

Running For Their Lives
- Repeated Civilian Displacement in Central Katanga, DRC

Medecins Sans Frontieres
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Executive Summary

Over the last twelve months, the violence and displacement in north and central Katanga have escalated, with 92,000 people now known to be displaced. Already impoverished and traumatised, the displaced have been the targets of ongoing, rampant abuse and aggression. They have fled after seeing their houses burnt and losing everything, seeking shelter, food and medical assistance.

Around the shores of Lake Upembe alone, 35,000 people are now seeking refuge, 15,000 of those in the last 3 months alone.. Since mid-November over 17,500 people have arrived in Dubie – almost doubling the town’s population to the point of unsustainability. In the Pweto-Kabalo area, 9,000 people have fled. The displaced either live scattered in the villages or the bush, or in hastily assembled camps.

On-going conflict has caused these people to flee. MSF is concerned about many who may still be trapped in the bush amidst insecurity. For those displaced to which MSF has access, food and medical care are a concern. MSF teams are providing them with medical care, shelter, water and sanitation. We are seeing more and more malnourished children due to the lack of food, particularly in Dubie, and hearing harrowing accounts of violence and multiple displacement. With their homes destroyed and their livelihoods lost, the displaced have little prospect for return. Their situation remains precarious together with the communities who host them.

In Katanga vital emergency assistance to these vulnerable populations has been neglected far too long, yet it is urgently needed to preserve their health and lives.

Medecins Sans Frontieres
In Katanga

MSF has been working in the Katanga province of DRC since 1988, and now works in nine locations throughout the province, including: Dubie, Pweto, Upembe, Mukubu, Kabalo, Nyunzu, Ankoro and Mitwaba. MSF provides healthcare through hospitals, health centres, mobile clinics, vaccination campaigns, nutrition centres, emergency water and sanitation and Non-Food Item distributions.

I. Violence in Katanga: An Introduction

Over the past few years, the people of central Katanga have been forced to flee their homes over and over again; each time losing everything they own to escape violence. Many eventually arrive to impromptu camps or settle in villages where little assistance awaits them; others are feared trapped in the bush. Without help and with little hope to return home, their situation remains unacceptable. Neither the Government nor the international community have shown an adequate commitment to fulfill their responsibilities to protect and assist these civilians in need.

Violence has held sway across much of central Katanga since at least 1998, when many people found themselves trapped along the front-line between the Rwandan-supported RCD-Goma on the one hand, and the Congolese Government army and Mai-Mai militia on the other.

By the early 2000s, as peace agreements were signed, power-sharing arrangements made and official support for the Mai-Mai dwindled, a different form of conflict began to emerge. Having long been the informal suppliers of foodstuffs for both FARDC troops and Mai-Mai militia, civilian populations are increasingly abused, attacked and manipulated. Meanwhile, military operations against insurgent parties are resulting in massive population displacement further increasing vulnerability to disease, malnutrition and mental trauma in areas where adequate emergency relief is almost entirely absent.

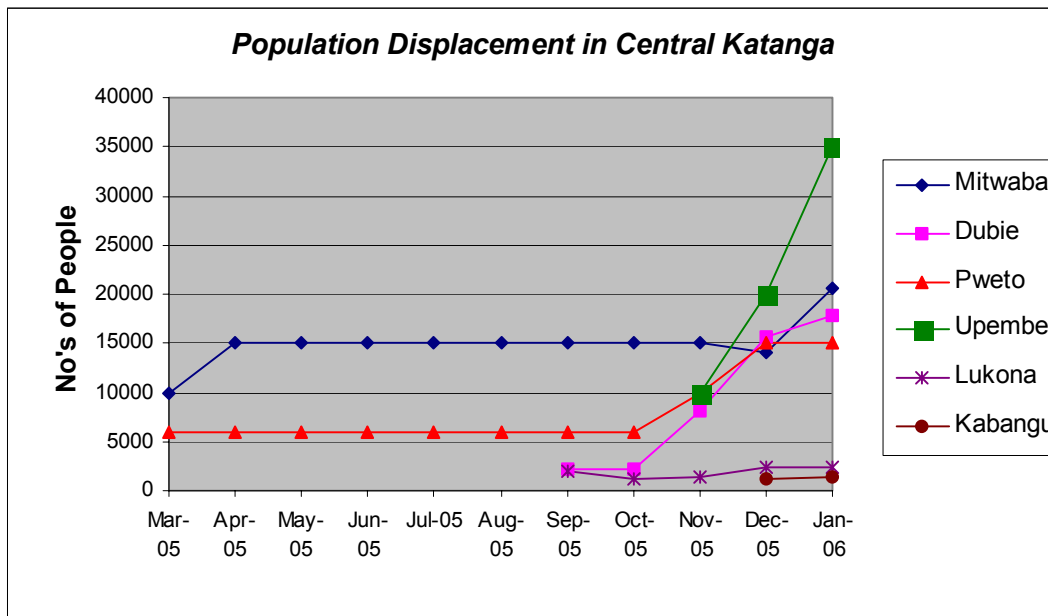
II. Patterns of Violence and Displacement

In the areas where MSF is working we have seen a total of 92,000 displaced who have fled their villages within the past year. They have sought refuge in Mitwaba, Mukubu, Dubie, Upemba, Kabangu, Lukuna, Kabalo and Pweto. In the last two years violence has provoked several waves of displacement in the Mitwaba – Upemba – Manono triangle.

- In early 2004, political divisions among Mai-Mai factions sparked fighting among groups and counter attacks by the FARDC north of Mitwaba causing a major population exodus towards the forest and the south of the territory;
- In March/April 2005, further fighting between Mai-Mai and military along the axes of Konga-Kintya and Dilenge-Mwema, left some 15,000 men, women and children spread across the camps and villages of Mitwaba, Mazombwe, Kasungeshi and Sampwe. In the zone around Kakonona, 6,000 persons also fled fighting;
- In July/August just under 2,000 civilians fled towards Lukona from villages such as Mukunda, Kyabwe, Shamwana, Kamazanga, Kibemba and Kampangwe. Another 2,000 or so arrived in Dubie around the same time from villages including Mutendele, Kishale and Mpaza in particular;
- In mid-November, following intensified military operations, 6,000 persons sought refuge in Dubie while a further 4,000 decamped to Kizabi near Pweto and another 5,000 to Kabalo.

Over December/January, another 10,000 people made their way towards Dubie while the displaced in Mazombwe were forced to flee after an attack by Mai-Mai. Of the 3,000 original inhabitants, only 1,000 appear to have returned. Another 15,000 persons fled to the shores of Lake Upembe adding to an existing 20,000 displaced. And a further 6,500 persons to Sampwe and Mitwaba.

This massive movement of 92,000 persons during a period of just over a year has to be added to pre-existing levels of displacement in these and adjacent zones in central and northern Katanga – much of which remains unknown.



II.1 Repeated Displacement

For most of the people across central and northern Katanga, such upheavals and displacement have been a constant feature of their lives ever since the war started in 1998, and have continued to this day with the conflict between the Mai-Mai and Congolese army.

Thousands of civilians have frequently been obliged to flee to their fields, following waves of abuse and violence. They have lived in their fields away from their villages for anything from a few days to several months –even up to one year – only then managing to return home.

Some had perpetually been going back and forth from their village to their fields and back again – for nights, for weeks or longer. Still others had eventually decamped from their fields to the bush unwilling and/or unable to return to their villages; many had lived a life of continually fleeing from one bush area to another continually in search of safer refuge during one or several months.

‘We were taken hostage by the Mai-Mai...they burned all our houses and we had to go and live on our field...sometimes the FARDC would try to attack and then we had to flee to the bush’.

November 2005, Male, 48 yrs

‘In the bush, we kept on moving. At night, every time we heard the Mai-Mai singing we packed our things and fled’.

June 2005, Female, 34 yrs

II.2 Family Separation

A number of IDPs told MSF of separation from family members en route, although where possible families tried to stay together carrying the ill, the elderly and the handicapped on bicycles.

‘We fled Watumpembe, 40 kms to the north of Mitwaba. We were all dispersed in the bush. My mother took a different direction to the rest of us. I came with my big sister and her husband to Kasungeshi. I don’t know where my mother or my brothers are’.

June 2005, Male, 14 yrs

II.3 Family Loss

Just as worrying are the high levels of mortality reported for the last few years. For the vast majority of the people in central and northern Katanga, only regular access to their fields allowed them to eke out a precarious existence. In the bush, they became dependent on scavenging wild foods and reported high levels of malnutrition and death among young children under five years old. This is borne out by the low numbers of under-fives in the camps of Dubie, once families had sought protection in Government-held zones.

‘Five children died. Two died around two years ago when we had to flee for the first time. They died in the bush because there wasn’t enough food. The three others died in 2004, during the rainy season – in the same circumstances’.

December 2005, Female, 40 yrs

‘In the bush we suffered a lot, sometimes we had only 1 meal per week...sometimes I had to walk for 30 km or more before finding some flour’.

Male, 7 Children; 1 Died in the Bush

III. The Search for Safe Refuge and the Lack of Attention to IDPs in Need

Today there are several sites in and around Mitwaba, including 3 camps; there are 3 camps around Dubie, and scattered displaced families around Pweto, Kabalo and Upembe Park. Supposedly safe and secure, the camps and their surroundings lack assistance and security.

Despite efforts by MSF and the host communities, the camps that exist are over-crowded, with few facilities, limited shelter and poor hygiene conditions. Around Upembe Park, thousands of people live in mosquito-infested swamps or on small floating islands on the lake itself. MSF is currently providing emergency medical care, shelter, non-food items and water/sanitation facilities across the displaced of Mitwaba, Dubie, Kabalo and Pweto; however, the effective presence of other national and international actors is thin despite the ever-increasing need.

There are large medical needs ranging from malaria through respiratory infections to diarrhea – all of which are common and treatable problems and exacerbated by pre-existing vulnerability, over-crowding and unhygienic conditions. Food remains a major challenge, with malnutrition – also preventable – rising. And the threat of violence and the reality of theft persist. The host communities have also been significantly affected.

III.1 Pressure on Host Communities

The displaced have found refuge in areas ill-equipped to receive them with little prepared for their arrival. Having arrived with nothing, they have largely been dependent upon the goodwill of host communities – for food, clothes, shoes, shelter... Yet as much as they try local populations lack the capacity to help, affected in their turn by the insecurity around them, poor infrastructure and limited resources.

III.2 Food Insecurity and Food Distributions

In Mitwaba, the last distribution of food rations from the World Food Programme (WFP), took place in August, with the displaced receiving three months worth of food each. Since then, they have not received anything – and due to current military operations, have limited access to fields for cultivation.

Over the last 12 months in Mitwaba, the displaced have accounted for 50% of the 1,026 patients treated for malnutrition by MSF, among them a number of breast-feeding mothers. With the remaining 50% being made up of the host community, the situation can only be described as precarious. Moreover, since mid-November, local communities in Mitwaba have reported the military imposing taxes on their food and taking crops from them so as to meet their own needs.

In Dubie and Pweto, local communities have allowed the displaced to take manioc from their fields and/or to plant small areas of their land in return for cash that they can use to buy food such capacity is becoming increasingly scarce.

In Dubie in particular, with the influx of more than 17,500 displaced persons at the time of writing, further land to cultivate is in short supply and food prices have rocketed. Items such as potato, onion and lettuce can no longer be found on the market, while others such as bean and tomato are rare. The price of manioc, the staple food, has doubled; the price of meat has tripled.¹

While food distributions have now arrived in Pweto, in Dubie they have been erratic. A local NGO began these in August / September when the displaced population only numbered a few thousand, but subsequently withdrew. Since then, WFP has committed to one month's food ration by re-allocating food from Mitwaba to Dubie, but distributions have been marred by logistical problems, bad planning and under-estimation of the problem and the resources needed. No food distributions have taken place around Lake Upemba. It takes at least two days to make the trip from Lubumbashi to Dubie or to Malemba Nkulu. Today thousands of displaced survive on only one meal a day, insufficient in either quantity or quality.

The numbers of children under five years old in MSF Therapeutic Feeding Centres have been swollen by the newly arriving displaced – with numbers from the host populations significant too. In Mukubu, MSF has admitted between 15-20 severely malnourished children each week for the last six months. On the road near Pweto, of the 21 serious cases transferred to the hospital, 14 were displaced children. In Dubie, of the 56 admissions to the TFC in December, 28 children were diagnosed as having kwashiorkor – an acute lack of protein from foods such as eggs, beans, meat, and fish. Most of them are displaced.

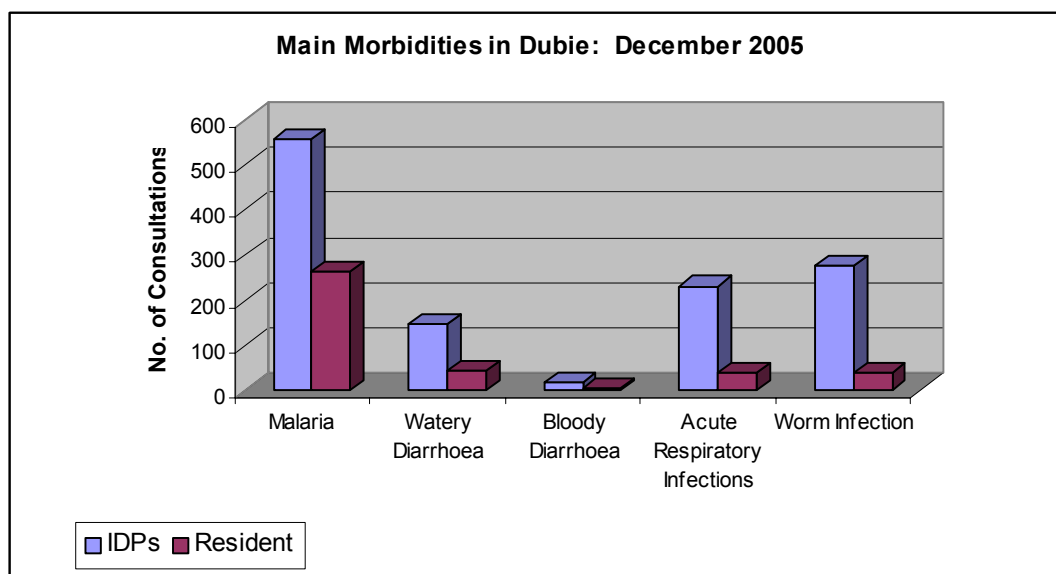
¹ While in September, the price of 5 manioc roots was 50 Congolese Francs (CF); today only 3 roots can be bought for the same price. One tomato now costs 50 CF, compared to 25 CF in September.

III.3 Public Health and Medical Needs

On top of Dubie town's normal caseload, MSF is now seeing an additional 70 displaced persons per day. Many of the displaced are coming to MSF seeking healthcare for fevers and chesty coughs, suffering from malaria, worm infections, acute respiratory infections and diarrhea. These pathologies are all linked to poor living conditions. Having survived with few or no clothes, blankets or shelter in the fields and in the bush, living in unsanitary conditions with little nutritious food, they are even more vulnerable now in the camps.

Although MSF (with some support from UNICEF) has been distributing blankets, soap, plastic sheeting, cooking sets and jerry cans, and plans to distribute mosquito nets, it is far from enough. Shelter materials and cooking sets for instance, have been distributed to over 17,000 persons across Kabalo and Dubie, but even more is still required. At present in Dubie, the displaced receive between 5-15 litres per person per day.² Around Park Upemba, a measles vaccination campaign is being conducted for 8,000 children, but even more displaced have sought refuge in the surrounding forests and remain inaccessible to our teams. In Pweto, only those along the main road can be reached.

The IDPs remain in temporary shelters, protected by a few blankets and threadbare clothes. The current rains are exacerbating the situation. The graph below is indicative of the health situation in Dubie, a town where residents are now outnumbered by the displaced by 5:9.



Moreover, not being built or equipped to cope with the sudden influx, Dubie's Referral Health Centre is experiencing severe over-crowding. In areas such as Kizabi near Pweto, after the health centre was looted and destroyed, MSF has been obliged to run a regular mobile clinic. A similar situation exists around Mitwaba and Mazombwe after health posts there were burnt to the ground.

² Five litres of water per person per day is the absolute minimum which can be sustained for 1-2 days during an emergency situation. Otherwise the minimum objective is the provision of 20 litres of water per person per day.

In addition, December is the beginning of the cholera season, with MSF already treating cholera in Moba, Kabalo, Ankoru, Kinkondja, north of Lake Upemba and around Malemba Nkulu. In Kikondja health zone alone, MSF treated 770 new cholera cases since the 6th January. There have been 34 deaths. In Kabalo, 190 cases were reported between 15 November and 12 January. MSF is racing to construct latrines and ensure safe water supplies to avoid further outbreaks amidst already weakened populations.

It can be imagined that further displacement due to conflict or an unprepared return to home villages would only further exacerbate their dire situation. Concerns of forced returns by either party to the conflict are increasing.

III.4 Diversion of Assistance and Violence

Already dealing with health problems, the IDPs are also having to struggle with the fear of theft and violence. A number of IDPs in both Pweto, Dubie and Mitwaba, as well in the Kabalo area, regularly report that the military loot their cooking pots, blankets and any other possessions they might own.

‘The military harass people at night. They come to inspect our homes, make the children leave and then help themselves...when there are distributions, I’m frightened: there are always military who come to take what we’ve been given’.

December 2005, Female, 40 yrs, Displaced

Diversion of food by the military is also regularly mentioned in Mitwaba and has been seen in the past in Dubie.

In Mitwaba in the past, both residents and displaced, men and women also complained of sexual violence and torture. In many cases, the perpetrators went unpunished.

‘In April, when I was coming to the health centre with my sisters, I met an armed military man. He got hold of me and forced me into the bush. He raped me... The man was called up by his commander, but he was only scolded...and ... freed’.

Female, 17 yrs, Displaced

‘My husband, my children and I fled...in March...Our eldest son was arrested by the military. He was freed a few days later but other family members died in prison...My husband was also arrested. He was accused of being an informer for the Mai-Mai. He left prison covered with wounds. Because of the torture, he has difficulty walking now’.

June 2005, Female, 38 yrs, Displaced

More recently, in mid-December alone, seven women and one girl of 14 years were treated by MSF following rape by military. Due to taboo and stigmatisation, sexual violence may well be under-reported.

Attacks by militias have not only occurred in Mazombwe and Kizabi but more recently in Kibondo and Kyubo, further adding to the insecurity felt by the displaced. This general insecurity restricts access by MSF to the displaced as well as the provision of assistance. As a preventive measure, near Park Upembe, MSF has suspended Non-Food-Item distributions as

these appeared to increase the likelihood of attacks. In the last several weeks, roads have also been cut-off due to military operations or attacks by militias. In January, a private truck, often used by MSF was attacked and looted while returning from Mitwaba. Truck drivers are now refusing to travel to Mitwaba.

IV. Still Trapped in the Bush?

While access by MSF to areas of military operation has been refused on the grounds of security, we have no idea how many people have been willing to take the risk of travelling to those zones controlled by the Government. Threatened and attacked by the Mai-Mai, they also fear arrest and violence by the military – particularly if they do not have an electoral registration card. Many may remain trapped in the bush still subject to violence and abuse.

‘We were told that...there would be repercussions. They [the Mai-Mai] encircled us to prevent us from fleeing’.

July 2005, Female, 31 yrs

‘Recently, we heard it was possible to go to the Government area and although we were afraid because we don’t have an election card, we tried...When we were still in the bush we met FARDC military. They yelled at us that we were Mai-Mai. I put my hands up, but my wife, who was really scared, tried to flee. They shot at her. The bullet went into her leg. We were together with our children, who were also scared, and they fled’.

December 2005, Male

IV.1 Destruction and Destitution

Many people told MSF of how they were consistently extorted, robbed and looted wherever they were: the village, the field or the bush: each time they managed to re-establish their livelihoods, they were forced to start again from zero.

As recently as last year, whenever one group withdrew from confrontation between Mai-Mai and military, the other group would loot and pillage the belongings of any departed families – taking everything from food to door posts and stripping them bare of the very basics.

Apart from these confrontations, voluntary and involuntary ‘contributions’ towards the up-keep of the Mai-Mai also increasingly spiraled to the point where visiting Mai-Mai (whether to the village, the field or the bush), simply took whatever they saw and wanted, whether pigs and poultry, cooking pots or sleeping mats.

Those who were relatively well-off might be further subject to arson, with any remaining merchandise of traders or belongings of village chiefs being subsequently set alight.

‘The Mai-Mai took everything each time they arrived: everything they saw. If you had soap, clean clothes, shoes – they took it all’.

Female, 32 yrs

In April 2004, the local people around and to the north of Mitwaba were forbidden by both the Mai-Mai and the military from freely circulating and moving from an area controlled by one party to that controlled by another, each group fearing infiltration. Restrictions on movements

were similarly imposed on civilians in and around Dubie with merchants complaining of harassment and arrest. Lack of trade meant lack of access to food and other essential items.

‘In March I went to sell peanuts in the military controlled-zone when they arrested me for 2 days. They thought I was a spy. When I was free to return, I was then arrested by the Mai-Mai’.

Male, 40 yrs

Increasingly, the displaced tell us, the Mai-Mai resorted to burning whole villages, whether following combat with the military or not. For many, this was often a decisive trigger to population flight – leaving most people with few belongings with which they could return to their homes.

‘We were back in the fields for the second time when we saw smoke coming from the village. My husband went to see. The Mai-Mai had burned the house – but the kitchen was still standing. All the houses had been burned and looted so we left. We weren’t able to take anything: cooking pots, mattresses or clothes’.

May 2005, Female, 39 yrs

IV.2 Violence and Intimidation

The displaced reported widespread psychological threat and physical violence whether in the villages, the fields or the bush. Recruitment into the ranks of the Mai-Mai became involuntary. Families that refused, ran the risk of beatings or death – so sons, husbands and uncles went instead to save the family ‘honour’ – and their own lives.

‘There are both young and old among the Mai-Mai [Bubangos], but particularly the young. They kidnap the young and force them to enter into their group. If they refuse, they die’.

Male, 46 yrs

Some of the displaced have also mentioned both Mai-Mai and military raping villagers in the fields and the bush. Forced marriages were systematically reported in the zone around Dubie where a token amount, either in-cash or in-kind, had been paid for the bride.

‘My daughter went with the Mai-Mai. She was sixteen years old when one of them saw her and asked to marry her. What could we say? If we refused, we would die. She went for the family honour. Her dowry was a bead, but you can’t do anything with a bead’.

Female, 36 yrs

The displaced commonly mentioned other forms of violence affecting men, women and children. If the performance of a new recruit was bad for example, then often the Mai-Mai would avenge themselves by killing a family or other village member – burning them alive.

‘I’d gone out to plant peanut. The Bubangos [Mai-Mai] had arrived in my village during the night. There were 24 of them, most of them about 18 years old – a few of 15 years old. They had... guns and ...traditional weapons (bows, arrows, knives). They began to beat me. They tied

me up saying: ‘you’re a friend of the FARDC’. They cut off my ears with a knife and attached them to their gun. They had already killed two men’.

December 2005, Male, 52 yrs

Just the very presence of the Mai-Mai was enough to create dread and terror every time they arrived. Whatever may have happened in the Mai-Mai controlled zones, there is a real sense of fear among the IDPs.

‘There were lots of them each time. They came with fetishes around their necks – male genitals and human hands – wearing bracelets and with faces painted red. They sowed panic wherever they went: people could do nothing’.

Male, 37 yrs

V. Conclusions

Gross neglect of the plight and suffering of the civilian populations of central Katanga by both international and national actors compounds the abuse and violence they have suffered, and the disease and vulnerability they experience.

Two recent studies by the IRC and MSF underscore the high levels of mortality throughout DRC, levels that remain above the emergency threshold of 2/10,000 persons / day largely due to preventable diseases – with children under five being particularly affected.³

Due to on-going insecurity and the lack of attention to immediate needs by Government and non-Government actors alike, the situation in central Katanga is of particular concern. Widespread and continued insecurity as well as violence directed at civilians continue to spark displacement throughout the region. All armed actors must respect the civilian population and ensure humanitarian access to the population where possible.

The health and nutritional situation of the displaced and the communities who host them, remains precarious. Some actors are already talking about sending people home but returning weak and vulnerable communities to their home villages will not reverse their needs – because nothing has been left of their homes and insecurity remains.

Food is a major challenge, but more assistance is needed for clothes, blankets, shelter, mosquito nets, water and sanitation. Logistical constraints and planning for tomorrow must not become excuses for inactivity today. The absence of all other humanitarian actors in Katanga is incomprehensible in light of the glaring needs right now.

³ MSF; 2005; Access to Health Care, Mortality and Violence in DRC and IRC & Burnet Institute; 2005; Mortality in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Results from a Nationwide Survey: April – July 2004.

APPENDIX B
MAP OF KATANGA

