

# Troubled waters on Lake Albert: conflict dynamics and prospects



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Photo taken by Trócaire at the Kasenyi fishing camp, South Bahema Sector, Irumu Territory.



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# Acronyms

|                 |   |                  |   |
|-----------------|---|------------------|---|
| <b>ACOOPELA</b> | Association des Coopératives des Pêcheurs du Lac Albert | <b>IGC</b>       | Institut Géographique du Congo  |
| <b>ADF</b>      | Allied Democratic Forces                                | <b>LAECMI</b>    | Initiative de Gestion du Bassin Versant Oriental du Lac Albert                      |
| <b>AMCOW</b>    | Conseil des Ministres africains Chargés de l'Eau        | <b>LEAAG</b>     | Lake Edward Albert Advisory Group   |
| <b>ANBO</b>     | Réseau africain des Organisations de Bassin             | <b>LEABO</b>     | Organisation du Bassin des Lacs Édouard et Albert                                   |
| <b>ARCOS</b>    | Société pour la Conservation du Rift Albertin           | <b>LEAF</b>      | Lakes Edward and Albert Fisheries and Water Resources Management Project            |
| <b>ARL</b>      | Programme des lacs du Rift africain                     | <b>N-CBTA</b>    | Ntoroko Cross-Border Traders Association  |
| <b>BAD</b>      | Banque Africaine de Développement                       | <b>NAPE</b>      | National Association of Professional Environmentalists                              |
| <b>BMU</b>      | Beach Management Unit                                   | <b>NBI</b>       | Nile Basin Initiative   |
| <b>CCR</b>      | Comité de Coordination Régionale                        | <b>NELSAP-CU</b> | Programme d'Action Subsidaire pour les Lacs Equatoriaux du Nil                      |
| <b>CER</b>      | Communautés Economiques Régionales                      | <b>OIM</b>       | Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations                                     |
| <b>CIRGL</b>    | Conférence Internationale sur la Région des Grands Lacs | <b>ONG</b>       | Organisation Non Gouvernementale  |
| <b>CLD</b>      | Comité Local de Développement                           | <b>ONGI</b>      | Organisation Non Gouvernementale Internationale                                     |
| <b>CLS</b>      | Comité Local de Sécurité                                | <b>ORRA</b>      | Oil Refinery Residents Association  |
| <b>CMH</b>      | Commission Mixte pour les Hydrocarbures                 | <b>OSC</b>       | Organisation de la Société Civile   |
| <b>CODECO</b>   | Coopérative pour le Développement du Congo              | <b>P-DDRCS</b>   | Programme de Désarmement, Démobilisation, Relèvement Communautaire et Stabilisation |
| <b>CRP</b>      | Convention pour la Révolution Populaire                 | <b>PFOG</b>      | Parliamentary Forum on Oil and Gas  |
| <b>CSH</b>      | Conflict Sensitivity Hub                                | <b>RDC</b>       | République Démocratique du Congo  |
| <b>CTP</b>      | Commission Technique Permanente                         | <b>RN</b>        | Route Nationale   |
| <b>CUA</b>      | Commission de l'Union Africaine                         | <b>TEI</b>       | Team Europe Initiative  |
| <b>FAO</b>      | Food and Agriculture Organisation                       | <b>UE</b>        | Union Européenne  |
| <b>FARDC</b>    | Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo    | <b>UPDF</b>      | Uganda People's Defence Force   |
| <b>FECOPELA</b> | Fédération des Coopératives des Pêcheurs du Lac Albert  | <b>URDPC</b>     | Union des Révolutionnaires pour la Défense du Peuple Congolais                      |
| <b>FRPI</b>     | Force de Résistance Patriotique de l'Ituri              | <b>USA</b>       | United States of America  |
| <b>GTF</b>      | Groupe Technique de Délimitation de la Frontière        | <b>USD</b>       | United States Dollar  |
| <b>IBN</b>      | Initiative du bassin du Nil                             | <b>WWF</b>       | World Wildlife Fund   |

## About this report

This report was jointly developed by Trócaire and International Alert through the Conflict Sensitivity Hub, to bring awareness to conflict dynamics and peacebuilding opportunities around Lake Albert, in the Great Lakes.

The report explains how conflict dynamics have developed in and around the lake, current concerns of communities who rely on the lake for their livelihoods and identified ways forward to address factors of instability. It contains policy and programming recommendations aimed at governments across the region, international partners and civil society actors.

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The report was produced by Zouzou Nobisabo, Jeannette Munguryek, Richard Matsipa, Thierry Ruzuba, Christian Vangazi, Hulda Vagheni, David Othieno, Gédéon Baudjo Kivi, and Emmanuel Sebujiangwe.

It was edited by Xavier Bardou, Camille Marie-Regnault, Desire Nduwayezu, Julien Muyisa Mapilanga, Jean-Christophe Saint Esteben and Lucy Williams.



Focus group discussion with farming and fishing communities living near the fishing port of Kasenyi. RDC, February 2026 (Conflict Sensitivity Hub).

# Summary

As the parties to the Doha, Washington and Lomé/African Union peace processes<sup>1</sup> strive to negotiate a path towards stability in the Great Lakes, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that there are many levers for bringing about broader peace and prosperity across the region. Cooperation on the joint management of natural resources, migration and the movement of people and goods – including labour – and on other common challenges facing the entire region, notably climate security and environmental protection, are all essential measures that can build trust.

Management of Lake Albert, situated between the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Uganda, is an excellent example of how important it is for countries to find ways of working together to manage joint resources. Situated along a major trade route linking the north-eastern forests and gold mines of the DRC to the booming markets and ports of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania, this area has, over many years, seen large communities of fishermen and cross-border traders create an ecosystem of regional integration, fostering social cohesion and bringing benefits to communities on both sides of the border. Working together can also work to protect the wider environment around Lake Albert – environmentalists have identified more than 45 species of fish endemic to Lake Albert, as well as 400 different species of birds across the region. The area is also home to populations of endangered elephants and crocodiles, as well as Murchison Falls National Park, which welcomes 50,000 visitors annually. However, instability on the DRC side of the border, nourished by cross border illicit activities, as well as poor communication and engagement by security services on both sides of the border with fishing communities, risks undermining this fragile and important balance.

In 2022, the Ugandan government announced that it had granted oil drilling

rights in the Albertine Rift, a geological basin located along the western border with the DRC. This basin could produce up to 6.5 billion barrels of oil, of which approximately 1.65 billion barrels are recoverable for annual commercial production<sup>2</sup>. The Albertine Rift is now at the heart of Uganda's oil industry, with exploration and production mainly concentrated around Lake Albert, particularly in the districts of Hoima, Buliisa and Kikuube.

This is the result of decades of economic planning and diversification of the national economy. However, it also presents environmental and social considerations that will require careful management, particularly regarding environmental and ecosystem protection as well as the continuity of social and economic networks among fishing and border communities. The shadow of illicit smuggling and the violent activities of armed groups looms over the region, which is now home to many displaced families fleeing violence perpetrated in DRC by armed groups such as the *Convention pour la Révolution Populaire (CRP)/Zaire* and the *Coopérative pour le Développement du Congo (CODECO)*. Incursions by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADFs) are a recurring feature in the south.

These issues are crucial for the development and prosperity of the countries in the region: poor management could lead to a spiral of poverty in an already fragile area, whilst inclusive, conflict sensitive and anticipatory management would enable the countries in the region to benefit from sustainable and transformative macroeconomic growth, capable of protecting one of the region's most threatened ecosystems.

International Alert and Trócaire have joined forces to update the analysis of conflict dynamics around Lake Albert and to formulate recommendations for policymakers and development donors,

with the aim of creating an environment conducive to peace and prosperity in the region.

This report concludes that the conflicts around Lake Albert do not result from isolated events; security gaps, institutional constraints, socio-economic pressures, governance issues, political instability, environmental shocks and social fragmentation are intertwined in a cumulative, mutually reinforcing cycle. Three main structural drivers of conflict dominate:

- Difficulties accessing resources, in particular fishing resources;
- Weak governance characterised by alleged abuses by security forces and state services, and accompanied by high levels of militarisation;
- Conflict over access and ownership of land, an increasingly precarious and precious resource across the region.

At the end of the report, a series of recommendations sets out ways forward to address the structural factors and causes of these interdependent conflict dynamics:

### **For national and provincial authorities**

To reduce insecurity and strengthen governance:

- Encourage both states (DRC and Uganda) to review the various bilateral agreements on the management of Lake Albert, particularly the 2018 bilateral agreement on the sustainable management of fishery resources and the 2022 operationalization of this agreement. An evaluation framework could be created and updated to identify priority areas for improvement;
- Strengthen oversight and coordination arrangements for security actors operating in the fisheries sector, including mechanisms and or designated bodies/ structures to support accountability, clarify roles, and enhance civil-military coordination;

- Harmonise DRC–Uganda regulations and clarify lake boundaries; governments in the region should make the most of existing regional mechanisms around Lake Albert and wider Nile Basin to engage in bilateral negotiations to align their fishing regulations and clearly define lake boundaries. This would reduce cross-border tensions and secure economic activities;
- Establish institutional mechanisms for conflict monitoring and resolution, and inter-agency coordination: Create monitoring and coordination units bringing together security, justice and local government services. These mechanisms would enable a rapid and coherent response to crises;
- To the Congolese State:
  - Promulgate a new law regulating the fisheries sector (artisanal and industrial) without delay, considering current realities in the DRC's lake and maritime sectors;
  - Restore security and state authority in conflict zones (Mahagi, Djugu and Irumu) in the DRC to facilitate the return of displaced populations to their places of origin, whilst developing resilience-building alternatives such as agricultural revitalisation to reduce the heavy pressure exerted by communities on Lake Albert.

### **For economic actors and businesses**

To strengthen social cohesion and mediation:

- Promote and formalise local peace committees and community dialogues: it is in the interest of businesses to support the creation and operation of peace committees by facilitating community dialogues on resources and economic activities; reach out to NGOs and community leaders who can support businesses to navigate this.

- Systematically include women, young people and displaced persons/returnees in decision-making bodies: Economic actors must ensure equitable representation within their governance and mediation structures.

To secure livelihoods and ensure equitable access to resources:

- Support adherence to designated fishing zones and the adoption of sustainable practices: Companies should collaborate with communities to ensure adherence to established fishing zones and apply environmentally sustainable practices in their operations, particularly in ways that minimize impacts on fisheries and lake ecosystems;
- Companies should enhance transparency in contractual and operational arrangements, ensure fair and timely compensation for affected communities, and contribute to equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms that support local development and livelihoods.

### For NGOs and civil society organisations

To support vulnerable populations and strengthen community resilience:

- Implement targeted programmes for women traders, young people and displaced persons/returnees: develop economic and social projects tailored to these vulnerable groups to reduce their dependence on high risk activities;
- Support training and information on rights, conflict management and the prevention of gender-based violence: organise awareness-raising campaigns and practical training to build local capacity;

- Conduct information and awareness-raising activities for community members on legal obligations in the fisheries sector;
- Support evidence-based community advocacy and dialogue with local authorities - Facilitate structured engagement platforms on priority issues including the collection of informal or non-regulated taxes and fees alongside other priorities to promote transparency, accountability, and adherence to existing legal frameworks.

To ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions:

- Combine security, governance, economic development and sustainable resource management: Interventions must be coordinated and multi-sectoral, to address the various causes of insecurity simultaneously;
- Regularly map conflicts, social vulnerability and the concentration of power: Establish monitoring and evaluation tools to measure changes in tensions and adjust strategies.



Photo taken by Trócaire at the port of Kasenyi in the South Bahema Sector, Irumu Territory, April 2026

# Introduction

The zones around, and the catchment area of, Lake Albert are strategically situated on the border between Ituri Province (DRC) and Rwenzori District (Uganda). They are home to approximately three to four million people living on both sides of the Uganda–DRC border, with a population density of up to 149 inhabitants per square kilometre<sup>3</sup>.

Lake Albert, covering an area of approximately 5,270 km<sup>2</sup>, of which 54% lies in Uganda and 46% in the DRC (FAO, 2018), is situated in the western part of the Rift Valley. It is 160 km long and 30 km wide. Its maximum depth is around 51 metres, and it lies at an elevation of 619 metres above sea level<sup>4</sup>. The territories of Djugu, Mahagi and Irumu (in DRC) lie opposite the districts of Ntoroko, Buliisa and Hoima (in Uganda) respectively, on either side of Lake Albert, forming the natural border between the DRC and Uganda.

## **An essential resource for economic development and a lifeline for many today**

Long before oil exploration, local communities, notably the Alur, were already exploiting the lake's resources for fishing and trade (Willame, 2000; Carbone, 2016). In 2006, the discovery of oil deposits profoundly altered its geopolitical significance. The lake has become a strategic area. It represents both state and private interests for the DRC, whilst in Uganda, it is linked to several projects involving Total Energies and Tullow Oil. The region has witnessed sporadic military tensions between the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and the Ugandan People's Defense Force (UPDF) and is experiencing cross-border governance challenges and environmental and community risks (Chober, 2017).

The primary economic activities on and around Lake Albert are fishing, cross-border trade and lake transport. Fishing is

the economic and food mainstay of the communities living along the shores of Lake Albert. Historically, the lake was home to between 50 and 55 species of fish<sup>5</sup>. However, on the Congolese shore, fewer than fifteen species are currently observed on a regular basis, due to overfishing, the destruction of spawning grounds, pollution and oil exploitation.

The transformation of economic activities is hampered by the lack of adequate ports and by rising lake levels, which disrupt operations. Initiatives are underway in Uganda to modernise ports and improve navigation. This lack of adequate port infrastructure partly explains the use of motorised canoes for transporting goods and people between the DRC and Uganda, despite their high vulnerability to the waves of Lake Albert.

## **The challenges associated with managing this precious resource**

Cooperation between the DRC and Uganda around the exploitation of Lake Albert's oil resources is a subject of strategic debate and essential to ensuring that the discovery of this precious resource becomes a factor for stability. Both countries are seeking to strengthen economic and diplomatic ties whilst minimising conflicts between their respective interests.

However, the Ugandan military presence in Ituri and the recent ratification of the bilateral agreement on hydrocarbon exploitation raise concerns regarding the management of these resources. Indeed, since November 2021, Uganda has deployed its armed forces, the UPDF, to the DRC as part of the joint 'Shujaa' operation alongside the FARDC. The stated objectives of this operation are to neutralise the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), secure the Ugandan Congolese border, and ensure the protection of infrastructure and civilian populations. Initially concentrated

in North Kivu, the operation has gradually expanded into Ituri, notably towards Kasenyi, Tchomia, Bunia and the shores of Lake Albert. However, some community members and analysts perceive this expansion as going beyond ADF-controlled areas. In their view, the heavily militarised areas correspond to trade corridors, fishing ports, and potential oil activity zones. Some also expressed concerns about Uganda's control of economic and lake routes within DRC territory. These perceptions – which the study did not independently verify – suggest a degree of mistrust regarding the operation's mandate.

The management of the border on lake Albert by the two states continue to present challenges. The main bone of contention remains Rukwanzi Island, at the southern tip of the lake. This island is reputed to be extremely rich in oil. Clashes between Congolese and Ugandan armies are a recurring feature there, particularly since Uganda has stepped up the pace of oil activities on the Albertine Rift (United Nations Security Council's Final report of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, issued on 3 July 2025 (document code S/2025/446)).

In addition to these skirmishes on Rukwanzi Island, disputes over the lake borders lead to regular altercations between community members of both countries, as well as repeated arrests of fishermen, who are often accused of crossing the border whilst fishing on the lake. A Ugandan fisherman taking part in a focus group in Ntoroko (Kanara Town) told<sup>6</sup> :

*“We fishermen are victims of the lack of clarity regarding the borders between the DRC and Uganda. The naval forces often arrest us on the pretext that we have crossed the border, even though it is sometimes difficult to determine when we enter foreign waters.”*

On Lake Albert, particularly in Mahagi, Kasenyi and Tchomia, elements of the FARDC Naval Force are accused of extorting fishermen. Some tolerate or protect illegal

fishing methods and make access to fishing zones conditional on informal payments.

According to the International Crisis Group (2024) and Stearns (2021), in addition to arrests, fishermen and boat owners on Lake Albert are regularly targeted by armed groups in the DRC, notably the Ituri Patriotic Resistance Force (FRPI) and the Convention for the People's Revolution (CRP), which emerged in 2025. Armed groups often seize produce and fishing equipment including engines, nets and fuel, and sometimes take hostages and require ransoms from fishing families. Cases of theft of fishing gear are also frequently reported, highlighting the insecurity prevailing on the lake.

These armed groups are often linked to the volatile security situation in Ituri Province, on the western shore of Lake Albert. In the territory of Djugu, the CODECO *and the Union des Révolutionnaires pour la Défense du Peuple Congolais* (URDPC) militias claim to protect Lendu communities in the area, against a backdrop of historical conflicts over land, customary power and access to agro-pastoral resources. Local tensions have often served as a lever for recruitment and community legitimization of this armed group. Once established, CODECO (often associated with, allied to or conflated with the URDPC) imposed security taxes and took control of entire villages. It erected illegal roadblocks (on the RN27, provincial roads and agricultural access roads). In different areas of the province, it either directly exploits, or claims to protect, artisanal gold mining sites. Elsewhere in Irumu territory, the ADF exploits local community tensions (distrust of the state, land disputes, identity conflicts, socio-economic frustrations) to blend in with civilians, recruit locally or obtain logistical support, and to prevent mechanisms of community cooperation with the army.

In the Ugandan districts bordering Lake Albert – Ntoroko, Hoima and Buliisa – tensions between communities living around the lake (fishermen and sedentary farmers) and agro-pastoral communities

(livestock herders, notably the Banyoro, Alur, as well as transhumant groups from other districts or the Congolese side) constitute a key factor in local instability, exacerbated by economic, environmental and security dynamics specific to Uganda.

For example, in Ntoroko District, there is a high level of daily movement of fishermen, traders and herders across the border with DRC. Access to land in Ntoroko is very limited, and competition is evident at watering points for livestock, in agricultural areas and at fishing landing sites. During the dry season, these tensions are further fomented by the movement of herders and their cattle as part of the transhumance.

Buliisa District has become characterized in recent years by oil extraction, the creation of protected areas and restrictions on access to grazing and fishing grounds. The drastic reduction in pastoral mobility corridors is driving herds towards agricultural land and ecologically sensitive areas. This situation is generating a sense of economic exclusion among local communities, with herders being perceived as 'favoured' or 'protected'.

Hoima District is the administrative and economic epicentre of the oil-producing region. It is experiencing intense pressure on land linked to speculation, expropriations and the arrival of new economic actors. Other issues include displacement and resettlement challenges linked to oil and other supportive infrastructure projects as well as unmet expectations around employment and other opportunities in the oil sector creating frustrations and tensions. Agro-pastoral conflicts are often taken to court or politicised, with a high level of involvement from local authorities and security forces.

## Methodology

With this report, our aim is to present an up-to-date analysis of the dynamics of the conflicts ongoing around Lake Albert and to propose ways to strengthen stability and social cohesion at both the community and regional levels.

The study was conducted in March 2026 across the area covering all the territories bordering Lake Albert in the DRC and Uganda. Given the objective of the research, the research team favoured a qualitative approach comprised of a literature review, individual interviews, focus groups, and direct observation. These methods allowed the team to analyse complex phenomena, perceptions, lived experiences, social interactions and power dynamics linked to the conflicts surrounding Lake Albert. This also facilitated an understanding of the meaning, context, motivations and emotions of those directly affected or possessing expert knowledge of the field.

Interviews were conducted with local and administrative authorities, government technical departments, fisheries organisations, community leaders, key informants with in-depth knowledge of the area, associations representing young people, women and marginalised groups, staff from local and international NGOs active in the study areas in the DRC and Uganda, as well as the presidents of the federations of fishing cooperatives<sup>7</sup> and representatives and presidents of women's fishing cooperatives. In total, 40 individual interviews (27 in the DRC and 13 in Uganda) and 41 semi-structured interviews (25 in the DRC and 16 in Uganda) were conducted, reaching 126 people, including 76 men and 50 women. In addition, 33 focus groups were organised, bringing together an average of 12 participants per group in each of the two areas. In total, 373 people (242 in the DRC and 131 in Uganda) participated in the study.

On the Ugandan side, the team encountered resistance and data protection issues in the district of Buliisa. Furthermore, the absence of effective cross-border coordination mechanisms complicated the integrated analysis of conflict dynamics on both sides of the border.



Photo CSH, focus group with fishermen in Ntoroko, Uganda, February 2026.

### **Key structural factors and sources of conflict**

The fishing communities that the research team spoke to, living on both sides of the lake, describe a multitude of ongoing conflict dynamics around Lake Albert. Some of these conflicts have persisted for several decades with only a few signs of improved governance of these conflicts, particularly regarding natural resources, and more specifically on the Congolese side of the border. Other sources of conflict have exacerbated these more structural factors— notably factors related to security governance on the Congolese side of the border and the ever-increasing pressure on land and water resources on both sides of the lake. The communities' experience of conflicts around the lake shows that provincial and national mechanisms on the DRC side, as well as regional mechanisms covering both countries, are still failing to effectively prevent and manage conflicts arising over access to this vital resource. These discussions form part of broader security and development cooperation agreements between the DRC and Uganda, in force across the region, whose objectives and effects remain unclear to the communities most affected by these agreements.

We have grouped these structural factors and sources of conflict into four main sections:

- Inequality of access to resources;
- Gaps in security governance, reflected in concerns related to the conduct of security and actors and high levels of militarization;
- Environmental pressures on land and lake resources;
- Gaps in regional frameworks for conflict prevention and management

### **Inequality of access to resources, particularly fisheries**

In 2016, International Alert's report on social accountability around Lake Albert (which, at the time, focused exclusively on the Ugandan side of the border) examined the power dynamics governing access to the lake's resources and land in the region, and highlighted significant gaps in accountability and information-sharing regarding resource-sharing agreements and decision-making. Ten years later, in this study covering both sides of the border, fishing communities tell us that little has changed.

Structural shortcomings in the management of these resources on the Congolese side of the lake, such as the almost total absence of control mechanisms to prevent taxation from being used as a rent-seeking tool by certain elites and local authorities, are causing deep resentment among communities living in poverty around the lake. The average household in this region earns approximately three US dollars a day, mainly from fishing activities. Threats by the authorities to withdraw licences – some of which, fishing communities allege have little or no legal basis – immediately consume the few dollars on which they depend for their daily survival. In the absence of oversight or accountability mechanisms, communities have little opportunity to oppose these unlawful practices and feel trapped in an entrenched system.

Access to fishing on Lake Albert in Uganda is perceived as being deeply unequal, shaped by institutional, security, economic and environmental factors. These inequalities fuel local social tensions, community grievances and conflictual cross-border dynamics. Before they can start fishing, communities must obtain official registration as a legal fisherman must pay for membership of a landing site management unit and pay additional fees. In practice, the costs are prohibitive for many artisanal fishermen, particularly for seasonal migrants or young fishermen who are excluded from the formal system<sup>8</sup>.

We found that fishermen are required to pay several different taxes. Those interviewed in the DRC said that the fisherman's nationality does not matter; it is the side of the lake where one fishes, lands or sells the fish that determines the tax regime.

*'A large proportion of our income is swallowed up by taxes, to the extent that some of us have been forced to give up our commercial activities.'*<sup>9</sup>

The following taxes and legal fees are official in the DRC:

1. Fishing licence or permit; these taxes are paid for the right to fish on the lake. They apply on the Congolese shore (Tchomia, Kasenyi, Mahagi-Port, etc.);
2. Boat (pirogue) taxes, which involve the registration of the pirogue (with or without a motor);
3. Landing fee (site tax), paid when fish are landed at a Congolese port;
4. Marketing taxes levied when fish is sold in Congolese markets or on official roads; Local road taxes (chiefdom/sector and commune): a local contribution linked to site access or local development.

On the Ugandan side, the following official taxes and fees are applied:

1. Ugandan fishing licence (annual and centralised, often by species and vessel type; fishermen are subject to formal registration of both the fisherman and the vessel, requiring the vessel to have an official registration number<sup>10</sup>);
2. Landing site fees paid at official landing sites in Uganda and taxes on transport and marketing, levied on transport vessels and marketed fish.<sup>11</sup>

The lack of consistent regulation and insufficient coordination between agencies encourage the emergence of informal practices and parallel resource management systems. For example, the uncoordinated closure of the lake for fish spawning often sees Ugandan fishermen crossing over to fish illegally in Congolese waters and the same practice is observed in reverse when bans are introduced on the DRC side of the lake<sup>12</sup>. In the absence of effective control by the Congolese state (fisheries services, lake naval force), fishing camp leaders, sometimes backed by local militias or residual armed elements, impose their own rules on access to fishing zones in some areas. The absence of clear demarcation and operational coordination with Uganda leads some Congolese fishermen to rely on informal guides or local dignitaries to identify 'safe' zones. These

actors effectively become parallel managers of lake mobility, often in return for payment<sup>13</sup>.

In Uganda, the authorities sometimes enforce stricter fishing bans than in DRC, particularly for environmental reasons or in connection with oil projects. In response, informal networks of night fishing are developing, using clandestine fish marketing channels<sup>14</sup>. Intermediaries (collectors, transporters) are involved in structuring parallel cross-border markets and rely on the perception of DRC controls being less strict.

Trust between communities and their leaders is essential for political decisions to be effective and operational. The communities we interviewed on the Congolese side of Lake Albert reported a very low level of trust in their local authorities, many of whom, they claim, exercise their power for personal gain.

For example, fishermen in the Tchomia, Kasenyi and Mahagi-Port areas in DRC report that, beyond the formal taxes mentioned above, they are required to pay a regular informal tax known as the 'network' tax, imposed by certain military personnel or similar groups, without any legal basis or official receipt. Measures such as the ban on certain gear or the closure of specific zones, perceived as arbitrary or poorly enforced, cause tensions between fishermen and the authorities, encouraging the circumvention of rules and the development of illegal activities. Informal permit issuance systems as well as the resale of confiscated equipment<sup>15</sup> (nets, canoes, engines, lamps and traps) reinforce the sense of injustice within communities. As a result, many in the population feel that they can no longer trust the authorities<sup>16</sup>.

In line with the findings of the 2016 International Alert study<sup>17</sup>, the lack of access



Photo taken by Trócaire at the port of Kasenyi in the South Bahema Sector, Irumu Territory, April 2026.

to information and the decision-making process is once again a major source of frustration and conflict. Policy decisions are perceived as being imposed and originating from provincial or national authorities. The enforcement of regulations governing fishing suffers and is a source of tension because they are not widely publicised. In fact, fishermen do not know which gear is prohibited or which areas are protected, where fishing is banned. Furthermore, poverty limits fishermen's ability to procure inputs or equipment authorised by fisheries legislation.

Even when communities have some information about the origins of certain policy decisions – for example, regulations on fishing intensity and seasons – many fishing communities called for strengthened policies and innovative thinking on how to protect fish stocks. Communities clearly see the depletion of stocks, but the lack of economic alternatives and their total dependence on this activity drives some of them to break the law.

*“No one respects the fishing regulations on Lake Albert; even the authorities are involved. Fishermen continue to fish in spawning grounds<sup>18</sup>, often because they are not fully aware of the applicable rules.”<sup>19</sup>*

In Uganda, oil exploitation is introducing new dynamics of conflict within communities.<sup>20</sup> The main sources of tension include forced displacement and compensation deemed unfair, the exclusion of local communities from employment opportunities, actual or perceived pollution of the lake, the increased security presence of oil producing areas, the importation of labour (see below for a more detailed explanation) and the poor integration of local economies into supply chains.

In Buliisa, for example, the local population criticises the fact that Total Energies recruits labour from outside the district, even though it is supposed to contribute to poverty reduction in local communities. In addition to the importation of labour,

a community leader from Buliisa stated during a semi-structured interview:

*“Total Energies brings in workers from outside and rarely recruits from within the local community. And when it does hire local workers, they work harder whilst being paid less than employees from outside. This situation fuels tensions between the local population and the oil companies.”<sup>21</sup>*

*“Total Energies does not purchase its basic necessities on the local market, even though its presence in Buliisa was supposed to help boost the local economy.”*

The study was unable to independently verify these claims, but this does suggest an information gap.

Fisherman of Buliisa also say that they do not have information on where the boundaries of the oil extraction zone in Lake Albert. Fishermen are often arrested on the grounds of having violated the oil zone, the boundaries of which are unknown to the local population.

According to accounts that this study was unable to independently verify from fishermen and communities living around the lake, the way in which legislation is implemented breeds mistrust and constitutes an obstacle to effective social cohesion. One of the most striking examples of this is the way in which people on both sides of the border are treated when they are arrested on either side for offences. Many people who took part in the study (on both sides) explained that they very often did not understand why they had been stopped or arrested and that they found it difficult to communicate with the authorities on either side to understand what they had done wrong and what the consequences were. On both sides, communities reported that they often dealt with these situations by paying bribes to authorities willing to accept them, for example to secure the release of fishermen or to recover their equipment. However, some are arrested and detained in cells on either side of the

border, where they have no knowledge of their rights, nor access to legal or judicial assistance. The widespread nature of these cases is exploited by leaders, fishermen and communities on both sides to stoke hatred or reinforce stereotypes against 'the other' and widens the divide between fishermen and communities who have more in common than differences.

### **Failing security governance, marked by abuses by the security forces and heavy militarisation**

The militarisation of Lake Albert is a major source of conflict. On the Congolese side, the government's introduction of the state of siege, through the Order of 3 May 2021, has established a regime of martial law, under which all provincial and local officials (territories and municipalities) have been replaced by representatives of the army and the police. The activities of the Provincial Assembly and municipal councils have consequently been suspended. Five years after the start of this state of siege, some of these local police and army representatives have become familiar with their roles and civil governance practices and, according to some reports, are meeting certain community needs. However, those interviewed for this study also explained that, since the imposition of the state of siege, decision-making on certain issues – particularly those relating to land and natural resource governance – has slowed down. This is because the former ministerial systems and processes have been suspended and, in some cases, replaced by advisory functions with army and police representatives. Many community members are still reluctant to approach the military authorities to resolve their disputes.

The state of emergency has also led to a significant increase in the number of uniformed personnel present and moving around the Lake Albert region.

The gaps of many oversight mechanisms allows certain uniformed individuals to

engage in illicit activities and to react inappropriately towards community members who challenge them.

Under an agreement between Kampala and Kinshasa, UPDF forces are also present in Mahagi, near Lake Albert. According to a fisherman from Kasenyi:

*"Ugandan forces are stepping up arbitrary arrests and forced payments on the lake, a situation that is seriously affecting the activities and livelihoods of Congolese fishermen."*<sup>22</sup>

On the DRC side, there is also a strong presence of armed groups, which further complicates security governance in this region. Even though the state of siege has been extended several times and agreements between the two countries have been signed to put an end to armed groups, the territories of Djugu, Irumu and Mahagi are struggling to find peace. In Uganda, the *Ngiti militia* has been identified as responsible for incidents ranging up to hostage-taking for ransom. During a focus group discussion with indigenous fishermen at the Ntoroko Council, one participant stated:

*"We are victims of attacks carried out by Ngiti militias on the lake. However, we have no problem with Ngiti civilians, who are themselves victims of the abuses committed by their own brothers."*<sup>23</sup>

Several participants in the focus groups and individual interviews reported that abuses against local communities are a recurring issue. These abuses include arbitrary arrests, extortion, tax harassment and the confiscation of fishing equipment (nets, engines, boats). Extortion provokes immediate reactions from the communities, sometimes leading to direct confrontations.

*"Recently on the lake, members of the naval force have been imposing forced levies on us. When we give them neither fish nor money, they confiscate our equipment. We thus risk losing all our inputs, which are, however, our sole source of income."*<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, the presence of armed groups and the militarisation of production areas lead to physical violence, forced displacement and the disruption of economic activities. These dynamics also exacerbate social vulnerabilities, particularly gender-based violence and child exploitation.

*“We are more frustrated by the military than by the waves on the lake. I will never forget the day they came without warning. They seized my fishing gear and even*

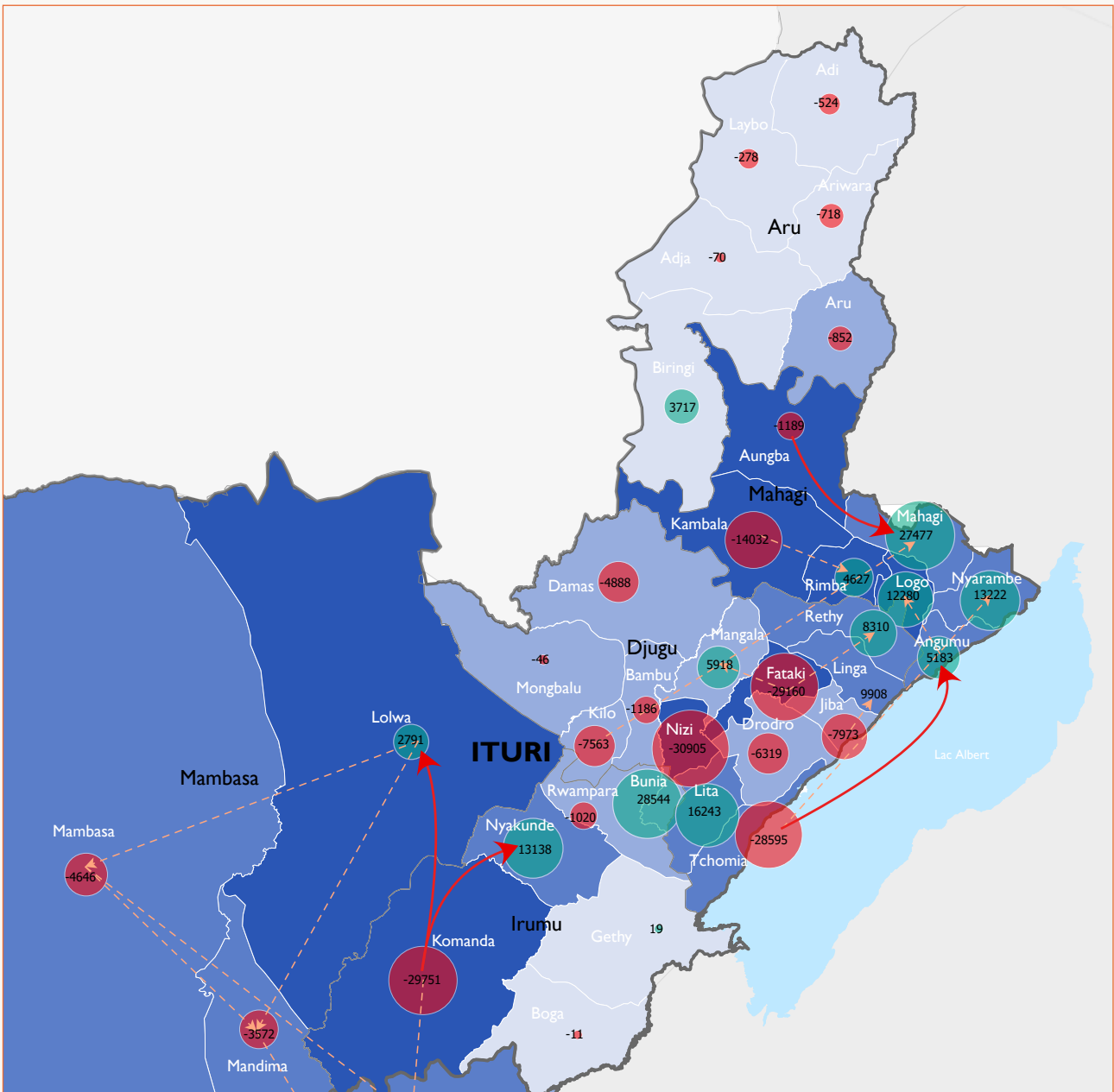
*asked me to destroy it myself on the spot... My own possessions, my livelihood. It has deeply hurt me to this day. We are suffering, and the harassment is increasing. Yet the lake is all we have here.”<sup>25</sup>*

### **Pressure on land and lake resources**

Insecurity and local conflicts prevailing throughout the region are also contributing to the already heavy pressure on water and land resources around Lake Albert.



Photo of a farmer from the village of Katho in the South Bahema Sector, taken by Trócaire in April 2026.

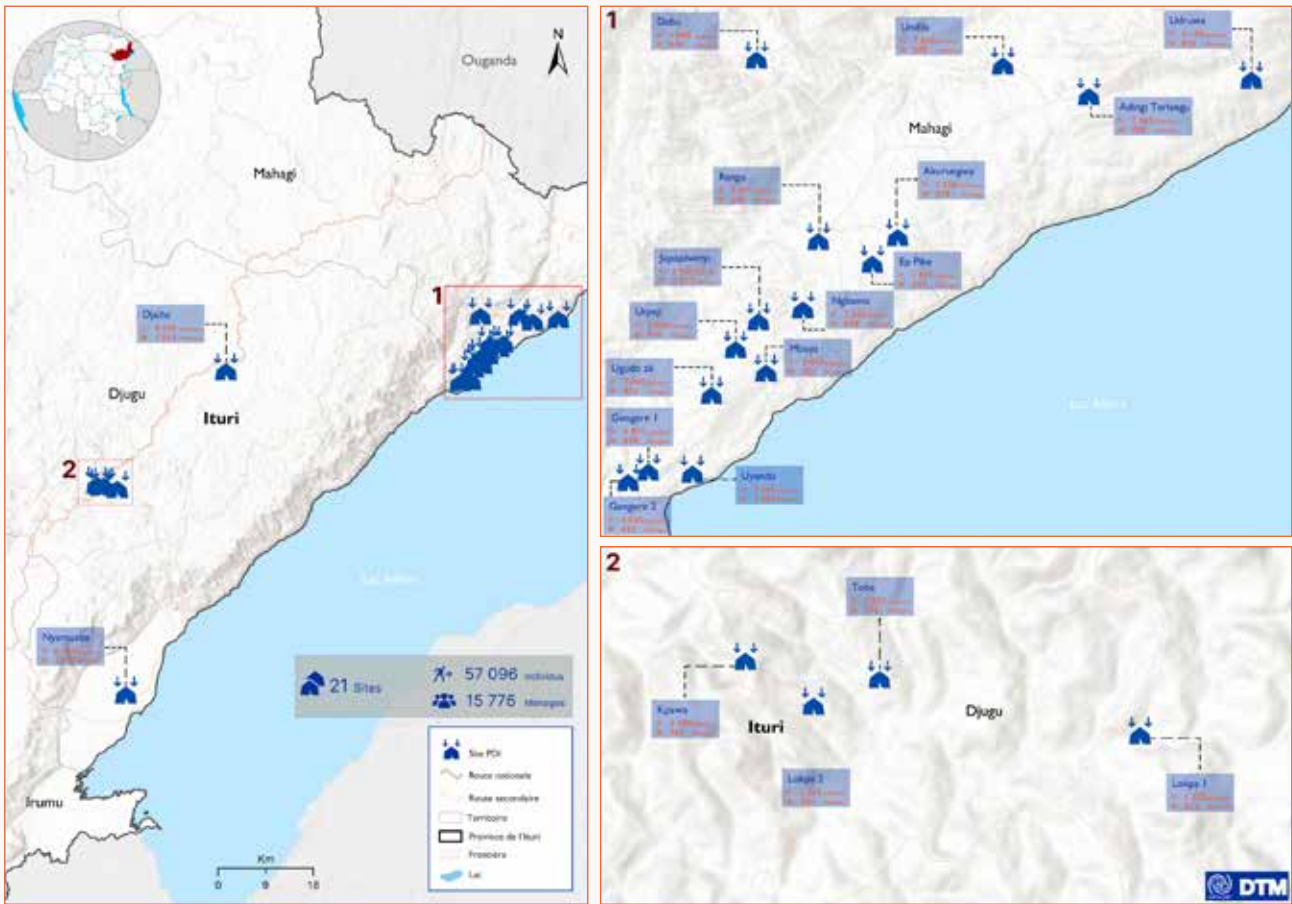


Overview of the migration map produced by the IOM – Overview of displacement in North Kivu and Ituri provinces<sup>26</sup> – March 2026.

In 2025 alone, the Mahagi territory hosted 57,096 displaced persons spread across 21 sites, the majority of whom (nearly 90%) were forced to leave their homes due to armed conflict<sup>27</sup>. The two sites that hosted the largest number of people were Nyamusasi 2, located directly on the lake shore, and Djaiba, situated slightly further inland. As shown in the maps below, taken from the IOM’s displacement tracking tool, many camps for displaced persons have been set up very close to the lake’s shores, where displaced persons can fish to support themselves. This has put further pressure on the lake as well as on the plots of land surrounding it.

An internally displaced fisherman interviewed by the research team testified that:

*‘The combat patrols are driving us away from Lake Albert. Yet here, we have only Lake Albert to live on. But the military are kicking us out. They are seizing our fishing gear. Often, it is the military and the police who are the cause of our misfortune. That is why our wives gather wood in the wild to survive. They forget that we are returnees and displaced people. We live only by the grace of God. By day, you see us [as] human beings. Know that by night, we are no different from wild animals (...).’<sup>28</sup>*



Internally Displaced People sites

On the Ugandan side of the lake, some participants in our study explained how population resettlement processes (for example, communities living in areas now ceded to oil companies and who have been resettled), often accompanied by compensation deemed insufficient, exacerbate tensions and contribute to the erosion of livelihoods. These new arrivals settle in a region where, as we have already described earlier in this report, communities live in an extremely precarious economic situation and depend almost entirely on fishing to meet their basic needs.

**Land conflicts** in this region are often linked to displacement, where communities have been dispossessed of their land when they have had to flee conflict. The research team also documented the re-sale of the same plot of land to multiple owners, tensions between indigenous communities, displaced persons and returnees, conflicts between farmers and herders (especially in the DRC), and perceived land grabbing linked to oil exploitation in Uganda. Interview

participants mentioned conflicts between fishermen and riverside communities. These are caused by the illegal sale by local authorities of portions of land reserved for fishing activities (construction of storage facilities, fish-drying areas, landing points, etc.), and, on the other hand, by rising lake levels forcing fishermen to move into areas usually intended for other uses.

The lack of communal grazing land means that some herders encourage livestock to roam freely, subsequently leading to the destruction of crops and exacerbating recurring tensions between farmers and herders. In Ntoroko and Buliisa, cows are at the root of several incidents as they attack people and cause injuries. It is important to note that the Albertine Shore is sandwiched between Lake Albert and the Semliki National Park in Ntoroko, Murchison Falls National Park in Buliisa and Kabwoya Game Reserve in Kikuube. The identification of land for national park use has been a contentious process and further contributes, according to community members to

land scarcity Furthermore, communities' dependence on natural resources drives certain populations, particularly on the Ugandan side of the border, to enter protected areas illegally to access resources, a situation that exacerbates pressure on the environment.

**Environmental changes** and natural disasters, particularly storms and floods, increase the vulnerability of populations, causing mass population movements towards already fragile areas, leading to a population explosion and pressure on resources. For example, the head of the Kolokoto fishing camp in Mahagi Territory stated during an individual interview that:

*'The flooding of Lake Albert has damaged fields and houses more than 200 metres from the shore to the dry land.'*<sup>29</sup>

Phenomena such as the floods, which have affected several fishing camps, as well as the gradual decline in fish stocks, are increasing pressure on livelihoods and exacerbating tensions between the various stakeholders<sup>30</sup>.

This is creating a vicious cycle; in the face of depleting stocks, some fishermen are using illegal fishing inputs (such as unauthorised live or scented bait) in order to increase their catch or, as already mentioned above, fish during breeding seasons. While this might allow them to meet their short-term needs, longer term it is having a devastating impact on the ecosystem of Lake Albert and the sustainability of the fish stocks. High levels of poverty and ever-increasing pressure on the lake, as documented early on in this report, only contributes to these practices. The use of illicit inputs also contributes to poor relationships between certain fishermen and the authorities patrolling the lake. The use of what is perceived by some fishermen to be excessive use of force by these authorities has led to some to call for surveillance of the lake be handed over to a civilians led local lake surveillance committee<sup>31</sup>.

It is important to note that the inability to access land and resources has serious repercussions on social conflicts. The way in

which communities' access and engage with the land constitutes an important dimension of individual and community identity in eastern DRC and influences different groups' access to power.

Those interviewed as part of our study explained how social conflicts manifest themselves at both the intra- and inter-community levels, particularly between fishermen on the one hand, and between herders and farmers on the other. Internal tensions include family conflicts, domestic violence and local rivalries, contributing to the fragmentation of the social fabric. In this context, corrupt practices to gain access to fishing areas are developing even during the period when the lake is closed on the Congolese side.



Focus group discussion with farming and fishing communities living near the Kanara fishing port in Ntoroko Sub County, February 2026 (Conflict Sensitivity Hub)

## Gaps in regional frameworks and their implementation for the joint management of the lake as a transboundary resource

Although this study focused exclusively on documenting the realities experienced by people living and working around Lake Albert, we found that much remains to be done in terms of regional cooperation between the DRC and Uganda regarding conflict management on the lake. However, several legislative frameworks exist, and considerable efforts have been devoted to establishing effective integrated water management projects and systems:

### What exists

#### Regional Frameworks: the strategic vision

These frameworks define the political will for cooperation and secure long-term investment.

1. The DRC-Uganda Bilateral Agreement (Fisheries and Resources): This is the most direct framework. Initially signed in 2018 in Munyonyo (Uganda) and reinforced by the LEAF II project (Lakes Edward and Albert Fisheries and Water Resources Management Project), a major regional initiative aimed at the sustainable management of the fishery resources and ecosystems of Lakes Edward and Albert, shared between the DRC and Uganda.

This agreement aims to:

- Harmonise fisheries regulations: Combat prohibited fishing techniques and manage closed seasons;
- Develop joint patrols: Use of surveillance vessels (based notably at Kasenyi on the DRC side) to reduce conflicts between Congolese and Ugandan fishermen;
- Develop joint water resource management frameworks: Monitoring water quality and ecosystems.

2. The Joint Technical Commission (Hydrocarbons): Lake Albert is at the heart of Uganda's giant oil project (Tilenga and

Kingfisher). A framework for consultation exists between the two countries to discuss the demarcation of the lake border and environmental management related to oil exploitation. In 2026, this framework is under significant pressure as Congolese civil society denounces potential environmental abuses arising from the Ugandan projects.

3. The Nile Basin Initiative (NBI): Lake Albert forms an integral part of the Nile Basin. As such:
  - The NBI provides the strategic framework for the equitable and sustainable use of water.
  - It acts as a technical arbiter for major infrastructure projects (dams, irrigation) that could affect the flow or quality of water into the White Nile.
4. The Regional Economic Integration Framework: the new framework signed in the USA (in connection with regional integration) now includes provisions on facilitation that consider the conflict-ridden contexts of cross-border trade. This could be used as a lever around Lake Albert (although Uganda is not a signatory to the framework), to encourage efforts to legalise and secure lake ports (such as Mahagi-Port or Kasenyi) to transform what was an area of tension into an economic corridor.

#### Technical Groups and Committees: the operational engine

Experts from both countries are working to operationalise these agreements. Several committees are currently operational, including:

1. The DRC-Uganda Permanent Technical Commission (PTC): This is the key technical body. It comprises experts from the two ministries responsible for water and the environment. Its mission is to ensure the implementation of the LEAF project. It is based on bilateral cooperation between the DRC and Uganda, harmonising fisheries regulations

between the two countries. Members meet to harmonise fisheries legislation (net sizes, closed seasons) and to monitor water quality to prevent cross-border pollution.

2. The Technical Group for Border Delineation (GTF): This group is crucial as the border on Lake Albert has long been a source of armed conflict between the two navies. It comprises expert cartographers and surveyors from the Geographical Institute of the Congo (IGC) and their Ugandan counterparts. They use precise GPS coordinates to define fishing zones and, above all, the distribution of oil fields that straddle the lake's median line.
3. The Joint Commission on Hydrocarbons (CMH): Given the oil exploration in the Albertine Basin (the Tilenga and Kingfisher projects), this technical group has become of major importance. Its remit is to discuss how to share revenues if a deposit straddles the border and the management of oil spill risks. The commission is currently working on the environmental impact of heated oil pipelines<sup>32</sup> that could affect the lake's ecosystem.
4. The Nile Basin Regional Coordination Committee (RCC): As Lake Albert is a reservoir of the White Nile, it is monitored by the Nile Equatorial Lakes Subsidiary Action Programme (NELSAP-CU), the technical arm of the Nile Basin Initiative based in Kigali. This group of engineers and hydrologists monitors water flow and funds community infrastructure (fish markets, landing ports) on both shores of the lake.

Despite the existence of well-defined structures, joint management and technical committees face several challenges in the implementation of these regional frameworks:

- Over militarisation: Ugandan navy and the Congolese naval force sometimes clash over the demarcation of the lake border. The persistent insecurity prevents

technical experts from travelling safely to the field to carry out hydrological surveys or fisheries inspections;

- Institutional asymmetry: there is an imbalance in implementation capacity between the two countries. Uganda often has more stable budgets for its technical agencies (thanks to anticipated oil revenues), whilst Congolese technical services (IGC, Environment) sometimes lack the operating budget to attend bilateral meetings and struggles to maintain a consistent presence on technical committees due to the frequent turnover of political and administrative officials;
- Oil-related issues: Oil versus the environment and imminent oil exploitation (Tilenga/Kingfisher projects) are creating tension within the technical committees. Environmental experts in the DRC fear that exploitation on the Ugandan side will affect spawning grounds (fish reproduction) on the Congolese side. Whilst the hydrocarbons committees are pushing for production, the fisheries committees are sounding the alarm over the survival of ecosystems.
- The lack of real-time data sharing: Currently, data on fish catches, pollution levels or transit statistics are often kept in paper records or isolated databases on either side of the border. Without shared and digitised information, the technical committees work with outdated figures, rendering the management of shared resources ineffective;
- Mistrust among local communities: Fishermen in Kasenyi or Mahagi often perceive these technical committees as distant bodies that impose restrictions (mesh sizes, taxes) without offering alternative solutions to poverty. Successfully integrating the voices of local populations into highly technocratic intergovernmental frameworks remains a major challenge.

## Chapter 2: Key actors

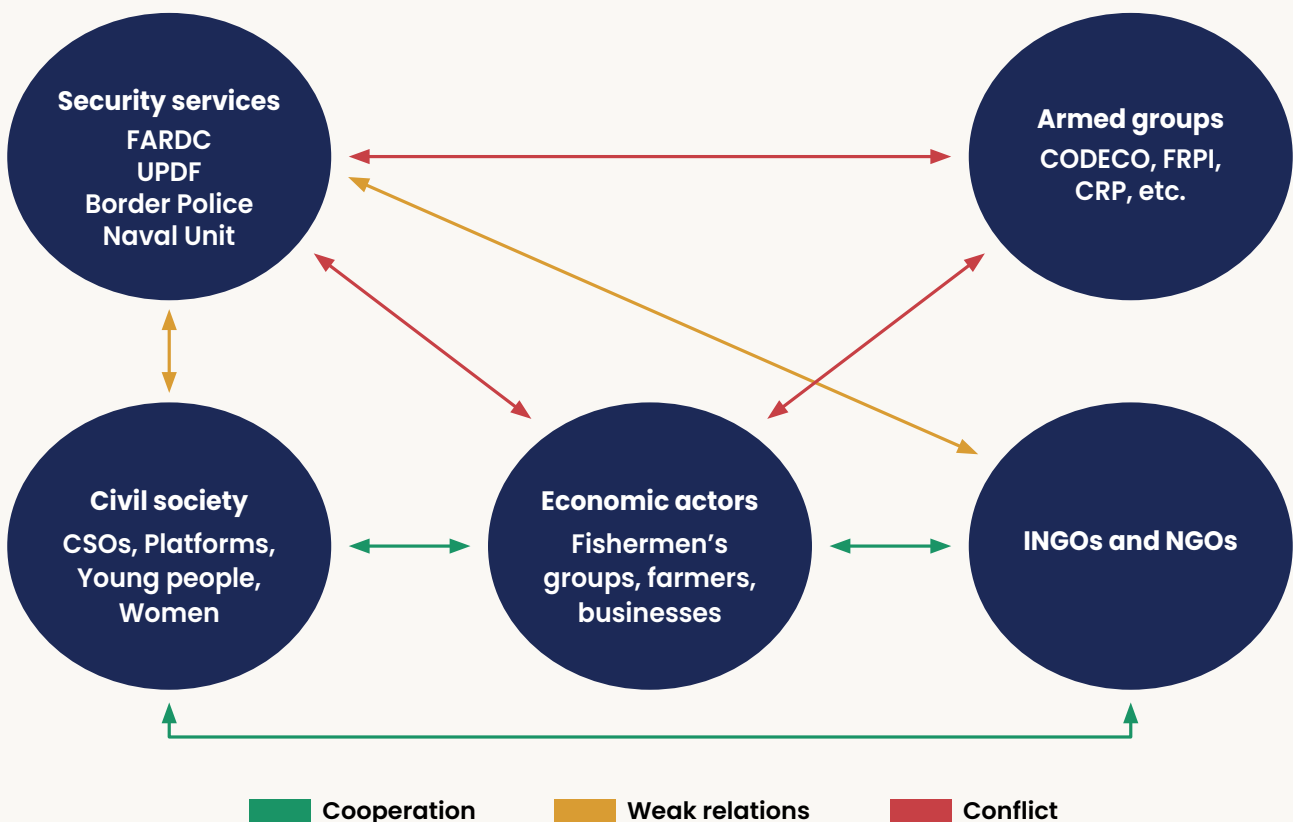
In this chapter, we present a brief overview of the various actors involved in the conflict dynamics described above, as well as their interests and positions. The image below is a network map depicting all the actors mentioned in the conflict analysis above, as well as the relationships that bind them.

The diagram below illustrates the links we outlined in the section on conflict dynamics and highlights how the various actors interact with one another. It is important to understand that our analysis of this situation must take certain nuances into account. According to unconfirmed reports, armed groups are said to be collaborating with the very same actors with whom they appear to be in conflict – notably with members of the security services or with fishermen, as indicated above, who resort to armed groups to exert power over others. It is difficult for us to verify these claims.

However, the level of trust between these different groups is low, even where channels of communication and collaboration

between institutions exist. For example, there are initiatives through which civil society and communities can engage with security actors who are also local authorities on the DRC side, but these are generally ad hoc and, for the time being, do not significantly alter the fact that community members have little confidence in the ability of security actors to protect them and serve their interests – this is due to the extent of corruption and instances of individual actors using their power for personal financial gain.

Any conflict transformation initiative must consider how to bring these different actors together within a shared dynamic and strive to build trust between those actors who can act as catalysts for positive change. Civil society and communities generally have very little power compared to the other actors mentioned on this map, but they constitute the group most affected by the conflict, the one that must bear the consequences of criminal behaviour and whose livelihoods are severely affected



by the conflicts described above. They do, however, have the power to influence and can encourage the wider population to support initiatives that may foster positive behaviour and contribute to good governance.

Initiatives must be based on robust strategies for engaging with the most powerful actors in this context – namely security actors, armed groups and economic actors. This requires a strong political engagement strategy, at both local and national levels, in order not only to improve the oversight and monitoring of local authorities and security actors, but also to consider internal reforms that could encourage positive behaviour – for example, where there are individual advocates for better governance.

This approach is also important in addressing concerns regarding the governance of the oil industry in both countries – perhaps more urgently in Uganda, given that the country is at a more advanced stage of production. Initiatives aimed at improving transparency in the sector and sharing information so that community actors and local leaders can help local communities adapt and meet their needs in oil-producing areas, whilst ensuring the protection of their rights, are essential. The involvement of armed groups poses a challenge for most actors on the ground who lack significant power and must be addressed through the state. Here too, it is

worth considering how community members – for example, mothers whose sons have joined armed groups – can be involved in demobilisation efforts, and whether formal fishing or agricultural cooperatives could offer an effective way out of armed group activities.

International and national NGOs must also improve their collaboration with local structures, including community associations, and consider who is not represented. The fishing community comprises many different groups of people, each with distinct roles and influence – it is important to analyse the dynamics between women engaged in fishing activities (as discussed in the section below), as well as between young men and women who have grown up in relative poverty and have now reached the age where they must enter the labour market.

### **The different roles of men and women within the fishing community**

Women of all ages play a vital role in the lives of fishing communities, on both the Congolese and Ugandan sides of Lake Albert. Many of the women we met during this study work together, sometimes within associations and cooperatives, sometimes within more informal networks, to clean, sort and sell the fish caught and brought back by the fishermen. They constitute a vital and highly active link in the fish value chain.



Focus group with women involved in fishing and fish sales in Kanara, Ntoroko Sub-County, February 2026 (Conflict Sensitivity Hub).

In addition to these activities, many women also engage in small-scale entrepreneurial activities linked to the fish value chain, for example by setting up food and drink stalls around the port areas where fishermen bring their catch or launch their boats.

Their involvement in the value chain represents a significant opportunity for the empowerment of women living and working around Lake Albert, many of whom come from highly disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and few of whom have continued their education beyond primary school, particularly on the Congolese side of the lake.

Although our analysis is anecdotal (and a more in-depth gender analysis is essential for any initiative launched in this area), the women we spoke to explained how they manage their fish cleaning and selling activities despite the enormous domestic burden they bear at home: they rise early to prepare meals for the family and send some of their children to school, then come to work at the port as soon as the boats return with their catch, before spending several hours at the market, and then returning home to do the housework and prepare meals for their extended family. The days are extremely long, and some women working in the fishing sector explained that their family members and the community sometimes did not understand where they 'disappeared' to all day when they were at work at the fish cleaning station and the market. This reflects deeply entrenched social norms in these regions (on both sides of the border), which dictate that women should not be seen as active in decision-making spaces. Those who manage to earn a meagre income are generally obliged to hand it over to their husbands or older family members and have little say in how the money they have earned is spent. Some mentioned joint decision-making within the household, which enabled them to meet certain basic family needs (medicines and schooling).

Some study participants indicated that some women engage in paid sexual activity due to financial constraints in certain fishing communities – particularly around major landing ports – a practice to which some women from particularly vulnerable families resort to meet their basic needs. This is an extremely risky occupation, and no protection is offered to these women, who are exposed to extreme levels of sexual and gender-based violence and serious health risks.

Certain initiatives exist, mainly led by international or national NGOs on both sides of the border, to help women form cooperatives (for example, the *Congolese organisation Solidarité des Femmes Commerçantes de Poissons*), as well as to introduce certain technological innovations aimed at alleviating some of the social and domestic burden weighing on them. However, these appeared to be very isolated and few of those interviewed were able to mention any longer-term changes or results. As mentioned above, any initiative launched in this region should be based on a more detailed mapping exercise than the one the scope of this study allowed us to carry out, to capitalise on the results achieved through projects aimed at combating harmful gender norms and strengthening women's economic and civic power.

Based on our interviews and analysis, women are generally not assigned a central role in conflict prevention or transformation processes or structures – even though they are among the primary targets of violence perpetrated by conflict actors.

The women we spoke to reported high levels of domestic violence within the communities where they live, and indicated that this intensifies when the men of the family return without having caught enough fish, or when they are feeling frustrated (for example, if they are in conflict with another fisherman or have had an altercation with an official that day). There appears to be an urgent need

to work on education and behavioural change in this regard elsewhere, in the farming communities living around the lake, women spend many hours cultivating the fields and play a fundamental role in agricultural value chains, just as they play a key role in fisheries value chains. On the Congolese side of the border, the fields to which women have access are also areas plagued by armed groups and banditry, and cases of sexual harassment and rape suffered by women on their journeys to and from the fields are legion. Generally, women travel in small groups for protection, but this is not always possible, and many are willing to take risks to have something to sell at the market or to prepare at home. Displaced women are particularly vulnerable, as they may not be familiar with their surroundings or lack a social network of other women with whom they can travel for protection.

Most of the conflict resolution structures we have identified are largely male dominated; this is partly because these structures involve community leaders and sometimes

authority figures, positions generally held by men. The situation is the same on both sides of the lake.

Several opportunities exist to influence harmful social and gender norms, which could help to reduce the likelihood of violence against women and within the community. Positive male leadership from men in the community – for example, those serving on committees such as Local Security Committees (LSCs), Local Development Committees (LDCs), etc. – could help set the tone and encourage positive behaviour within a wider group. Similarly, it would be extremely important to work with young men who have grown up in fishing communities on both sides and whose identity – as well as what they consider *'being a man'* to mean, namely providing for their families – is closely linked to their fishing activities. Given the pressure currently weighing on these livelihoods, due to the conflict and the environmental issues identified above, it would be important to support these young men.



Photo taken by Trócaire at the port of Kasenyi in the South Bahema Sector, Irumu Territory, April 2026.

## Chapter 3: Prospects for peace

Several opportunities for the transformation of conflicts into positive peace (Galtung, 1969) exist, for example, by promoting dialogue, peaceful coexistence and shared development between the riparian communities of the DRC and those of Uganda.

In the conflict analysis presented above, this report highlights the need to work towards:

- greater accountability and better access to information, and improving the quality and implementation of governance, particularly in the fisheries and land sectors;
- the establishment of a climate of trust between communities and the government;
- continued efforts to strengthen social cohesion among local stakeholders;
- greater security for communities and the professionalisation of security services provided by state actors;
- the demobilisation of armed groups;
- the creation of economic opportunities offering relevant and climate-friendly alternatives to illicit activities and the overexploitation of resources, particularly as part of a sustainable approach aimed at assisting displaced persons and unemployed or at-risk young people;
- an improved regional governance framework that addresses the needs identified by fishing communities on both shores of the lake, is effectively implemented on both sides, and is communicated transparently to the communities.

For each of these key areas for change, there is a local peace architecture that can be built upon and strengthened.

### **Improved accountability and**

**implementation:** On the Congolese side of Lake Albert, it is possible to raise awareness

among local authorities (civil and military) regarding the rights, taxes and fees to be collected at the initiative of the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, as set out in a legal text.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, no tax should be paid if it is not provided for a legal text currently in force. Civil society should be supported to more effectively demand more effectively, information on legal taxes that are payable and those that have no legal basis and therefore do not need to be paid.

The ACOPELA cooperative and its umbrella organisation, FECOPELA, which bring together a broad range of fishing cooperatives and fishing communities, offer a significant opportunity to improve awareness and accountability of government services amongst fishermen. These associations are relatively well-structured, having benefited for several years from the support of the LEAF project<sup>34</sup> run by the AfDB and the World Bank.

On the Ugandan side of the lake, there are opportunities to build on several social responsibility programmes implemented in the region for over a decade, notably the LEAF programme (AfDB, World Bank). These initiatives have mobilised political economy levers to strengthen the authorities' capacity to respond to fishing communities' demands regarding social responsibility. Such projects could be consolidated to strengthen community accountability mechanisms – including those linked to bilateral aid – by facilitating more active engagement between communities and the authorities, whilst providing safe and structured spaces for dialogue conducive to debate and access to information. More specifically on the issue of oil extraction, in Uganda there is a significant opportunity to collaborate with existing national-level structures working to improve accountability, transparency and monitoring of legislation relating to oil and gas extraction. One such important body, with which peace actors have collaborated

in the past, is the *Parliamentary Forum on Oil and Gas* (PFOG). The PFOG was established in 2010 to provide MPs with a constructive platform enabling them to better understand and significantly influence the governance of the extractive resources sector, particularly about oil and gas<sup>35</sup>. The forum has over 100 active MPs and brings together parliamentary stakeholders from across the country; it maintains a direct link with civil society organisations, thereby creating a multi-stakeholder platform for monitoring and enabling members of the community to contribute to discussions and debates on the development of the oil sector. This initiative does, however, have limitations, notably the fact that it is national in scope and relies on the active participation of parliamentarians. It would be important to focus on strengthening links with local associations and organisations to take full advantage of this opportunity to address the structural factors underlying conflicts.

**Trust between communities and the authorities, including security services:**

the examples cited above, namely the LEAF project and the PFOG's work on oil and gas, illustrate the potential for building bridges between communities and the authorities, both at district and national levels, on the Ugandan side of the border. It is important that these confidence-building initiatives are also extended to the local level and that regular public meetings are organised between communities and their leaders to enable the former to express their concerns or highlight areas where they expect a response from the latter.

On the Congolese side of the border, this is of paramount importance, and trust will only begin to be established once the authorities have demonstrated that they take fishermen's concerns regarding illicit taxation and abuses of power by the authorities seriously. Given the balance of power, it may prove necessary to call upon a third party to act as an independent monitoring body or service regulator who could work alongside bodies such as the

local Territorial Inspectorate, as well as the military inspection and justice systems, to eradicate impunity. At the same time, townhall forums – a relatively innovative mechanism in Ituri province but one that has already proven effective in several areas of the Mahagi, Djugu and Irumu territories – can offer community members a space where they can receive information and answers to their questions, for example when new procedures or rules have been introduced.

There are operational Local Security Committees (CLS) in the three territories on the DRC side – state structures that also involve community representatives in local security matters and meet monthly to discuss insecurity in the territory. Such structures have had a transformative impact on conflicts in other parts of Ituri province as well as in other provinces in eastern DRC and could present a significant opportunity to build trust around shared security concerns – both regarding movements on the lake and the activities of armed groups in the region. However, the functioning and inclusivity of some of these expanded CLSs<sup>36</sup> pose challenges, as many of them do not provide sufficient space for women's representatives or for representatives of young men and young women. Any initiative involving the CLS should therefore seek to remedy this situation and create a space enabling women's representatives and the representatives of young men and women – who are highly active and mobilise associations as well as the Local Youth Council – to hold a permanent seat within the CLS. This is extremely important, as women, men and younger generations experience and perceive security very differently. Supplementing these initiatives with a '*peace in everyday life*' approach would help to better understand how different segments of the community perceive security in the region, as well as the various types of measures needed to ensure inclusive security.

**Social cohesion:** Around Lake Albert, several local mechanisms (community-based organisations or associations), which drive social and cultural dynamics, contribute to stability and development, namely:

- **Traditional mediation mechanisms:** These traditional structures enable conflicts to be resolved through dialogue, negotiation and the search for consensus. They are based on a restorative justice approach, aiming to restore social relations rather than to punish. They also organise palaver or baraza gatherings;
- **Local peace committees:** These facilitate communication between groups in conflict (fishermen, farmers, cross-border communities), thereby helping to reduce tensions and prevent escalation through awareness-raising;
- **Community resource management practices:** Shared management of Lake Albert (particularly fishing) promotes cooperation and limits conflicts arising from competition.

Changing the way stakeholders perceive conflicts (from a threat to an opportunity) is essential for sustainable transformation. In the DRC, there are many different structures: some are rooted at the community level, others represent specific groups (such as the Local Youth Council), and others form part of the broader state architecture (such as the Local Security Committee). All are active to varying degrees in different areas around Lake Albert. Many of them receive support from local organisations, and some have also received ad hoc funding as part of projects implemented by international NGOs. Many local initiatives on the Congolese side of the lake are based on values of solidarity, coexistence and respect for local norms. They help to reduce tensions by promoting solutions tailored to the socio-cultural context of local communities.

*“To reduce tensions within the communities living along Lake Albert, local community structures and NGOs organise community*

*dialogues, mediation sessions, awareness-raising sessions, advocacy campaigns and capacity-building workshops .”<sup>37</sup>*

However, projects wishing to work with these structures should note that some participants in our study explained how community structures for peaceful conflict management remain weak, poorly organised and dependent on NGO interventions. The lack of sustainable mechanisms to ensure the long-term viability of these structures’ actions limits their effectiveness and allows tensions at the community level to persist. It would be essential to assess the extent to which these structures are inclusive, effective and autonomous, and to work with them to identify ways of ensuring their sustainability and securing lasting support within the community to resolve conflicts between members of fishing, farming and pastoralist communities.

In Uganda, our study struggled to find many structured community initiatives to manage these tensions between communities. In Ntoroko District, for example, communities say they have been abandoned by the community leaders who were supposed to help them resolve tensions. Very often, the parties in conflict, apart from the amicable settlements that are commonplace, turn to *the* ‘Chairman’ (Nyumba Kumi). This grassroots authority remains the key mechanism at community level for helping to resolve tensions. In addition to the ‘Nyumba Kumi’, those displaced by the floods say they turn to the chairmen of local councils, particularly when tensions are of a domestic nature. The community laments the fact that it has been abandoned even by those who are supposed to help resolve conflicts:

*“There are no community meetings or dialogues. No one comes to consult us or listen to our concerns.”* The fishermen state: *“The communities do not trust those who set themselves up as leaders of the various [social] groups because of corruption. These people are often complicit in the harassment to which we fishermen are subjected .”<sup>38</sup>*

Cross-border traders in Ntoroko, are organised into an association known as the Ntoroko Cross-Border Traders Association (N-CBTA), whose committee helps to resolve conflicts between cross-border traders.

In Hoima District, apart from women's associations and other interest groups, our study did not identify many structured community initiatives to manage these tensions. Certain organisations support communities in conflict management, notably OKADEWO (Caritas), AFIEGO, ORRA and NAPE. These organisations facilitate community dialogues and awareness-raising activities on peace and social cohesion.

**Demobilisation of armed groups:** Without serious efforts to put an end to the activities of armed groups on the Congolese side of the lake, communities living around Lake Albert will continue to live in an extremely precarious situation. Although the security situation in the three territories bordering the lake has seriously deteriorated over the last five years, initiatives are underway at both provincial and territorial levels and can be utilised to reduce the activities of armed groups around the lake.

Foremost among these is the DRC government's Programme de Désarmement, Démobilisation, Relèvement Communautaire et Stabilisation (P-DDRCS) programme. Although this programme has faced serious implementation challenges since its inception, it remains the main foundation upon which demobilisation and stabilisation activities are based. The programme has a clear legislative framework and teams, including a territorial branch in Mahagi, which is closest to the lake and is essential for any project aimed at transforming the dynamics of conflict in the region. In line with the objectives of the P-DDRCS, projects carried out in the Lake Albert region must develop strategies aimed at:

- Raise awareness among members of armed groups regarding

demobilisation (in this regard, the work of women's associations and other local peace committees represents a significant opportunity and lever);

- Collaborate with cooperatives (agricultural and fishing) as well as with small and medium-sized enterprises in the region to develop effective economic alternatives, so as to encourage members of armed groups to leave the lucrative networks of which they are currently part – this is likely to pose a significant challenge in the Lake Albert region, as armed groups derive substantial profits from movements and access to the lake;
- Support the reintegration of ex-combatants into cooperatives and the wider community. Several models of this approach already exist in Mahagi, a territory accustomed to welcoming people into its social and economic fabric after more than a decade of displacement into this territory from neighbouring areas such as Djugu. However, this should also serve as a warning: communities around the lake are already stretched to the limit in terms of economic and social capital and may struggle to share further with new arrivals. Consequently, economic development opportunities that take conflict contexts into account and are open to all (ex-combatants, members of the local host community and displaced persons) would be most effective in this context, thereby improving the local economy as a whole;
- Build on past demobilisation processes to encourage other groups to demobilise (for example, the FRPI, which was on the verge of mass demobilisation five years ago following significant stabilisation efforts led by the government, NGOs and their international partners);
- Improve the quality of security that government services can provide to community members, as some armed

groups have formed in the name of self-defence or by claiming to defend and protect community members. This is essential to provide a foundation for all the previous areas of work.

**Regional frameworks:** Institutional interventions complement community efforts by structuring resource governance and providing a framework for interactions between local, national and regional actors. Within this framework, several initiatives are being led by various actors, notably state institutions, regional organisations and civil society organisations (NGOs, research institutes or universities, churches, etc.).

Over the last ten years, several large-scale regional projects have been established to support the joint management of Lake Albert, some of which have led to the creation of structures such as the Lake Edward and Albert Basin Organisation (LEABO), which was initially supported by the African Development Bank (AfDB) and World Bank's LEAF project and by NELSAP.

A consultative group for Lakes Edward and Albert (LEAAG) was established in 2019 to bring together the scientific community from both countries to monitor the health of the lakes and propose sustainable solutions<sup>39</sup>. The LEAAG brings together representatives from Uganda and the DRC from the following sectors or fields: fisheries and aquaculture, oil and mining, water resources (management, quality and pollution control), climate change, monitoring, education and information, maritime transport, wildlife and tourism, research, and socio-economic aspects<sup>40</sup>. Although our desk research confirmed the existence of this group, which was still active in 2022, field interviews with community members and civil society organisations made no reference to its activities or outcomes.

Other key programmes highlighted by our literature review include:

- **NELSAP Programme:** Linked to the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), NELSAP

coordinates fisheries studies and develops lake management plans, ensuring cooperation between the DRC and Uganda;

- **African Rift Lakes (ARL) Programme (WWF):** This programme focuses on biodiversity conservation, sustainable livelihoods and ecological footprint management in the region. It incorporates the Albertine Rift Mountain Forests Ecoregion Programme as well as action plans for certain species (elephants, rhinos, great apes);
- **Lake Albert Eastern Catchment Management Initiative (LAECMI):** A WWF-supported project aimed at integrated water resources management (IWRM) in Ugandan catchments, notably the Waki, Nkusi and Wambabya rivers;
- **Albertine Rift Conservation Society (ARCOS):** A regional organisation focused on promoting collaborative actions for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in the Albertine Rift.

Lake Albert is also covered by the '**Team Europe' (TEI) initiative on transboundary water management in Africa, which** was launched in 2022 and aims to strengthen regional development and integration through improved transboundary water management. The initiative forms part of the '*Global Gateway*' initiative and the African Union-European Union investment programme. It brings together EU institutions, EU Member States, African Union bodies (African Union Commission – AUC, African Ministers' Council on Water – AMCOW, African Network of Basin Organisations – ANBO) and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to mobilise over €670 million to support water-related investments<sup>41</sup>.

This project represents a crucial opportunity to strengthen the institutions and accountability of the authorities responsible for the management of Lake Albert. An initial project report was published last year, in

2025<sup>42</sup>, which therefore presents a concrete opportunity to be seized. It is, however, important to conduct a more in-depth analysis to determine how the project aligns with the community level and what scope communities must monitor implementation and hold authorities to account, given the major challenges outlined earlier in this report.

Due to its limited scope, our study was unable to analyse in depth the results of these various programmes over the years. However, a meta-evaluation of these initiatives would be useful, as several of them have sought to establish various structures, sometimes temporary, aimed at strengthening technical cooperation between the DRC and Uganda regarding the management of Lake Albert.

### Legal frameworks and public policies

Finally, both countries have a solid national legal framework in place to address some of the structural factors underlying conflicts in this region.

In Uganda, the Fish Act (Cap 197)<sup>43</sup> is the principal legislation governing fisheries, aquaculture and the management of fishery resources. It regulates the capture, processing and marketing of fish, whilst providing for conservation measures to protect the country's fish stocks and aquatic ecosystems. It aims to limit the over-exploitation of species, define fishing seasons and minimum catch sizes, and regulate authorised fishing gear. The Act also establishes penalties for illegal fishing and the marketing of non-compliant fish (Government of Uganda, 2017).

Immediately after gaining independence in 1960, the DRC nationalised Congolese territory, granting the State absolute authority over its airspace, maritime and land areas. Article 9 of the DRC Constitution thus states that:

*'The State exercises permanent sovereignty, in particular over the soil, the subsoil,*

*waters and forests, over Congolese airspace, rivers, lakes and maritime areas, as well as over Congolese territorial waters and the continental shelf'.*

The legal framework governing the fisheries sector in the DRC is well defined, with laws and regulations in force. This is notably the case through<sup>44</sup>:

- 1) the decree of 12 July 1932 regulating fishing concessions;
- 2) the Decree of 21 April 1937 on fishing and hunting;
- 3) the decree of 6 May 1952 on concessions and the administration of waters, lakes and watercourses;
- 4) the Order of 1 July 1914 on the pollution and contamination of springs, lakes, watercourses and parts of watercourses;
- 5) Act No. 74.009 of 10 July 1974 on the delimitation of the territorial sea of the Republic of Zaire;

Their implementation faces several difficulties. These include their limited dissemination, the obsolescence of the texts governing the fisheries sector, overlap with legal instruments in related sectors (hydrocarbons, water, nature conservation, transport, electricity, etc.), misinterpretation by certain inadequately qualified technical staff, the ineffectiveness of measures for the civil and criminal prosecution of those who violate the law, influence peddling, the lack of an effective presence of competent courts and tribunals in several rural areas, and the presence of armed groups exercising total or partial control over certain villages on the shores of Lake Albert.

With regard to potential disputes between stakeholders involved in the management of lake or river waters, Law No. 15/026 of 31 December 2015 on water in the DRC<sup>45</sup> provides for conflict resolution mechanisms in Articles 14, 75, 106, 107 and 108 (Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2015).

Coordinated governance would help to limit tensions related to borders and the exploitation of resources. Article 29 of Law No. 11/009 of 9 July 2011<sup>46</sup> on fundamental principles relating to environmental protection in the DRC encourages inter-state cooperation regarding the protection, development and use of transboundary lakes or watercourses in accordance with ecological balances (Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2015).

This spirit of cooperation is enshrined in the Framework Agreement on Peace, Security and Cooperation for the DRC and the Great Lakes Region, signed by 15 countries in Addis Ababa on 24 February 2013. Indeed, the DRC has committed to '*Strengthen regional cooperation, including through the deepening of economic integration, with particular attention paid to the issue of natural resource exploitation*'<sup>47</sup>.



Photo taken by Trócaire at the port of Kasenyi in the South Bahema Sector, Irumu Territory, April 2026.

# Chapter 4: Conclusions and recommendations

Above all, this report highlights the significant opportunities offered by Lake Albert to build trust and demonstrate effective joint management of the shared resources between the DRC and Uganda. There is a clear sense of urgency: the environmental degradation of the lake and its surroundings is worsening, despite the measures put in place by both sides. At the same time, the arrival of displaced people affected by the ongoing and unresolved armed conflicts in Ituri is placing additional pressure on this precious source of livelihood. It is essential to find immediate solutions to these interlinked crises. This requires courageous decision-making on the part of local authorities, as well as at national and regional levels. The report identifies several key areas of action for this work, which can build on substantial efforts already implemented and proven effective in the past, but which must be intensified and sustained. This represents a significant opportunity for both states, as well as for their regional partners, to demonstrate their goodwill and commitment to peace and prosperity throughout the region.

## Recommendations

### For national and provincial authorities

To reduce insecurity and strengthen governance:

- Encourage both states (DRC and Uganda) to review the various bilateral agreements on the management of Lake Albert, particularly the 2018 bilateral agreement on the sustainable management of fishery resources and the 2022 operationalization of this agreement. An evaluation framework could be created and updated to identify priority areas for improvement that need to be addressed urgently;
- Strengthen oversight and coordination arrangements for security actors operating in the fisheries sector, including mechanisms and or designated bodies/ structures to support accountability, clarify roles, and enhance civil-military coordination;
- Harmonise DRC-Uganda regulations and clarify lake boundaries; governments in the region should make the most of existing regional mechanisms around Lake Albert and wider Nile Basin to engage in bilateral negotiations to align their fishing regulations and clearly define lake boundaries. This would reduce cross-border tensions and secure economic activities;
- Establish institutional mechanisms for conflict monitoring and resolution, and inter-agency coordination: Create monitoring and coordination units bringing together security, justice and local government services. These mechanisms would enable a rapid and coherent response to crises;
- To the Congolese State:
  - Promulgate a new law regulating the fisheries sector (artisanal and industrial) without delay, considering current realities in the DRC's lake and maritime sectors;
  - Restore security and state authority in conflict zones (Mahagi, Djugu and Irumu) in the DRC to facilitate the return of displaced populations to their places of origin, whilst developing resilience-building alternatives such as agricultural revitalisation to reduce the heavy pressure exerted by communities on Lake Albert.

## **For economic actors and businesses**

To strengthen social cohesion and mediation:

- Promote and formalise local peace committees and community dialogues: it is in the interest of businesses to support the creation and operation of peace committees by facilitating community dialogues on resources and economic activities; reach out to NGOs and community leaders who can support businesses to navigate this.
- Systematically include women, young people and displaced persons/returnees in decision-making bodies: Economic actors must ensure equitable representation within their governance and mediation structures.

To secure livelihoods and ensure equitable access to resources:

- Support adherence to designated fishing zones and the adoption of sustainable practices: Companies should collaborate with communities to ensure adherence to established fishing zones and apply environmentally sustainable practices in their operations, particularly in ways that minimize impacts on fisheries and lake ecosystems;
- Companies should enhance transparency in contractual and operational arrangements, ensure fair and timely compensation for affected communities, and contribute to equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms that support local development and livelihoods.

## **For NGOs and civil society organisations**

To support vulnerable populations and strengthen community resilience:

- Implement targeted programmes for women traders, young people and displaced persons/returnees: develop economic and social projects tailored to these vulnerable groups to reduce

their dependence on high risk activities;

- Support training and information on rights, conflict management and the prevention of gender-based violence: organise awareness-raising campaigns and practical training to build local capacity;
- Conduct information and awareness-raising activities for community members on legal obligations in the fisheries sector;
- Support evidence-based community advocacy and dialogue with local authorities - Facilitate structured engagement platforms on priority issues including the collection of informal or non-regulated taxes and fees alongside other priorities to promote transparency, accountability, and adherence to existing legal frameworks.

To ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions:

- Combine security, governance, economic development and sustainable resource management: Interventions must be coordinated and multi-sectoral, to address the various causes of insecurity simultaneously;
- Regularly map conflicts, social vulnerability and the concentration of power: Establish monitoring and evaluation tools to measure changes in tensions and adjust strategies.

## Endnotes

1. The Doha, Washington and Lomé processes are three separate peace initiatives aimed at resolving the conflict between the DRC on the one hand, and the M23/AFC and Rwanda on the other. The Doha process (2025) focuses on restoring peace between the DRC government and the M23/AFC rebels. The Washington process (2025) addresses tensions between the DRC and Rwanda. The Lomé process represents a new national process officially launched in January 2026 with the support of the African Union, which aims to broaden the peace process and work towards creating an enabling environment, including at community level, for the implementation of a potential peace agreement (it focuses on the broader dynamics of the conflict, particularly the resolution of local, social and structural conflicts).
2. Petroleum Authority of Uganda. *Exploration and Appraisal of Oil and Gas Discoveries*. Uganda announces tender for Albertine Graben acreage | Oil & Gas Journal
3. Source: <https://www.greatlakesofafrica.org/lake-albert/>
4. Source: Lake Albert » [archive of 7 June 2025], on *Encyclopaedia Britannica*
5. National Fisheries Resources Research Institute (NaFIRRI, Uganda)
6. FGD Fishermen, Ntoroko (27 March 2026)
7. For key informants, we developed a structured interview comprising key questions related to the study's research questions. Other individual interviews were less structured and allowed us to explore the context in greater depth and to gather the main priorities and concerns of the various groups.
8. 2024-9-15\_Addressing-Conflicts-in-Ituri\_by-APC\_Final-Version3.pdf
9. Comments from a female cross-border trader, gathered during a semi-structured interview on 27 February 2026 in Ntoroko/Kanara.
10. C8 Implementation of user rights in Lake Albert fisheries.pdf
11. Comments from a trader, focus group with local people, Ntoroko Council Town, 27 February 2026. "Fish are subject to multiple taxes: on purchase at the lake, in depots, along the roads and at markets, in addition to transport costs. Several roadblocks are specifically set up to tax fishery products."
12. A fishermen association leader who took part in a focus group in Ntoroko stated that the differences between the fishing season closure schedules in Uganda and the DRC encourage cross-border movements of fishermen
13. Congolese and Ugandan experts seek to harmonise fishing standards on Lakes Albert and Edward | Radio Okapi
14. Research-brief-Impact-of-Lake-Albert-oil-project-on-fisherfolk-in-Uganda-April-2024-2.pdf
15. Informal resale takes place either to the fisherman from whom the equipment was confiscated, to a third party (sometimes on the other side of the border), or in local or cross-border markets. It should be noted, however, that the 'confiscation-storage-destruction-restitution-legal sale' chain is difficult to trace in the context of these two countries.
16. <https://digitalcongo.org/detail13695-ituri-des-militaires-accuses-d-imposer-une-taxe-illegale-aux-pecheurs-sur-le-littoral-du-lac-albert>
17. [https://www.international-alert.org/app/uploads/2021/08/UgandaSocialAccountability\\_EN\\_2016.pdf](https://www.international-alert.org/app/uploads/2021/08/UgandaSocialAccountability_EN_2016.pdf)
18. **The spawning grounds** of Lake Albert are specific areas where fish reproduce where they come to lay their eggs. A spawning ground is a shallow aquatic area, rich in vegetation or substrates (sand, gravel) and calm (weak current).
19. Interview reported by Radio Okapi, 21 March 2025, Dieudonné Lossa, Civil Society Coordinator for Ituri.
20. International Alert has been documenting this tension for a decade as part of its Sida-funded programmes in Uganda. For further details, click here: <https://www.international-alert.org/publications/governance-and-livelihoods-ugandas-oil-rich-albertine-graben/>.
21. Semi-structured interview, Buliisa.
22. Focus group in Kasenyi (25 February 2025, Kasenyi).
23. Focus group with indigenous fishermen at the Ntoroko Council (27 February 2026, Ntoroko).
24. Interview with a fisherman in Agudi I, Jupasonge Group, Wagungu Chiefdom, Mahagi territory (4 February 2026, Agudi I).
25. Individual interview with a fisherman in Kasenyi on 25 February 2026
26. <https://dtm.iom.int/fr/maps/rdc-aperçu-des-déplacements-provinces-du-nord-kivu-et-dituri-mars-2026>
27. IOM Displacement Tracker 2025
28. Testimony of a displaced fisherman collected during a focus group in Mitaa Village, in the Bahema Banywagi Chiefdom, Djugu territory, on 26 February 2026.
29. Head of the Kolokoto fishing camp in Mahagi Territory (5 March 2026, Kolokoto).
30. Testimonies gathered during a focus group with fishermen in Kasenyi village, Beizia Group, South Bahema Sector, Irumu Territory, on 25 February 2026.
31. Focus group with male fishermen (27 February 2026, Ntokoro).
32. Example: INTERMINISTERIAL DECREES No. 0058/CAB. MIN/PE. EL/2022 and No. 085/CAB/MIN/FINANCES/2022 of 18 July 2022
33. A heated oil pipeline is a pipeline designed to transport oil by maintaining it at a high temperature. Some oils, such as those extracted around Lake Albert, are highly viscous (thick, almost paste-like) and flow poorly at room temperature. Heating helps to thin the oil and facilitate its transport over long distances. In Uganda, the best-known project is the 'East African Crude Oil Pipeline', approximately 1,400 km long, running from Uganda to Tanzania (Port of Tanga); it is an electrically heated pipeline.

34. Lakes Edward and Albert Integrated Fisheries & Water Resources Management Project
35. <https://www.parliament.go.ug/page/parliamentary-forum-oil-and-gas>
36. It should be noted that there are restricted security meetings and other broader meetings involving various social groups, including civil society.
37. Participant in the focus group with local authorities in Kasenyi, in the South Bahema Sector, Irumu Territory, on 25 February 2026.
38. Stated by participants in the Ntoroko discussion group on 26 February 2026.
39. <https://www.agl-acare.org/programs/advisory-groups/lake-edward-albert-advisory-group/>
40. <https://www.agl-acare.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/lake-edward-albert-terms-of-reference.pdf>
41. [https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/resources/team-europe-tracker/partner-countries/sub-saharan-africa/transboundary-water-management-africa\\_en](https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/resources/team-europe-tracker/partner-countries/sub-saharan-africa/transboundary-water-management-africa_en)
42. [https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/library/1st-progress-report-team-europe-initiative-transboundary-water-management-africa\\_en](https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/library/1st-progress-report-team-europe-initiative-transboundary-water-management-africa_en)
43. <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/uga96142.pdf>
44. <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/cng216433.pdf>
45. <https://www.leganet.cd/Legislation/Droit%20economique/Eaux/Loi.15.026.31.12.2015.html>
46. <https://medd.gouv.cd/loi-n-11-009-du-09-juillet-2011-portant-principes-fondamentaux-relatifs-a-la-protection-de-lenvironnement/>
47. <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/scanned-on-24022013-125543.pdf>





**For further information  
please contact:**

**Jean-Christophe Saint-Esteben**

Country Director, Trócaire DRC  
jean.saintesteben@trocaire.org  
+243 815 244 317

**Lucy Williams**

Country Director, International Alert DRC  
LWilliams@international-alert.org  
+243 993 136 430

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