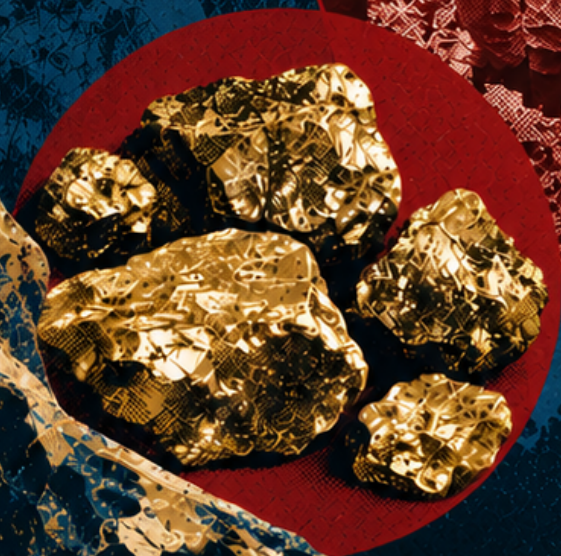


Gold-Backed Brutality

The ISIL-Affiliated Allied Democratic Forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo



October 2026



THE SENTRY

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Executive Summary

Despite military setbacks and the disruption of funding streams linked to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL),¹ the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has evolved into a self-reliant, resilient militant group sustained by conflict gold, new recruits, and entrenched local support networks. The ADF, also known as the Islamic State Central Africa Province (ISCAP) and designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the United States (US) in 2021,² has operated in eastern DRC since the mid-1990s and remains one of the region's most lethal armed groups today.^{3,4} Beyond its ability to finance itself, the group has capitalized on the effects of a Ugandan-Congolese military operation that, despite having counter-ADF objectives, has increasingly been undermined by broader Ugandan strategic and economic interests in eastern DRC that have allowed the ADF to reorganize. The group's financial and military resilience ensures that the Congolese people continue to pay the price. The ADF was the second deadliest non-state armed group for civilians globally in 2025⁵ and has been the largest perpetrator of killings in eastern DRC in recent years.⁶ The group's attacks have included mass killings at churches⁷ and funerals,⁸ and survivors have described militants burning homes, mutilating bodies, and using systematic rape.⁹

The Sentry's investigation indicates that in recent years the ADF's financing has shifted from a reliance on ISIL support toward domestic resource mobilization—specifically, conflict gold that is trafficked to Uganda. Previously, integration into ISIL provided the ADF with access to propaganda and financing.¹⁰ However, these channels began to diminish in late 2024 following US sanctions against key facilitators.¹¹ Since then, conflict gold has provided the majority of the group's funding, followed by cocoa production, racketeering, and kidnapping.¹² As noted in the latest United Nations (UN) Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team report,¹³ the ADF is now largely independent of external ISIL financing, having shifted toward domestically generated revenues, which, as The Sentry's investigation found, are embedded in regional illicit gold and trade networks. This shift has reduced the group's vulnerability to disruptions targeting ISIL-linked financial channels while creating new pressure points within the commercial networks that sustain its gold revenues.

The ADF's conflict gold economy is centered in eastern DRC on the Manguredjipa-Mambasa-Bafwasende corridor, spanning northern North Kivu, southern Ituri, and eastern Tshopo provinces.¹⁴ The Sentry estimates—based on observed revenue shares captured by other armed groups involved in gold trafficking in the DRC and comparable conflict settings—that the ADF could generate approximately \$1 million to \$1.6 million annually from gold sites in the Manguredjipa area alone.¹⁵ This system is sustained by coercive collaboration networks involving traders, transporters, and intermediaries across rural and urban areas,¹⁶ enabling the ADF to maintain mobility, regenerate operational capacity, and—through mobile units—embed itself within eastern DRC's broader conflict economy.¹⁷

Operationally, the ADF functions through dispersed rather than fixed territorial control.¹⁸ Abduction remains the backbone of the ADF's manpower, supplying labor, recruits, and dependents while reinforcing control through systematic violence.¹⁹ As of February 2026, the group maintained an estimated operational strength of 600-700 combatants and an estimated 2,000 dependents, understood to be split between Manguredjipa (Bapere sector of Lubero territory, North Kivu province) and Mambasa (Mambasa territory, Ituri province).²⁰ Offensives by the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) and the Ugandan People's Defence Forces (UPDF) have degraded the ADF's strongholds and driven fragmentation, but



smaller ADF units have continued attacks across forested corridors in North Kivu, Ituri, and increasingly Tshopo province.²¹ These attacks are often strategic, diverting military pressure away from core ADF camps and resource zones.²²

The ADF operates alongside multiple regional armed groups, including the Rwanda-backed M23,²³ within intersecting and fragmented areas of control. Notably, the ADF appears to exploit the FARDC's inability to sustain simultaneous pressure on multiple fronts, with the ADF intensifying attacks when attention shifts toward the M23.²⁴ This strategy is reinforced by political prioritization in Kinshasa, where the M23 is treated as the primary threat, effectively relegating the ADF to a secondary front.²⁵ While The Sentry found no conclusive evidence to demonstrate direct operational collaboration between the ADF and M23 and its regional supporters, a 2024 UN report identifies attempted engagement,²⁶ permissive transit corridors,²⁷ and strategic economic dynamics—particularly linked to Uganda's military and commercial presence²⁸—that may indirectly reinforce the conditions under which the ADF continues to adapt and survive.

The Sentry's investigation further indicates that Operation Shujaa, the UPDF's counter-ADF intervention in eastern DRC, increasingly overlaps with the Ugandan government's economic interests tied to illicit gold, regional trade corridors, infrastructure, and resource flows.²⁹ While Operation Shujaa has pushed the ADF away from sections of the Ugandan border, the insurgency has adapted by dispersing into more remote and resource-rich areas while continuing to conduct large-scale attacks against civilians.³⁰ This prolonged insecurity has coincided with the expansion of UPDF deployments beyond the original Operation Shujaa framework into additional areas of North Kivu and Ituri alongside the growing importance of transport corridors linking eastern DRC to regional markets. Gold and other commodities continue to move toward buyers, refiners, and export channels across the border through routes such as the Beni-Kasindi axis and trading hubs, including North Kivu's Butembo city.³¹ Local civilians The Sentry spoke to in eastern DRC frequently echoed the belief that the ADF is the best excuse for Uganda to exert control over the DRC's resources,³² reflecting widespread perceptions that the continued ADF threat sustains the conditions for Uganda's long-term security, political, and economic presence in strategically important parts of eastern DRC.³³

The ADF's endurance thus stems less from territorial control or stable alliances than from its ability to operate as a flexible extremist group embedded in a fragmented conflict ecosystem. As military pressure and sanctions disrupted external support networks, the militia adapted by turning to conflict gold, coercive taxation, abduction, and recruitment, making it increasingly self-sufficient and resilient against several conventional counterterrorism measures.³⁴ The ADF's survival is sustained by networks linking conflict-affected mining areas to regional trade corridors and Ugandan markets, while military offensives have fragmented and dispersed—rather than dismantled—the group's operational capacity.³⁵ Far from a declining insurgency, the ADF has evolved into a more decentralized, adaptable, and financially resilient threat—one capable of regenerating under pressure and perpetuating violence across eastern DRC.³⁶ On the other hand, the scarcity of reported ADF attacks on Ugandan soil since late 2023 suggests that the group's reach and threats to Uganda remain limited.³⁷ This raises important questions about the extent to which the threat to Uganda justifies the country's expanding military presence in eastern DRC.



Key recommendations

- The UN Security Council, United States, United Kingdom, and European Union (EU) should investigate conflict gold supply chains that link eastern DRC to Ugandan trading, refining, and export networks. Particular attention should be given to identifying traders, intermediaries, refiners, exporters, and financial facilitators that knowingly or negligently enable the laundering of conflict gold benefiting the ADF. These actors should be considered for designation under paragraph 7(g) of UN Security Council Resolution 2293 (2016).³⁸
- The government of Uganda should ensure that Ugandan army deployments strictly adhere to existing agreements with the DRC and refrain from unilaterally expanding the geographic scope of Operation Shujaa. Any modification to the operation's mandate or areas of deployment should be jointly agreed upon, publicly clarified, and limited to demonstrable counter-ADF objectives. Given the scarcity of ADF attacks on Ugandan soil since late 2023, any further expansion of UPDF deployments should be justified by clear evidence of a continuing threat to Uganda rather than serve as a pretext for an open-ended Ugandan military presence pursuing unrelated political, commercial, or resource interests in eastern DRC.
- The government of the DRC should rebalance security priorities to counter the ADF alongside the M23. This reprioritization should include dedicated FARDC deployments and coordinated operations to sustain pressure on both fronts and prevent exploitation of operational gaps.
- Given that military pressure alone has repeatedly displaced rather than dismantled the ADF, the UN, the EU, and other international partners should support the government of the DRC in developing long-term civilian strategies to reduce the ADF's local entrenchment and recruitment base. Priority should be given to strengthening communities' capacity to resolve local disputes, which the ADF frequently exploits to gain local acceptance by presenting itself as *Walinda Amani* ("guardians of peace") before imposing its own coercive rule. Priority should also be given to community-based programs that provide economic and social alternatives for young people vulnerable to recruitment as combatants or facilitators of ADF supply chains.



ADF Command Structure, Force Composition, and Ideology*

It was around 1 a.m. on July 27, 2025, and dozens of worshipers in Komanda, Ituri province, had gathered at Saint Anuarite Catholic Church for a night vigil—a tradition meant to bring the community closer to God and to each other. Instead, it became a massacre. Armed with guns and machetes, ADF fighters stormed the church and killed more than 40 civilians, including women and children, before burning nearby homes, abducting survivors, and disappearing into the surrounding forest before security forces ever arrived.³⁹ This was not an isolated horror.

On September 8, 2025, ADF fighters reportedly mingled with residents during a funeral wake in Ntoyo, North Kivu, before suddenly attacking mourners. Victims were killed with machetes and firearms, and subsequent reporting indicated a death toll of at least 60. Survivor accounts describe screams, mutilated bodies, and a profound sense that security forces had abandoned the community.⁴⁰

The ADF's violence is not incidental—it is strategic. The group deliberately and systematically targets civilians in eastern DRC,⁴¹ killing over 1,370 people in 2025 alone.⁴² This report draws on testimony gathered directly from those who have survived. Former ADF hostages interviewed by The Sentry described details of their abduction, including witnessing ADF combatants beheading scores of civilians on the same day the hostages were abducted.⁴³ Abducted women revealed being systematically subjected to rape and gang rape by ADF fighters during their capture and detention in ADF camps.⁴⁴

This pattern of extreme violence raises a critical question: how has the ADF sustained its capacity to operate at this scale despite years of military operations against it? Following the arrest of its longtime leader Jamil Mukulu in April 2015, the group appeared to be in decline, weakened by low morale and financial strain.⁴⁵ However, under the leadership of Musa Baluku, who officially pledged allegiance to ISIL in 2019,⁴⁶ the ADF appeared to have gained access to operational, financial, and propaganda support from ISIL-linked networks in East Africa, helping revive the extremist group.^{47, 48} Understanding the group's command structure, force composition, and ideology is key to explaining how it has withstood sustained military pressure while continuing to inflict widespread civilian harm through abduction, indoctrination, and systematic violence.

Centralized leadership, operational flexibility

The ADF functions as a flexible insurgent system, leveraging mobility, forested terrain, and weak governance to sustain operations. ADF leadership is centralized under the alias Musa Baluku, whom the UN has identified as Seka Baluku.⁴⁹ Baluku has overseen the group's integration into ISIL structures since 2015, progressively aligning its operations, financing, and propaganda with transnational jihadist networks.^{50, 51}

*Reports by The Sentry are based on interviews, documentary research, and, where relevant, financial forensic analysis. In some cases, sources speak to The Sentry on the condition that their names not be revealed out of concern for their safety or other potential retaliatory action. The Sentry establishes the authoritativeness and credibility of information derived from those interviews through independent sources, such as expert commentary, financial data, original documentation, and press reports. Prior to publication, The Sentry endeavors to contact the persons and entities discussed in its reports and afford them an opportunity to comment and provide further information.



While the ADF command structure is organized around a central leadership nucleus, it is geographically distributed with regional delegations. Baluku is associated with the Madina camp in Mambasa near the Ituri River. As the group's primary command hub, the Madina camp hosts other key figures⁵² and serves as the center for strategic coordination, communications, and external linkages.⁵³

Ahmad Mahmood Hassan (also known as Abwakasi) leads operations along the Lubero-Bapere-Manguredjipa axis,⁵⁴ with headquarters in Lohoa and positions across Batike, Baredje, and Bapukara.⁵⁵ This expansion front overlaps with major gold mining sites,⁵⁶ indicating a strategy that combines deploying to new areas to control natural resources while relieving pressure on core bases in Ituri.⁵⁷

ADF deployment areas as of October 2025 in relation to gold mine locations. Source: IPIS Mapping Data.



Notably, the ADF's structure combines combatants (both voluntarily enrolled and coercively enlisted), abducted civilians assigned to supporting roles, and dependents. Abwakasi reportedly commands around 600 individuals, including roughly 250 combatants since June 2024,⁵⁸ while the broader organization is estimated at approximately 600 combatants. The ADF also includes approximately 2,000 noncombatants—including abducted civilians, family members, and other dependents living under its control—reflecting the group's reliance on captive and controlled populations to sustain its operations.⁵⁹ Operationally, the ADF relies on small, decentralized units, normally comprising 20 to 40 fighters, enabling mobility and evasion⁶⁰ and partially explaining why FARDC-UPDF offensives have fragmented rather than dismantled the group. The ADF has retreated into forested areas such as Mont Hoyo, Mungamba, and Idohu while maintaining a steady tempo of attacks, particularly against civilians,⁶¹ to divert pressure from core camps and resource zones.⁶²

The ADF operates across a fluid corridor spanning Beni, Mambasa, and Irumu in eastern DRC, with growing activity toward Nia Nia-Bafwasende.⁶³ These are not fixed territories but interconnected operational spaces where units circulate and regroup. ADF camps are mobile, forest-based, and typically located near rivers. While some host hundreds of people or even more,⁶⁴ they are frequently moved due to military pressure. As a result, infrastructure remains minimal—tents, solar panels, generators, and basic communications such as phones and radios are standard.⁶⁵

Recent operations have confirmed the group's high adaptability. Following losses in 2025, the ADF rapidly regrouped, resumed attacks, and reimposed taxation in retreat zones.⁶⁶ Movements across subgroups appear coordinated, including redeployments from Bapere toward Mambasa and the Okapi Reserve in early 2026.⁶⁷ Overall, military setbacks have triggered redistribution rather than degradation.

A dense network of local collaborators

Field evidence indicates that the ADF's resilience depends less on formal alliances than on dense, structured networks of local actors embedded within communities and local economies. Across interviews with former hostages, judicial investigators, local civil society, and UN officials, respondents noted the ADF consistently relies on civilian-based networks for supplies, transport, and communication, making collaboration a core component of its functioning rather than a marginal phenomenon.⁶⁸

Former hostages and ex-combatants report that ADF camps are regularly resupplied through civilian intermediaries, with deliveries coordinated via phones and GPS-designated dropoff points, often involving motorbike transporters and local traders.⁶⁹ These supply chains operate on recurring cycles, sometimes every one to three months, indicating a degree of organization and predictability.⁷⁰ DRC military intelligence and judicial investigators interviewed by The Sentry further confirm structured communication networks: in 2025, investigations, which included analyzing mobile phones seized from arrested ADF operatives, identified more than 1,000 contacts linked to operational coordination that the group used to dispatch instructions and organize supply routes.⁷¹

Collaboration within these networks is fundamentally structured around forced labor and coercion, including threats of violence, abduction, reprisals, or denial of access to farmland and trade routes, while economic incentives and social embeddedness operate as secondary and reinforcing mechanisms.⁷² What may appear as civilians' voluntary engagement typically reflects constrained choices under duress.



At the same time, some civilians engage for pragmatic reasons, such as maintaining livelihoods or securing market access, although still within an environment shaped by intimidation.⁷³ In some cases, collaboration is reinforced through family or financial ties, including mobile money transfers and intermediary networks linking rural and urban areas.⁷⁴

The ADF's logistical system is closely connected to commercial and urban networks, particularly in Butembo, which functions as a key hub for procurement, coordination, and recruitment facilitation. Traders, small businesses, and transporters based in or connected to Butembo contribute to supply chains, sometimes knowingly and sometimes without full awareness of the end users, with documented arrests of collaborators linked to these networks.⁷⁵

This urban embedding is illustrated by several cases. Motorbike transporters operating along routes such as the Kamango road collect and deliver supplies, with dropoff points communicated by phone. Local authorities are aware of some drivers. In Beni, transporters purchasing goods for ADF networks fled after learning they were under investigation. Their employer subsequently reported them to the police, exposing organized supply chains linking urban actors to ADF camps.⁷⁶ In Manguredjipa, a woman was arrested after receiving a mobile money transfer from her husband—who was inside an ADF camp—to procure goods locally, highlighting how urban-based financial and family networks sustain ADF logistics.⁷⁷ Judicial investigators interviewed by The Sentry identified several similar cases linked to the arrest of Judison Kasereka Katrisa (“Kahu”), a central intermediary between the ADF and ISIL financing networks and a key figure in the development of its gold-based financing system, further underscoring the role of urban-based financial and logistical networks in sustaining ADF operations.⁷⁸ Katrisa was arrested in Bunia and later sentenced for terrorism financing.⁷⁹

These examples confirm that the ADF's logistics apparatus extends beyond rural strongholds and is embedded in broader economic circuits that link conflict zones to urban markets, transport networks, and downstream markets in Uganda. In particular, goods, funds, and conflict-linked resources are routed through hubs such as Butembo and Kasindi via intermediary traders and transport networks to Ugandan commercial channels, where weak oversight and traceability sustain these cross-border systems.⁸⁰

Acceptance through deception

The ADF employs strategies of deception, infiltration, and social positioning to sustain and expand its collaboration networks. These include disguises—such as impersonating FARDC soldiers using looted uniforms—and broader tactics designed to infiltrate communities and avoid detection.⁸¹ Such practices align with external reporting highlighting the ADF's reliance on clandestine methods and informal networks.⁸²

A central element is the *Walinda Amani* (“guardians of peace”) narrative, through which the ADF presents itself as a security provider or mediator. Field evidence indicates that the ADF exploits local grievances such as land disputes, intercommunity tensions, or protection gaps to gain initial acceptance or tolerance. This allows the group to establish footholds in a community before imposing coercive authority.⁸³

In practice, this posture often masks control. Initial nonviolent engagement—sometimes accompanied by symbolic gestures—frequently transitions into forced collaboration, taxation, and ideological imposition.⁸⁴ Deception thus extends beyond battlefield tactics to social and political positioning.⁸⁵



Overall, the ADF's use of deception constitutes a broader strategy of social penetration, embedding the group within local conflict environments and converting initial acceptance into systems of control, extraction, and indoctrination.

Rigid ideology

Underpinning many of these strategies and structures is the ADF's ideological system, which former ADF abductees interviewed by The Sentry described as built around forced belief, absolute domination of abducted civilians, and strict regulation of daily life. Former hostages consistently described an environment in which virtually every aspect of life was governed by the group through a combination of religious coercion, violence, and fear, leaving captives little room for personal autonomy—let alone resistance.

Multiple testimonies described systematic forced conversion to Islam, with abductees compelled to adopt religious practices immediately upon arrival in ADF camps or face punishment for noncompliance.⁸⁶ Religion functioned less as an expression of faith than as a mechanism for enforcing obedience and reinforcing the group's hierarchical structure. This system was sustained through rigid rules governing daily behavior—including mandatory prayers, strict dress codes, and movement restrictions for some dependents—and requiring unquestioning submission to male authority, with violations commonly punished through whipping or other forms of violence.⁸⁷

This same logic of control extends beyond religious observance to the institutional regulation of family life. Forced marriages are embedded within the ADF's hierarchy, with women assigned to fighters—in some cases after being subjected to medical examinations intended to determine their capacity to bear children. Children are simultaneously indoctrinated into the group's religious framework and exposed to extreme violence from an early age, a practice that reflects the ADF's efforts to ensure both ideological continuity and organizational resilience.⁸⁸ Taken together, these practices—forced conversion, rigid behavioral control, and the institutionalization of reproduction—reflect the ADF's ideological and operational links to ISIL,⁸⁹ even as the group continues to favor mobility, coercive control, and episodic violence over the durable territorial administration ISIL-affiliated groups have pursued elsewhere.⁹⁰



Evolution of ADF Financing: From External Support to Domestic Resource Mobilization

Despite its ties to transnational jihadist networks, the ADF's financing has progressively shifted from external support to a predominantly localized and resource-driven system. Earlier links to ISIL networks in East Africa and Somalia supported the group's funding, recruitment, and expertise transfer.⁹¹ For years, this support—supplemented by racketeering, coercive taxation, and predatory exploitation of populations under its control—allowed the group to operate without developing large-scale domestic resource extraction systems.⁹² However, the arrest and sanctioning of key actors who facilitated ISIL fund transfers disrupted this model, prompting a shift toward local resource mobilization.⁹³

The July 2025 arrest of ADF collaborator Judison Katrisa marked a turning point. Katrisa had managed structured smuggling and communication systems, including the use of Starlink technology, and he was arrested with Starlink systems smuggled from Uganda.⁹⁴ The introduction of portable satellite broadband likely provided a significant operational advantage for remote ADF camps by enabling reliable, high-bandwidth communications in areas with little or no cellular coverage.⁹⁵ Compared with traditional satellite telephones, Starlink terminals offer substantially lower operating costs while supporting voice, messaging, video, and large-volume data transfers that facilitate command and control, logistical coordination, propaganda dissemination, and communication with external facilitators.⁹⁶ Since late 2024, reports warned that Starlink systems' portability and independence from terrestrial telecommunications infrastructure also make them well suited for mobile insurgent groups operating in remote areas.⁹⁷

Indeed, the ADF's use of smuggled Starlink technology has aided the group's communications and operations. Interview evidence indicates that Katrisa was responsible for coordinating these communications alongside established smuggling routes,⁹⁸ illustrating how commercially available technologies can enhance the operational resilience of armed groups despite sustained military pressure. The reported use of stolen Starlink terminals is consistent with wider regional concerns over the illicit cross-border movement of the technology. Prior to licensing Starlink services in Uganda in 2026, Ugandan authorities reported that terminals were being illegally imported and activated through neighboring countries before requesting that the company block unauthorized users.⁹⁹ This demonstrates that informal regional networks could acquire and operate Starlink equipment outside official distribution channels, making such technology accessible to armed groups operating in remote areas.

As external financing channels have come under increasing pressure, the ADF has relied more heavily on the domestic revenue streams that Katrisa had helped establish.¹⁰⁰ Gold is now the core of the ADF's financing, particularly along the Manguredjipa-Mambasa-Bafwasende corridor.¹⁰¹ The ADF's involvement in the gold economy ranges from direct control of mining areas to taxation and regulation of access to extraction sites. Since mid-2024, ADF operations have increasingly concentrated around mining zones, trade hubs, and transport routes, directly linking violence to resource control.¹⁰² Attacks on mining infrastructure and key roads both generate revenue and create economic vacuums.¹⁰³ Operation Shujaa's limited pursuit of the ADF into dense forest areas, where several mining sites are located,¹⁰⁴ has enabled the group to consolidate influence over lucrative resource zones, while repeated attacks on trading centers serve as warnings to gold dealers to bend to the ADF's requests or face reprisals.¹⁰⁵ Civilians mine gold under coercive conditions while traders and intermediaries integrate production into



regional commercial networks.¹⁰⁶ The group continues to expand toward new mining zones, as reflected in attacks around Muchacha and Mavuvu in March 2026.¹⁰⁷

Key sites in Bapere—including Botambisi, Lata Bien, Mapendano, Bududyia, Mabuo, and Isange—remain central (see Annex 3). At Botambisi, the number of diggers reportedly dropped from around 3,000 to 350 following the ADF's arrival between October 2025 and January 2026. Nevertheless, production remains significant, with estimates of five kilograms (kg) of gold mined per week.¹⁰⁸

As of January 22, 2026, reported gold prices along the supply chain were as follows:¹⁰⁹

- Manguredjipa négociants purchase price: ~\$123/gram
- Sale price from Manguredjipa traders to Butembo buying houses: ~\$131/gram
- Sale price from Butembo buying houses to Ugandan refiners: ~\$138/gram
- Sale price from Ugandan refiners to Dubai-based operators: ~\$147-150/gram
- International market price: ~\$155/gram

This structure demonstrates progressive value capture at each stage of the supply chain, from extraction zones in eastern DRC through regional trading hubs and Ugandan refining networks to international export markets. Overall, sites under the ADF's influence in Manguredjipa produce an estimated 800 kg of gold per year, worth approximately \$98 million at market prices. Traders and intermediaries involved in this trade are estimated to capture about \$6.8 million in annual profits, a portion of which—along with other taxes and fees imposed throughout the supply chain—could generate between \$1 million and \$1.6 million annually for the ADF.¹¹⁰

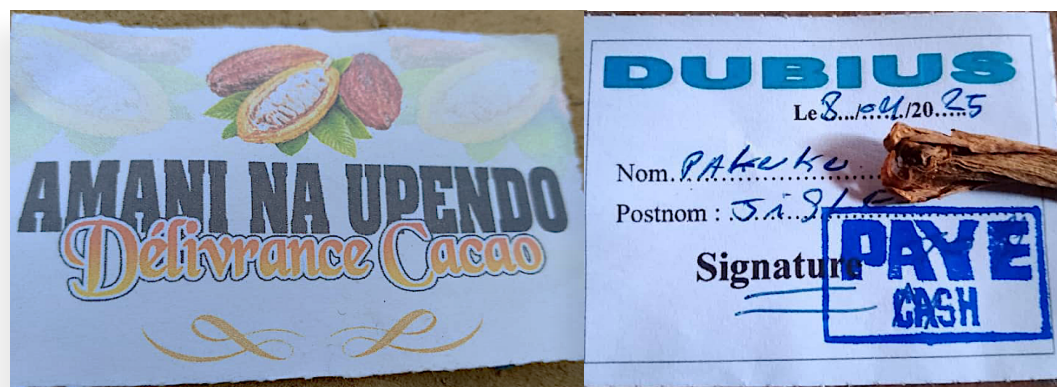
Gold mining and trading sites are also the focus of violent competition between armed groups, as illustrated by clashes with NDC-Rénové (NDC-R) at Lukayayo in September 2025.¹¹¹ The ADF and other armed groups loosely affiliated with the Wazalendo coalition control some of the most productive mines in Bapere, generating substantial output.¹¹² More broadly, mining zones are characterized by coercive taxation, forced labor, and restricted access, reflecting their central role in armed group financing.¹¹³

Either knowingly or through inadequate due diligence, intermediaries and traders source gold from areas under ADF influence and route it via Butembo to gold dealers and refiners in Uganda.¹¹⁴ Field evidence indicates that at least 30 of the 54 gold buyers still operating in Manguredjipa as of March 2026 knowingly purchased gold from sites controlled by the ADF and other armed groups, operating on margins of \$6-8 before reselling to officially approved gold purchasing counters in Butembo.^{115, 116} These counters then sell the gold to Uganda-based gold refineries.¹¹⁷ The same sources note that the remaining buyers also do not differentiate between conflict and non-conflict gold, instead smuggling it directly to Uganda to their own buyers, where gold traceability mechanisms are weak and easily circumvented.¹¹⁸

Alongside gold revenues, the ADF has expanded coercive taxation and predatory extraction systems. In areas such as Mugamba and the rest of Walese Vonkutu chiefdom, located in Irumu territory (Ituri province), the group imposes *jeton* (“token”) fees for access to land, trade, or livelihoods.¹¹⁹ Since March 2025, it has implemented a structured taxation system requiring civilians to pay for access to cocoa



fields, fishing areas, and other economic activities. Reported fees include \$10 for individual registration (covering farmers, hunters, fishermen, and other livelihoods), \$25 per hectare for field access, \$10 per canoe, and up to \$130 for chainsaw operators.¹²⁰ Refusal to pay exposes civilians to retaliation.¹²¹ This model is complemented by systematic looting, forced labor, and the exploitation of rural populations rather than any attempt at formal governance.¹²²



(Left) ADF jeton from Mabuo/Botambisi (Right) ADF jeton from Mambasa. Photos: The Sentry.

After coercive taxation and predatory extraction systems, cocoa constitutes the ADF's third largest revenue source. Since 2024, the group has increasingly exploited the sector through looting and coercive control while remaining largely absent from direct cocoa production or trade.¹²³ Following Operation Shujaa's pushback of the ADF from its former strongholds around Beni, the group's area of activity shifted during 2025 toward the RN4 axis between Komanda and Mambasa, where attacks frequently coincided with cocoa harvest periods and aimed to seize production while restricting civilian access to fields.¹²⁴ Additional field reporting suggests that the ADF has reinforced its presence in cocoa-producing areas through local armed networks, including possible renewed linkages with the Banya Bwisha and Chini ya Tuna groups in Irumu territory.¹²⁵ Kidnapping for ransom provides a further—though comparatively limited—source of income, with reported payments typically ranging between \$500 and \$800.¹²⁶

This financing system depends on the ADF's deep integration into civilian, commercial, and cross-border trading networks linking rural mining areas to urban hubs and Ugandan markets. Through coercion, intimidation, and embedded intermediary systems, the group is able to move goods, funds, and logistical support across areas characterized by weak oversight and limited traceability.¹²⁷ Communication technologies, including mobile phones and GPS coordination, further enhance operational connectivity and resilience.¹²⁸ Together, these networks enable the ADF to regenerate capabilities and sustain influence across a fragmented conflict environment.¹²⁹

While external support networks have not disappeared entirely, they appear to play an increasingly secondary role. The ADF continues to maintain links across East Africa, but these sources now operate alongside—and are increasingly overshadowed by—locally generated revenues.¹³⁰ The latest UN Monitoring Team report assessed the group as largely self-sufficient and receiving limited outside financing.¹³¹



ADF Relations with Other Armed Groups

Rather than structured around stable alliances, the ADF's relationships with other armed groups are fluid, situational, and contested. Cooperation is shaped by a combination of ideological, political, economic, and local security considerations. The ADF's transnational jihadist orientation and alignment with ISIL set it apart from most other armed groups in eastern DRC, which primarily mobilize around community representation and local grievances.¹³² This ideological distinctiveness—particularly the ADF's objective of establishing a “caliphate” in a predominantly Christian region—limits the prospects for durable alliances. Nevertheless, economic interests, shared enemies, commercial networks, and localized tactical considerations may encourage episodic cooperation, coexistence, or accommodation. Multiple sources cautioned against overstating formal ties.¹³³

These relationships vary significantly by locality and operational context, ranging from coexistence and transactional accommodation to competition and occasional tactical overlap. The ADF interfaces with zones controlled by M23 as well as the Congolese armed group CRP/Zaire, elements linked to the Wazalendo coalition of armed groups like the Union des patriotes pour la libération du Congo (UPLC) and Mai Mai factions, and Coopérative pour le Développement du Congo (CODECO).¹³⁴ The UN Group of Experts has also documented CODECO's involvement in gold trafficking to Uganda.¹³⁵

Box 1: The ADF-M23 Relationship: No Formal Alliance, but Persistent Indicators of Attempted Engagement, Permissive Transit, and Strategic Overlap

Circumstantial evidence, alongside reporting from field researchers, judicial authorities, and civil society sources, suggests attempted engagement, permissive transit, and indirect interaction between the ADF and M23. At the time of writing, however, The Sentry found no evidence of a formal operational alliance or direct command and control collaboration linking the two groups.¹³⁶

As M23 advanced into Lubero in 2024, networks linked to both groups reportedly interacted, including in Kampala, according to the UN Group of Experts on the DRC.¹³⁷ M23 allegedly sought nonaggression arrangements and safe passage with the ADF, though these overtures were reportedly rejected by ADF leadership, suggesting exploratory outreach rather than formal partnership.¹³⁸ Notwithstanding, despite the ADF's area of operations sharing a long “border” with the M23 in Beni and Lubero, there have been no reported attacks between the two groups. The May 2026 arrest by the FARDC's Sukola 1 operation of five alleged ADF collaborators linked to Abwakasi in Bapere alongside alleged M23 collaborators showcases the overlapping operational environment in Beni and Lubero.¹³⁹ Importantly, Sukola 1 spokesperson Lieutenant Marc Elongo did not present the arrests as evidence of direct collaboration between the ADF and M23 but rather as the dismantling of two distinct networks operating within the same broader conflict environment.¹⁴⁰



Field and judicial investigations further document cases in which ADF-linked supply chains and military materiel transited through, or originated from, areas under M23 influence. These include the September 2025 arrest of an ADF collaborator linked to Abwakasi while collecting explosives from Goma, additional cases involving military fatigues trafficked from Goma into Beni,¹⁴¹ and military intelligence reports of explosives intercepted in Butembo after transit from Goma.¹⁴² While these incidents do not establish direct collaboration, they indicate permissive transit corridors, tolerated movement, or gaps in M23 territorial control that may indirectly facilitate ADF logistics.¹⁴³

Field intelligence sources further reported that Uganda tolerated or reopened commercial border flows through M23-controlled zones in Rutshuru despite the group's occupation of Congolese territory. In addition, Uganda's Chief of Defence Forces (CDF) and President Yoweri Museveni's eldest son, Muhoozi Kainerugaba, published several posts online aligning himself with Rwandan and M23 positions, including dismissing UN findings on Rwanda's role.¹⁴⁴ These dynamics further reinforce perceptions of permissive regional conditions surrounding overlapping M23 and ADF operational environments.

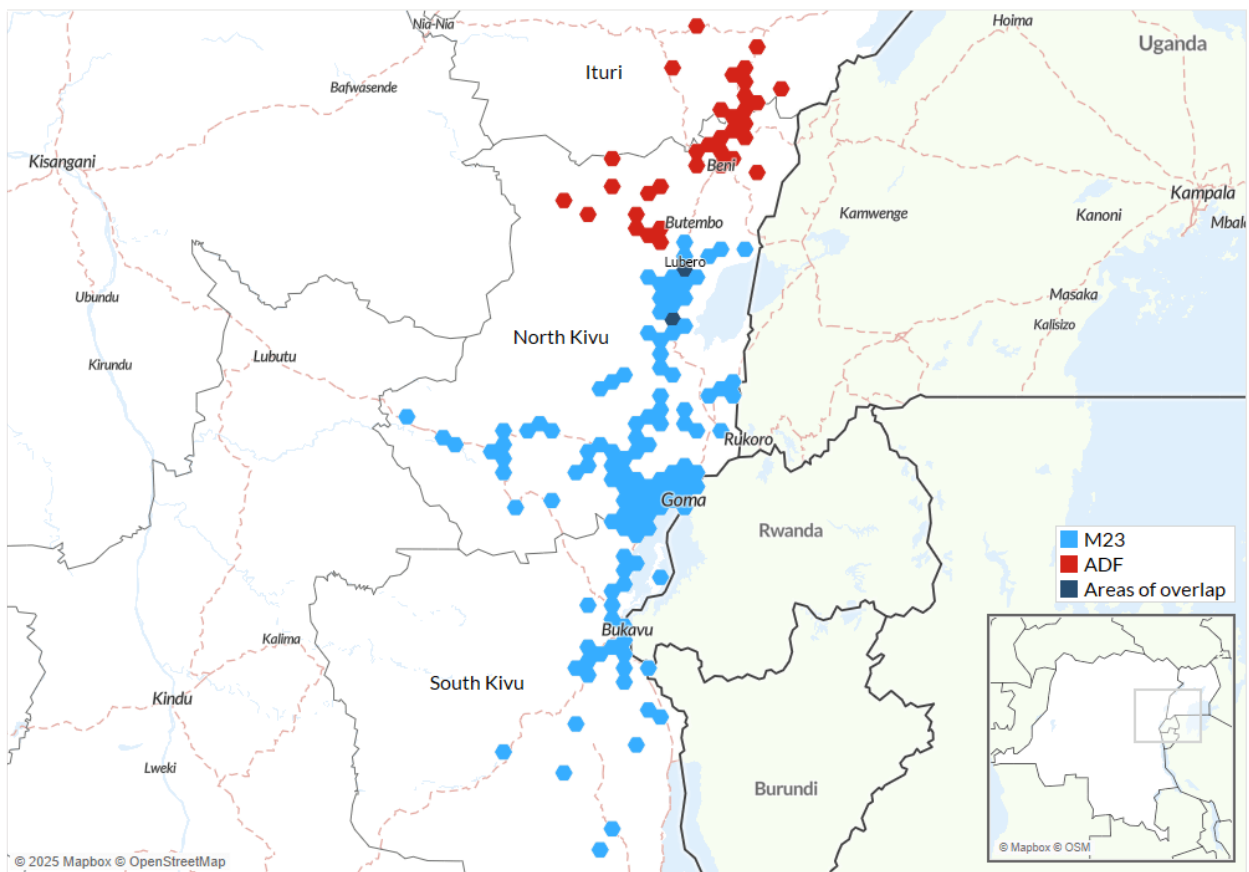
Military and intelligence sources have also identified patterns of operational sequencing that may have mutually beneficial effects. Following UPDF-supported FARDC operations that halted an M23 advance in Kitundi in December 2024, the ADF intensified attacks in Manguredjipa two weeks later, further stretching the FARDC across multiple fronts.¹⁴⁵ In this context, both the ADF and M23 appear to benefit from the FARDC's limited capacity to sustain simultaneous pressure across multiple fronts, allowing ambiguity, weak territorial control, and contested security dynamics to function as force multipliers that sustain their respective operations.¹⁴⁶

In Ituri, the ADF shares operational space with Thomas Lubanga's CRP/Zaire, an M23-aligned proxy,¹⁴⁷ but field interviews did not establish evidence of operational collaboration between the ADF and CRP/Zaire.¹⁴⁸ Overall, available reporting does not demonstrate a formal alliance between the ADF and M23 or its proxies. However, attempted engagement, permissive transit corridors, overlapping operational spaces, and broader regional political dynamics indicate a relationship shaped less by direct coordination than by mutually advantageous coexistence within eastern DRC's fragmented conflict environment.



Areas of activity of the M23 and ADF in the DRC

December 2024 - March 2025



While no formal alliance between the ADF and the M23 exists, the groups operate in close proximity, and circumstantial evidence suggests attempted engagement, permissive transit, and indirect interaction. Source: ACLED (2025).

Box 2: Overlapping Operational Spaces, Shifting Relationships, and Local Perception of ADF-Wazalendo Ties

The Wazalendo label encompasses a highly fragmented coalition whose components maintain diverse and often shifting relationships with the ADF depending on locality.¹⁴⁹ Available evidence suggests that these relationships range from active confrontation to coexistence, transactional arrangements, and occasional opportunistic engagement rather than enduring organizational partnerships.

Relations with UPLC and certain Mai Mai factions remain particularly difficult to assess. In areas such as Pangoyi, Kalunguta, and Manguredjipa, local communities frequently interpret the continued presence or apparent inaction of UPLC and other Wazalendo-linked actors during ADF attacks as possible



complicity. While such perceptions appear to be widespread, field investigations did not establish evidence of structured collaboration.¹⁵⁰ Rather, they reflect broader mistrust generated by overlapping operational environments, fragmented chains of command, and the difficulty of distinguishing between armed actors operating in the same areas.

These perceptions are reinforced by recurring reports of overlapping ADF and UPLC activity in parts of Lubero, accusations of support to the ADF, and contested narratives surrounding attacks in mining zones.¹⁵¹ At the same time, UPLC's historical role as a FARDC-aligned force, together with allegations that some actors have staged attacks attributed to the ADF, blurs distinctions between collaboration, imitation, competition, and opportunistic coexistence.¹⁵² Some sources further alleged that factions such as UPLC and Mai-Mai Kabidon (FPP/AP), another local armed group, maintain contacts with both the ADF and M23.¹⁵³

Beyond UPLC, some reporting from late 2025 suggested increasing interaction between the ADF and other armed actors operating in Ituri and Lubero. Military intelligence sources reported possible cooperation or transactional arrangements involving CODECO-linked Lendu militias¹⁵⁴ as well as instances in which the ADF may have relied on local armed groups such as Chini ya Tuna in Mambasa and Komanda to carry out violence or facilitate access to territory.¹⁵⁵ Field reporting also pointed to possible renewed linkages with groups such as Chini ya Tuna in cocoa-producing zones of Irumu.¹⁵⁶

Overall, available evidence suggests that the ADF relies less on stable alliances than on adaptive interactions shaped by local conditions, permissive operational environments, and fragmented armed authority across eastern DRC. These dynamics blur attribution and allow the ADF to benefit from fragmentation without relying on structured partnerships.



Uganda's Ambiguous Operations in Eastern DRC

The FARDC and UPDF began Operation Shujaa, a joint military operation to fight the ADF, in November 2021. While the operation has pushed the ADF away from Uganda's border and other strategically important areas, available evidence suggests that Uganda's intervention increasingly serves its broader geopolitical, security, and economic objectives. Uganda's military operations have concentrated on securing border areas, strategic infrastructure, trade corridors, and resource flows while proving less effective at dismantling the group's core sanctuaries in eastern DRC. The result has been the displacement rather than the defeat of the ADF, allowing the insurgency to adapt and persist deeper inside eastern DRC while Congolese civilians continue to bear the consequences.

A growing body of evidence suggests that Uganda's military presence in the DRC increasingly serves the country's broader geopolitical and economic objectives alongside formal counter-ADF goals. The 2022 Ebuteli/Congo Research Group study concluded that through Operation Shujaa, the Ugandan government has likely sought to secure strategic road infrastructure, protect commercial expansion, and safeguard oil interests around Lake Albert.¹⁵⁷ Subsequent analyses by Egmont and Radio France International (RFI) reinforced this assessment, highlighting the importance of securing cross-border trade routes and regional resource flows.¹⁵⁸ UN reporting and The Sentry's field interviews repeatedly echoed this perception, with multiple sources describing the ADF threat as creating conditions that sustain Uganda's long-term military entrenchment in economically strategic zones.¹⁵⁹

Gold is particularly significant in this regard. Despite limited domestic production, Uganda exported approximately \$6.4 billion worth of gold in 2025, the vast majority of which was destined for the United Arab Emirates.¹⁶⁰ Substantial volumes of gold and other commodities from eastern DRC move through Ugandan trading, refining, and export networks.¹⁶¹ These dynamics are reflected in the concentration of UPDF deployments along strategic transport axes such as the Kasindi-Beni-Butembo corridor and in Uganda's continued expansion into areas of North Kivu and Ituri that are economically and politically significant beyond the immediate ADF threat.

For example, beginning in February 2025, the UPDF unilaterally expanded deployments into additional parts of North Kivu and Ituri beyond the original framework of Operation Shujaa, significantly broadening its military footprint in eastern DRC.¹⁶² During UPDF Chief of Defence Forces Muhoozi Kainerugaba's June 2025 visit to Kinshasa, a revised memorandum of understanding formally extended joint operations across North Kivu and into Ituri, consolidating Uganda's expanded role.¹⁶³ In February 2026, UPDF Land Forces Commander Lieutenant General Kayanja Muhanga and FARDC Deputy Chief of General Staff for Operations and Intelligence Lieutenant General Chalingoza Nduru Jacques met in Beni to review ongoing operations against the ADF.¹⁶⁴

As reported by the UN, while Operation Shujaa displaced the ADF from the Ugandan border in Lubero and split its area of operations into two noncontiguous zones, it did not significantly degrade the group's operational capacity.¹⁶⁵ Attacks attributed to the ADF increased in both frequency and lethality throughout 2025 and 2026 and expanded into communities previously untouched by its violence, including Haut-Uele and deeper into Mambasa, Lubero, and Tshopo territories.¹⁶⁶ Analysts further observed that as the ADF expanded westward, the UPDF and FARDC forces became increasingly overstretched, particularly as FARDC resources were diverted toward M23-related fronts.¹⁶⁷





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UPDF ground operations have remained concentrated along road networks and commercially strategic corridors, particularly the Beni-Kasindi axis, while core ADF sanctuaries in dense forest zones beyond these routes are primarily subjected to air and drone strikes rather than sustained territorial clearing.¹⁷⁰ These operational limitations have repeatedly produced ADF dispersal rather than decisive dismantlement.¹⁷¹

UN Group of Experts findings, field reporting, and public statements by Kainerugaba suggest that Uganda is leveraging its military presence not only for counter-ADF operations but also to shape political and security dynamics in eastern DRC.¹⁷² Kainerugaba's posts on X include repeated threats of unilateral military action in Bunia, defenses of specific communities in Ituri, and public framing of UPDF deployments as protective of Uganda's broader regional strategic interests.¹⁷³ In March 2026, the Congolese presidency resisted Ugandan pressure to remove Ituri's military governor, Lieutenant General Johnny Luboya Nkashama, who had opposed the expansion of UPDF deployment across the province,¹⁷⁴ but Luboya was eventually removed in June 2026.

This ambiguity lies at the core of Operation Shujaa's contested legacy: while the operation has advanced Uganda's security and economic interests, it has displaced rather than eliminated the ADF, enabling the insurgency to persist and continue inflicting violence on civilians across eastern DRC.



Conclusion

The findings in this report indicate that the ADF has adapted to military pressure, sanctions, and regional interventions. As external financing channels narrowed and military operations disrupted traditional strongholds, the group evolved into a more decentralized and locally financed insurgency embedded within eastern DRC's conflict economy. This transformation helps explain both the ADF's resilience and the persistence of violence against civilians across eastern DRC.

Organizationally, the ADF has combined centralized leadership with decentralized and highly mobile operations. Military pressure under Operation Shujaa has not dismantled the group but instead dispersed it across eastern DRC, pushing its activities toward resource-rich areas such as Bapere, Mambasa, and Bafwasende while enabling smaller units to sustain attacks across multiple fronts. Rather than degrading the group, repeated offensives have often triggered redistribution, allowing the ADF to regroup, regenerate manpower, and continue targeting civilians.

Financially, the transition from external ISIL-linked financing networks toward domestic resource mobilization represents a major shift in the ADF's evolution. Following sanctions and arrests targeting regional facilitation networks and intermediaries beginning in late 2024, the ADF increasingly turned toward conflict gold, extortion, kidnapping, taxation, and cocoa-related predation. As a result, the group is now largely self-sufficient, relying less on external transfers than on coercive integration into local economies and regional trade networks. Its financing system links mining zones and rural communities to commercial hubs—such as Butembo—and onward into Uganda through networks of traders, transporters, intermediaries, and collaborators operating under conditions of coercion, weak oversight, and limited traceability.

Strategically, the ADF endures less through territorial control or stable alliances than through its ability to exploit fragmented governance, weak state presence, and overlapping conflict dynamics. While no evidence demonstrates formal alliances with M23 or other armed groups, attempted engagement, permissive transit, and indirect operational overlap complicate military responses and create opportunities for the group to reorganize under pressure. Combined with forced recruitment, indoctrination, mobility, and collaboration networks, these dynamics enable the ADF to regenerate despite sustained military and financial pressure.

Regionally, Uganda's military presence in eastern DRC increasingly serves its regional economic and geopolitical objectives alongside its formal counter-ADF operations. Field investigations, UN reporting, and regional trade analysis indicate that Uganda's deployment has become closely tied to the protection of strategic infrastructure, commercial corridors, oil interests around Lake Albert, and cross-border resource flows, particularly conflict gold trafficked through Uganda. While Operation Shujaa has succeeded in pushing the ADF away from sections of the Ugandan border and other strategically important zones, it has failed to decisively degrade the group's operational capacity. The result has instead been to disperse the ADF toward resource-rich areas deeper inside eastern DRC, allowing the insurgency to adapt while sustaining the rationale for Uganda's long-term military presence in gold-rich strategic areas of eastern DRC.



Annexes

Annex 1: Methodology

This report is based on extensive field and documentary research into illegal gold trafficking networks operating between eastern DRC and Uganda. The findings draw on direct observations and more than 100 interviews conducted with actors across the gold supply chain and conflict environment, including miners, mine site operators, traders, transporters, smugglers, financiers, armed group collaborators, former hostages, security officials, military personnel, government representatives, civil society actors, researchers, and international experts.

The analysis focuses primarily on eastern DRC, particularly the Grand Nord region (Beni and Lubero territories in North Kivu province) and the Mambasa, Djugu, and Mahagi territories of Ituri province. Given the highly fragile security environment, the investigation adopted a socio-anthropological approach to data collection aimed at understanding the organization of mining activities, the role of security services and armed actors within supply chains, and the dynamics of gold trafficking across the research areas.

Annex 2: Note on geographical names in the DRC

Administrative divisions in the DRC sometimes show different names for the same decentralized level (e.g., sector or *chefferie*). The following list clarifies the administrative levels of the areas of investigations in eastern DRC.

Nord Kivu province (admin 1)

Beni territory (admin 2): sector (admin 3) **Beni-Mbau**: groupements (admin 4) Banande-Kainama, Bambuba-Kisiki, Baswagha-Madiwe, Batangi-Mbau; sector (admin 3) **Rwenzori**: groupements (admin 4) Bolema, Malambo, Basongora, Baniangala, Buliki; chefferie (admin 3) **Watalinga**: groupements (admin 4) Batalinga, Bahumu, Bawisa; chefferie (admin 3) **Bashu**: groupements (admin 4) Isale Bulambo, Isale Kasongwere, Isale Vuhovi, Masiki Kalonge, Masiki Vahyana, Malio, Bunyuka; communes Oicha, Mangina, Lume, Kyondo, Bulongo.

Lubero territory (admin 2): sector (admin 3) **Bapere**, chef lieu Mangurejipa: groupements (admin 4) Bapakombe, Baredje, Babika, Bapukara, Batike, Bapaitumba; chefferie (admin 3) **Baswagha**, chef lieu Musienene: groupements (admin 4) Manzia, Muhola, Mwenye, Luongo, Buyora, Bulengya, Bukenye, Ngulo; sector (admin 3) Bamate; chefferie (Admin 3) **Batangi**, chef lieu Bingi: groupements (admin 4) Musindi, Mbulie, Itala; chefferie (admin 3) **Bamate**, chef lieu Mambasa: groupements (admin 4) Buhimba, Tama.

Ituri province (admin 1)

Mambasa territory (admin 2): chefferie (admin 3) **Mambasa**: groupements (admin 4) Binase, Mputu, Nyangwe; chefferie (admin 3) **Wa Lesse Karo**: groupements (admin 4) Yedi Karani, Mayala, Koffi, Mulikaro 1, Mulikaro 2, Andiaku, Maro, Andifele, Andibuta; chefferie (admin 3) **Wa Lesse Desse**: groupements (admin 4) Andabe, Andisengi, Andali; chefferie (admin 3) **Ba Bila Bakwanza**: groupements (admin 4) Bayaku, Bapwele, Bakwanza; chefferie (admin 3) **Ba Bila Ba Bombi**: groupements (admin



4) Babombi, Bapongomo, Babila Teturi, Bagnole, Mambembe Bela, Makeke, Bakaeku; chefferie (admin 3) **Bombo**: groupements (admin 4) Enjewa, Badumbisa, Babeke d'isaye, Basiri, Bafambaya; chefferie (admin 3) **Bandaka**

Irumu territory (admin 2): Bahema sud; Bahema d'Irumu; Basili; Walendu-Bindi: groupements (admin 4) Bamuko, Zadhu; Walese Vonkutu; Andisoma; Baboa Bokoe.

Annex 3: Mining sites under ADF control

Main gold production mining sites in Beni territory, North Kivu¹⁷⁵

Mining Site	Sector (Admin 3)	Groupement (Admin 4)	Approximate No. of Miners	Point of Sale	Armed Groups
Kasongo / Maliajamais	Beni-Mbau	Batangi-Mbau	36	Mamove, Oicha	UPLC, ¹⁷⁶ ADF
Camp Kamanyola	Beni-Mbau	Bambuba Kisiki	60	Eringeti, Oicha	ADF
Camp Mungu	Beni-Mbau	Bambuba Kisiki	43	Eringeti, Oicha	ADF
Mukondi / Atonja	Beni-Mbau	Bambuba Kisiki	87	Eringeti, Oicha	ADF
Bango / Abia	Beni-Mbau	Bambuba Kisiki	75	Eringeti, Oicha	ADF
Venez voir	Beni-Mbau	Banande Kainama	30	Eringeti, Oicha	ADF
Baeti / Asefu	Beni-Mbau	Batangi-Mbau	185	Baeti, Oicha	UPLC
Mamove / Mabatutu	Beni-Mbau	Batangi-Mbau	65	Mamove, Oicha	UPLC, ADF
Kisitu	Beni-Mbau	Baswagha-Madiwe	85	Mununze, Mangina	UPLC
Kikundo	Beni-Mbau	Baswagha-Madiwe	120	Mununze, Mangina	UPLC
Kaichokea	Beni-Mbau	Baswagha-Madiwe	100	Mununze, Mangina	UPLC
Mununze	Beni-Mbau	Baswagha-Madiwe	60	Mununze, Mangina	UPLC
Nzaba	Beni-Mbau	Baswagha-Madiwe	45	Ngoyo, Mangina	UPLC
Saba Saba	Beni-Mbau	Baswagha-Madiwe	102	Ngoyo, Mangina	UPLC



Tokou	Beni-Mbau	Baswagha-Madiwe	150	Ngoyo, Mangina	UPLC
Mabalako	Beni-Mbau	Baswagha-Madiwe	65	Mabalako	UPLC
Cantine	Beni-Mbau	Baswagha-Madiwe	86	Cantine	Mai Mai Wakombozi
Kiboto	Beni-Mbau	Baswagha-Madiwe	244	Cantine	UPLC
Visiki	Beni-Mbau	Baswagha-Madiwe	124	Visiki, Cantine	UPLC
Mabuku	Bashu	Malio	52	Mabuku	UPLC
Kyavisogho	Bashu	Malio	96	Kyavisogho	UPLC
Vurondo	Bashu	Malio	100	Vurondo	—

Main gold production mining sites in Lubero territory, Nord Kivu

Mining Site	Sector (Admin 3)	Groupement (Admin 4)	Approximate No. of Miners	Point of Sale	Armed Groups
Lata Bien	Bapere	Batike	100	Mabuo	ADF
Botambisi	Bapere	Batike	350		ADF, NDC-R
Mapendano	Bapere	Batike	150	Manguredjipa	ADF
Mabuo	Bapere	Batike	1,300	Mabuo	ADF
Bududyia	Bapere	Bapaitumba	700	Manguredjipa	ADF
Pangoyi	Bapere	Bapakombe	900	Manguredjipa	ADF, UPLC
Isange	Bapere	Bapaitumba	250	Manguredjipa	ADF



Endnotes

- ¹ For Da'esh/Islamic State, this report uses the name of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), as adopted by the UN sanctions regime. See:
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- ³ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data, "Q&A | The Islamic State's Pivot to Africa," September 4, 2025, available at: <https://acleddata.com/qa/qa-islamic-states-pivot-africa>
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- ⁵ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data, "What's Driving Conflict Today? A Review of Global Trends," December 11, 2025, available at: <https://acleddata.com/report/whats-driving-conflict-today-review-global-trends>
- ⁶ Amnesty International, "I'd Never Seen So Many Bodies: War Crimes by the Allied Democratic Forces in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo," May 2026, pp. 14-15, available at: <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/I-d-Never-Seen-So-Many-Bodies-War-Crimes-by-the-Allied-Democratic-Forces-in-the-Eastern-Democratic-Republic-of-Congo.pdf>
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- ⁷ Forty-three people were killed at a church in July 2025. See:
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Manguredjipa négociants purchase price: ~\$123/gram

Sale price from Manguredjipa traders to Butembo buying houses: ~\$131/gram

Sale price from Butembo buying houses to Ugandan refiners: ~\$138/gram

Sale price from Ugandan refiners to Dubai-based operators: ~\$147-150/gram

International market price: ~\$155/gram

This structure demonstrates progressive value capture at each stage of the supply chain, from extraction zones in eastern DRC through regional trading hubs and Ugandan refining networks to international export markets.

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