

Cross border dynamics: Burundi-DRC (updated August 2019)

This brief summarises key considerations concerning cross-border dynamics between Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in the context of the outbreak of Ebola in North Kivu and Ituri provinces. It is the third in a series of four briefs focusing on the at risk border areas between DRC and the four high priority neighbouring countries (Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan).¹ As of July 2019, there have been no cases of Ebola imported from the DRC into Burundi, although cross-border movement has been identified as a significant risk to transmission. This brief provides details about cross-border relations, the political and economic dynamics likely to influence them, and specific areas and actors most at risk.

The brief is based on a rapid review of existing published and grey literature, previous ethnographic research in Burundi and informal discussions with in-country colleagues. The brief was developed by Jean-Benoît Falisse (University of Edinburgh), with support from Ingrid Gercama, Nadia Butler, Theresa Jones and Juliet Bedford (Anthrologica) and Oto-Asael Magerano, Louis Rivière, Shaka and Hugues Nkengurutse. Prior finalisation, it was reviewed by expert advisors from the University of Antwerp, University of Cambridge, Université Catholique de Louvain, University of Edinburgh, University of Gent, Université du Lac Tanganyika, Northwestern University, Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, and the UNICEF Country Office in Burundi. The brief is the responsibility of the Social Science in Humanitarian Action Platform (SSHAP).

Key considerations and recommendations

- **Politicisation:** The ruling party, *Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie – Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (the National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy, CNDD-FDD), is present at all levels of public (and often private) life. The surveillance apparatus extends from the national to the local level. Ebola preparedness and response actors must pay particular attention to the perceived and/or real politicisation of public health interventions and how they intersect with communal and political tensions and patronage networks.
- **Political crisis with Rwanda and international aid actors:** The 2015 political crisis and its aftermath led to severe tensions between Burundi and Rwanda, countries in the global north, and NGOs. Many organisations ceased operations or diminished their presence in the country. Donors that could be key in supporting a response to Ebola, such as the European Union, have, to some degree, stopped funding the government (in part due to human rights issues) and this has increased pressure on the Ministry of Health due to the substantial reduction in operating budget.
- **Porous border:** Burundi shares a 236 kilometre (147 mile) border with the DRC (South Kivu Province). The border remains highly porous and is important for the trafficking of minerals, arms, drugs and smuggled goods (including truckloads of fuel, beer, fabric, second-hand clothes, cattle, and other imported items). Key actors who operate at the border (both formally and informally) include the police, army, *Imbonerakure* (the youth wing of the CNDD-FDD), traders, local cattle herders and fishermen. All these groups should be sensitised and actively engaged as part of Ebola preparedness and response activities.
- **Tensions and armed groups:** The Rusizi plain, the only terrestrial border between DRC and Burundi, has seen important inter- and intra-communal clashes on the DRC side of the border. Multiple armed groups of various sizes and kinds operate from there, including Burundian rebels who make occasional incursions into Burundi. The Burundian army and the *Imbonerakure* ('those who see far' in Kirundi, the national language) also make less frequent incursions into the DRC.
- **Informal cross-border life:** Life in the borderland, which extends to Bujumbura (Burundi's economic capital) and Uvira (the second largest city in South Kivu), includes small-scale trade in food and clothes (mostly by Congolese women) and larger-scale trade in beer and sugar. Familial ties straddle border communities, students travel across the border in both directions, and social activities such as cross-border football games are common. Most people usually cross the border legally, although abuses at border posts involving people from vulnerable groups have been reported in the past. Access to cross-border services is often channelled through brokers (*commissionnaires*). They are a specific group who should be identified and sensitised as part of Ebola preparedness activities. In all cross-border activities, it is important to ensure that everyone, including women and youth, are treated respectfully. Kirundi is the main language across Burundi (spoken by 98% of the population) and should be used in communication activities and materials for Ebola preparedness. At the border, Congolese who do not speak Kirundi may use Swahili.
- **Cross-border healthcare:** There is perception on the DRC side of the border that Burundi has better quality health services, and it is not uncommon to see Congolese patients crossing the border for treatment. The movement of patients with malaria may be particularly problematic for cross-border monitoring so testing and surveillance to distinguish between malaria and Ebola symptoms must be carefully implemented. Community Health Workers (*abaremeshakiyago*) remain good entry points to engage the population and along with the *Association des Tradipraticiens du Burundi* (Associations of Traditional Healers, ATRADIBU) have already been engaged and sensitised to refer patients if they present with signs and symptoms of Ebola. Such engagement needs to be continued and CHWs and *tradipraticiens* (traditional practitioners) supported to make referrals.
- **Cross-border churches:** Faith plays a central and critical role in social life across Burundi and religious leaders are an obvious channel of communication that have already served as an important way to directly and effectively relay Ebola-related information. *Banyamulenge* (Pentecostal and Evangelical) churches are present across the border, and peripatetic evangelists and 'prophets' attract large audiences. The followers of Zebiya, a Christian sect, used to span the border but currently appear to be mainly based in Burundi. They may constitute a group difficult to engage because of certain firmly held beliefs (such as sickness is God's will) and it has a history of clashes with authorities of both sides of the border.
- **Engaging fisherfolk:** A focus on preparedness activities at the terrestrial border is well-placed, but key exchanges also take place on Lake Tanganyika. Fisherfolk follow fish populations across DRC and Burundi territorial waters, and some vessels may fly two

flags depending on the country and nationality they assume. Burundian fishing communities have already been engaged as part of Ebola preparedness activities through the *Fédération des Pêcheurs et des Fournisseurs du Poisson au Burundi* (Federation of Fishermen and Fish Providers in Burundi, FPFPPB) and its local committees (FPFPPB claims to have 15,113 members and trained leaders). Fisherfolk should be further engaged in preparedness activities, and sensitisation about Ebola cascaded through FPFPPB.

- **Refugees and returnees:** As of May 2019, there were close to 347,100 Burundian refugees in the African Great Lakes Region, of which over 45,000 were in DRC.² There were also over 78,000 Congolese refugees in Burundi.³ The movement of refugees is often quite fluid as they 'informally' visit their country of origin, and are visited by friends and relatives who have remained at home. To date, the voluntary repatriation of Burundian refugees has been relatively limited, but pressure from the Burundian, Tanzanian, Ugandan, and Congolese authorities may generate mass movements back to Burundi or to alternative asylum country such as Rwanda or Uganda.
- **Limited freedom of information:** Freedom of the press is limited in Burundi. Many independent media outlets have been shut down since the 2015 failed coup, and *Reporters Sans Frontières* (Reporters without Borders) has highlighted systematic human rights abuses against journalists. The remaining radio and television stations are seen to be the voice of the ruling party. Engaging with social media (WhatsApp, Twitter), new micro-blogging platforms (e.g. *Yaga Burundi*), and media located abroad may help reach the more urban and affluent population, but these communication channels will not reach the broader population and those based in rural areas.
- **Perceptions of Ebola:** Little is known about how Ebola is perceived in Burundi. Although there have been a number of preliminary studies, focused social science research with different stakeholder groups would provide important contextual data to help shape preparedness and response activities.

Socio-economic and political context

- **Political and economic crisis:** Burundi is one of the world's poorest countries, ranked 185/189 in the 2018 Human Development Index (HDI), below neighbouring DRC.⁴ The 2015 political crisis in which President Nkurunziza's (ultimately successful) bid for a third term in office was faced with insurrection, continues to dominate the political and economic landscape. A recent International Crisis Group (ICG) report noted that "*For the vast majority of the population, both in Bujumbura and elsewhere in the country, daily life is a permanent struggle to get by*".⁵ Many people opposed to the regime fled the country, whilst those who stayed were either killed, imprisoned, or 'choose' to remain silent. The 2018 Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) noted that "*Mistrust is most pronounced along political lines, between individuals loyal to the CNDD-FDD (the ruling party) and the rest of the population, but also between different parties of the opposition. A very realistic fear persists that the ruling party and its youth wing have infiltrated and therefore control all levels of society*".⁶ The mediation of the Burundian crisis by the African Union and the East African Community has been largely ineffective to date. In 2018, Transparency International gave Burundi its worst ever score on its corruption index whilst, in an earlier report, International Crisis Group highlighted the limitation in social service delivery due to corruption.^{7,8} Both reports were dismissed by the government.⁹ Burundi maintains good relations with Tanzania and DRC, but leaders in Burundi and Rwanda have traded threats for the last two years, and trade between the two countries has been dramatically curtailed. Burundi accused Rwanda of hosting, arming, and training Burundian rebels, whilst Rwanda accused Burundi (and DRC) of doing the same with Rwandan rebels (*interahamwe*).¹⁰ Recent reports suggest that Burundi and Rwanda are, in effect, fighting a proxy war in the DRC via the different armed groups that they support.¹¹ Political tensions between Burundi and its main donors are also evident including with Belgium, the former colonial power in Burundi, Germany (the colonial ruler prior to Belgium), France, the European Union and the United States. All have issued and renewed international sanctions against a number of key figures of the regime and severely cut or withdrawn their development aid. The fact that major international donors have suspended direct financial support to the Burundian government has resulted in a liquidity crisis and since 2015, Burundi has experienced a recession (its GDP growth rose in 2017, but still remained below its population growth). The very limited resources that have flowed into the country over the last few years may explain the multiple new formal and informal 'taxes' and fees that have been imposed recently. It has been reported that inter-ministry rivalry over donor funding has magnified. This may impact the distribution of resources for Ebola preparedness and response activities. It is important that response partners take these factors into consideration, understand the background context and decision making (e.g., who has the authority to influence and make decisions) in relation to the functioning of the Ebola Taskforce and the operationalisation of interventions in priority districts.
- **Administrative and party structure:** The country is organised into 18 provinces, each subdivided into between three and 11 communes. The provinces of Cibitoke, Bubanza, and Bujumbura are directly adjacent to DRC, while the provinces of Rumonge and Makamba and the Municipality of Bujumbura face DRC across Lake Tanganyika. At the local level, the communes are divided into zones and *collines* (hills), and further into *sous-collines*, or *quartiers* in towns. The *collines* directly elect their leaders, and *chefs de collines* (leaders of the hills) wield important local political force. They generally command respect and authority, and convene community meetings in which messages are shared with the population. Most public officials, from provincial governors down to communes administrators and the *chefs de colline*, belong to the ruling party or a closely allied party.¹² The *Imbonerakure*, who have been accused of engaging in a wide range of human rights abuses, are instrumental in suppressing dissent and their presence is, as OCHR notes, "*Felt in all aspects of daily life*".^{13,14} They are often armed and sometimes work with the police.¹⁵ A series of recent measures have reinforced state surveillance and security measures. Since 2016, for example, the Ministry of the Interior and local administrative authorities have demanded that every household records the names of visitors staying in their household in a registry (*cahier de ménage*).¹⁶ This measure appears to be mostly implemented in Bujumbura. The population is also subjected to a wide range of financial mandatory and semi-mandatory contributions to party and state institutions (e.g., for the upcoming elections).
- **Human rights:** Burundi withdrew from the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2018 and international human rights organisations continue to denounce gross violations by the regime.^{17,18} On 5 March 2019, faced with three UN Security Council resolutions condemning its domestic situation and renewed accusations of human rights abuses and having already shut down local human rights NGOs (e.g. Ligue Iteka, APRODH, ACAT), the government of Burundi closed the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).¹⁹ Recent government legislation has required international NGOs to disclose the ethnicity of their staff

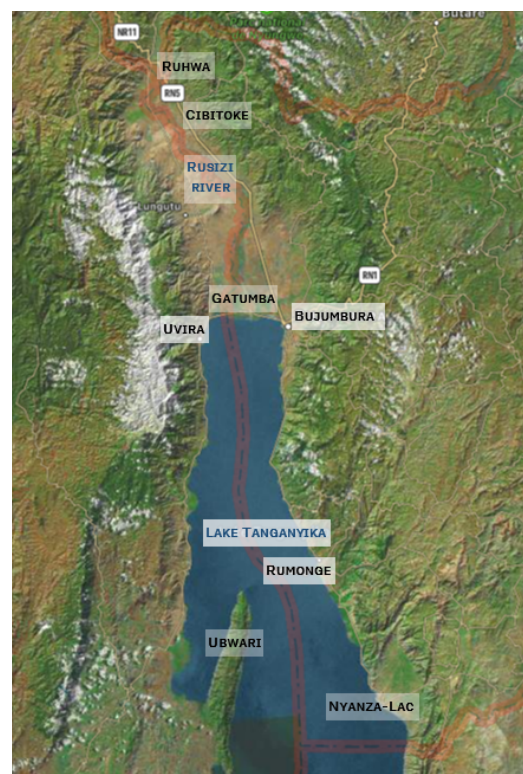
members and provide the government with oversight of their finances and bank accounts. A number of NGOs (such as Handicap International) refused to comply, did not have their NGO status renewed by the government and left the country.²⁰

- **Freedom of press and information:** Most of Burundi's independent media was decimated during the 2015 coup attempt or closed down shortly afterwards, and a number of foreign media outlets such as Voice of America and the BBC were temporarily or permanently banned in the country.²¹ *Reporters Sans Frontières* classifies the country as having "no media freedom".²² In towns and in Bujumbura, independent information (and mis- and dis-information) circulates via social media, particular on Twitter and WhatsApp.²³ Yet, the penetration of the internet (and, therefore, social media) remains limited. At the end of 2017, internet coverage was estimated to be 5.5%, very far from 52.1% penetration rate of neighbouring Rwanda.²⁴ The state media, *Radio Télévision Nationale du Burundi* (National Television and Radio of Burundi, RTNB) and private radio stations (mainly pro-regime or music/religion/sports-focused) remain the dominant media in rural areas.²⁵ Ebola preparedness activities must to continue engage with state media and the remaining independent media such as *Isanganiro* radio and *Iwacu* newspaper, but also with social media and new initiatives, such as the micro-blogging platforms *Yaga Burundi*, developed by young people to discuss societal issues whilst managing to avoid political subjects.²⁶
- **The 2020 elections:** Both national and local elections are scheduled for 2020. The 2018 referendum validated an amendment to the constitution that allowed President Pierre Nkurunziza, Burundi's head of state since 2005, to run again and to remain in power, at least theoretically, until 2034. Exactly when the elections will be held, and who will participate in them, remains unclear but tensions between the ruling party and the opposition *Amizero y'Abarundi coalition* (Hope for the Burundians coalition, CNL) are already high. 2020 could see an escalation of tensions and there is potential for the elections to further complicate (or disrupt) Ebola prevention activities should they continue. The current pre-election environment magnifies existing suspicions, thus Ebola awareness raising activities (door-to-door and crowd gatherings) require the presence of government officials. The risk that Ebola becomes highly politicised is great (e.g. for Ebola to be associated with or appropriated by specific groups, and the potential for it to interfere with elections, as in the December 2018 elections in DRC).

Border crossings, trade and armed groups

- **Border areas:** Burundi shares a 236km (147 mile) border with the DRC (see Map 1).²⁷ It encompasses several natural obstacles, including the Rusizi River which, further to the north, marks the boundary between DRC and Rwanda, and separates Burundi and DRC for 40km until reaching the settlement of Gasho. The river is only 40m wide at its narrowest point, but is fast flowing with strong currents. There the river enters Burundian territory before flowing into Lake Tanganyika 10km later. The beaches before the border town of Gatumba remain a relatively popular weekend excursion for the wealthier inhabitants of Bujumbura. South of Gatumba, Lake Tanganyika separates Burundi and DRC. Most of the Rusizi plain is located on the Congolese side of the river, with steep hills rising above the plain about 12km away from the river. The narrower part of the plain is located on the Burundian side of the river, home to the Rukoko Forest national park (59 km²) just north of Gatumba, and Cibitoke town further north. Bujumbura, Burundi's economic capital city is located 15 km from the national border and 26 km (20 km across the Lake) from Uvira, the second largest city of South Kivu.

- **Rusizi crossing points:** The main crossing point between Burundi and DRC is the Gatumba-Kavimvira border post, on the road connecting Bujumbura and Uvira (RN4 in Burundi). The road between the border and Bujumbura was upgraded in 2017 and a new bridge opened in 2018.²⁸ Gatumba attracts almost double the amount of traffic compared to all the other entry points combined, and an estimated 60% of all traffic from DRC to Burundi.²⁹ 'Less formal' control also takes place in eight other land-based entry points across the provinces of Bujumbura rural, Bubanza, and Cibitoke. The second most important crossing point between the two countries is via the Burundi-Rwanda one-stop-border post of Ruhwa. This is only 1km from the tri-border point with DRC, Rwanda and Burundi, and 80km from Bujumbura on the RN5. This road was upgraded in 2012-2013, leading to the development of new services for travellers (such as forex in Gasenyi). From the Rwandan border, the journey to Bukavu is only one hour by car. By comparison, the journey through the escarpments between Kamaniola, the northern Congolese town on the Rusizi plain, and Bukavu regularly takes over three hours on a poorly maintained and dangerous road. Insecurity in the Rusizi plain (see below) used to lead most travellers from Burundi, and many from Uvira, to pass through both Burundian and Rwandan border crossings to reach Bukavu, although this situation may be changing due to renewed tensions between Rwanda and Burundi. However, this is the route taken by the four main mini-bus companies (*La Colombe*, *Okapi-EI Shadai*, *Ngomo* and *Mapasa*) that connect Uvira/Bujumbura and Bukavu daily, with services operating between 6 am and 4 pm. For Burundian and Congolese nationals, the only necessary documentation to cross the border is an official *laissez-passer* or passport, or most commonly a *laissez-passer* issued by the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Region, known locally as the CEPGL (*Communauté Economique des Pays des Grands Lacs*, Economic Community of the countries of the Great Lakes). Cost remains a barrier to acquiring these documents (a passport costs the same as a teacher's monthly salary) and passing through informal crossing points remains common practice (see below).³⁰ Residents of the *communes* located on the border can cross with only their national identity card for a maximum of 15 days (having received a *jeton*, or token, at the border post).



Map 1 - The DRC-Burundi border (Google Earth)

- **Informal Rusizi crossing points:** In December 2015, a report by Action on Armed Violence assessed 60 unofficial crossing points on the DRC side of the border, and 38 on the Burundian side, most on the Rusizi (rather than Lake Tanganyika).³¹ The actual number of informal crossing points is likely far higher. Crossing the Rusizi remains perilous, and people have been reported to die attempting to cross the river.³² The local community and smugglers regularly swim across the river, however, using an

inexpensive inflated jerry can (a *bidon*) as a flotation aid. Sometimes small improvised barges and wooden boats are used. Informal crossing is not always related to smuggling (see below), but sometimes a result of official crossing points been located far away.³³

- **Tanganyika crossing points:** Lake Tanganyika has an average width of 50km, but this distance narrows to approximately 20km around the peninsula of Ubwari, almost opposite the Burundian town of Rumonge. Transport on the lake is challenging. A recent World Bank report highlighted that there are “no up-to-date navigational charts, no functioning aids to navigation, or landing lights, no search and rescue services, limited information on current and forecast weather conditions, and no modern, efficient vessels”.³⁴ The two official entry ports in Burundi are Bujumbura and Rumonge (just a handling beach but with a sealed-off enclosed customs reception area). Both are used mostly for freight and Rumonge is also used for fishing. There are no formal ferry companies, but cargo boats carry passengers and wooden motorboats carrying up to 45 people provide daily crossings to Burundi. The main port in the DRC (facing Burundi across the Lake) is Kalundu, located 4.5km south of Uvira and almost opposite Bujumbura. It has a proper quay, 156 meters long. On the DRC side of the Lake, the next port with similar infrastructure is in Kalemie, almost 300km to the south. The motor vessel (MV) Liemba is the main and only sizeable ferry boat on the north side of the Lake. It normally operates between Tanzania and Zambia but in 2015 was also used by UNHCR to evacuate Burundian refugees to Tanzania.³⁵
- **Informal Tanganyika crossing points:** All fishing villages on the lake constitute potential entry points and people without travel authorisations cross the lake from Burundi (the largest fishing villages include Nyanza-Lac and Kabonga) to villages such as Dine, Mizimu, and Mukindu on the peninsula of Ubwari. Navigation depends primarily on local knowledge and tends to be restricted to daylight, although fisherfolk go out every night (weather permitting) and sometimes decide to dock on the opposite shore (e.g. if the wind is too strong). There is no effective lake-to-shore communication system and, as the World Bank noted in their 2019 report, no “general weather synopsis, storm or other navigational warnings [are] given to ships departing from any of the lake ports”.³⁶
- **Official cross-border trade:** There are strong commercial ties between Burundi and DRC. In the borderlands, which include Bujumbura and Uvira, Burundians typically cross the Gatumba border to buy potatoes, maize, taro, and fabrics. Petty Congolese traders, mainly women, cross the border to sell colourful Congolese fabric (*pagne*), as well as second hand shoes and clothes in the main markets of Bujumbura.³⁷ The foremost large and private market is Bujumbura City Market, better known as ‘*chez Siyon*’, but there are also significant markets in Kamenge and Buyenzi in the Northern suburbs of Bujumbura (two crowded neighbourhoods that attract a large number of travellers from the DRC and should be a focus of Ebola prevention efforts) as well as Buganda market in Cibitoke. Congolese traders come to Burundi to buy fruits and vegetables. Other popular goods exchanged across the border include beer, particularly Primus and Amstel from the Heineken-run brewery in Brarudi (traded semi-formally at Vugizo and other smaller crossings along the plain), bottled mineral water, sugar, and goats. These goods tend to be bought in larger quantities by wholesalers and are destined for Uvira and Bukavu markets. At border points, brokers who have a personal relationship with border officials often act as transport agents for smaller traders, transporting their goods across the border. This method of transportation seems to persist despite the streamlining of border bureaucracy over recent years. Yet, brokers have also been known to harass traders, inform on them to the authorities, or in some cases steal their goods.³⁸
- **Informal cross-border trade:** It is commonly assumed that much of the cross-border trade remains unaccounted for by the *Office Burundais des Recettes* (Burundi Revenue Authority, OBR).³⁹ Most of the informal trade is across the Rusizi border, as the logistics are easier. Sometimes the level of the river drops due to the dam/hydraulic plant located upstream, on the border between Rwanda and DRC, and this provides huge opportunities for smuggling.⁴⁰ Beer, liquor and deodorant are commonly smuggled but also old Burundian coins (used to make jewellery) and electric wires stolen from the national grid (the Regideso). One of the most lucrative businesses is the smuggling of fabrics as formal fabric imports are normally heavily taxed (Burundi is trying to protect its own industry, Afritextile). The periodic shortages of fuel lead to its smuggling in taxis with enlarged gas tanks and (less frequently) tanker trucks. The collapse of the Burundian Franc (BIF) against the dollar and the increasing difference between the official and black market USD–BIF exchange rate (around 30% at the time of writing) has made the smuggling of international imported goods, such as chemicals and fertilizers, a very lucrative business. The mark-up for products like Amstel beer bottles is also reported to be over 100%. Such smuggling takes different forms. Some smugglers swim across the river at night, whilst others use a network made of police, military, militia (*Imbonerakure* work as part of the mixed civilian-police security committees) and even knowledgeable local cattle herders. It is sometimes done in plain sight, in which case smugglers may have their temperature checked at the border post. Cattle and their herders continue to cross the border from Burundi to DRC despite a recent ban for sanitary reasons. Kaburantwa is a known transit point for such traffic, and key players have been arrested and released several times over the last few months.
- **Minerals, drugs, and arms trafficking:** Burundi is a well-known route for smuggling gold outside the DRC. According to United Nations reports in 2011 and 2016, Burundi exports more gold than it produces, and similar movement of minerals such as coltan, diamond, tin ore or cassiterite (whose production in Burundi suddenly multiplied tenfold between 2008 and 2009) have been reported.^{41,42} Analysts have suggested that the higher the value, the more likely a material (e.g. gold, diamonds, rare earth materials) will be transported across the Lake, the trade-off being between levels of monitoring (lower on the lake) and logistics (easier via terrestrial border). It has also been reported that Bujumbura airport and refugee camps have been used by smugglers. Burundi is only one stage in the global networks active in looting the Eastern DRC. Over the years, Burundi has also become a hub in international drugs trafficking. Cannabis is smuggled into Burundi from the DRC with most of it being exported to or through Tanzania. New cocaine and heroin routes that run from Africa to Europe go through Burundi, and as recently as 29 March 2019, a Brazilian drug trafficker was arrested in Bujumbura.^{43,44} Burundi is also a centre for arms trafficking in the region.
- **Violence and armed groups:** The area of South Kivu that borders Burundi is possibly the most violent and unstable of that province. This represents a challenge to effective border monitoring and for public health interventions. In recent years, the area has seen significant outbursts of communal violence, including clashes involving the Bafuliuro and Barundi ethnic groups in the Rusizi plain and further conflict involving the Banyamulenge ethnic group and the Bembe group around Uvira and in the *hauts plateaux* (high plateaux).⁴⁵ The population of the Rusizi plain, on both sides of the river, is armed.⁴⁶ Numerous Congolese and Burundian armed groups also operate from the area.⁴⁷ On the Burundian side, the *Imbonerakure* are a de facto armed militia in many parts of the country. The Burundian rebels, which are based in South Kivu and sometimes venture into the Rukoko forest in Burundi include the *Forces Nationales de Libération* (National Liberation Forces, FNL) led by Aloys Nzabampema (with a smaller faction under Isidore Nibizi), the *RED-Tabara* (*Résistance pour un État de Droit au Burundi*, Resistance for the Rule of Law in Burundi) and the *Forces Populaires du Burundi* (Popular Forces of Burundi, FBP, former *Forces Républicaines du Burundi*,

Republican Forces of Burundi). Attacks on the Burundian border have been reported, the bloodiest being the unclaimed May 2018 attack on the village of Ruhagarika that left at least 24 civilians dead.⁴⁸ It is difficult to estimate the size of Burundian rebel forces. The *RED-Tabara* launched offensives at the end of 2018 but seem to have been weakened by counter-attacks by the Burundian army, supported by Congolese Mai-Mai and *Imbonerakure* forces. Both sides have employed small Congolese groups as proxies, and it was not the first occasion that the Burundian army had crossed the border. The Congolese army has also been involved in operations against the Burundian rebels (FOREBU and FNL) and it reported that they had killed 34 rebels on 14 April 2019.⁴⁹ The Burundian rebels are known to actively support some Congolese armed groups (whilst fighting others) and routinely raid villages in the Uvira and Fizi territories (particularly the high plateaux of Minembwe, Bjiombo and Bijabo). Battles sometimes force communities into Burundi. In January 2018, for example, clashes between the Congolese army and the Mai-Mai Yakutumba in Yungu and Kikonde led civilians to cross the lake and seek shelter in Burundi (in Rumonge and Kabonga). It was reported that alleged militia were among those who crossed, but were then returned to Congolese authorities by Burundian intelligence.⁵⁰ Some armed groups, including the Mai-Mai Yakutumba, also have a presence on the lake and subsist from racketeering and piracy.⁵¹ Unsubstantiated claims suggested that *Interahamwe* forces (Rwandan rebels, likely the National Council for Renewal and Democracy branch) crossed the border at the start of 2019 and are currently based in the Mabayi forest in Burundi, working jointly with the *Imbonerakure* to secure the Burundi-Rwanda border.

Refugee flows

- **Congolese refugees in Burundi:** UNHCR reported that as of 31 May 2019, 78,425 Congolese were registered as refugees in Burundi with just less than half that number housed in the camps of Bwagiriza, Kavumu, Musasa, Kinama, and Nyankanda.^{52,53} Although many refugees have been in Burundi for long periods and have often passed through several camps, (Kinama was established in 2002, Musasa in 2007), nearly 8,000 Congolese refugees have newly entered Burundi since July 2018, fleeing fighting between the Mai-Mai Yakutumba rebels and the *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* (Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo, FARDC), the national army of the DRC.⁵⁴ The main entry point for Congolese refugees is Lake Tanganyika where there is a refugee transit centre at the port of Rumonge. A lesser-used transit centre is located in Cishemeye in Cibitoke province, where infiltration attempts by Congolese rebels have been reported.⁵⁵
- **Burundian refugees in the DRC:** The crackdown on dissident voices in Burundi has led to over 350,000 people fleeing the country since 2015. Of the 347,110 Burundian refugees identified by UNHCR at the end of June 2019, 45,099 are in the DRC, mainly in the overcrowded camp of Lusenda (south of Uvira), as well as in transit centres at Sange and Kavimivira (across the Rusizi) and Mongemonge (across the lake).⁵⁶ Some refugees settled in the locality of Mulongwe further south, and at the time of writing, more were being relocated to that location by UNHCR.⁵⁷ Refugees in the camps often receive visitors from Burundi and it has been reported that the camps are potentially infiltrated by both Burundian rebels and the army and intelligence services.^{58,59} Some Burundian refugees, but not all of them, have already experienced multiple waves of forced displacement (e.g. 1972, 1993), subsequent return and failed reintegration with difficulties accessing land, livelihoods, and social services.⁶⁰ A dominant concern in terms of the mobility, however, is the massive re-displacement or forced repatriation of Burundian refugees. Tanzania, DRC, and more recently Uganda are all pushing for a return of refugees to Burundi.⁶¹ This tension with neighbouring authorities is not new, but voluntary return to Burundi has been marginal to date. Repatriation is facilitated by UNHCR, mostly using trucks from Tanzania that cross at the Mabamba-Gisuru border post.⁶² As of the end of May 2019, IOM and the Burundian Red Cross reported 115,708 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Burundi, the majority of whom had been displaced due to natural hazards including drought.⁶³ Of the total IDPs, 51% are in provinces neighbouring DRC, living with relatives or in private accommodation.

Ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic cross-border ties

- **Ethnic groups and languages:** There are three main groups in Burundi: the majority Hutu, the Tutsi, and the Twa. They have similar cultures, languages and religion, yet 'ethnic' belonging (perceived or claimed) remains a major fault line in Burundian society.⁶⁴ Kirundi, which is very close to Rwanda's national language Kinyarwanda, is the mother tongue of 98% of the population in Burundi and UNESCO estimated the adult literacy rate to be 62% (2014). It is the language that should be used for communication on Ebola. Swahili is the lingua franca in South Kivu and on the DRC shores of Lake Tanganyika, but it is not widely understood in Burundi, with the exception of amongst Muslims, traders and people living in some parts of Bujumbura (Buyenzi and Bwiza), on the Burundian shores of Lake Tanganyika and on the Rusizi plain. In DRC, the Burundi ethnic group⁶⁵ of the Rusizi plain speaks Kirundi⁶⁶, and the *Banyamulenge*, residing mainly on the 'Hauts Plateaux' of Uvira speak a language mutually intelligible with Kirundi.⁶⁷ French is the administrative language in both Burundi and DRC, although it is more widespread in DRC than in Burundi, where it is only spoken by 12% of the population (the better educated).⁶⁸
- **Religion and faith groups:** Faith plays an important role in social and public life. The majority of the population is Catholic, and the remaining Protestant (Anglican, Baptist, Evangelical, and Pentecostal).⁶⁹ Many churches, including the highly popular Pentecostal churches, have been established on both sides of the border. Congolese Banyamulenge, in particular, have established churches in Congolese communities in Bujumbura, Muyinga, Ngozi and Ruyigi, and regularly travel back and forth to their homeland in DRC. The President of Burundi is a born-again Christian who frequently refers to his faith, and the First Lady is an Evangelical church leader with the *Eglise du Rocher* (the Church of the Rock). Another notable faith group are the followers of the Christian prophetess Zebiya. Following deadly confrontations with the police in 2013, many of her followers fled to Kamanyola in DRC and then to Rwanda after clashes with the Congolese police. Although some Zebiya followers have returned to Burundi, many still travel across the region to earn money, trade goods and preach.⁷⁰ A small Muslim minority (estimated to be 1% of the population) plays an important commercial role in Burundi. They are mainly based along the shore of Lake Tanganyika and in Bujumbura (Bwiza and Buyenzi) as well as in towns such as Rumonge Gitega and Ngozi. Locally, a Muslim is often referred to as a 'swahili' or 'arab' (*mwarabu*).
- **Social life in the borderlands:** Field research in the province of Cibitoke highlighted dense social relations and networks between communities living on both the Burundian and DRC side of the Rusizi River. Weekends in this area are marked by many cross-border activities including weddings ceremonies and sports games, in particular football: youth teams from the provinces of Cibitoke and Bubanza legally cross the border to play local Congolese teams (and vice versa). Gasenyi and Rugombo are the main border posts located close to football fields. Bujumbura, with its beaches and clubs, has long been a popular weekend

destination for the wealthier city-dwellers of the region and Congolese from Uvira and Bukavu are the main clientele of mid-range hotels in Bujumbura during the weekends.

- **Education:** After South Africa, Burundi is the second most popular destination for Congolese students (receiving 1,529 students in 2015).⁷¹ Student fees are reported to be four times cheaper than in DRC (typically 100-500 USD per year, versus 400-2000 USD in DRC) and the collapse of the Burundian Franc against the USD (which is widely used in the DRC) has made Burundi an even more attractive option for education. Private universities have the reputation of 'running on time' with undergraduate degrees taking three years as opposed to five years in some DRC institutions that have not yet fully embraced the Bachelor-Masters-PhD curriculum. Hope Africa University, Equateur University, and the *Université Lumière de Bujumbura* are reported to be the most popular among Congolese students. Students typically return home to South Kivu during university breaks and are sometimes visited by their families during term time.
- **Migratory work in DRC and Congolese settlements in Burundi:** The largest group of foreigners living in Burundi are Congolese. They are mostly city-dwellers and many are car mechanics and traders. The neighbourhoods of Buyenzi and Bwiza in Bujumbura and the town of Rumonge are well-known for having large Congolese populations who have been established for several generations. These residents maintain connections with and visit relatives across the border in South Kivu. During cultivation season (October-June), a high number of Burundians from the provinces of Cibitoke and Bubanza work as seasonal labourers in the DRC, particularly in the Rusizi plain.
- **Fishing:** Fishing is a key economic activity on both coasts of Lake Tanganyika. The main fishing beaches in Burundi are in the provinces of Bujumbura rural (Kajaga, Kanyosha, Nyamugari, Kabezi, Gitaza, and Magara), Rumonge (Kabonga, Busambi, Rumonge, Kizuka, Kagongo, Minago, Rutumo, Magara, Gitaza) and the commune of Nyanza-Lac in the province of Makamba (Mvugo, Muguruka, Nyagatanga, Nyanza-Lac). In order to protect fishing stocks, Burundian fishermen are required by law to alternate two weeks of fishing with two weeks of rest. Yet, during the break they often keep fishing but do so in DRC (where fishing is continuous), bribing the leaders of Congolese fisherfolk (the price is said to be equivalent to 5-10 litres of fuel) and even residing in Congolese communities in Dine, Mizimu and Mukindu over those weeks. Congolese fisherfolk also venture into Burundian territory. Small impromptu and illegal fishing villages appear and disappear seasonally in isolated marsh areas up-and-down the lake. The industry is only loosely unregulated: laws on fishing small fry in marsh (hatchery) areas with fine nets are not respected and laws to prevent overfishing the lake are only partially followed (and enforced with intent to extort payment). The Burundian navy has a small flotilla of new zodiac powerboats (five in Bujumbura and five in Rumonge) that intercepts boats on the lake. Burundian fishermen are organised in committees affiliated with the national fishing syndicate, the FFPFB. It meets regularly with fishing syndicates in Dine, Mizimu and Mukindu in DRC, yet conflicts (sometimes deadly) do occur between fishing communities.⁷² They experience almost yearly cholera outbreaks in or near their communities and are suspected of transmitting cholera between South Kivu and Burundi. The fishing communities have already been targeted by Ebola outreach workers as part of preparedness efforts, but further and continual work amongst these communities is necessary.
- **Burial practices:** Most Burundians identify as Christians and observe Christian burial practices. Attendance at funerals is a moral obligation with the participation of extended family, friends, neighbours, business associates and often the entire local community. Relatives travel from across the country to attend funerals. In preparation for burial, the body is customarily washed and dressed and during the funeral, Catholic attendees may trace the sign of the cross over the forehead of the deceased (a practice that has largely replaced the traditional anointing).⁷³ Close relatives may kiss or lay their hands on the deceased. During the first week after a person died and after *gutanga amasuka* (literally 'giving the hoe') the first ceremony with close relatives, the family receives multiple visits from the community. The intense mourning period usually lasts two to three weeks until a ceremony called *gucakumazi* (or *levée de deuil partielle*, the partial ending of the mourning period). If the deceased is an adult with a family, mourning is completed a year after the burial with a ceremony called *kuganduka* (or *levée de deuil définitive*, the final ending of the mourning period). The Twa communities living in the border areas with DRC are likely to have different burial practices and more specific details on the practices of other population groups, including refugee and migrant groups, would be instrumental for adapting burial protocols to be dignified and culturally appropriate in the context of Ebola.

Health system

- **Health status and healthcare:** Most health indicators improved between the end of the civil war and 2015, but since then there has been considerable concern that key indicators have stagnated or deteriorated and the Burundian health system is under severe pressure although it has made some progress towards universal health coverage. There were two major malaria epidemics in 2017 and 2018 (affecting 8 million and 6 million people out of the total population of 11 million), and by July 2019, 4.1 million cases had been reported so far this year. There are also frequent outbreaks of cholera and ongoing malnutrition. Burundi has reported the worst acute chronic malnutrition rates in the world, with 56% of children under five years of age being affected in 2016-2017.⁷⁴ In general, however, Burundian health infrastructure is perceived to be stronger and more affordable than in the DRC, leading many Congolese to cross into Burundi to use private hospitals, such as Kira hospital and the Central Polyclinic in Bujumbura, or the public hospitals of Cibitoke and Kaburantwa (both of which were recently renovated and equipped by Italian aid), and Mpanda in Bubanza province. Brokers are often used to help facilitate cross-border transfers and visits to health related services.
- **Public healthcare:** The public healthcare system is divided into health provinces and districts that correspond to the administrative provinces. There are a total of 93 hospitals/clinics across the country (44 public, 31 private, 17 faith-based and 1 independent). Faith-based and independent clinics have autonomous management but are fully integrated into the health system, contrary to private practices (discussed below). There are also 1,080 primary healthcare facilities (587 public; 330 private; 137 faith-based; and 26 independent), and 80% of households are located within a 5km radius of a health facility.^{75,76} It should be noted that three of the districts classified as priority Level 1 in terms of Ebola preparedness (discussed below), do not have a reference or district hospital (Bugarama, Bujumbura Nord and Bujumbura Sud). Financial access was facilitated by the introduction of free healthcare for pregnant women and children below five in 2006, and a series of insurance schemes, including the 2013 *Carte d'Assurance Maladie* (Health Insurance Card, CAM). Key challenges remain, however, particularly related to the supply of essential drugs and human resources for health. The 2015 crisis put the country's healthcare system under renewed pressure.⁷⁷ After an initial slowdown, the demand for health-services returned to pre-crisis levels, but issues around informal payment (and therefore equity) have continued to escalate.⁷⁸ Doctors and qualified nurses represent only 3% and 37% of the health workforce respectively.⁷⁹ As

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