



7 February 2014 - Village after village in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been razed to the ground since October 2013 by armed groups calling for the resource-rich province of Katanga to secede and become an independent state. These groups, as well as political affiliates operate under the collective name of Mai Mai Kata Katanga.

The “scorched earth” campaign by the rebels and clashes with security forces have displaced up to 400,000 people from what has been dubbed the “Triangle of Death.” An unknown number of people have been killed or wounded, and top UN official for DRC last week called the situation a “humanitarian disaster.”

Many of those displaced have found refuge with relatives or other host families in the towns of Manono, Mitwaba or Pweto - the three points of the triangle - or have re-settled elsewhere. Some have been able to return to their homesteads to rebuild. But the poorest have been driven into the bush or to villages at risk of further attacks.

The affected communities are vulnerable even by the standards of impoverished DRC, which ranks last in the UN’s [Human Development Index](#) . Rural Katanga benefits little from the wealth generated by vast mining operations further to the south. According to the World Food Program (WFP), surveys in Mitwaba and Manono last year indicated acute malnutrition rates of 16 percent and 20 percent, respectively, and the figures have likely worsened.

Violence has surged in the area following the 2011 jailbreak of a Mai Mai leader who had

haunted the region before his detention in 2007. Hopes for peace rose last year when hundreds of fighters [surrendered to the army](#), but the remaining rebels have responded with the scorched earth policy, which shows no sign of abating.

While civilians have been mostly spared, rebels have hunted down village leaders and engaged in gun battles with soldiers sent to combat them.

The current wave of violence comes at the start of the wet season, worsening conditions for the displaced. Having lost most of their livestock and harvest, many are surviving on little more than manioc roots.

WFP said it was concerned that the proportion of pregnant and breast-feeding mothers as well as children suffering from malnutrition must have risen, bringing in its wake other health problems. A cholera epidemic has been raging in several parts of Katanga, including Pweto, where many internally displaced persons (IDPs) have found refuge.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the only international relief group still operating inside the triangle, said civilians were increasingly unable or unwilling, for reasons of security, to seek medical care at its hospital or clinics in the area. In addition, malnourishment was making them more vulnerable to infections.

Thomas Mollet, head of mission for MSF Holland in Katanga, said mortality rates at the organization’s hospital in Shamwana had more than tripled. “When we do see patients, they arrive very late,” Mollet said. “A lot of children are dying from malaria.” He said many women and infants were also dying during unattended childbirths in the bush.

And it is not only civilians that suffer - there is also misery for those who have given up the fight.

“We’re not seeing any change,” Jean Muzela, a 42-year-old from Mundela Village, told [IRIN News](#)

“We sleep on the floor. We eat poorly. We have no clothes. We thought we would see some change, but we are in the same situation.”

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*UN's mission in DR Congo:* <http://monusco.unmissions.org/>

*Drones to protect civilians in DR Congo:* <http://unric.org/en/latest-un-buzz/28886-drone-to-protect-civilians-in-vast-dr-congo>

*UN News on DR Congo:* <http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocusRel.asp?infocusID=120&Body=Democratic&Body1=Congo>