have been hushed up as a result of interference by political players. In short, the judiciary in Bukavu is completely dependent on the legislature and the executive branches. The separation of power provided for in the 2006 Constitution exists in name only; in practice, it is far from the case.

**The weakened transport system:** The transport system in Bukavu is operated by public agents (police, army, public administration agents, and so on) who produce both order and disorder. The distrust of those involved in law and order is the result of the behaviour of certain players who, instead of reassuring the population, are complicit in or even directly responsible for harassment. For example, there have been several reports of violence, corruption and harassment by members of the Bukavu road traffic police, leading to the dismissal of some members of this police unit (Cubaka, 2022).



The uncivil behaviour of the traffic police is compounded by influence peddling by powerful actors. This leads to abuses of all kinds. For example, many vehicles in Bukavu do not need any of the papers one is usually required to carry because they are protected by military and political authorities. Phrases such as “the colonel’s vehicle”, “the prosecutor’s vehicle”, “the honourable so-and-so’s vehicle”, act as “passwords” to ensure that a vehicle is not checked by the police. Similarly, smugglers benefit from the protection of their political connections at the provincial and national level. This leads to insecurity on the roads and a loss of tax revenue for local, provincial and national levels of government. The situation is similar for imported food products on the Bukavu markets, where the quality of the products is difficult to guarantee because of the indifference of the regulatory authorities. The *Office Congolais de Contrôle* (OCC; Congolese Quality Control Agency), which is responsible for inspecting goods, seems to be more concerned with collecting taxes than checking the conformity of imported products.

**Water supply problems:** The water supply in Bukavu is another major challenge. Despite the presence of REGIDESO and other water supply sources, almost two-thirds of the population do not have access to drinking water. Frequent water stoppages affect all areas of the city, including schools, universities and administrative buildings. The informal settlements, which make up a large part of the city, are particularly hard hit, as they often have no access to drinking water. These neighbourhoods depend on water sources managed by NGOs or private actors, and many poor residents buy water from informal kiosks. During the 2011, 2018 and 2021 election campaigns, water became a political rallying point, with some politicians installing standpipes and wells in certain neighbourhoods to win votes.

**Hygiene and sanitation problems:** The lack of access to drinking water also contributes to hygiene and sanitation problems in the city. It is common practice to use water from Lake Kivu for domestic needs, even though the lake has become an outlet for waste and faecal matter. This raises serious questions about health security. The situation is exacerbated by the emergence and expansion of new unplanned neighbourhoods in which the installation of infrastructure has not kept pace with the population’s growth. Bukavu, which had a population of around 300,000 in the 1957 development plan, is now home to more than 1.3 million people, an enormous demographic pressure for a city that covers just 60km<sup>2</sup>. As a result, the majority of the city’s plots are too small to allow for adequate sanitation facilities. Sanitation associations find it difficult to access certain neighbourhoods that lack infrastructure. Aware that the lack of roads in their neighbourhoods impedes access by collection vehicles, few households sign up for waste collection companies’ services.

**Waste management, a clear failure:** Waste management in Bukavu is another illustration of the inefficiency of urban systems. A UN-Habitat study in 2022 showed that the city produces 898 tonnes of waste per day, of which only 7% (62.22 tonnes) is collected. The impact of several initiatives by the municipality, local associations and private companies to address this has remained marginal. No clear wastewater



management policy has been put in place, leaving each resident to define his or her own strategy, depending on their neighbourhood, income and access to drainage systems. In the absence of a centralised policy, residents fend for themselves as best they can, often throwing their waste into the gutters, the streets or even Lake Kivu, exacerbating the health problems already faced in the city.

**Housing and infrastructure problems:** Demographic pressure on the city of Bukavu over the last 30 years has been a major factor in the deterioration of its landscape. The city began to lose its beauty and deteriorate from 1994 onwards. It was the sub-regional political context, and in particular the Rwandan genocide of 1994, that began to put pressure on the urban landscape: the city absorbed more than 50,000 of the 355,000 refugees counted by the UNHCR in South Kivu in 1995 (Bradol and Le Pape, 2016). This affected the ability of city authorities to meet the population's need for access to goods and services. But it was above all from 1996 onwards that the city of Bukavu underwent further transformation, as a result of a combination of factors. First, the persistence of insecurity in rural areas led to a permanent rural exodus. Second, the business opportunities offered by the city, with its connections to foreign countries such as China, India, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Tanzania, and so on (Nyenyezi et al., 2021), encouraged many young people to come to the city as entrepreneurs. Third, the fact that in and around the city of Bukavu the rules governing access to land and the construction of housing are very permeable gives free rein to informal and quasi-formal arrangements. People from rural or peri-urban areas can obtain a plot of land and build without necessarily having a legal title deed or building permit (van Overbeek, 2020). Building on prohibited and inappropriate land and sites, such as riverbanks or lakeshores, or on steep slopes and embankments, is rife in Bukavu. Fourth, living conditions on the outskirts of the city have forced many households to look for a plot of land in the city, no matter how small (DSCR, 2010), since they think being there will allow them access to water, electricity, security and other benefits. This pressure on the city has led to pressure on available resources. As a result, the city has lost its green spaces (Moeyersons et al., 2004) and the phenomenon of unplanned construction has become widespread, exposing residents to constant danger and even risk of death in times of rain and landslides. Yet recent studies show that the population of Bukavu, estimated at 1.3 million, will double by 2030 and triple by 2050 (Muhaya et al., 2022, Muhoza, 2022). It goes without saying that, in the absence of a forward-looking policy, the dysfunction of Bukavu's urban systems is likely to only get worse.

**Fires and natural hazards:** Bukavu faces two major recurring problems: fires, particularly in the dry season; and natural hazards linked to heavy rainfall, such as landslides and floods. Due to informal urbanisation and a lack of firefighting resources, 70% of the areas affected by these disasters are inaccessible to firefighters. Between 2019 and 2022, around 3,820 homes were destroyed by fire, with a significant number of deaths. Heavy rainfall also causes flooding, washing away unmanaged waste and further polluting public spaces and Lake Kivu. The situation is exacerbated by the lack

of proper urban planning and political interference, which blocks integrated risk management initiatives.

To sum up, the malfunctioning of urban services in Bukavu is the result of a combination of political, economic and social factors. Political interference and the absence of coherent public policies exacerbate the problems of infrastructure, sanitation, waste management and water supply. These problems are fuelled by uncontrolled population growth and unplanned urbanisation, which further complicate the management of urban services. The lack of coordination between the various urban players, the compromised independence of the judiciary, and politically protected informal networks make any substantial and sustainable reform of the urban system difficult.

### 4.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the city of Bukavu is far from providing adequate public services to its inhabitants, due to the absence of urban policies adapted to the current demographic challenges. The city is characterised by strong demographic growth, while policy measures to guarantee good living conditions are non-existent. The urban plan established during the colonial period has not been revised. Worse still, all the green spaces, recreational areas and most of the areas of public interest have been sold to private individuals, who have built houses on them. Over the last 30 years, the avenues linking the various districts have been reduced to mere footpaths by encroachment from houses on both sides, making mobility difficult.

The inability of municipal authorities to manage the city's systems has led to non-state actors (NGOs, politicians, local leaders) and the private sector playing a growing role in domains such as water, hygiene and sanitation, security, transport, and so on. This multiplication of actors generates confusion and competition, without improving the systems' functioning. To a certain extent, the dimensions of political settlement analysed above – resulting from the power relationships between the intermediary elites and the urban and provincial elites – prevent the emergence of urban leadership capable of meeting the current urban challenges. Political clientelism takes precedence over accountability, leading to poor governance and contributing to the deterioration of the city and the quality of life of its inhabitants.

## 5. Summary of the three domains in Bukavu

After examining the political settlement and urban systems, we now examine how these shape certain areas of development in Bukavu. A development domain is a distinct field of discourse, policy and practice focused on a complex, cross-systemic challenge in a city, involving a range of actors (political, bureaucratic, professional and grassroots) who collaborate or compete for authority. These challenges generally fall within the remit of central and/or local government departments. Affected residents and civil society groups are often involved, as well as experts (who often form an “epistemic community”). Ruling elites may or may not become involved, depending on the

opportunities for asset accumulation, rent extraction and electoral success, which may be pursued through ideological representation, demonstrating the state's capacities, or voter manipulation.

In each area of development, specific ideas, practices and systems interact to either maintain or reshape the configuration of power in the city. Understanding its key actors and interconnected ideas, practices and systems is essential to changing the way a domain's problems are addressed. In this section, we use this approach to elucidate the domains of land and connectivity; security; and health, wellbeing and nutrition.

Bukavu, with a population of around 1.3 million, faces major challenges relating to land, infrastructure and other urban systems. The city is divided into three zones: the city centre, working-class neighbourhoods (*quartiers populaires*), and informal settlements located on slopes, ridges and valleys. Urbanisation has far exceeded the forecasts of the 1957 development plan, leading to overpopulation and inefficient land use. The transport system is hampered by poor road conditions, while water and energy infrastructures remain inadequate. Security problems, including urban violence, armed groups and dysfunctional policing, mainly affect people living in less developed areas. In terms of health and nutrition, Bukavu faces food insecurity, with 43% of households lacking access to healthy food. High food prices, low local production and inadequate infrastructure contribute to malnutrition, particularly among vulnerable populations. Although efforts have been made to address these problems, they remain insufficient and require concerted action by the state and civil society.

The following sections explore these challenges in the three areas studied: 1) land and connectivity, 2) safety and security and 3) health, wellbeing and nutrition.

### 5.1. Land and connectivity

Bukavu's territory is divided into three types of terrain: slopes, plateaus and valleys, creating a three-zone structure: the city centre, working-class neighbourhoods and informal districts. Today, Bukavu has a population of around 1.3 million, well above the 300,000 forecast in the 1957 development plan. This growth, largely fuelled by the rural exodus of the last 30 years, has led to increased demand for housing and land, while the city remains confined to an area of just 60km<sup>2</sup> (Musobwa et al., 2022). Pressure on available land has led to fragmentation of plots in the city centre and on the outskirts, with rural residents occupying land unsuitable for building. In response to the population explosion, the authorities have subdivided new neighbourhoods, but this expansion has not been followed by adequate infrastructure development, resulting in a disordered urban landscape (Hoffman et al., 2019). The demand for land has put pressure on public spaces, particularly around the lakeshore (Alinirhu and Karhakubwa, 2019) and green spaces in the city centre and outskirts. Due to the lack of clear administrative measures for urban expansion, some actors are acquiring land in rural areas close to Bukavu, particularly along the Mudaka-Katana and Nyantende-Nyangezi axes, which are emerging as new urban development zones.

Bukavu is connected to the rest of the world by land, lake, air and digital routes. Three national roads link the city to neighbouring provinces, although their poor condition severely limits the transport of goods and people. Economic exchanges are mainly with neighbouring countries, such as Rwanda and Burundi. Lake transport, particularly between Bukavu and Goma, is fluid, with a daily flow of around 5,000 passengers. Bukavu also benefits from the national airports of Kavumu and Goma, as well as the international airports of Kamembe, Kigali and Bujumbura. Digital connectivity is provided by four telecommunications companies: Airtel, Vodacom, Orange and Africell.

Internally, Bukavu has a road network of 95km, with a density of 0.6km of road per km<sup>2</sup>. The main roads total 26km, while the secondary streets account for 69km, but the various sectors are unevenly connected. This lack of roads reflects the city's inability to adapt to population growth and urban expansion. The table below illustrates the road links between the various districts of the city.

**Table 1: Roads in Bukavu**

Types	Number of km of paved roads			Number of km of unpaved roads			Total
	Ibanda	Kadutu	Bagira	Ibanda	Kadutu	Bagira	
Main roads	10	5	8	0	0	0	26
Secondary roads	11	10	9	12	10	20	69
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>95</b>

Source: Bukavu City Hall.

In addition to being insufficient in number and length, an increasing population and changing urban morphology have left most of the secondary roads in an advanced state of disrepair, significantly limiting the movement of vehicles, motorbikes and tricycles in the city.

Bukavu's land and property markets include housing, undeveloped land and buildings. The monthly rent for a three-bedroom flat ranges from USD 50 to USD 1,500. Prices for undeveloped land fluctuate between USD 1,000 and USD 250,000, while houses are sold for between USD 1,000 and USD 400,000. Location and connectivity explain this wide disparity in prices. The demand for housing and new land, coupled with the reinvestment of capital from successful sectors such as mining and commerce, explains the overheating of the land and property markets.

The political economy of land in Bukavu reveals that several public institutions regulate the land and property markets and ensure the city's connectivity, but their roles are often confused and overlapping, contributing to conflicts. In principle, taxes and duties are set by the central state, in order for it to capture this income, and are collected by two financial authorities: the *Direction générale des recettes administratives et domaniales* (DGRAD; general directorate for administrative and land revenues) and the *Direction provinciale de mobilisation des recettes* (DPMR; provincial revenue collection

directorate). They cover property taxes, rental income and administrative fees. Property taxes collected by the DGRAD and the DPMR bring in an average of less than USD 200,000 per month, despite higher budget forecasts. This poor performance can be explained by structural tax evasion in the DRC, where public officials collaborate with taxpayers to minimise the amounts owed. In addition, several public institutions are involved in regulating the property market and managing the city's connectivity: Land Titles, Infrastructure and Public Works, Land Management (*Aménagement du territoire*), Housing, Transport and Communications. However, civil servants responsible for land administration, such as *bourgmestres* (heads of the municipal sectors referred to as *communes*) and neighbourhood chiefs, play an informal role in access to land, land titling and conflict management, reflecting the hybrid nature of land governance. Property brokers, although informal, facilitate transactions and disseminate information, helping to regulate markets.

Land in Bukavu also has a political function, by serving to increase the visibility and prestige of political players. The most influential political entrepreneurs are often large land and property owners, who sometimes abuse their position to monopolise land. Land-related abuses of power can provoke political disputes, as was the case with a concession acquired by the former president of the Republic, Joseph Kabila, on the northern outskirts of the city (Thill and Muzalia, 2022). Land is also a source of illegal enrichment for political players. Since the rebellions of 1996 and 1998, most successive provincial governors, in collusion with the land administration, have parcelled out and illegally sold state land in Bukavu, both from the public domain as well as parcels owned by the state. This practice has both given rise to political conflicts between the provincial executive and the provincial parliament, and been remarked upon and denounced by civil society. Inspections carried out by the central government and the central administration have failed to stop these acts. Abuses of power in land governance are widely disapproved of by public opinion and give rise to popular protests (Mudinga, 2021).

Analysis of the land tenure system reveals at least four groups of interacting actors. These players operate between the formal and informal sectors in an unequal balance of power. Their nature and roles are set out in the table below.

**Table 2: Map of players with control over land in Bukavu**

Major formal controllers	Major informal controllers
Ministries, general secretaries, provincial governors, land administration; courts and tribunals.	Big landowners, the city's leaders, big real estate brokers and speculators.
Granting of land and ratification of land rights, establishment of property titles, settlement of disputes, levying of taxes and duties, collection of commissions on transactions in collaboration with informal controllers.	Land grabbing, property investments, creation of asymmetric information on the land market, alliances with formal regulators, commissions on major transactions, and so on.

Minor formal controllers	Minor informal controllers
Territorial administration and traditional chiefs, administrative agents, registered smallholders.	Small unregistered owners, farmers, tenants, small commission agents.
Sale of unregistered land, resolution of minor conflicts, technical operations in the field.	Negotiations with the major controllers, institutional tinkering for access to land and securing rights (informal titles), challenges to land grabs in the peri-urban zone.

Land governance in the city is based on formal rules contained in laws; the application of these, however, is governed by the prevailing political regulations. The land administration, under pressure from the authorities in place, sometimes derogates from the land access rules and procedures and takes decisions that are then ratified by judges and the courts. Such political subordination of land administration and justice creates a context conducive to land grabbing and unauthorised declassification of the state's public domain for the benefit of the elite. When the legal system is not sufficient to resolve the resulting land disputes, the parties generally do so through contractual arrangements.

The dynamics of land ownership in Bukavu challenge a number of paradigmatic ideas. Firstly, the state, as the absolute owner of land by law, is not immune to land grabbing, as its land is also taken by private individuals using different strategies and in collaboration with state agents. Secondly, the unplanned expansion of the city is reintroducing customary chiefs into urban land administration, from which they had previously been excluded, thus raising the question of hybrid governance. In rural areas under traditional administration, customary chiefs and large landowners, through financial transactions, are creating new urban land without prior urban planning measures. Finally, although property tax is an important source of funding for urban development, its potential can be undermined by an inappropriate tax system.

Overcrowding in working-class neighbourhoods is due to the excessive fragmentation of residential plots. Low-income households are vulnerable to rising land prices and rents. More than 50% of the population live on sites unsuitable for construction, exposed to the risks of subsidence, erosion or flooding. Land tenure insecurity prevails in neighbourhoods where land governance is hybrid, combining land administration and customary authority. Individual, collective and inter-institutional conflicts are linked to land grabbing. Abusive capture and mismanagement of land revenues prevent their use for the city's development. Roads are blocked or non-existent in some areas, due to irregular settlements. Finally, the city's isolation is caused by a lack of maintenance of national and agricultural roads.

In summary, the analysis of land dynamics highlights eight major challenges that the city must overcome if it is to develop: overcrowded housing in working-class neighbourhoods, resulting from excessive fragmentation of residential plots; the vulnerability of low-income households to rising land prices and rents; more than 60% of the population living on sites unsuitable for construction, exposed to the risks of



subsidence, erosion or flooding; land tenure insecurity in neighbourhoods where hybrid land governance prevails (interference by the land administration and customary authority); individual, collective and inter-institutional conflicts linked to land grabbing; the abusive capture and mismanagement of land revenues that should finance the city's development; the obstruction or non-existence of roads in certain neighbourhoods experiencing irregular occupation; the city's isolation, due to poor maintenance of national and agricultural roads.

In recent years, urban policies in the DRC have encouraged the expansion of cities in response to the growth in urban populations. The need to expand the city of Bukavu has been expressed and debated in local, international and civil society political circles. To mitigate the negative effects of urban growth on land use, several initiatives have been taken by the government and civil society. These include the identification of sites at risk and the banning of new construction, private housing estates on the outskirts of the city, public-private partnerships for the reconstruction of civil servants' housing and household waste collection, and the setting up of a commission to settle customary conflicts. Reforms are planned to improve land governance and its contribution to regional development. These include promoting the allocation of land titles to people with insecure land tenure, rehabilitating public spaces and planning the extension of the city's administrative boundaries to its outskirts. This includes building social housing and relocating people living on high-risk sites. A joint commission should be set up to resolve land disputes, and informal settlements should be managed after their creation. Waste treatment and recycling are also planned, as are public-private partnerships for the improvement of national roads.

These initiatives and reforms aim to deliver a more sustainable and resilient urban development for Bukavu, meeting both the immediate needs of the population and the requirements of governance and long-term planning. Collaboration between government and civil society is essential to overcome these challenges and to promote inclusive and sustainable development.

## 5.2. Safety and security

The city of Bukavu has been experiencing urban insecurity for several years, due to a variety of factors. The current forms of insecurity are largely explained by the influx of Rwandan refugees following the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, the overpopulation of the city following the rural exodus, the persistence of local and foreign armed groups in the outlying areas, the emergence of informal local security groups, the increase in the number of children and adolescents living on the streets, inadequate salaries, multiple dysfunctions within the defence and security forces, and unplanned construction.

Insecurity generally takes the form of urban crime, including robberies, rapes, burglaries, hold-ups, extortion of property, arson, murders, kidnappings – particularly of children – and torture. The neighbourhoods most affected by insecurity and vulnerability are the overpopulated and underdeveloped areas of Bukavu: Nkafu, Cimpunda, Panzi, Irambo, Crédit, Mulambula, Brasserie, Buholo-Kasha, Nyamugo,



Nyakavogo and others. Public places, particularly markets (Kadutu, Nyawera), car parks (Essence Major Vangu, Place de l'indépendance, Carrefour), large public squares (traffic lights, Place de l'indépendance, Nyawera), and the areas around village halls and public buildings are also permanent or sporadic areas of insecurity in the city of Bukavu. According to statistics from a local human rights organisation, quoted in a Rift Valley Institute report (Thill et al., 2019), Bukavu was the scene of 118 murders, 368 burglaries, 24 kidnappings and 14 cases of mob justice in 2018 alone. For example, in October 2023, a SAJESEK-FORCES VIVES newsletter reported 22 murders in South Kivu, including five in the city of Bukavu. A few months earlier, in a statement made on 21 August 2023, a citizens' organisation, *Nouvelle Dynamique de la Société Civile* (NDCCI; New Impulse for Civil Society) denounced instances of insecurity and lack of safety in Bukavu, including children being accused of witchcraft, murders, and bandits and gang members kidnapping people to extort cash, telephones and other goods.

Several factors contribute to the insecurity and lack of safety in Bukavu. These firstly include social factors, such as the continued presence of armed groups, local conflicts, high unemployment rates, rural migration, the rise in the phenomenon of street children, the operation of brothels, and the widespread use of alcohol and drugs. In addition, reliance on mob justice and the failure of demobilisation and reintegration programmes for ex-combatants and child soldiers exacerbate the situation.

Secondly, other factors contributing to the security situation include the inadequacy of police staff and police stations, the lack of equipment and the low level of competence within the police force, the legitimisation of informal urban security groups and the inadequate security of border crossings with Rwanda. These are structural factors that limit the capacity to guarantee security in Bukavu, a city plagued by crime and violence. Crime has become a means to access the resources needed to survive for large numbers of low-income residents, particularly young people, as well as for certain elements within the security forces faced with resource shortages.

Finally, territorial factors have a systemic relationship with other urban areas and systems, notably land use and connectivity, water and electricity systems and the health system. These factors include uncontrolled construction, the lack of landscaped and lit avenues, the deterioration of water and electricity distribution networks, and land disputes. Unlit avenues expose residents to extortion, assault or torture by bandits. The water shortage in Bukavu is the cause of many illnesses and deaths, as well as violence and kidnappings. Land disputes, a widespread phenomenon in Bukavu, are poorly regulated, leading to violence and insecurity. On this subject, in the case of Nigeria, Oluwakemi Okenyodo (2016) notes that the inability of government institutions to moderate and resolve land ownership conflicts and provide services is one of the main factors in urban violence. This leads to the creation of private militias and the imposition of street justice, through which various groups seek to protect or impose their personal interests.

Insecurity is produced by a variety of actors operating in isolation or in collusion, depending on their interests: law enforcement officers, street children, gangs, informal local security associations, drug addicts and other young people and adolescents severed from their families.

Individuals from army and police forces (*Forces armées de la République Démocratique du Congo*, *Police nationale congolaise*) are outside the control of security structures, and act alone or in collaboration with gangs and informal youth associations. According to Thill (2019), markets and transport hubs, for example, attract a variety of petty criminals. These include pickpockets, known as “*deux doigts*” (two fingers) or “*misapistes*” (from the Lingala word “*misapi*” meaning “fingers”) and “*shamuleurs*” (from the Mashi word “*kushamula*” meaning “to take by force”), who steal handbags, phones and money from their victims. Many of them are “*maibobo*” (street children). With the exception of a few uncontrolled elements, it is not the army and police that habitually cause insecurity, but rather gangs and local informal youth associations formed to provide policing (such as *Pomba solution* and *Popo solution*), street children and other idle youth. These non-state actors operate in collaboration or in isolation, and sometimes in collusion with a few undisciplined members of the national army and police. Without a policy targeting these issues and support from public authorities, or sustained community solidarity (due to shifting ethical and cultural reference points), this dynamic leads to a breakdown in social ties and the exclusion of the most disadvantaged sections of society. This state of affairs pushes some individuals towards violence and juvenile delinquency, or even adult criminal behaviour (Sudi, 2015).

The presence of all these sources of insecurity makes the city of Bukavu less safe, especially at night. Statistics provided by various international organisations and local civil society on murders, robberies and extortion, rape and violence against women, and kidnappings clearly show that the city of Bukavu is a place of insecurity and vulnerability.

The central state, through its technical services and security and law enforcement agencies, as well as the judicial system, is making efforts to reduce insecurity and guarantee the protection of people and their property, although the results remain inadequate. Indeed, security is a prerogative of the central state. This role is shared between organisations at different levels throughout the hierarchy. Elements of the armed forces are commanded and coordinated at the level of the military region – that is, the provincial command – while the police are deployed at different levels: province, city, *commune* and neighbourhood. The police are deployed in the districts of Bukavu and in some areas there is a police unit known as the “local police”. Neighbourhood policing is a strategy aimed at bringing police closer to the population for urgent intervention in cases of insecurity. The implementation of this strategy has been supported by international cooperation efforts for the promotion of urban security in the DRC. In addition to a permanent presence at the city’s security points, the police organise cordon-and-search operations to check whether civilians are carrying

weapons and ammunition, and to detect criminals in certain areas. The police authorities, civil society and the city's residents recognise that the number of police officers is insufficient to ensure security. In addition, the police are underequipped and lacking the requisite professional skills to deal with the volume of cases and sophisticated forms of crime in Bukavu.

The judicial system, including the police, is the controlling body that helps to reduce insecurity by imposing various penalties on criminals apprehended by the security and law enforcement forces for established offences such as theft, kidnapping, rape and murder. However, many of those responsible for crimes are not apprehended. Many criminals are released without serving their sentences, or manage to escape from prison. The judicial system is often criticised by local civil society and the general public for its complacency or complicity in cases of early release or escape by prisoners. The state's penal system does not seem to be playing an effective role in reducing insecurity in the city of Bukavu. In this regard, Robert Muggah (2012) notes that, in many fragile states, the systems serving public order, from the police to the judiciary, penitentiary and other forms of policing, are dysfunctional and seen as illegitimate by the citizens they are supposed to serve. Disparities in the capacity to deliver reliable basic security services are a key causative factor of urban violence.

However, in some cases, local security associations have partly replaced state security forces in providing security and protection for the inhabitants of certain areas of Bukavu. The success of these associations depends on them having legitimacy, covering a small geographical area, being supported materially and financially by local residents, and having effective leadership. These exceptional examples can be seen in the Plateau and Lac avenues in Nguba, and in Buholo IV avenue in the *commune* of Kadutu. Civil society is playing a more important role in alerting and denouncing cases of insecurity and lack of protection. To do this, it uses a variety of strategies and means, including the media, petitions, letters of denunciation addressed to national, provincial, municipal and communal authorities, monitoring of cases of insecurity, demonstrations and so on. Grassroots action is having a considerable influence on the authorities at various levels to improve the level of security and protection in Bukavu.

Several challenges – structural, economic, territorial and social challenges – limit the efforts of urban authorities and civil society to guarantee a high level of security and protection. The structural challenges are organisational problems in the police and military forces – in particular, the shortage of personnel, the low level of professionalism of the police, the inadequacy of military and police salaries, the lack of police equipment, the instrumentalisation of the security services for private interests, and so on. Current challenges include the presence of local and foreign armed groups in rural areas (Kabare, Walungu, Plaine de la Ruzizi, Uvira, among others) and peri-urban areas linked to the city of Bukavu. These areas are hotbeds for criminals who increase insecurity in the city. Territorial challenges include increasing urbanisation (demographic growth), inadequate street lighting on the city's main arteries, a lack of pavements and the fact that avenues are unpaved, and uncontrolled urbanisation in

areas that are unsuitable for construction and difficult to access. Finally, the social challenges relate to the problems of urban social pathologies, such as the increase in the number of streetchildren and unemployed people, the sale of alcohol and drugs, brothels, and so on.

Safety and security are criteria for the stability and viability of a city; permanent insecurity undermines the living conditions of urban populations. According to Commins (2018), around 40% of Africans living in urban areas express a feeling of insecurity when they move around their neighbourhood. Bukavu is one of the African cities where the population lives with permanent psychological and physical insecurity.

Safety is linked to other urban sectors and subsystems such as water, electricity, the environment and so on. The institutional responses to the many safety challenges have not been able to guarantee the safety of the inhabitants of Bukavu. Reforms and specific solutions to the main security and protection challenges in Bukavu are governance priorities. However, important reforms have not been launched, despite the urgent need for action to guarantee security in Bukavu. Reforming the security services is one of the strategies for rebuilding post-conflict states. At an overall structural level, reforms of the security services, particularly the army and police, have been limited to the production of legislative texts, and the structural problems remain. There are therefore no concrete reforms to provide lasting solutions to the problems of security and protection specific to the city of Bukavu.

The Bukavu authorities have introduced a number of measures to reduce the level of crime in the city. These include setting up local police stations in each *commune*, training police officers in various areas, the creation of a border police force, and the demolition of certain buildings on the main thoroughfares. Other actions include tracking down street-children and drug addicts, holding security meetings at the city, *commune* and neighbourhood levels, and collaboration between urban authorities and civil society on security issues. In addition, lighting is gradually being installed on the city's main thoroughfares.

The continuing lack of security in Bukavu is the cause of protests and denunciations by civil society and citizens' movements in the city. To a large extent, the inhabitants are expressing their dissatisfaction with the security provided by the city. Demonstrations by the population and denunciations by civil society and citizens' movements are recurrent, even going so far as to challenge the power of the urban and provincial authorities.

In short, safety and security in Bukavu remains an area with multiple challenges. Its inhabitants are exposed to permanent psychological and physical insecurity that affects their quality of life, due to poor security governance by the city's authorities, the police, the army and other security services.

### 5.3. Health, wellbeing and nutrition

The continued deterioration of food supply chains threatens Bukavu's inhabitants' ability to access healthy food, particularly for vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant and breastfeeding women, displaced people, people living with disabilities and HIV/AIDS and elderly people without support (Vwima et al., 2022). Recent surveys show that 43% of households in the city are food insecure, mainly in the *commune* of Ibanda, which means that many families live in poverty and cannot afford sufficient, healthy food.

Basic products in Bukavu, such as cassava, bananas, maize and beans, cost between USD 0.5 and USD 0.75 per kilogram. Demand for these products is not met by local production, necessitating imports, particularly of cassava flour from Rwanda and North Kivu. Products such as rice and sectors such as fisheries and livestock have not been developed, due to insecurity and conflict. Other challenges include poor roads, high transport and agricultural input costs, and competition from foreign products (Vwima and Rushigira, 2020). Bukavu's dependence on North Kivu for food supplies has been disrupted by recent clashes between the Congolese army and M23 rebels, leading to shortages. The closure of the border with Rwanda has exacerbated the situation, hampering the movement of traders. The war in Ukraine has also contributed to the rise in prices of imported products. Fish is sold to retailers by traders who store fish imported from China and Uganda in refrigerated lorries. This affects local fishing, as imported fish is more affordable (Ndabarushimana and Mwenyemali, 2021).

In addition, limited access to quality food leads to increased consumption of highly processed foods, rich in fats and sugars, which increases the prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as obesity, hypertension and diabetes (Mwene-Batu et al. 2021). For the local food supply to become profitable and sustainable, a synergy of efforts is needed to overcome these many obstacles. Politicians are promising to improve food security by investing in research and development, improving access to water and irrigation, and promoting climate-smart farming practices. In October 2019, the head of state promised to develop sustainable food value chains at the inauguration of the IITA/Kalambo agricultural research station. Despite this promise, however, government actions do not always prioritise healthy food, and many consumers and economic operators do not recognise their role in this promotion.

However, some local efforts must be acknowledged, such as those of the president of the Congolese senate to provide drinking water, and members of parliament supporting farmers. Promises and social programmes around health and nutrition aim to legitimise the government and give people hope. The governor's goal is to eradicate hunger and improve nutrition by 2030, with initiatives to promote healthy eating habits, create technical schools and support the sale of products made by women. The government is also committed to ending all forms of malnutrition and ensuring the viability of food production systems, doubling agricultural productivity and the incomes of small-scale

producers by 2030, with a particular focus on gender equality and the inclusion of vulnerable groups.

There are several reasons for the fragmentation and failure in the field of health, welfare and nutrition, as well as some externalities. The large plantations and agricultural concessions in South Kivu province are owned by politicians, economic operators and sometimes army officers, who use sharecropping to influence the electoral choices of small farmers. Although these concessions used to produce a lot of food, they are no longer properly exploited by their new owners. Governors' election promises, which focus on welfare, health and nutrition, are often not translated into concrete action. For example, during the 2011 elections, some candidates opened free public restaurants, a superficial gesture that does not tackle the root causes of malnutrition. Municipal and national policies have a major influence on people's nutrition. To improve health and nutrition, leaders must take concrete action, invest in sustainable agriculture, improve access to drinking water and strengthen the health system. This will require a clear vision, accompanied by supportive measures from the government and the political will to achieve it.

Bukavu has been marked by armed conflict, population displacement and a lack of coordination between actors in the domains of food, health and nutrition. These factors have hampered progress against malnutrition, which has been endemic since 1960. The lack of coordination and prevention, for example by improving access to drinking water and sanitation, has led to mainly curative measures. The provincial government has identified armed conflict, limited access to healthcare and agricultural land, and inadequate food supply as the main causes of malnutrition. In October 2021, a multisectoral committee was set up to address these determining factors and reduce malnutrition in children aged 0-23 months.

Several factors are enabling the population of Bukavu to adopt healthy diets. State and non-state interventions play a crucial role, even if they are mainly supported by international partners. These interventions focus on prevention, treatment and promotion of nutrition through a multisectoral approach involving health, education, agriculture and the private and public sectors. However, most residents are unaware of these initiatives. In addition, some households grow their own food, particularly in remote areas, although this production is often insufficient.

A number of factors limit the adoption of a healthy diet. The high cost of healthy food is a major obstacle, with fruit and vegetables often more expensive than processed foods. Many people also lack knowledge about healthy eating, which prevents them from making appropriate nutritional choices. Lack of time to prepare healthy meals is another limiting factor, particularly for those who work long hours. In addition, some people do not have the necessary resources, such as money, cooking facilities or drinking water. The lack of refrigeration in informal settlements also makes it difficult to preserve food, leading to spoilage and loss of nutrients.



To overcome these challenges, it is crucial to improve nutritional education, make healthy food more affordable and provide the necessary infrastructure, such as access to drinking water and refrigeration facilities. Concerted efforts by governments and non-state partners are needed to promote healthy and sustainable eating habits. Churches, universities, schools and socioeconomic groups are key players who could help to raise public awareness.

The urban population of Bukavu faces many health problems. Malnutrition among children (aged under five) and pregnant and breastfeeding women is a serious public health problem. A recent survey showed an overall prevalence of severe malnutrition of 2.4% (based on the weight/height ratio) or 5.3% (mid-upper arm circumference); 0.1% with oedematous malnutrition; a prevalence of stunted growth of 42.2%; and a prevalence of low weight of 13.4% among children aged between six and 59 months in Bukavu (PRONANUT, 2023). The same survey showed that 6.5% of pregnant and breastfeeding women suffered from malnutrition in Bukavu. The rate of malnutrition varies from one *commune* to another.

In addition to this undernourishment, there is also overnourishment that coexists with the presence of NCDs in Bukavu, such as hypertension, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity. Katchunga et al. (2016) show that the prevalence of diabetes is 5% in Bukavu. The coexistence of malnutrition and diabetes represents a public health problem and limits the management of these two diseases. Populations are often unaware of the link between malnutrition and NCDs, as is the case in Bukavu, which complicates disease management (WFP, 2008). Other nutrition-related diseases include hypertension, elevated LDL-C (low-density cholesterol) and hypertriglyceridaemia (HTG), and obesity (Mwene-Batu et al., 2022).

The population of Bukavu has limited access to drinking water. A shocking 90% drop in access to drinking water occurred between 2003 and 2019. This critical situation is due to the city's dilapidated infrastructure. In some neighbourhoods, the water in the pipes comes from Lake Kivu, which is used to dump waste (Mulungula et al., 2021).

Malnutrition, infectious diseases and non-communicable diseases in Bukavu are closely linked to poverty. The poorest communities, living in overcrowded and unsanitary areas, are more likely to suffer from stunted growth, cognitive problems and infections such as cholera, typhoid and malaria. People living in poverty are also more exposed to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression, exacerbated by stress, violence and trauma. Conflict exacerbates these problems, as people displaced by war often lack access to food and healthcare, increasing their risk of malnutrition and infectious diseases. Damaged or destroyed health infrastructures and the loss of medical staff further complicate access to care. Limited access to healthcare is another critical factor. Health facilities are often far away, difficult to reach, due to lack of transport, or inaccessible to impoverished populations. In addition, discrimination against people with disabilities, HIV and other marginalised groups prevents access to necessary treatment. Unsanitary conditions in Bukavu's informal settlements encourage the spread of pathogenic bacteria and parasites, contaminating water and



food and leading to infectious diseases. The lack of adequate sanitation facilities also contributes to mental health problems.

Lack of education compounds these challenges. People with less education are more likely to adopt risky behaviours and fail to recognise the early signs of a disease, delaying diagnosis and treatment. Better education can help individuals make more informed food choices and take advantage of available health services. International factors and external shocks, such as the war in North Kivu, the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, are also having a negative impact on food security in Bukavu. These crises have led to a rise in food prices, making it difficult to access sufficient, healthy food. Climate change is another threat to health and nutrition in Africa, with forecasts of new tropical diseases and environments more conducive to the transmission of diseases such as dengue fever. Fluctuating food prices compound these problems, forcing many households to reduce their food consumption.

#### 5.4. Conclusion

Bukavu faces major challenges in terms of land use, connectivity, security and nutrition, all of which have a serious impact on the lives of its inhabitants. The fragmentation of plots and the occupation of unstable land aggravate overcrowding and unsanitary conditions, especially in peri-urban areas lacking basic services such as sanitation and access to drinking water. The lack of resources prevents local authorities from providing adequate road infrastructure, isolating certain parts of the city and holding back the economy. In terms of security, the presence of armed groups and rapid urbanisation have led to the emergence of informal settlements vulnerable to crime, while the inadequately equipped police force struggles to guarantee safety. In terms of health and nutrition, deteriorating supply chains, high prices and limited local production are leading to food insecurity, particularly affecting vulnerable groups such as children and displaced persons. Around 43% of households are food insecure, a problem exacerbated by the lack of infrastructure, poverty and precarious sanitary conditions, contributing to malnutrition and the spread of disease in the city.

The efforts of the authorities and NGOs are insufficient in the face of the complexity of these challenges, which require better governance and improved infrastructure to support the wellbeing of the population. These challenges are intertwined with historic, structural and cyclical factors that influence the trajectory of development in the DRC. National and local policies, as well as the dynamics between various actors and agencies, play a central role in creating or sustaining these challenges facing the city, particularly in the areas of property, connectivity, security and health. The interconnections between these and other challenges reveal persistent deficits in governance, infrastructure and public services. These shortcomings are not only holding back the city's economic growth, but also the wellbeing of its inhabitants, especially marginalised groups.

## 6. Overall analysis: Accountability and pressure from civil society

In this section, we return to: 1) the problem of accountability in the relationship between political settlement, power and rentseeking; 2) Kinshasa's stranglehold on South Kivu and Bukavu; 3) the agency of South Kivu and Bukavu; and 4) the role of civil society vis-à-vis the elites.

### 6.1. Political settlement, power, rentseeking and accountability

One of the main contributions of this research was to show how a provincial capital, a secondary city, is politically linked to the national capital. The concepts of “intermediary elite” and “semi-autonomous field” were used to situate this approach within a broader theoretical framework of political settlement. In order to grasp the specificity of the capital–province–city relationship in Bukavu, we have highlighted the importance of understanding how the province of South Kivu and the city of Bukavu interact with Kinshasa in a way that is distinct from other cities and provinces in the DRC. This specificity helps to explain the mechanisms of political settlement between Bukavu and Kinshasa, illustrating how the dynamics of actors and the distribution of economic rents settle into a certain equilibrium. However, it only partially captures how this particularity affects systems and domains at the city level.

Indeed, the concept of political settlement makes it possible to identify the most influential players around various issues – often those who control or mobilise financial flows (“rents”) on an urban scale. Clientelism, often of a politically partisan kind, manifests itself in particular in administrative appointments and public companies, the management of tax revenues and the awarding of public contracts; the intermediary elites play a decisive role here through the highly personalised parties they lead. Such a system is closely linked to the development problems we have observed, such as corruption, public sector disengagement and weak public service delivery. However, the major impact of this clientelism lies in the weakening of accountability: protected by the intermediary elites, urban leaders answer to these elites rather than to the population. They are often removed from office not for failing to meet the expectations of their constituents, but for having disappointed these elites. This phenomenon contributes to the inefficiency of public services and the control of urban resources and opportunities by unscrupulous actors.

However, it is essential to emphasise that the system of power and rentseeking that links elites and their protégés in the urban environment does not encompass all areas of rentseeking and power at the municipal level. In other words, the political settlement does not cover all the sources of income that can be subject to rentseeking, or all the issues of governance in the city. In a country with 80% unemployment and an economy that is 90% informal, the survival of the state and society depends on the existence of spaces that allow people outside the political settlement to access certain financial flows. Without these spaces, the country would risk tipping over into civil war. In this context, it becomes relevant to analyse these actors, as well as their interactions with

the intermediary elites and their dependents. So the question of municipal accountability also arises outside the framework of the political settlement.

In addition, the conflict context is another significant factor shaping Bukavu/South Kivu as a semi-autonomous area, given Bukavu's proximity to the Rwandan border. Although parts of South Kivu province remain affected by armed conflict, Bukavu has always presented itself as a peaceful town, untouched by violence. The authorities portray the war as a distant problem, confined to the province's borders, with no impact on governance. Although this view is inaccurate (since armed groups on the outskirts of the province affect security, the economy, infrastructure, and so on), it is understandable that after nearly 30 years of recurring conflict and armed groups in the region, this situation has become a background feature with which the inhabitants and leaders live, a social condition that no longer figures as prominently in people's way of thinking. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand that this situation of perpetual war is frequently exploited by political and administrative actors at city, provincial and national levels to justify their various forms of incompetence and their lack of accountability for the state of public goods and services.

Similarly, the slow process of decentralisation, which was supposed to give more autonomy to the provinces, has not produced the expected results. This problem is not due solely to a lack of resources accompanying decentralisation, or to poor planning or misunderstandings about decentralisation. The problem lies in the way in which Kinshasa's elites, urban elites and mediating elites constantly adapt to reforms, evolving their strategies to maintain control and preserve the status quo. This can be seen, for example, in the appointment of provincial governors: although decentralisation gave provincial assembly members the power to elect governors, under President Kabila the presidency pressured them to elect a governor aligned with the president's political position. Under Tshisekedi, provincial assembly representatives became more independent from the presidency, but the mediating elites now influence the selection of governors. The problem of funding allocation is also used by provincial and municipal elites to justify their various forms of incompetence and their lack of accountability for the state of public goods and services.

In addition, the provinces remain constrained by Kinshasa, which continues to flout laws requiring the transfer of tax revenues. This leads to a disconnect between the political discourse across domains and systems and the reality on the ground. Although this rhetoric is often aligned with international frameworks adopted by the public administration or promoted by donors, it is not necessarily translated into action, due to, among other things, the lack of funding. Limited resources force decisionmakers to prioritise, creating a reality that is increasingly disconnected from stated objectives. For example, in the healthcare sector, "not-for-profit" and "for-profit" players coexist in a problematic way with public, religious and private players. This sometimes chaotic mix requires an inductive study to understand how the sector works. It is interesting to see how key players or trade associations act as income-seekers within the city's political settlement, or how certain import/export companies dominate sectors such as

pharmaceuticals. These actions allow us to understand not so much the distinction but the intertwining of formal and informal elements, providing insights into how the “reach” of the state is negotiated in the regulation of this sector. These aspects could be the subject of future research, and would considerably enrich the analysis of economic policy in the health sector.

In this context of discrepancy between discourse and practice, fuelled by the power of the relevant actors, rentseeking and the availability of resources, civil society actors are faced with the dual challenge of pressurising and legitimising the urban authorities. This dual role is necessary if these authorities are to stand up to Kinshasa’s intermediary elites and drive forward urban development initiatives, despite the absence of a clear framework. In addition, it is important to understand the interaction between three main actors, in order to try to find ways of promoting accountability and the provision of quality public services in the city: Kinshasa, Bukavu and civil society.

## 6.2. Kinshasa’s stranglehold on South Kivu and Bukavu

The DRC Constitution provides for a regionalised unitary state with provinces and decentralised territorial entities. Provincial decentralisation has been operational since the 2007 parliamentary elections and the 2008 organic law. Although the provinces are decentralised, their public services remain the responsibility of the respective sectoral ministries in Kinshasa. These services are therefore still those of the central state, albeit decentralised. The provinces enjoy legal, financial and political autonomy, but not technical autonomy. This creates the impression that the provinces are not yet fully decentralised, an impression that is reinforced by the control that the central government still exercises over the appointment of provincial governors (even though they are elected by the provincial assemblies). The political interference of the Ministry of the Interior, which has suspended provincial assemblies and recalled provincial authorities to Kinshasa for consultations, suggests that the minister of the interior polices the provinces. These problematic actions are compounded by interventions by the constitutional court, which has on several occasions succeeded in reinstating governors who had previously been deposed by the provincial assembly.

In addition, delays in the decentralisation process have led to a lack of direction and inconsistency between different laws and actions, which helps to explain how national actors still manage to impose their power over the provinces through a series of deals. Within the provinces, the city, *commune*, chiefdom and sector are all decentralised territorial entities (DTEs) in theory but not in practice. At city and *commune* level, respectively, the mayor and *bourgmestre* (administrative heads at the *commune* level) are still appointed by the president of the republic on the recommendation of the minister of the interior. It should be noted that political parties weigh in the balance, influencing the government’s proposal for these appointments. As they are not elected locally, these appointed leaders owe more allegiance to the leaders of the political parties that sponsored their appointments. If a mayor or *bourgmestre* is suspended at provincial level, their suspension may be lifted if they manage to mobilise a powerful contact in Kinshasa.

In addition, the leaders of local entities still have no room for manoeuvre to implement an effective local governance policy. Major decisions are still taken from Kinshasa. It should be noted that many of these coordinators were put in place by political players at national level, often on a clientelist basis. In addition, the government retains a right of supervision over the province, in that decisions taken by its coordinators are *de facto* subject to prior approval by the ministry in charge, even though there is no *de jure* supervision over the province. The only possible supervision is exercised by the provincial governor and covers only the DTEs. This creates interference in the political management of the province. Upon analysis, this interference, unsurprisingly, destabilises the balance of local governance and is a strategy by the central government to continue to capture the province's power and resources. Although the aim of the decentralisation policy is to transfer powers to the local level, this *de facto* supervision results in power still being exercised over the provincial authorities, which can be sanctioned through acts of suspension, dissolution or dismissal. The provincial team's room for manoeuvre in this context is all the more limited. The delay in organising local and municipal elections has increased the fragility of the DTE leadership. Kinshasa also uses a powerful financial weapon to reduce the province's room for manoeuvre: instead of allowing the provinces to directly retain 40% of national revenues, the central government instead applies a system of transfer payments, which is unconstitutional. This system allows it to allocate resources to the provinces in a discretionary manner, disproportionately and with delays in disbursements. Some political crises in the provinces have been linked to delays in paying the salaries of provincial assembly representatives.

All these factors help to explain why the city of Bukavu is not completely autonomous from the national authorities, despite the autonomy of management it should have. Nevertheless, it is essential to identify the areas where the Bukavu authorities have some, albeit limited, room for manoeuvre vis-à-vis Kinshasa. This manoeuvring space may enable them either to impose the interests of the urban population, or to act discreetly in their interests, sometimes bypassing Kinshasa's directives.

### 6.3. Agency of South Kivu and Bukavu

Understanding claims and access to power in Bukavu also means understanding the way in which the city's elites manipulate their relations with Kinshasa to increase their power in Bukavu, in the province or in the capital. This flexibility on the part of provincial actors demonstrates the semi-autonomous nature of their province, which emerges from these power relations with Kinshasa. South Kivu is a strategic space for elites to retain their power at provincial level and remain in the political sphere at national level. As an area of political mobilisation and contestation, South Kivu province also represents a major challenge for the elites there. As we have seen, control of the province allows them to obtain political dividends and to influence political negotiations and/or powersharing at the central level. It also gives them the opportunity to be at the heart of the province's political and social issues and to have a positive influence on urban and provincial development.

However, this attempt by South Kivu elites to control the province is often a source of conflict with senior political and administrative officials in Kinshasa. For example, on several occasions, telegrams from the Ministry of the Interior have forbidden provincial assembly members from exercising parliamentary control over members of the provincial executive. Sometimes they are asked to postpone the procedure, sometimes they are invited to go to Kinshasa to explain their reasons. And yet, the Constitution does not allow for the minister of the interior to exercise supervisory powers over the actions of the provincial assembly.

This does not mean, however, that these provincial elites should be seen as victims, with no room for a certain degree of autonomous action, or unable to serve their own selfish interests. South Kivu's elites are often involved in a race for power, in order to position themselves politically in Bukavu and Kinshasa for the sake of their own political agendas. This race also enables them to enter the game of rentseeking at the provincial level. The city's top political and administrative officials engage in illegal practices, such as land grabbing, mineral trafficking, creating or supporting armed groups, economic embezzlement and so on. Sometimes they do so in complicity with the Kinshasa authorities, in order to ensure their impunity, without the authorities necessarily being aware of the full extent of their activities.

Thus, to understand access to power and rentseeking in South Kivu, it is not only necessary to understand the capital's hold over the province. It is also necessary to understand the political manoeuvres of the provincial elites and the way in which they navigate between arenas, alliances and splits within the province, the city and the sub-region. These manoeuvres aim at defending their own interests, which may or may not be in the general interest, or even legal. It is also at this level that potential and actual areas of conflict between national and provincial elites sometimes emerge.

In addition, there are signs of political manoeuvring from the world of business towards the world of politics. Many economic players in Bukavu migrate to the political sphere, in order to, among other things, avoid certain tax obligations. In Bukavu, powerful economic players are often exempt from certain tax obligations.

In the day-to-day management of the province, for example, we are witnessing a tribalisation of positions within the public administration. This is also happening at the level of the provincial divisions, to the point that certain divisions are reputed to be managed solely by members of a particular ethnic group. If identity of this kind is so decisive in determining who occupies these decisionmaking positions within the province, it is because the public administration is in itself a form of income for the provincial elites, often independently of Kinshasa.

The same is true at a more local level, where the degree of accountability of administrative authorities to citizens is often determined by their links with the dominant elites. Thus, civil servants at provincial level try to obtain the support of the more powerful authorities in the province or in Kinshasa to ensure that they retain their posts



no matter what, obtain easy access to other benefits, such as promotions, pay rises or bonuses, or simply gain access to various forms of legal or illegal income.

Finally, other provincial authorities try to strengthen their power at provincial level, in order to gain recognition from higher provincial and national authorities. For example, some authorities often try to take control of certain districts with a reputation for opposition, in order to gain political visibility. Others get involved in development, sporting or cultural activities for the same reason. In short, the more elites enjoy popular legitimacy in the province and are able to mobilise for or against provincial or central power, the more weight they have in negotiations over powersharing and access to financial rents.

All this shows that, despite Kinshasa's stranglehold on South Kivu and Bukavu, there is still room for manoeuvre, enabling local authorities to act against the wishes of the central government. Based on our fieldwork, the discourse of South Kivu and Bukavu elites often consists of justifying their failure to serve the public interest by citing obstacles imposed by Kinshasa. However, this explanation is not always well-founded. Often, instead of exploiting their room for manoeuvre for the good of the population, they use it for personal ends. Whether they are protected by Kinshasa, or blame it for the lack of urban development, in either case they escape their duty to be accountable.

This is why we are proposing to strengthen the role of civil society, which could exert joint pressure on the elites in Kinshasa and Bukavu, with the aim of increasing the accountability of local authorities to the population.

#### 6.4. Role of civil society vis-à-vis the elites

Our research has shown that we need pressure from civil society to increase the accountability of Congolese politicians and administrators, particularly in the delivery of quality public services. A culture that has been developing within civil society in the DRC for a decade provides an example from which one can draw support for this proposal. It is constituted by the actions of two organisations: *Lucha (Lutte pour le Changement; Struggle for Change)* and *Filimbi*. These are two citizens' movements campaigning for democracy, human rights and social justice. Founded in a context of political repression and authoritarian governance, they aim to mobilise the Congolese population, particularly young people, to fight against injustice and impunity, and to demand democratic reforms and political change.

Non-violent movements made up mainly of young people, their aim is to promote social and political change in the DRC by denouncing bad governance and putting pressure on the authorities at various levels to provide adequate public services and improve accountability. Similar to youth movements in Africa, such as *Y'en a marre* (We've had enough) in Senegal and *Balai Citoyen* (Citizen's Broom) in Burkina Faso, these movements engage in awareness-raising campaigns on civil rights and call on citizens to get actively involved in maintaining pressure on the Congolese government. Despite the repression, they enjoy growing popular support, particularly among young people disenchanted with the status quo in terms of development. It seems to us that it is

possible to build on this kind of pressure to make the authorities at various levels more accountable.

In relation to the various governance challenges in Bukavu, the pressure exerted by civil society movements such as Lucha and Filimbi can play a key role in strengthening the accountability and responsiveness of local authorities, thus improving the delivery of public services. We set out below how this pressure can interact with the various challenges identified.

**Incomplete decentralisation and political clientelism:** Decentralisation, although introduced by the 2006 Constitution, is undermined by the absence of local elections and the dominance of Kinshasa's control over local authority appointments. This system prevents genuine autonomous local governance and creates an environment where clientelism predominates. Pressure from civil society movements can force these authorities to be more accountable to the people. By raising awareness and mobilising, these movements can demand more transparent mechanisms for managing appointments and allocating resources. By supporting citizen engagement, these movements can push local authorities to favour policies that respond more to the needs of local residents, rather than to the political or personal interests of elites.

**Financial constraints and lack of funds for public services:** Bukavu's municipal authorities suffer from a lack of funding, due to the central government's inability to meet its financial obligations to the provinces. In response to these constraints, civil society organisations can exert pressure to demand a better allocation of national resources or external funding. By mobilising the population around concrete demands, these movements can ensure that local authorities are obliged to find alternative solutions, such as creating public–private partnerships or improving the collection of urban taxes, and to guarantee stable funding for essential services such as health and transport.

**Corruption and political interference in the health and transport sectors:** Corruption and political interference seriously damage public services, particularly in the health and transport sectors. Civil society organisations, acting as pressure groups, can denounce these practices by organising campaigns to raise awareness and advocating for the introduction of stricter control mechanisms. They can demand transparency in public contracts, regulation of health establishments and rigorous checks on vehicles on the road. By building on popular support, these movements can encourage the authorities to take action against corruption and introduce fairer public policies.

**Political, ethnic and territorial divisions:** The struggle for power and access to resources in Bukavu is strongly marked by ethnic and territorial divisions. These divisions make it difficult to establish inclusive and accountable governance. By pushing for more inclusive governance mechanisms, civil society organisations can encourage the representation of all communities in decisionmaking processes. Through citizen pressure, these movements can demand that local authorities commit

to looking beyond ethnic and partisan interests to meet the needs of the whole population. In addition, they can advocate public policies that promote an equitable distribution of resources and opportunities between different groups in the city, thereby reducing political and social tensions.

In short, civil society, through movements such as Lucha and Filimbi, can be a powerful catalyst for strengthening the accountability of local authorities in Bukavu, by exerting constant pressure for more transparent, accountable and equitable governance practices. Their role is not only to denounce abuses, but also to promote civic engagement and create an environment in which the authorities are held accountable to the legitimate expectations of citizens.

## 6.5. Conclusion

The Bukavu authorities have the legal right to emancipate themselves from Kinshasa in order to develop their city. The Congolese Constitution of 2006 and the decentralisation laws theoretically give them management autonomy and responsibility for their urban systems and territories. Although local authorities are still appointed or imposed via the ballot box by Kinshasa, which hinders their independence, a legal framework exists to promote greater autonomy. By building on this framework and strengthening their capacity to mobilise local resources and manage urban affairs effectively, Bukavu's authorities could potentially reduce their dependence on the central government. This emancipation would enable them to implement policies and initiatives tailored to the specific needs of their population, thereby promoting more targeted and effective development.

However, as this report has shown, the developmental potential of such leeway to achieve these objectives is very limited, for two reasons. On the one hand, the often extreme demands of the intermediary elites reduce the resources and manoeuvring room of the provincial and municipal authorities to do their job properly. On the other hand, once they have satisfied the self-seeking demands of the intermediary authorities, they are no longer subject to pressure from above, and need not be concerned with the legality of their actions or whether they are in the general interest and for the wellbeing of the population.

In such a context, it is necessary to exert greater pressure and citizen control over the urban and provincial elites to guarantee transparency and accountability, by encouraging participatory and responsible governance. In a context where civil society remains a dynamic player and new forms of social mobilisation are vigorously emerging, the situation in Bukavu shows that citizen participation is a source of both pressure and legitimisation of urban authorities. Pressure is essential because, like all elected representatives and public officials, these authorities must be constantly reminded of their obligation to be accountable to the local population. Legitimisation is also crucial because these authorities are too heavily dependent on the intermediary elites to rely on their own political will as the basis for fulfilling their mission towards the

population. They need compelling arguments to persuade these elites that they have no choice but to serve the population because of the pressure they are under.

## 7. Involvement in future research and action

We propose below a number of lines of research and action arising from the governance, decentralisation, urbanisation and resource management dynamics identified. These include an analysis of the mechanisms for appointing local authorities, the impact of dependence on Kinshasa on local governance, and improvements to the health, transport and waste management systems. They also examine strategies for improving access to drinking water and sanitation, as well as the causes of urban insecurity and the power dynamics influencing economic development and governance in Bukavu. It is very important to gain an in-depth understanding of these challenges through thorough research and specific case studies, so as to be able to envisage very precisely how civil society can act vis-à-vis the elites to demand greater accountability and adequate services for urban development.

### 7.1. Future research

Several lines of future research are needed in order to examine in greater depth the issues relating to the political economy of development in Bukavu. The current situation in Bukavu highlights the complex challenges of governance, decentralisation, urbanisation and resource management, which require in-depth investigation, in order to better understand and propose effective solutions.

Firstly, it is crucial to conduct research into the dynamics of governance and decentralisation. The 2006 Constitution established a framework for the decentralisation of urban systems, giving local authorities responsibility for their management. However, the absence of local elections has kept urban authorities under the appointment of Kinshasa, limiting their administrative, financial and political autonomy. Research should focus on the mechanisms by which local authorities are appointed, the impact of this dependence on local governance and the ways in which genuine decentralisation could be implemented to strengthen local autonomy.

How can the implementation of decentralisation in South Kivu be improved to strengthen the autonomy of municipal authorities and optimise the management of urban systems and domains in Bukavu?

Secondly, studies on the effects of the dependence of local authorities on Kinshasa are essential. This dependence has led to largely dysfunctional urban systems as a result of constant interference from the central state and inadequate funding. Research needs to explore how the current mode of financing, which does not respect the legal provision that provinces should directly retain a portion of the tax revenues they collect, affects the functioning of urban systems. Particular attention should be paid to the impact of irregular and incomplete transfer payments on the ability of local authorities to manage their resources effectively and provide adequate public services.

What are the specific mechanisms by which the dependence of local authorities on central government affects the governance and development of urban systems and areas?

Thirdly, the health, transport and waste management systems in Bukavu also require in-depth research. Corruption and political interference have seriously affected these sectors, limiting citizens' access to quality services. It is crucial to examine how private and religious actors, often politically backed, control much of the health sector, leading to the proliferation of unregulated pharmacies and health facilities. Studies into corrupt practices in the transport sector and the challenges of waste management are also needed, in order to propose reforms and strategies for improvement.

How do corrupt practices and political interference influence the efficiency of Bukavu's health, transport and waste management systems?

Fourthly, with regard to access to drinking water, which is a major challenge in Bukavu, research needs to look at the causes of frequent water cuts and supply problems. It is important to explore how the current housing structure, characterised by cramped plots and unplanned urbanisation, exacerbates hygiene and sanitation problems. Potential solutions to improve access to drinking water and the management of water resources must be studied, taking into account the growing needs of the urban population.

What strategies can be put in place to improve access to drinking water, sanitation and public services in Bukavu, given the current constraints?

Fifthly, demographic pressure on available land and the uncontrolled urbanisation of Bukavu are also important research topics. With a current population of around 1.7 million, well above the 300,000 predicted by the 1957 development plan, Bukavu faces considerable challenges in terms of land management and housing. Research must analyse how the fragmentation of plots and settlement on inappropriate sites affect the quality of urban life and urban planning. Studies on housing policies and mechanisms for regulating the land and property markets are needed, in order to propose sustainable solutions.

What are the impacts of demographic growth and uncontrolled urbanisation on urban planning and quality of life in Bukavu, and what solutions could improve the situation?

Sixthly, urban insecurity in Bukavu, due to various factors – such as the influx of refugees, overpopulation and malfunctions within security forces – requires particular attention. Research should explore the root causes of this insecurity, the actors involved (law enforcement agencies, gangs, idle youths) and the structural and situational challenges that stand in the way of effective protection for local residents. It is essential to examine existing security initiatives and propose strategies to strengthen urban security, involving both the state and civil society.

What are the root causes of urban insecurity in Bukavu, and what measures can be taken to improve the safety of residents while taking account of local dynamics?

Seventhly, the challenges linked to food, health and wellbeing in Bukavu are also crucial areas of research. The deterioration of food supply chains is threatening people's access to healthy food, particularly for vulnerable groups. Research needs to focus on the causes of food insecurity, high prices for healthy food, lack of nutritional knowledge and inadequate infrastructure. It is important to explore existing governmental and non-governmental interventions and propose solutions to improve access to healthy food and to strengthen health and community support systems.

What are the main obstacles to access to healthy food and quality healthcare in Bukavu, and how can they be overcome to improve the nutrition and wellbeing of the local population?

Eighthly, political interference is a key factor in the malfunctioning of urban systems in Bukavu. Research needs to examine how politicians extract political dividends from these systems and how they exploit problems of access to water, waste management and sanitation for electoral gain. It is crucial to analyse the mechanisms by which politicians influence these systems and to identify ways of reducing this interference, in order to improve local governance.

How can urban systems be freed from political interference to ensure their effectiveness?

Ninthly, the political economy of development in Bukavu is marked by structural and cyclical challenges affecting governance, infrastructure, public services and security. Future research should explore how incomplete decentralisation, dependence on central government, corruption, unplanned urbanisation and demographic pressures are hampering the city's development. It is important to analyse the interactions between these factors and to propose political and economic reforms to overcome these challenges and improve the quality of life for the people of Bukavu.

How do power dynamics and political, ethnic and geographic divides influence economic development and governance in Bukavu?

Tenthly, we have seen that an engaged civil society can act as a real counterweight, holding authorities to account and maximising the possibility of improving the provision of urban services. Their well-coordinated action can bring about beneficial city-wide reforms and force ruling elites to make better decisions for the wellbeing of the population. Nevertheless, civil society organisations are often fragmented around their own immediate interests and are often subservient to political elites who try to co-opt them to meet their political demands. Moreover, the fragmentation of civil society and the inadequacy or even total absence of resources are a real handicap to the effectiveness and sustainability of their actions. Yet the cases of Lucha, Filimbi and other civil society organisations in Goma, Bukavu and Kinshasa show that a strong, diversified civil society with sufficient resources can be a real lever for social change in the country and in cities. Hence the question:

How can civil society be supported so that it can exert full and effective pressure to demand real accountability from Bukavu's urban and provincial authorities?



Finally, research should look at how power is configured in Bukavu and the province of South Kivu. The dynamics of access to power and ethnic, geographic and political divisions play a crucial role in the city's governance and development. It is essential to understand how these divides influence interactions between local and national elites, and how they affect the distribution of resources and the implementation of development policies. Studies of political alliances, conflicts of interest and elite co-optation mechanisms are needed to propose strategies for strengthening local governance and promoting more inclusive and equitable development.

How do political alliances, conflicts of interest and elite co-optation mechanisms impact on local governance and the distribution of resources in Bukavu?

## 7.2. Future actions

To resolve the governance problems identified in the city of Bukavu, it is crucial to develop strategic interventions that tackle the root causes of the current dysfunctions. These interventions must be designed to strengthen local autonomy, improve the transparency and accountability of the authorities, and promote sustainable urban development. There are four main questions to be answered in this respect:

1. How can the implementation of decentralisation in the DRC be improved to strengthen the autonomy of local authorities and optimise the management of urban systems in Bukavu?
2. How do corrupt practices and political interference influence the efficiency of Bukavu's health, transport and waste management systems?
3. What strategies can be put in place to improve access to drinking water, sanitation and public services in Bukavu, given the current constraints?
4. What security mechanisms and urban development projects would improve security in Bukavu, a post-conflict city, taking into account the weapons in circulation, gangs, streetchildren and deteriorated infrastructure?

## 7.3. Four major interventions

1. **Strengthening decentralisation and local autonomy:** It is crucial to put in place a robust framework for functional decentralisation, with regular local elections and clear mechanisms for transferring powers and financial resources to local authorities. To strengthen local governance and reduce Bukavu's dependence on Kinshasa, it is essential to hold regular local elections to allow citizens to choose their representatives and to ensure that these representatives are accountable to the local population, rather than to central government. The implementation of decentralisation must also include clear mechanisms for the transfer of administrative powers and financial resources to local authorities. This includes the provinces retaining 40% of revenues they collect, as stipulated by law, to ensure adequate and stable funding for local initiatives. Once local elections are in place, it is essential to build the capacity of local authorities, so that they can effectively manage their jurisdictions. This can include training in financial management, urban planning and public service delivery. In addition, it is important to create monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure that resources are used transparently and accountably, and that local projects are implemented effectively.

2. **Fighting corruption and improving transparency:** It is important to establish mechanisms to fight corruption, including the creation of independent oversight institutions and the promotion of transparency and accountability in the management of public affairs. Corruption is a major problem affecting governance and development in Bukavu. To combat this scourge, independent institutions must be set up to monitor and investigate corrupt practices. These institutions must have the power to sanction corrupt officials and protect whistleblowers. In addition, it is essential to promote transparency in the management of public resources by publishing regular financial reports and involving civil society in the monitoring of development projects. Initiatives such as the use of information and communication technologies to improve transparency and citizen participation can also play a crucial role. For example, online platforms can be created to enable citizens to report cases of corruption and monitor the progress of public projects. In addition, education and awareness-raising on the negative impacts of corruption can help mobilise the population against this problem.
3. **Improving urban infrastructure and public sanitation and waste management services:** There is a need to develop integrated, sustainable urban infrastructure projects, including improvements to transport, water supply, waste management and sanitation systems, in partnership with international and local organisations. To improve the quality of life in Bukavu, it is crucial to develop sustainable urban infrastructure. This includes rehabilitating and expanding transport networks to facilitate the mobility of people and goods, modernising water supply systems to ensure regular, high-quality access to drinking water and setting up efficient waste management and sanitation systems to improve hygiene and reduce health risks. These infrastructure projects can be carried out in partnership with international and local organisations that have the necessary expertise and resources. It is important to involve local communities in the planning and implementation of these projects to ensure that they meet the real needs of the population. In addition, the use of innovative technologies and sustainable practices can help to maximise the positive impact of these projects on the environment and society. Another crucial aspect is the improvement of healthcare services. Given that 85% of the health sector in Bukavu is controlled by private and religious actors, it is important to regulate this sector to ensure the quality and accessibility of healthcare. This can include setting quality standards, training medical staff and regularly monitoring health facilities. In addition, the (re)development of the city is possible through the construction of access lanes and large rainwater drains. A programme of environmental education and collective hygiene is also important to improve living conditions in the city of Bukavu.
4. **Improving security and protection:** One of the major problems facing cities like Bukavu in post-conflict countries is the lack of security and protection as a result of the availability of weapons and the presence of gangs or streetchildren. The city of Bukavu is plagued by persistent insecurity, often linked to the ineffectiveness of the security measures deployed by the urban authorities and the deterioration of urban infrastructure. It is important for the state to put in place appropriate and effective security mechanisms, in particular by increasing the number of police officers and the number of police stations in the area. Also, lighting and footpath development projects need to be put in place.

The proposed actions aim to address the structural and cyclical problems hampering Bukavu's development. By strengthening decentralisation and local autonomy, fighting

corruption and improving urban infrastructure and public services, Bukavu can overcome the current challenges and move towards sustainable and inclusive urban development. Implementing these interventions requires strong political will, the mobilisation of adequate resources and the active participation of all stakeholders, including local authorities, civil society and international partners. By adopting an integrated and coordinated approach, Bukavu can improve the quality of life of its inhabitants and become a model of urban development in the DRC.

#### 7.4. Conclusion

There are several key areas for future research if we are to explore the issues surrounding urban dynamics in Bukavu. The city faces complex challenges in terms of governance, decentralisation, urbanisation and resource management. It is crucial to study the dynamics of governance and decentralisation and, in particular, how local authorities' dependence on Kinshasa impacts local management. Research should also examine how corruption and political interference influence the efficiency of health, transport and waste management systems. Access to drinking water and the challenges of uncontrolled urbanisation require particular attention, as do the impacts of demographic pressure on the quality of urban life. Finally, studies of political alliances and ethnic and geographic divisions are crucial to understanding the interactions between local and national elites and their influence on governance and the distribution of resources. By addressing these issues, research will be able to propose political and economic reforms to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of Bukavu.

In conclusion, solving the problems of governance in Bukavu requires a holistic approach that integrates decentralisation, the fight against corruption and the improvement of urban infrastructure. These interventions must be supported by a strong political will and the mobilisation of all stakeholders to guarantee sustainable and inclusive development. By tackling the root causes of the current dysfunctions, Bukavu can transform its challenges into opportunities and become an example of successful urban development in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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