

Mapping artisanal mining sites in the Kibali gold mine concession in Faradje territory

Haut-Uélé, DRC

The **Kibali gold mine** is one of Africa's most productive industrial gold mines, operating in the Haut-Uélé province in northeastern DRC. Having started its operations in Watsa territory, the gold mine is now also increasing its mining exploration activities in Faradje territory, an area where many artisanal miners are active. The Dutch peace organization PAX and the Antwerp-based International Peace Information Service (IPIS) collaborated to map artisanal mining sites within the Kibali concession in Faradje, from April to June 2024.

Data collection was done by a research team through interviews with a range of stakeholders in the artisanal mining sector, including miners, site managers, local authorities, civil society representatives, and administrative services at mining sites and nearby trading centers. The team used a structured questionnaire on the ODK Collect mobile application and conducted semi-structured interviews, interviewing a total of 90 individuals. This document presents a summary of the main findings from this field research.

In total, **18 artisanal gold mining sites** were visited in the Logo Doka *chefferie*¹, in Faradje territory, along the road between the towns of Aru and Durba, where the operating headquarters of the Kibali gold mine are located (Figure 1). These appeared to be all the main artisanal mining sites in Faradje within Kibali's concession at the time. IPIS estimated that almost **5,500 artisanal miners** worked at these mining sites. Women were also present at the mining sites and involved in the production of gold, as well as other jobs, such as cooking and water transport. Around two-thirds of these workers were concentrated in two large sites: *Rambi* and *Drikilimbi*, with estimated totals of 1,300 and 2,450 workers, respectively. Interviewed individuals reported that their income supported an average of 7 people, implying that the population dependent on artisanal mining is much larger than the number of miners.²

While the security situation in Faradje territory was relatively calm in 2024, several issues persisted, including social tensions between Kibali Goldmines SA (the joint venture that owns the mine, hereafter referred to as just "Kibali") and the artisanal miners, unlawful interference by the national army and the lack of effective state oversight.

1 In the DRC, a *chefferie* (chiefdom) is a rural administrative entity, often comprising several *groupements*. A chefferie forms part of a larger *territoire* (territory), which in turn forms part of a province.

2 PAX and IPIS also conducted a survey with 170 individuals working at 17 mining sites to gain a better understanding of their socioeconomic profiles. For a more detailed overview of the findings, see the advocacy paper prepared by PAX: <https://paxforpeace.nl/kibali-goldmining-concession>

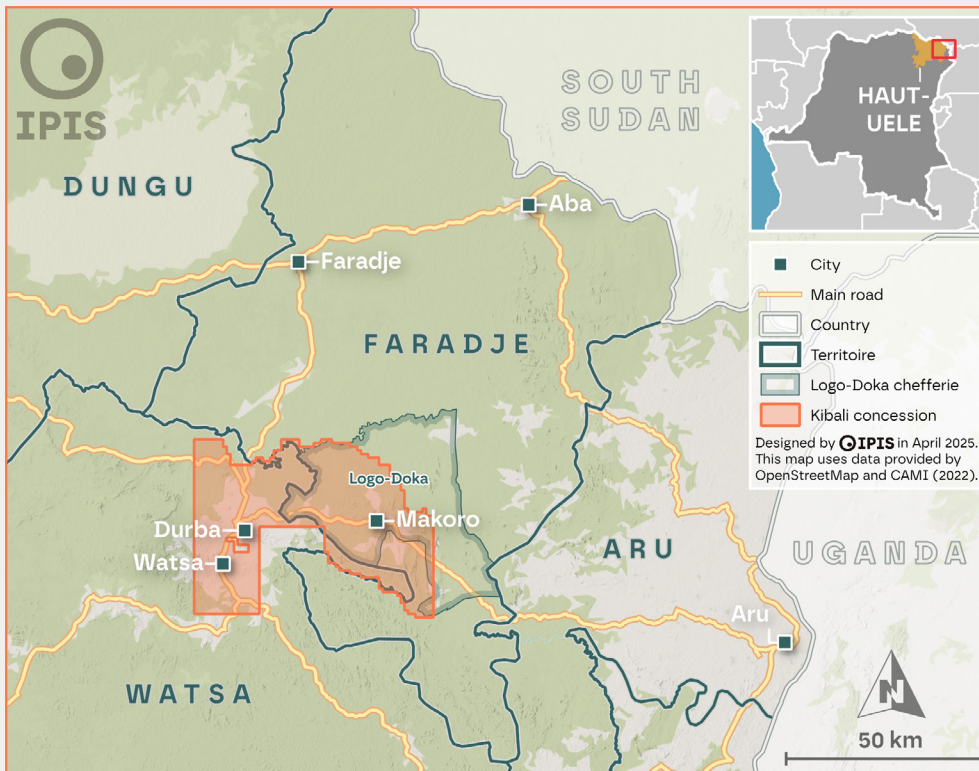


Figure 1: The Kibali concession in the Haut-Uélé province.

Conflicts and social tensions

Artisanal gold mining is a **vital source of livelihood** in the region, and the gradual expansion of the Kibali gold mine has fueled tensions with artisanal miners. Even though Kibali largely tolerates artisanal mining in the parts of its concession located in Faradje territory, miners view the industrial mine's nearby presence as detrimental to their livelihoods. Fears of future mass evictions from artisanal mining sites have plunged the miners into antagonism with Kibali.

The conflict can be divided into **two distinct types**, each occurring in different geographic areas:

Makoro, Dix Pas, and Bovi

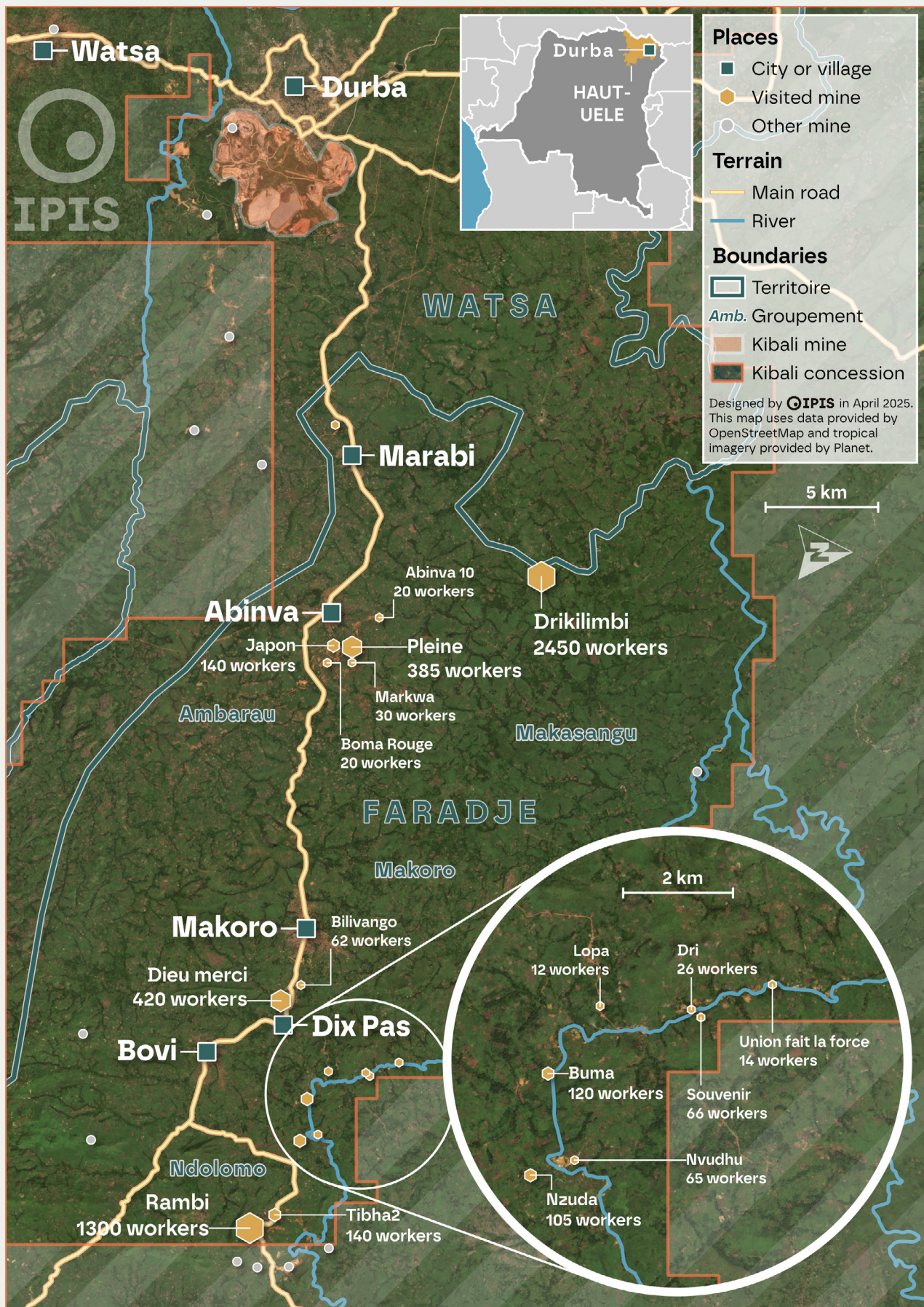
- At the trading centers of Makoro, Dix Pas, and Bovi (see map, figure 2), as well as surrounding mining sites, tensions exist between miners and Kibali about the use of **mechanized tools** (such as excavators). Although Congolese mining law prohibits mechanization in artisanal mining, state enforcement of this provision remains limited outside of Kibali's concession. Artisanal miners

blame Kibali for the application of this regulation within its concession (enforced by state security forces, see further). Miners believe these tools are crucial for efficiency and productivity. According to mining state agents, Kibali wants to protect its future mining projects and prevent artisanal miners from depleting gold deposits. They believe Kibali tolerates only basic mining operations in order to deter large investments in artisanal mining, making it easier to evict miners if necessary.³

- At the mining sites of *Rambi*, *Bilivango* and *Souvenir*, tensions intensified after **mine pits were backfilled**, for which artisanal miners blamed Kibali. According to interviewees, pits were backfilled either because they were particularly gold-rich (notably in *Rambi*), or because they were located close to the main transport road used by Kibali and put the road at risk of damage (*Bilivango*).⁴ At *Souvenir*, interviewed miners blamed Kibali for an attempted eviction and backfilling of pits in 2018. However, strong resistance from the miners prevented this.

3 Interviews with state mining officials, Makoro, 02-05-2024.

4 Interviews with managing staff of mining sites, Makoro, 01-05-2024 and 05-05-2024.



▲ Figure 2: Location of mining sites visited in Faradje territory in the concession of Kibali Goldmines.

- Artisanal miners and artisanal mine managers often claimed to have had no direct contact with Kibali. Instead, some interviewees said that Kibali limits its engagement to **traditional chiefs and local community leaders**. According to interviewees, the company seeks to leverage local leaders' influence to facilitate its installation in the area and defuse tensions with artisanal mine managers.⁵
- Despite a *cabier des charges* – a community development and social action plan – being signed with Kibali, many members from the local communities expressed frustration about the slow progress and partial implementation of development projects by Kibali.

Abinva

- Closer to Kibali's headquarters, at the Abinva trading center and surrounding sites in the Ambarau *groupement* (see map, figure 2), opposition to Kibali is even stronger. Many community members fear the expansion of the industrial mine. They are concerned that Kibali will dispossess them of their land, restrict their artisanal mining activities, and provide no meaningful compensation in return.
- The lack of trust towards Kibali is so severe that community members in recent years rejected Kibali's proposed social projects, viewing the company as unwelcome. As a result, no community development projects had been carried out in this *groupement* when IPIS conducted this research.

Security

At the time of the IPIS visit, the security situation in the Logo Doka chiefdom was calm, with no presence of non-state armed groups.⁶ National police were present in all trading centers and the local population regularly reached out to them to resolve disputes (except in Abinva, see below). Main roads were secure, with elements from the Congolese army, the FARDC, **patrolling the Durba-Aru route**, and enforcing the

ban on mechanized tools. Congolese police officers, **perceived locally as having been seconded to Kibali**, were also observed in the center of Makoro.

FARDC elements have however been accused of misbehaviour and illegal interference in the mining sector, leading to negative perceptions among the local population:

- **Oppression of artisanal miners:** in October 2023, the FARDC were deployed to suppress resistance from artisanal miners when their pits were backfilled at the *Bilivango* site, leading to a massive departure of the miners.⁷
- **Illegal roadblocks:** the FARDC and the *Police de Circulation Routière* (PCR) operated four roadblocks along the main road, levying illegal 'taxes' and harassing travelers.
- **Illegal interference in artisanal mining:** the FARDC maintained a **permanent presence** at the two largest artisanal mining sites (*Rambi* and *Drikilimbi*), where they illegally collected 'taxes', engaged in the sale of hemp and alcoholic beverages, owned mining pits, and **guarded the backfilled pits** (at *Rambi*).⁸
- The FARDC's control of pits and their attempts to claim a large share of production have sparked tensions with miners, culminating in an **uprising** in April 2024 by the miners at the *Drikilimbi* site. Tensions reduced as many FARDC soldiers left the site following the uprising, and those who remained in *Drikilimbi* began paying the miners properly for the production at their pits.
- The FARDC also collected 'taxes' on gold production from the *Japon* site.
- The FARDC justified its presence (at the *Rambi* site) due to reported security threats from nomadic Mbororo herders, who are sometimes armed, and South Sudanese and Central African rebel groups, despite these groups being primarily active in the

5 Interviews with members of civil society, Makoro, 05-05-2024.

6 However, in recent years, non-state armed groups have been active in the wider region. Notably, South Sudanese rebels have occasionally been present in the northern part of Faradje territory. Furthermore, Faradje borders Ituri province, which has been affected by a renewed cycle of violence since 2017.

7 Interview with artisanal mine managers, Makoro trading center, 15-05-2024.

8 Interview with artisanal miners and pit managers, Rambi, 11-05-2024.

border area, relatively far from the Logo Doka chiefdom.

- **Judicial overreach in Abinva:** in the Abinva trading center, civil offenses were sometimes handled by the FARDC instead of the police, with excessive fines imposed, fostering distrust between the population and the army.
- **Opaque collaboration with Chinese semi-industrial companies:** At the *Buma* and *Nzuda* mine sites, unidentified Chinese semi-industrial mining operators were accused by interviewees of illegally taking control of artisanal mining activities through the corruption of traditional chiefs and state security forces. The latter's role allegedly included:
 - **Blocking access:** Establishing barriers at mine entrances to prevent anyone from entering (including state agencies).
 - **Facilitating smuggling:** Escorting Chinese operators during transport to exit points.



State control

As is common in the DRC, artisanal mining actors, though organized, **operate largely informally**. The visited area lacks officially designated zones for artisanal mining (*zones d'exploitation artisanale* or ZEAs). Moreover, miners supplying gold to various buyers are not organized into cooperatives, as required by the Congolese mining code, nor do they possess the *cartes de creuseurs* necessary for legal artisanal mining. Similarly, traders purchasing gold from diggers within the Kibali concession operate illegally, as none hold a valid trader's card.

State services generally tolerate most informal artisanal mining. Their capacity to regulate the artisanal mining sector is limited, for example, by low remuneration. In addition to the local administration (*chefferie* and *groupement*), the state agencies active in the area and involved in the artisanal mining sector include *SAEMAPE* (*Service d'Assistance et d'Encadrement de l'Exploitation Minière Artisanale et de Petite Échelle*), the *Division des Mines* (agencies responsible for supporting and overseeing artisanal mining) and the *Direction Générale des Recettes du Haut Uélé*.

- Their presence on mining sites largely consists of **collecting lump sum 'taxes'**. These practices are not accompanied by any technical support for the miners, or collection of information to increase transparency and oversight of the gold production and trade.
- Despite these shortcomings and reports of mistreatment by some state agents, their presence is also valued by the miners and the Mining Site Managers (*Administrateurs de Foyer Miniers*) - individuals authorized by a local customary chief and provincial mining agents to oversee artisanal mining at a specific site. Miners appreciate the sense of **legitimacy** gained from paying taxes, believing this compliance protects their right to mine without interference from Kibali, as they see themselves in good standing with state and customary authorities.
- At the same time, the state mining department does not issue artisanal miner and trader cards to people active inside Kibali's concession.

Health and safety

The role of the state services in monitoring Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) standards on sites is limited, while:

- 84% of the miners in our sample (4,594 out of a total of 5,473) worked at a site where **mercury** was used to process gold (at 8 sites out of 18).
- At the Rambi site, miners used high-pressure water jets to reduce the amount of earth covering the gold-bearing vein and to recover the gold dust contained in the surface earth, leading to high water pollution around the site.
- In the six months preceding the IPIS visit, **more than 100 accidents** occurred, primarily due to a lack of protective equipment, and interviewees reported 22 fatalities resulting from landslides, rockslides, or tunnel collapses.
- A significant number of **children younger than 15 years (875)** were estimated to work at certain mining sites, primarily due to the absence of schools in remote areas and the fact that a number of parents bring their children to work with them.
- At the sites *Rambi*, *Drikilimbi*, and *Nvudbu*, specific risks for girls, including prostitution, unwanted pregnancies, and marriages, were observed.

Table 1: Visited mining sites

Mine site	Groupement	Miners	Principal mineral
Drikilimbi	Makasangu	2,450	Gold
Rambi	Ndolomo	1,300	Gold
Dieu merci	Makoro	420	Gold
Pleine	Ambarau	385	Gold
Tibha 2	Makoro	140	Gold
Japon	Ambarau	140	Gold
Buma	Makoro	120	Gold
Nzuda	Makoro	105	Gold
Gaga	Ambarau	68	Gold
Souvenir	Makoro	66	Gold
Nvudhu	Makoro	65	Gold
Bilivango	Makoro	62	Gold
Abinva 10	Ambarau	50	Gold
Markwa	Ambarau	30	Gold
Dri	Makoro	26	Gold
Boma Rouge	Ambarau	20	Gold
Union fait la force	Makoro	14	Gold
Lopa	Makoro	12	Gold



Mapping artisanal mining sites in the Kibali gold mine concession in Faradje territory, Haut-Uélé, DRC

Antwerp, November 2025

Author:

IPIS

Suggested citation:

IPIS, Mapping artisanal mining sites in the Kibali gold mine concession in Faradje territory, Haut-Uélé, DRC, Antwerp, November 2025.

D/2025/4320/15

International Peace Information Service (IPIS) is an independent research institute providing tailored information, analysis, capacity enhancement and policy advice to support those actors who want to realise a vision of durable peace, sustainable development and the fulfilment of human rights.



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

This publication has been produced with the financial assistance of the Belgian Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD) and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The contents of this document can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the Belgian Development Cooperation nor the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.