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Patrick Habakaramo Macumu, Guillaume Boudoire, Sergio Calabrese, Francesco Rufino, Rachel Coyte, et al.. Impacts of volcanic hazards on rural communities and adaptative strategies: A case study of the Virunga Volcanic Province (Democratic Republic of Congo). International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, In press, 86, pp.103566. 10.1016/j.ijdrr.2023.103566 . hal-03965619

HAL Id: hal-03965619 https://uca.hal.science/hal-03965619

Submitted on 31 Jan 2023 $\,$

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Impacts of volcanic hazards on rural communities and adaptative strategies: a case study of the Virunga Volcanic Province (Democratic Republic of Congo)

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22 Abstract

Active volcanoes are a continuous threat for several regions worldwide and cause socio-economic 23 24 and environmental issues, including the Virunga Volcanic Province (D.R. Congo). There, more than 2 million people are permanently exposed to the hazards of the most active volcanoes in 25 26 Africa: Nyiragongo and Nyamulagira. However, there is a clear lack of information regarding the impacts of these hazards and how they may be affected by social vulnerability. In this study, a 27 28 household survey based on semi-structural interviews was performed for rural communities in 29 Virunga. This research aims to (i) investigate the impacts of volcanic hazards on rural communities facing distinct levels of social vulnerability, (ii) understand the adaptive strategies developed by 30 these communities to address these impacts, and finally (iii) identify the main grievances with 31 32 respect to volcanic hazards raised by these rural communities. The most vulnerable households are those directly affected by volcano-tectonic hazards such as lava flows, mazukus, volcanic gases, 33 34 ash fallout, and seismic activity. Indirect dangers related to water and food contamination by 35 volcanic emissions are also stronger for the most vulnerable households. Respondents reported 36 that most edible plants and waters are strongly affected by direct volcanic emissions. Drinking

waters, which come from traditional drainage, rainfall, and streams, are generally not suitable for
human consumption in the study area. Community suggestions for addressing issues related to
volcanic-tectonic hazards include efforts to improve water and food quality, enhancement of the
sanitary system, timely information on the volcanic activity, volcano monitoring, and capacity
building for volcanologists.

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43 Keywords: Volcanic hazards, Social vulnerability, Risks perception, Nyiragongo, Nyamulagira.

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45 **1 Introduction**

46 Volcanic hazards are of concern worldwide, causing severe damage to infrastructure and loss of 47 human life. In volcanic provinces, hazards related to lava flows, volcanic ash, and particulate fallout can lead not only to socio-economic losses but also to adverse effects on human health and 48 49 damages on livestock (Gudmundsson, 2011; Hansell et al., 2006; Horwell and Baxter, 2006; Markantonis et al., 2012). Active volcanoes, such as those of the VVP, emit huge amounts of 50 particulates and gases into the atmosphere, which threaten the human life at both regional and 51 52 global scales. More than 600 million people live less than 100 km from an active volcano (Auker 53 et al., 2013; Gudmundsson, 2011; Hansell and Oppenheimer, 2006; Lara et al., 2021; Schuster and Highland, 2001; Small and Naumann, 2001; Tesone et al., 2018; Freire et al., 2019). Threats 54 55 associated with volcanic hazards around the globe are increasing with population growth, while 56 the lack of awareness, preparedness, and resilience capability among citizens remains a concern 57 (Antronico et al., 2020; Wiley et al., 2017).

In low- to middle-income countries fertile volcanic soils tend to favor agricultural activities 58 59 and the settling of rural communities (Dibben and Chester, 1999; Lowe, 2010). However, there is 60 little research being done on vulnerability and risk perception of these rural communities in volcanic provinces, especially in the Global South. According to the United Nations Development 61 62 Program (UNDP) (2015) and Prelog and Miller (2013), the most vulnerable rural communities 63 live in the less developed countries of Asia, Latin America, and Africa, with many rural communities facing different and at times more severe disadvantages related to natural disasters 64 than their urban counterparts (Firdhous and Karuratane, 2018). Rural risk factors include limited 65 access to primarily resources, high levels of poverty, inadequate and underdeveloped 66 67 infrastructure, and lack of access to public services (e.g., hospitals, schools, markets, roadway 68 networks).

69 While exposure to volcanic hazards may be the same for distinct social groups or 70 households, the actual impacts will strongly depend on the social vulnerability of each group

(Cutter et al., 2008; Hummell et al., 2016). The concept of vulnerability is defined as the conditions 71 72 determined by physical, social, economic, and environmental factors or processes, which increase the susceptibility of a community to the impact of a hazard (Gaillard, 2008; Antronico et al., 2020). 73 74 Traditional vulnerability approaches in volcanic provinces are focused on the vulnerability of 75 buildings (physical destruction of buildings and inventories) and the probabilities of loss of life given to the proximity to a volcanic hazard. Such evaluations calculate the expected damages, or 76 77 the degree of damage based on the monetary values of assets (Blong et al., 2017; Hopkins et al., 2021; Jenkins et al., 2014, 2017; Markantonis et al., 2012; Meyer et al., 2013; Michellier et al., 78 79 2020) or the direct loss of life. These, however, neglect the continual human and environmental risk from volcanic activity. There is an additional strong vulnerability component to volcanic 80 81 multi-hazards that includes socio-economic considerations, known as social vulnerability. Only a 82 few studies have evaluated the social vulnerability and community resilience of populations facing volcanic hazards in the Global South (Michellier et al., 2020; Tedesco, 2002, 2003). Resilience 83 refers to the ability of communities exposed to hazards to anticipate, prepare for, reduce the impact 84 85 of, cope with, and recover from the effects of shocks and stresses without compromising their long-term prospects (De Iuliis et al., 2019; Marasco et al., 2022; Mitchell and Harris, 2012). In 86 87 this respect, resilience can provide a way to overcome vulnerability to a hazard and prioritize mitigation actions among communities to decrease the vulnerability level. Therefore, studying the 88 89 social vulnerability and resilience of people living in the vicinity of an active volcano regarding 90 volcano-tectonic hazards can inform sustainable strategies for living in volcanic provinces.

91 In this study, we lead an innovative approach to investigate the impacts of volcanic hazards on rural communities responding to distinct levels of social vulnerability. We explore the adaptive 92 93 strategies intuitively developed by these communities to address these impacts. Finally, we identify the main grievances raised by rural communities, to aid future efforts at improving quality 94 95 of life and resilience in volcanic environments. This study is focused on rural communities present 96 in the vicinity of the very active and dangerous Nyiragongo and Nyamulagira volcanoes in the 97 Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). To our knowledge, this is the first study to deal with 98 vulnerability and resilience related to volcanic hazards as experienced by exposed rural 99 communities in the Virunga Volcanic Province (VVP).

100

101 **2** Context of the study

The Virunga Volcanic Province (VVP) in Africa lies within the western branch of the East African
Rift System between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Republic of Rwanda and the
Republic of Uganda (Pouclet and Bram, 2021; Poppe et al., 2014) (Fig. 1). The area is continuously

threatened by the activity of the Nyiragongo (Latitude 1.52°S, Longitude 29.25°E, Altitude 3470 105 106 m a.s.l.at the rim of the summit crater, 1240-1345 m in diameter) and Nyamulagira (Latitude 107 1.41°S, Longitude 29.20°E, Altitude 3058 m a.s.l. in height at the edge of a large caldera which is 2150 m in diameter) volcanoes, two of the most active volcanoes in Africa, and worldwide (Pouclet 108 109 and Bram, 2021) (Fig. 1). Other dormant volcanoes are present in the VVP setting up the Central 110 and Eastern volcanoes groups: Mikeno (4437 m a.s.l.), Karisimbi (4508 m a.s.l.), Visoke (3911 m 111 a.s.l.), Sabinyo (3647 m a.s.l.), Gahinga (3474 m a.s.l.), and Muhabura (4127 m a.s.l.) (Le Guern, 1987; Pouclet and Bram, 2021). Even in a quiescent state of activity, these dormant volcanoes are 112 113 still a source of concern for local populations and authorities. For instance, Mikeno drained sludge 114 flows in the villages of Rugari and Jomba in the territory of Rutshuru, between July and September of 2021. 115

116 Nyiragongo is a stratovolcano well known worldwide for the semi-permanent active lava 117 lake that has repeatedly formed in its main crater (Pouclet and Bram, 2021). Documented records of Nyiragongo go back to 1894 and have been summarized by several previous works (Sahama 118 119 and Meyer, 1958; Sahama, 1962), most recently by Tazieff (1977, 1984, 1985). In recent times, 120 Nyiragongo has erupted only three times outside of the summit crater: on January 10, 1977, 121 January 17, 2002, and on May 22, 2021. The first lateral eruption drained lava from the lava lake 122 towards Goma (50,000 inhabitants; Tedesco et al., 2007) and the lava flows stopped in Munigi 123 village, covering between 16 to 20 km² in around 32 minutes (Tazieff, 1977), and killing about 70 people (Pottier, 1978). In 1982, the lava lake appeared again (Durieux, 2002, 2003) and remained 124 125 active for a shot period: in August 1995, the lava lake activity stopped, and the lava solidified until 126 a second flank eruption in 2022 (Tedesco et al., 2007). Meanwhile, the population of Goma had 127 increased to $\sim 400,000$ inhabitants. About 15% of the city was destroyed by the lava flows from 128 the two main fissures opened during the 2002 eruption (Komorowski et al., 2002; Tedesco et al., 129 2002, 2007; Wauthier et al., 2012). A part of Goma airport runway and ~120,000 households were 130 destroyed. Around 300,000 people were evacuated and ~140 people were killed (Komorowski et 131 al., 2002; Tedesco et al., 2007). The latest lateral eruption of Nyiragongo on May 22, 2021, surprised people and scientists due to the apparent absence of precursory signs preceding the 132 133 eruption recorded by the volcanic monitoring network. The subsequent seismic events and 134 associated surface fracturing surprised and scared the population (Boudoire et al., 2022). In the 135 meantime, the population in Goma and the surrounding villages had increased to about 2 million. The eruption led to a very disorderly displacement of more than 500,000 individuals from the 136 137 surroundings areas of Goma, Sake, Minova, Kiwanja, Bukavu as well as Rwanda (Boudoire et al., 138 2022). The lava flows, subsequent ash fallout (mainly due to chunks of the crater collapsing within

the same crater), and the long-lasting seismic activity have been a stressful and traumatic experience for many people in the region. The official report from the Congolese civil protection stated that 23,045 individuals were impacted by the eruption: among those, 22,395 individuals lost their home or had them heavily damaged by the earthquakes that followed the eruption, while 650 lost their fields. A new magmatic event with a proto-lava lake started forming in September 2021 and in December 2021/January 2022, with small degassing vents developing and intermittent eruptive activity.

Nyamulagira is the second active volcano in VVP. It is a shield volcano located 13 km 146 147 North-West the Nyiragongo, well known by natives and first explored by Europeans in 1880s (Pouclet and Bram, 2021). It is marked by eruptive cycles averaging 1-4 years throughout the last 148 century (Burgi et al., 2020; Pouclet and Bram, 2021; Smets et al., 2015; Syavulisembo et al., 2015). 149 150 It has erupted at least 40 times since 1865 (see table 1 in Pouclet and Bram, 2021; Smets et al., 151 2015; Mavonga et al., 2010). In 1938, eruptive fractures opened on the southwest slope of the 152 volcano and drained a lava lake which has persisted in its main crater since 1913, impacting several 153 areas including Sake, Rusayu, and Kingi villages (Fig. 1). The drained lava reached the 154 westernmost part of Lake Kivu and separated one small area from the rest of the lake, today called 155 the Bay of Sake. The eruption stopped 3 years later in 1940 (Pouclet et al., 1983, 2016). This historically long eruption of Nyamulagira completely disrupted patterns of land cover and land 156 157 use, including the destruction of important infrastructure for several villages. Nyamulagira eruptions are generally preceded by several month of abnormally high seismicity (mainly 158 159 earthquake swarms) (Mavonga et al., 2010), and include lava fountaining and lava flows, gas 160 plumes, scoria, Pele's hair, and ash injected into the atmosphere, which can generate serious 161 consequences for human health and the environment (crops yields, livestock, infrastructure, etc.) 162 (Vaselli et al., 2007). The intense activity of Nyamulagira is usually reported by local inhabitants 163 living southwest of the volcano downwind of the gas plume, as a permanent danger to the whole 164 community, especially to children under 10 years old and the elderly. Nyamulagira volcano is 165 nowadays characterized by an intermittent lava lake in the central part of the crater, the so-called 166 "pit-crater" which collapsed after the eruption that occurred from November 6, 2011, to mid-April 167 2012 (Balagizi et al., 2017; Cuoco et al., 2013a, b; Pouclet and Bram, 2021). The Goma Volcano 168 Observatory (GVO) reported a new active lava lake in the Nyamulagira central caldera on June 169 23, 2014, which remained active until April 26, 2017 (Report GVO, 2014). One month after (May 170 26, 2017), only fumaroles inside the main crater were documented and the lava lake was not active. 171 A new lava lake reappeared early in January 2018 and remains todays (Burgi et al., 2020). However, the insecurity caused by several armed groups within the Virunga National Park does 172

not allow researchers to reach the Nyamulagira crater regularly to make direct field observations
inside the crater. This is possible only with help from the Virunga National Park rangers and/or
the MONUSCO (United Nations) helicopters, which supports the GVO for field work once or
twice a month.

177 It is clear that both Nyiragongo and Nyamulagira volcanoes present a permanent danger for local populations. The most exposed areas are those close to the lake Kivu, threatened both by 178 179 lava flows and by a potential gas release from Lake Kivu where an important reservoir of CH4 and CO₂ is stored within (Tassi et al., 2009). The VVP is a densely populated area with more than 2 180 million people, most of them living in Goma, the main regional city, located 18 km from the 181 182 summit of Nyiragongo (Arellano et al., 2017; Liotta et al., 2017; Poppe et al., 2016) (Fig. 1). In 183 the VVP, rural communities face volcano-tectonic dangers related to lava flows, cold dry CO₂ emissions (so-called "mazukus"), seismicity, and volcanic gas plume/ash emissions causing 184 185 multiple health, environmental, and socio-economic damages (Balagizi et al., 2018; Tedesco et al., 186 2007, 1995, 1996; Vaselli et al., 2002). Exposure to volcanic emissions can threaten the health of 187 inhabitants in many ways, depending on the physical and chemical characteristics of these 188 emissions. Among volcanic hazards, lava flows and tephra deposits can seriously damage land, 189 buildings, and ecosystems, tiggering fires and leading to socio-economic losses. The health effects 190 can be acute or chronic, being a consequence of inhalation either of particles directly emitted from 191 the volcanoes, or from the re-suspension of the soil ashes during clean-up, agriculture, 192 construction, quarrying, vehicular movements, etc. Ash-fall is of concern because of the wide areas 193 that can be covered by fallout that may remain in the local environment for years to decades being 194 remobilised by human activity or re-suspended by the wind (Horwell and Baxter, 2006). Acute 195 effects of ash exposure can include eye, skin and throat irritation, cough, dyspnoea, chronic 196 obstructive disease, cardiovascular events, psychological stress, reversible changes in healthy lung 197 function, and asthma (Hansell et al., 2006; Horwell and Baxter, 2006). A second major volcanic 198 hazard for local communities and ecosystems is the permanent volcanic plumes, a mixture of gas, 199 liquid and solid particles continuously injected in the atmosphere that become more intense during 200 eruptive phases, mainly at the beginning of each eruptive phases or cycle. Volcanic plumes affect 201 the lower part of the troposphere and strongly influence the chemistry of rainwaters (the most 202 important source of drinking water for Virunga inhabitants), often producing acid rains. Acid rains 203 lead to lower crop yields and hinder meat and milk production which are crucial for the survival 204 of local populations (Cuoco et al., 2013a, b; Yalire et al., 2010). The most exposed areas are located 205 downwind the volcanic gas plumes that regularly blow south-southwest (Fig.1). Surveys

conducted in the VVP have indicated a significant number of diseases and damages induced byvolcanic emissions, with a higher exposure among rural communities (Balagizi et al., 2018).

208 As the VVP is one of the most densely populated areas in Africa, with an extremely high 209 rate of population growth, data scarcity related population vulnerability and exposure in the face of volcanic hazards is a major concern (Michellier et al., 2020). This concern is amplified by the 210 211 fact the VVP is also the locus of (i) many epidemics such as Malaria, Ebola, Cholera, measles, 212 respiratory tract infections, and diarrhoea (Arie, 2019; Annelies et al., 2020), and (ii) persistent 213 insecurity for decades due to armed rebel groups that have forced thousands of people to flee their homes leading to massive migratory flows (Arie, 2019). It is important to note that both epidemics 214 215 and migratory flows are also related to the state of volcanic activity (Boloweti et al., 2020; Burgi 216 et al., 2020). This makes the VVP a complex area, subject to multiple and often interconnected 217 natural and anthropological risks. In this context, defining the vulnerability of rural communities 218 to volcanic hazards is a crucial task for the development of well-targeted remediation actions 219 among communities, stakeholders, and the government. It should lead to the implementation of 220 common strategies, as effective as possible, to manage volcanic risks, by means of the integration 221 of (structural and non-structural) preventive actions and adaptive strategies which might help to 222 decrease vulnerability levels. Whereas social vulnerability to volcanic hazards was recently investigated in the city of Goma (Tedesco, 2002; Michellier et al., 2020;), little is known about 223 224 how the rural communities in the VVP perceive, prioritize, and face multiple volcanic hazards. 225 Most of the studies led in the VVP focus either on volcanic hazards (Favalli et al., 2006; 226 Syavulisembo et al., 2015) or vulnerability (Michellier et al., 2020), but, at our knowledge, no 227 study deals with the real impact of volcanic hazards as felt, undergone, and faced by local people. 228 The presented results constitute thus an essential background for an integrated assessment and key 229 awareness of volcanic risks in the rural areas neighbouring VVP active volcanoes.



Fig. 1. Location map of the investigated areas (VVP, Eastern DRC, satellite image captured by Landsat 8) with (i)
Nyiragongo and Nyamulagira volcanoes, (ii) the cities of Goma (DRC) and Gisenyi (Rwanda), and (iii) the rural
communities involved in this study, the villages of Kingi, Sake, Rusayu and Rumangabo.

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3 Methodology

3.1 Rural communities interviewed in the survey

237 Rural communities interviewed in this study include 119 households randomly sampled from three villages exposed to multiple volcanic hazards (red circles on Fig. 1) and one village relatively 238 239 less exposed to volcanic hazards (white circle on Fig. 1). The choice of these villages from among 240 several in the vicinity of Nyiragongo and Nyamulagira relates to two criteria: (1) being exposed or impacted by distinct volcanic hazards to compare the perception of rural communities facing 241 242 the presence or the absence of each volcanic hazard identified in the area (Balagizi et al., 2018) 243 and (2) allowing for interviews to be conducted in safe conditions considering the security issues 244 in the area raised by the presence of several armed groups (Boudoire et al., 2022). For example, at 245 the time of writing, the village of Rumangabo is no longer accessible due to intense fighting 246 between the FARDC (Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo) and the M23

rebel movement north of the City of Goma. All the villages are exposed to latent seismicity related to the tectonic activity of the East African Rift System and to several recurrent attacks by armed groups or political instability that has occurred in the region since 1996. The region has also been the site of multiple epidemics including measles, cholera, and Ebola (Boudoire et al., 2022). In addition, each village is characterized by the presence or absence of specific hazards:

- Sake (30 households) is the most economically rich and densely populated village (after the City of Goma) located 25 km southward of Nyamulagira, in front of the Kabuno bay. The village may be impacted by lava flows (cf. 1948 eruption of Nyamulagira; Smets et al., 2015), volcanic gas (plume) and particles from Nyamulagira (under the prevailing winds; Fig. 1), and mazukus (Smets et al., 2010).
- Kingi (20 households) is a small remote village almost continuously impacted by volcanic
 gas (plume) and particles mainly from Nyamulagira (under the prevailing winds; Fig. 1).
 However, the village is not exposed to either mazukus (mainly on the shoreline of Lake
 Kivu; Smets et al., 2010) or lava flows (due to its elevation, almost 500 m more than Sake).
- Rusayu (33 households) is a village close to Goma that is highly threatened by the volcanic gas (plume) and particles from both volcanoes. Several eccentric eruptive cones are present in the vicinity of the village (Pouclet & Bram, 2021) that testify to the possibility of future eruptive events in the area even if no lava flow has affected the village in the last century. No mazuku is described in the village, but the closest ones on the shoreline of Lake Kivu are less than 5 km from the village (Smets et al., 2010).
- Rumangabo (36 households) is located North-East of Nyiragongo and is marginally to not at all affected by volcanic hazards identified for the other villages (far from the shoreline of Lake Kivu, in the opposite direction of the prevailing winds). Note that the village is close (less than 1 km) to the lava flow emitted during the 1981-1982 eruption at Nyamulagira. However, compared to the other three villages, Rumangabo represents our "background area" in this study, i.e., a place where rural community is scarcely exposed to volcanic hazards.

Note that all villages exposed to volcanic gas and particles emissions from the plume of either Nyiragongo and/or Nyamulagira volcanoes are also potentially faced with derived hazards, like the contamination of local water and food resources (Balagizi et al., 2018). Therefore, the perception of the degree of contamination of local water and food resources is investigated in this study.

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280 *3.2 The Questionnaire*

281 The survey was conducted from July to December 2020 (before the last eruption of Nyiragongo 282 on May 22, 2021) by means of a structured interview using an anonymous questionnaire composed 283 of 30 questions organized into six sections (Appendix 1) to obtain both quantitative and qualitative 284 data on social vulnerability, severity of the impacts of volcanic hazards, and resilience strategies 285 developed by rural communities in the VVP. People were informed about the final purpose of their 286 answers and gave their consent to use the data in general terms. Neither name nor physical address 287 were collected. The respondents were either met at their homes or at their workplace during daily 288 activities. Most of the participants were not able to read the survey, so questions were directly 289 asked by the first author of this study, translating the English into Swahili or local dialects. The 290 household socio-economic variables (e.g., time in village, level of education, number of people in 291 the household, number of dependents in the household, main source of income, annual income, 292 means of transport, means of communication; see Appendix 1) were investigated in the first part 293 of the questionnaire, based on the main recommendations and results discussed by Michellier et 294 al. (2020). The second part of the questionnaire was developed to evaluate (i) the experience of 295 the respondent regarding volcanic hazards, (ii) respondent impression regarding the impact on 296 local resources such as drinking waters and food plants, and (iii) the preparedness and resilience actions deployed to face these volcanic-related issues. Interviews lasted 15-20 minutes, on 297 298 average. Responses were then compiled in a table on an electronic worksheet (Appendix 2).

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- 300

3.3 Definition of the vulnerability classes

301 To study the impacts of volcano-tectonic hazards on rural communities, we analysed the 302 questionnaire responses by both village and group vulnerability using an Operational Vulnerability 303 Index (OVI) that was developed for studying social vulnerability within the city of Goma 304 (Michellier et al., 2020). The OVI is recognized as an index that can "help to communicate more 305 easily a certain message to political authorities for risk management actions" and is adapted to 306 contexts for data availability may be an issue (de Assis Dias et al., 2020; Michellier et al., 2020). 307 To construct the OVI, the first step was to aggregate individual socio-economic data for each 308 household. In our case, eight variables were selected based on both previous work by Michellier 309 et al. (2020) and also our knowledge of the local social context in VVP: (i) the time in village, (ii) 310 the educational level, (iii) the household size, (iv) the number of dependents, (v) the main income, (vi) the average annual income, (vii) the means of transport, and (viii) the means of 311 communication. These variables, previously identified as relevant for the City of Goma (Michellier 312 et al., 2020) were applied in our study to rural communities because urban and rural areas are 313

314 mixed in the VVP due to continuous population movements triggered by economic interests or 315 insecurity issues (Verhoeve et al., 2004; Syavulisembo Muhindo et al., 2021). Moreover, except 316 for the (remote) village of Kingi, the other villages are either in the immediate vicinity of Goma 317 (Rusayu) or well connected to Goma by national roads of interest related to local trade (Fig. 1). A 318 value between 0 and 1 (from the lowest to the highest vulnerability) was assigned to each socio-319 economic variable, as reported in Table 1. The selection of the main variables of interest for 320 defining the OVI was based on results obtained from a Principal Component Analysis (PCA), which is a widely used multivariate statistics technique for reducing the dimensionality of data 321 322 sets with many input variables (Wold et al., 1987; Reimann et al., 2008) (Fig. 2). Tests of reliability (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test; see Shrestha (2021) for a review) and of sampling adequacy 323 324 (Cronbach's alpha; see Taber (2018) for a review) were performed for the PCA of the whole dataset. The value of the KMO test is 0.69 (i.e., >0.60 retained as acceptable value for the sampling 325 326 size; Shrestha, 2021) and the Cronbach's alpha is 0.58 (range of confidence of 0.45-0.68, i.e., 327 slightly beneath acceptable values). Optimized indicators (value of the KMO test equal to 0.72 and 328 Cronbach's alpha equal to 0.66 with a range of confidence of 0.56-0.75) are obtained by removing 329 the variables "household size" and "number of dependents". Actually, these two variables are 330 known to trigger either positive or negative benefits on vulnerability, especially in rural 331 communities (Kakota et al., 2015). In the absence of clear statement about the impact of these two 332 variables on the evaluation of the local vulnerability, we decided to exclude them in the PCA. 333 PCAs performed individually for each village do not satisfy the tests of reliability and of sampling 334 adequacy and were thus not retained timely. The first two axes (or principal components: PCs) 335 have eigenvalues (λ on Fig. 2a) greater than 1 and are thus significative (cf. eigenvalue-one 336 criterion). We also retained the third axis (even if the eigenvalue is slightly lower than 1) bringing 337 the cumulative variance of the PCA from 56 % (with the first two axes) to 71 % (with the first 338 three axis) (cumulative proportion of variance criterion) (Fig. 2b). The other axes have a very low 339 eigenvalue (<0.8) and do not contribute enough to the cumulative variance (<10 %) to be retained. 340 Representative variables to define the OVI were chosen with respect to two main criteria:

341 (1) a unique variable selected from each axis and usable only once, and (2) a score of the variable 342 along the axis greater than 0.5 or lower than -0.5 (practically, the variable with the maximum score 343 was chosen for each axis; Fig. 2c,d). In total, three variables were retained to define the OVI (one 344 for each axis). Then the OVI, for each household, was calculated by summing (for the three first 345 retained PCs; n = 3) the products of the PC variance by the value of the selected variable for the 346 household following the equation:

$$OVI = \sum_{i=1}^{n=3} variance_i \times value_i$$

Where "variance_i" corresponds to the variance of each axis (i.e., 0.39, 0.17, and 0.15 for the first 350 351 three axes) and "value_i" corresponds to the value set for the household for each variable representative of the axes (i.e., value of the variable "means of communication", "time in village", 352 and "annual income"; more information is provided in the following parts about the choice of these 353 variables). Finally, the OVI was normalized to between 0 and 1 for the whole sampling group (see 354 355 Appendix 2 for the OVI for each household). This approach captures the social vulnerability for 356 each household of the survey. Finally, the 119 households were assigned to one of three groups of 357 vulnerability according to their OVI. We applied a maximum-likelihood method using a Gaussian 358 Mixture Model (GMM) implementing an expectation maximization (EM) algorithm developed in 359 Python to distinguish the populations (see Boudoire et al. (2018) for details): the low vulnerability 360 population (OVI between 0 and 0.5), the medium vulnerability population (OVI between 0.5 and 361 0.9), and the high vulnerability population (OVI between 0.9 and 1).

Variable of social vulnerabilty	Threshold	Scale of vulnerability
Time in village	>2017 2003-2017 1978-2002 <1978	1 0,66 0,33 0
Level of education	No formal education Primary Secondary University	1 0,66 0,33 0
Number of people in the household	>9 6-9 2-5 1	1 0,66 0,33 0
Number of dependents in the household	>9 6-9 2-5 1	1 0,66 0,33 0
Main source of income	Agriculture Market	1 0,75

	Private sector Liberal profession Public sector	0,5 0,25 0
Annual income (USD)	<528 (national average) 528-1278 (SMIG) 1278-2556 >2556	1 0,66 0,33 0
Means of transport	None Bicycle Motocycle Car	1 0,66 0,33 0
Means of communication (Radio - TV - GSM)	0 1 2 3	1 0,66 0,33 0

Table 1. Variables used to define the Operational Vulnerability Index (OVI). The scale of vulnerability ranges from

0 to 1 (most vulnerable) and is based on 4 to 5 thresholds.



365

366 **Fig. 2.** (a) Cumulated contribution variance of the PCA axis (e.g., Principal Component: PC). The eigenvalue (λ) is 367 highlighted for each PC (in green for the first axis, in purple for the second axis, and in blue for the third axis). The 368 last three axes (in grey) were not retained being characterized by low eigenvalues and contribution to the cumulative 369 variance. (b) Statistics of the PCA for the three retained axes (eigenvalue, variance, cumulated variance) and score of 370 the variables along each axis. In **bold**: significative variables for each axis (score greater than 0.5 or lower than -0.5). 371 The variable retained for each axis to define the OVI is highlighted in green, purple, and blue for the first, second, and 372 third axis, respectively. (c) PCA circle defined by the first and second PC (56 % of the cumulated variance) with the 373 main representative variables (the closest ones to 1 or -1 along each axis) surrounded in green and purple for the first 374 and second axis, respectively. (d) PCA circle defined by the first and third PC (54 % of the cumulated variance) with 375 the main representative variables surrounded in green and blue for the first and third axis, respectively.

377 4 Results and Discussions

378 *4.1 Vulnerability of rural communities*

Eight socio-economic variables were defined in this study: (1) time in village (with respect tohistorical eruptions at Nyiragongo in 1977 and 2002, and considering that people already affected

by a natural disaster have developed a higher level of preparedness), (2) education level (from no 381 formal education to university), (3) household size, (4) number of household dependents (non-382 working people like children or retired persons who increase the number of people physically 383 present at home in case of a hazard event), (5) main source of income (from agriculture, which is 384 385 strongly threatened by volcanic emissions, to public sector, which is less affected), (6) annual 386 income (defined according to the national average and the minimum salary defined by the state or 387 SMIG), (7) the means of transport (relevant to escaping dangerous situations), and (8) the means of communication (to be informed about dangerous situations). The results of PCA have 388 389 highlighted three main axes (PC) that explain 71 % of the total variability of the dataset (Fig. 2). The first axis explains 39 % of the total variance and shows a close correlation between the means 390 391 of communication (score along the first axis = -0.83), the main source of income (-0.78), the level 392 of education (-0.75) and the means of transport (-0.63). The second axis explains 17 % of the total 393 variance and is mainly defined by the time in village (so-called "seniority" in Fig. 2) with a score 394 along the second axis = 0.90 whereas scores of the other variable along this axis are <0.4. The 395 third axis explains 15 % of the total variance and is mainly defined by the annual income (score 396 along the third axis = -0.87 whereas scores of the other variable along this axis are <0.4). All other 397 PCs were considered as "scree" due to the eigenvalues largely lower than 1 together with a low contribution to the total variance of the dataset (<10 %). With respect to the methodology described 398 399 above, the PCA allows us to restrict our dataset to the use of 3 main variables representative of the 400 3 retained axes: means of communication, time in village, and the annual income.

401 The first axis of the PCA reveals a strong and interesting correlation between the level of 402 education, the main source of income and the kind and number of means of communication and 403 transport available for the household. In urban areas, Michellier et al. (2020) highlighted that 404 bicycles or motorcycles are the most important means of transport for people that can be used to 405 evacuate household's dependents to low-risk areas if they are prepared in for eruptive events. The 406 PCA suggests that the absence of means of communication and transport, which increases the 407 vulnerability of individuals faced with volcano-tectonic hazards, is strictly dependent on the 408 respondent's job and thus indirectly of his/her education level. It is consistent with previous studies 409 showing that individual income and the education level are the most important key factors for 410 assessing social vulnerability within rural communities facing natural hazards (Qureshi et al., 411 2021).

The second axis of the PCA is essentially defined by the time in village which reflects household experience with past eruptive events and volcano-tectonic hazards. Past experiences will positively influence preparedness and favor the development of preventive actions by the household (Michellier et al., 2020; Wiley et al., 2017). People living for a long time in the villages
who have already experienced volcano-tectonic hazards (like the Nyiragongo eruptions in 1977
and 2002) are less vulnerable than individuals living in the same area for shorter times (with similar
characteristics for the other variables).

419 Finally, the last axis of the PCA shows that social vulnerability to volcano-tectonic hazards is 420 influenced by the household economic features. Households with economic stability (the richest 421 ones) are less vulnerable due to their ability to access primary resources more easily (Hummell et 422 al., 2016). According to Antronico et al. (2020), natural hazards affect society by disrupting utility 423 services and local business, thereby leading to lost revenue, and limiting the access to primary 424 resources. These observations from the PCA are in line with several prior works (Zêzere et al., 425 2007; Schuster and Highland, 2001; Schuster and Fleming, 1986) suggesting that the indirect 426 socio-economic loss is fundamental in understanding social vulnerability within the communities. 427

428 4.2 Perception of the impacts of volcano-tectonic hazards in the VVP

In this study, the impact of direct volcano-tectonic hazards (lava flows, mazukus, ash fallout,
seismicity, volcanic gas plume) and derived hazards (drinking waters and edible plants
contamination, diseases, and insecurity) were discussed with rural communities.

432

433 4.2.1 Evaluation of the impacts of volcano-tectonic hazards on VVP rural communities

434 The impacts of epidemics and insecurity are major concerns in rural communities, independent of 435 the level of social vulnerability (Fig. 3). It is important to note that both insecurity and epidemics 436 (sustained by migratory flows) are accentuated by the volcano-tectonic activity in the VVP 437 (Boloweti et al., 2020). The attention paid to epidemics and insecurity may be due to several 438 reasons including the absence of adequate health infrastructure in rural areas, the inaccessibility 439 of health care, and the absence of public medical insurance in the VVP. Furthermore, the VVP has experienced insecurity since the 1996 wars of "liberation" with the presence of multiple armed 440 441 groups spread in the rural surroundings of Nyiragongo and Nyamulagira volcanoes.

More vulnerable rural communities are the most concerned about the impact of volcanotectonic hazards, with concern progressively declining in the less vulnerable populations (Fig. 3). This trend is even more pronounced for the perception of the impacts related to volcanic plume gas and particle emissions, and to a lower extent, to their derived impacts on water and food quality that pose several health problems among the end users (Arellano et al., 2017; Cuoco et al., 2013a,b; Tedesco, et al., 2013; Kasereka et al., 2021; Tedesco et al., 2007; Yalire et al., 2010; Habakaramo et al., 2019). The most severe impacts related to volcanic plume gas and particle emissions

identified by rural communities are the loss of farming activities and livestock together with 449 450 sanitarian issues (burns, skin and eyes irritation) (Table 1). When impacting water and food 451 quality, local inhabitants raise various health problems, in particular tooth diseases (mostly linked 452 to dental fluorosis due to the fluoride enrichment in drinking waters; Vaselli et al., 2007; Balagizi 453 et al., 2018) and diarrhoea-nausea (Table 1). Similar fluorosis and diarrhoea-nausea issues have 454 also been reported in other places along the East African Rift System since colonial times 455 (MacQuillan, 1944; Onipe et al., 2020). Remedial actions implemented by rural communities 456 consist in (i) protecting water and food resources, (ii) washing food before eating, and (iii) 457 protecting the skin or staying inside during intense periods of volcanic gas and particle emissions.

458 The study reveals that both lava flows and mazukus are of minor concern with respect to volcanic plume gas and particle emissions (Fig. 3). This mirrors the narrow impact of lava flow 459 (in time) and of mazukus (in space) in contrast to persistent volcanic gas and particle emissions 460 461 from the summit craters of Nyiragongo and Nyamulagira that affect large-scale areas (Balagizi et al., 2018). In the case of the mazukus, local inhabitants are mostly aware of asphyxia issues and 462 463 thus most of them can avoid them (Table 1). Regarding the impact of lava flows, the respondents 464 mostly evoked the loss of farming activities, livestock, and homes rather than human loss. Faced 465 with lava flows, many of the respondents mentioned migration on the highlands or the building of 466 wooden and thatched houses that are more economic and easier to rebuild (Table 1).





Fig. 3. Perception of the severity of the impacts of hazards affecting household life for VVP rural communities.
Answers provided by the household respondents are clustered in three distinct groups of social vulnerability (see
Methodology) from high to low vulnerable populations. The number of respondents in each group of social
vulnerability is shown in white italic bold.

Hazard	Impact	Remedial action
Lava Flow	 #1 – Loss of farming activities and livestock (32) #2 – Loss of home (30) #3 – Human loss (4) 	 #1 – Migration on the highlands (27) #2 – Wooden houses (24) #3 – Thatched houses (19)
Mazukus	 #1 – Asphyxia (46) #2 – Loss of farming activities and livestock (8) #3 – Pollutants (7) 	-
Plume	 #1 – Loss of farming activities and livestock (54) #2 – Pollution and contamination (45) #3 – Sanitarian issues : diseases (21) 	 #1 – Protecting water and food ressources (57) #2 – Washing food before eating (49) #3 – Bringing children indoors or protecting the skin during high peaks of activity (41)

Ash fallout	 #1 – Sanitarian issues: burns, skin and eyes irritations (49) #2 – Loss of farming activities and livestock (42) #3 – Pollution and contaminion (27) 	 #1 – Protecting water and food ressources (51) #2 – Washing food before eating (38) #3 – Protecting the skin and staying inside (38)
Seismicity	 #1 – Loss of farming activities and livestock (32) #2 – Loss of home (31) #3 – Change in the volcanic activity (21) 	- -
Water contamination	 #1 – Various health problems (33) #2 – Tooth problems (12) #3 – Diarrhea and nausea (4) 	-
Food contamination	 #1 – Diarrhea and nausea (31) #2 – Loss of quality and reduced stock (20) #3 – Various health problems (10) 	- -
Epidemy	#1 – Mortality (35) #2 – Major diseases (37) #3 – Origin from waters (18)	-
Insecurity	 #1 – Looting and rape (89) #2 – Kidnapping (44) #3 – Attacks by animals (7) 	-

474 Table 2. Main three impacts and remedial actions raised by household respondents in the VVP faced with regional
475 dangers. The number of respondents is shown in parenthesis (for a total of 119 respondents).

476

477 **4.2.2** Geographical variability of the perception of the impacts of volcano-tectonic hazards

478 The perception of the impacts of volcano-tectonic hazards for each village was surveyed (Fig. 4). There is a clear difference between the responses provided by the inhabitants of Rumangabo 479 480 ("background area") and those from Sake, Kingi and Rusayu ("gas and particulate plume affected areas"). Rumangabo is located to the North-East of the Nyiragongo and Nyamulagira volcanoes, 481 482 in the opposite direction of the prevailing winds (Fig. 1). Consequently, whatever the level of 483 social vulnerability of the respondents, the severity of the impacts of volcano-tectonic hazards is 484 considered weak to moderate for the volcanic gas and particle emissions. Unsurprisingly, local 485 perceptions of derived hazards, such as food and water contamination, are weak (Fig. 5). Only the impacts of epidemics and insecurity are felt moderately to strongly by the respondents, 486 487 independently of the level of social vulnerability. Interestingly, the perception of the impacts of lava flows is considered weak at Rumangabo. This contrasts with the fact that the village is
exposed as evidenced by the lava flow from the 1981-1982 eruption at Nyamulagira that passed
less than one kilometer far from the village.

491 The villages of Sake, Kingi, and Rusayu are located to the South-West of the Nyiragongo 492 and Nyamulagira volcanoes, downwind the volcanic gas and particulate plumes (Fig. 1). Note that 493 these villages, known to be poor areas economically, host a majority of medium to highly 494 vulnerable inhabitants compared to those from Rumangabo. This strongly increase the level of risk 495 and danger in the face of volcano-tectonic hazards and derived hazards (Fig. 4). These villages are 496 constantly affected by tectonic earthquakes or volcano-tectonic seismic events (Mavonga et al., 497 2010; Pouclet et al., 2016; Pouclet and Bram, 2021) and by the lava flows coming from several eruptions of the Nyamulagira volcano since 1865 to 2019 (~ 40 eruptions; see Table 1 in Pouclet 498 499 & Bram, 2021). Consequently, the severity of the impacts related to lava flows and volcanic gas 500 and particulate emissions is strongly felt by the inhabitants (Fig. 4). This is thought to be of direct 501 concern for food and water quality (Fig. 5), especially considering that drinking water in these 502 villages generally comes from rain, streams, or rivers (Vaselli et al., 2007) and are generally stored 503 and continuously accumulated in traditional containers such as tanks and canisters (Balagizi et al., 504 2017, 2018; Cuoco et al., 2013a,b). The impact of the mazukus is of major concern for the 505 inhabitants of Sake (and of Rusayu to a lesser extent). This is consistent with the fact that many 506 mazukus have been inventoried within Sake (and close to Rusayu) leading to frequent human and 507 animal fatalities by CO₂-asphyxiation (Kasereka et al., 2017; Smets et al., 2010).

508 One peculiarity of the survey lies on the concern for the seismicity. Although this concern 509 should be common to the four villages because of the regional impact of seismicity related to the 510 opening of the East African Rift (Burgi et al., 2020; Mavonga et al., 2010), the severity of the 511 impact of the seismicity at Rumangabo is weakly felt by local respondents. We think this may be 512 related to the fact that the other villages are close to Lake Kivu and Kabuno bay and may reflect 513 the fear that regional earthquakes could trigger a limnic eruption or a tsunami (see Balagizi et al. 514 (2018) for a review of the potential effects of earthquakes on the stability of Lake Kivu). The lake contains high quantities of dissolved gases: $\sim 250 \text{ km}^3$ of CO₂ and $\sim 55 \text{ km}^3$ of CH₄ stored in deeper 515 water layers (Schmid et al., 2004; Baxter et al., 2004), which might be catastrophic for the 516 517 population living on its shores. Recently, Boudoire et al. (2022) highlighted that earthquakes were 518 strongly felt by the inhabitants of Goma and Gisenyi, located on the shores of Lake Kivu (Fig. 1), a few hours after the last Nyiragongo eruption. They significantly damaged infrastructure and 519 520 generated panic among local inhabitants due to the fear of the opening of eruptive fissures within the cities and of the impact on the stability of water layers in Lake Kivu. 521



Fig. 4. Evaluation of the severity of the impacts of volcano-tectonic hazards by rural communities for distinct villages
in the VVP (more details in Methodology). Grey background highlights the villages where each volcano-tectonic
hazard is considered as a major concern for local inhabitants (moderate to strong impact; Smets et al., 2010, 2015;
Balagizi et al., 2018). The number of respondents in each group of social vulnerability and for each village is shown

528 in black italic bold.



Fig. 5. Evaluation of the severity of the impacts of derived hazards by rural communities for distinct villages in the
VVP (more details in Methodology). Grey background highlights the villages where each volcano-tectonic hazard is
considered as a major concern for local inhabitants (moderate to strong impact; Smets et al., 2010, 2015; Balagizi et
al., 2018). The number of respondents in each group of social vulnerability and for each village is shown in black
italic bold.

530

4.3 Effects on local resources (edible plants and drinking water) sustaining rural communities 537 538 In this study we investigated in more detail the effects reported by local inhabitants from rural communities of the VVP on the quality of water and food. In particularly, we have surveyed the 539 540 main edible plants used locally (Fig. 6) as well as the main sources of drinking waters (Fig. 7). 541 Based on respondents' answers, the most common edible plants grown and eaten by rural communities include three main genera (Fig. 6): Amaranthus (31%), Brassica (25%) and 542 Cucurbita (17%). In Rumangabo, these three genera represent 99% of the plants. Amaranthus 543 544 genus is the most common edible plant grown and eaten by respondents (Fig. 6). The only major difference is the predominance of the Amaranthus genus (>29%) together with the use of the 545 546 Manihot genus (up to 26%) in the villages located downwind the volcanic plume. In Rumangabo, 547 Brassica genus is more widely grown than Amaranthus genus and the Manihot is almost absent 548 from crops (1%). Not surprisingly, village inhabitants downwind of volcanic plume expressed strong concern for the severity of the impacts of volcanic gas and particulate emissions (>7.6 on a 549

550 scale of 10). There, respondents have reported may issues mainly related to diarrhea, nausea, and 551 to the loss of farming activities and livestock (Table 2). At Rumangabo, these impacts are judged 552 weak by the inhabitants (2.9/10). These results highlight the need for targeting these edible plants 553 to assess environmental health and to develop public health initiatives in the VVP considering the 554 impacts of volcanic emissions on food contamination. Several studies revealed that temporary or 555 continuous exposure to volcanic gas and particulate emissions has harmful effects on vegetation, 556 since gases (and/or chemical compounds) exchange across plant stomata and are directly absorbed 557 onto the leaf surface with a potential impact for human consumption (Kabata-Pendias and Pendias, 558 2001; Martin et al., 2012).

559 Three main sources of drinking waters reported by the respondents are (Fig. 7): traditional 560 drainage through a pipe system (55%), rainwater/meteoric (29%) and rivers/surface water (16%). 561 Rainwater is directly collected from the house rooftops and continuously stored using plastic tanks 562 or traditional collectors (see more details in Balagizi et al., 2017). It should be emphasised that 100% of the respondents using *rainwater* as their primary drinking water believe the water is 563 564 contaminated (acidity, high fluoride concentrations, volcanic particles, etc.). 95% of the 565 respondents believe that waters from rivers are also contaminated, whereas this percentage falls to 566 14% for *drained* waters (less prone to contamination according to local users). Among the main 567 impacts reported by the respondents consuming contaminated waters, the development of various 568 health issues including teeth problems (known locally and in other volcanic provinces along the 569 East African Rift System as fluorosis; Onipe et al., 2020) is of most concern (Table 2). At 570 Rumangabo, which is our reference site, there is a clean and safe water system. This village has 571 benefited of financial support from the Virunga National Park (PNVi), the Great Virunga 572 Transboundary Collaboration (GVTC) and other multiple donors to improve basic infrastructure, 573 including drinking water, farming, and environmental maintenance (Karume et al., 2019). In 574 contrast, our survey reveals a strong perception by rural communities of the severity of the dangers 575 related to water quality in the villages located downwind the volcanic plumes (Sake, Rusayu, 576 Kingi) that are continuously threatened by volcanic gas and particle emissions. This spatial 577 distribution shows that water contamination is not only associated with naturally occurring toxic 578 elements in groundwaters (such as fluoride) triggered by geothermal temperature and rock 579 leaching as frequently reported in sub-Saharan African countries (Onipe et al., 2020). In our case, 580 the source of toxic elements seems to also come from volcanic plume - rainwaters interactions (Calabrese et al., 2014). The absence of artificially drained filtered waters for the villages located 581 582 downwind the volcanic plume (with respect to Rumangabo) is a major issue. For instance, our survey reveals that all the respondents of Rusayu use *rainwater* as drinkable water (no draining 583

system, no river) and at the same time are aware it is contaminated (Fig.7). Finally, we note that the higher the level of social vulnerability of the respondents, the higher reported consumption of contaminated waters (Fig.7). In VVP, Habakaramo et al. (2019) highlighted multiple disadvantages of volcanism including death of human beings, wild animals, water contamination and plant decay due to high volcanic degassing as well the conversion of arable soils into rocks after lava flow events; that lead to poverty and famine for the local population.

590 These results are important to guide strategies of local sanitarian agencies, public services, and authorities: it strongly emphasizes that rural communities are aware of the level of water 591 contamination but cannot avoid its use due to the lack of public alternative, or to economic issues 592 593 at the household level (high vulnerability). To our knowledge, there is currently no local program for rural communities living downwind the volcanic plumes that aims to minimize the impacts of 594 595 volcanic gas and particle emissions on food and water quality, nor are there programs aiming to 596 decrease the level of social vulnerability of exposed population. Future studies based on chemical 597 analyses of both edible plants and water used for drinking purpose are required to (i) quantify the 598 level of contamination of these staple products with respect to sanitarian thresholds and (ii) foment 599 the development of adapted sustainable strategies.



601 Fig. 6. Edibles plants commonly used as food by rural communities in the VVP. The first three genera listed by the

602 respondents were considered. The severity of the impact of volcanic emissions on food quality is described from 0 to

10. Pictures from personal collection and Google Images.



605

Fig. 7. Water resources (drinking waters) used by rural communities in the VVP. For each water resources,
respondents were asked if, according to them, the water was contaminated or not (the percentage of people for which
the water is contaminated is shown in a circle for each water resources). The percentage of consumption of reportedly
contaminated waters by households is also reported for each level of social vulnerability (high-medium-low). Pictures
from personal collection.

612 4.4 *Remedial actions raised by rural populations*

We saw that not only did people from rural communities in the VVP developed their own preventive actions when faced with volcano-tectonic hazards (e.g., cleaning edible plants after an episode of volcanic gas and particulate emissions and before eating) but they are also aware of the impact of some of them even if they do not have the tools to limit exposure to contamination (e.g., contaminated waters that are nevertheless used for drinking). Consequently, to conclude the survey, respondents were asked to propose actions and adaptations for managing and mitigating the negative effects of volcano-tectonic hazards.

The respondents suggested multiple remedial actions (for resilience and mitigation) that should be considered by local authorities, volcanologists, civil protection organizations, humanitarian groups, and other stakeholders to safeguard the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in the VVP. We notice that respondents with a low to medium level of social vulnerability primarily emphasized the need for volcanic monitoring (44 % and 22 %, respectively) and of education-information (14 % and 8 %, respectively) to cope with volcano-tectonic risks (Fig. 8).
In contrast, for people holding a higher level of social vulnerability, these needs are considered of
less importance (26 %) than the need to have uncontaminated food and water resources available
(42 %). We can directly make the link with our previous observations that respondents belonging
to a higher level of social vulnerability are those who consume the most contaminated water and
food resources (Fig. 7).

631 When looking the responses independent of the level of social vulnerability (Fig. 9), these three remedial actions remain majoritarian (59 %). The need to develop volcano monitoring 632 633 includes the setting of a permanent and reliable monitoring network, as well as the adequate 634 training of local researchers at the Observatoire Volcanologique de Goma. Following the latest 635 eruption, Boudoire et al. (2022) strongly suggested the development of initiatives based on 636 participatory approaches to (i) strengthen the links between researchers and citizens, (ii) propose 637 reliable alternative to expensive monitoring stations (which are not always able to detect changes in volcano-tectonic activity), and (iii) reinforce the sustainability and resilience of local 638 639 communities faced with natural hazards (in a way that also responds to the demand made in terms 640 of educations and access to knowledge). On the basis of this survey, the improvement in the quality 641 of drinking water and edible plants should be taken into greater consideration by the Congolese government and local authorities with the strong support of humanitarian agencies (WHO, FAO, 642 643 WFP, ICRC and others). (3) Finally, the level of education and of the access to information must be improved to enhance the awareness and the preparedness of rural communities living close to 644 645 the active volcanoes of VVP. This work emphasizes the need for strong communication between 646 civil communities, researchers, and local authorities as well as the necessity to support the access 647 to primary and high schools for children.

648 We note that the remedial actions proposed by the respondents of each village surveyed in 649 this study are tightly related to the peculiar dangers affecting the villages (Fig. 9). At Rusayu, for instance, which is the village where the issues related to water contamination are the most 650 651 important (Fig. 7), almost 60 % of the respondents highlight the need for access to drinkable water 652 and uncontaminated food. It is three times more than the average calculated in this study. On the 653 other hand, at Rumangabo, our "reference" site, no one expressed this need (due to the installation 654 of an artificial drainage system for filtered drinking water; Fig. 7). Inhabitants of Rumangabo 655 rather emphasize the need to improve volcano-tectonic monitoring tools and skills (60 %, i.e., almost three times more than the average calculated in this study). 656



- 659 Fig. 8. Statistical distribution of the remedial actions suggested by rural communities in the VVP to face volcano-
- 660 tectonic dangers. The statistical distribution is shown for each group of social vulnerability.





Fig. 9. Statistical distributions of the remedial actions proposed by all the respondents of this survey and for eachvillage.

661

665 5 Conclusion

666 The perception of the severity of the impacts of volcano-tectonic hazards on VVP rural 667 communities and adaptative strategies/remedial actions were discussed in this study. The main 668 findings of the current research are summarized below:

An Operational Vulnerability index (OVI) was developed for each household surveyed (for
a total of 119 households). Based on the OVI, low vulnerable population (OVI from 0 to
0.25), medium vulnerable population (OVI from 0.25 to 0.65), and highly vulnerable
population (OVI from 0.65 to 1) were distinguished. This information can be useful to local
and national authorities, volcanologists, civil protection, NGOs, and the international
community to provide adapted prevention programs and/or to better target assistance to the
population at risk or at the time following a crisis.

676 2. The severity of the impacts of epidemics and insecurity is the main concern for VVP rural677 communities, independently of the level of social vulnerability. A strong perception of the

678 impacts related to gas and particulate emissions is expressed by local communities living
679 downwind the volcanic gas plume. These volcanic emissions are a major source of water and
680 food contamination, leading to several sanitarian issues among local inhabitants. Lava flows
681 and mazukus are of minor concern compared to volcanic plume gas and particulate emissions.

- 3. Locally eaten plants include three main genera: *Amaranthus, Brassica* and *Cucurbita*,
 representing up to 99% of the edible plants at Rumangabo village. Local inhabitants living
 downwind the volcanic gas plume report many issues related to food quality in response to
 volcanic emissions. Similarly, multiple diseases related to the quality of the water are
 reported in the villages located downwind the volcanic plumes (Sake, Rusayu, Kingi).
- 687 4. Remedial actions are suggested by the respondents: improving monitoring, water and food
 688 quality, education, and information on volcanic risks. Preparedness to cope with the impacts
 689 of volcano-tectonic hazards is highly recommended in rural areas.

It appears that rural communities in the VVP are strongly aware of the hazards to which they are exposed. This awareness should be considered as a major advantage by stakeholders to build community resilience face to local natural hazards (Valdés et al., 2013; Burnside-Lawry and Carvalho, 2016). In this respect, we would recommend that stakeholders focus on the implementation of adapted remedial actions to enhance the ability of the rural communities to face potential natural disasters. Based on the results of this study remedial actions should be developed for:

- Providing safe drinking water and edible plants to the most vulnerable populations who are
 exposed to a natural contamination of these primary resources and that are unable to access
 uncontaminated resources. We hope that such a study may help civil authorities, non governmental organizations, and other intergovernmental programmes (as the Word Food
 Programme of the United Nations) in orienting their strategy in a complex environment
 where, unfortunately, natural hazards are not the only sources of disasters in the area
 (insecurity, epidemics).
- 704 2. Promoting education and information about "good practices" to face natural hazards. For 705 instance, the area where mazukus are present (as Sake and close to Rusayu) will benefit 706 from better delimitating these hazardous places, indicating their presence, and excluding 707 them from land-use plans (in the last years the City of Goma is expanding towards Sake 708 with many new buildings in the vicinity of the mazukus) or adapting the infrastructures to 709 these peculiar conditions (Smets et al., 2010). The reinforcement of evacuation plans and 710 overall, their promotion in the civil society (dissemination, exercises) appear also fundamental to face potential future eruptions reaching populated areas. 711

3. Reinforcing local monitoring capacity. This should be done both by strengthening local 712 713 skills within the relevant agencies through specific training programs and by developing 714 new approaches in monitoring. We emphasize the need to involve civil society in local monitoring strategies by developing participatory approaches. Such approaches proved 715 fundamental during the last eruption (Boudoire et al., 2022) in identifying early signs of 716 717 unusual volcano-tectonic activity in the weeks preceding the eruption. They also help to 718 develop the resilience of local populations and to strengthen the bond of trust between the 719 population and the civil authorities, which is fundamental in dealing with natural disasters.

720

721 Author contributions

Patrick Habakaramo Macumu: conceptualization, methodology, data collecting, data analysis and
validation, writing-original draft, writing-reviewing, and editing; Guillaume Boudoire:
conceptualization, methodology, data analysis and validation, initially reviewed and edited the
manuscript, supervision; Dario Tedesco and Sergio Calabrese: conceptualization, data validation,
reviewing and editing, supervision; Francesco Rufino and Rachel M. Coyte: reviewing and editing.
All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

728

729 Acknowledgments

730 This study is part of the PhD thesis of P. Habakaramo Macumu at the Università degli Studi della 731 Campania Luigi Vanvitelli under the supervising of D. Tedesco, G. Boudoire, and S. Calabrese. 732 Funding from the World Bank (DRC-Kinshasa) and the European Union (DRC-Kinshasa) have 733 greatly helped PMH and DT during they stays in Italy and DRC. We thank the staff of the 734 Observatoire Volcanologique de Goma (OVG) for their priceless support during field surveys. We 735 are in debt with local persons who accepted to answer to the questionnaire. Data discussed in this 736 study are fully available in Supporting Information. This research was partially supported by the 737 French Government IDEX-ISITE initiative 16-IDEX-0001 (CAP 20-25). MONUSCO and UNDP 738 are warmly thanked for their support in the field.

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1049 Supplementary material

- 1050 Appendix 1. Survey questionnaire used in this study.
- **Appendix 2.** Dataset with all compiled responses from the VVP household survey.