Artwork: Walter Zandamela
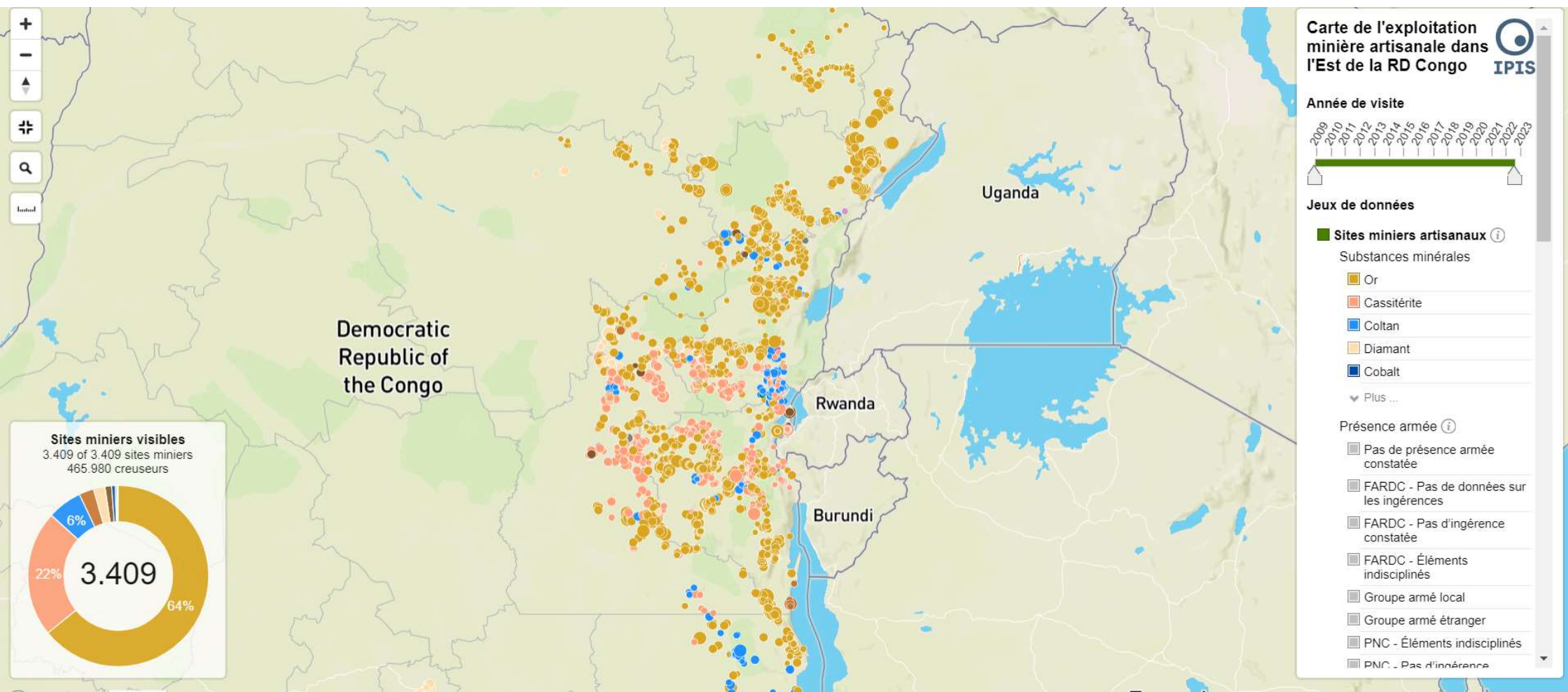Thanks to Alternatives to Extractivism project

Heterogeneity and Labour Agency in Artisanal and Small-scale Gold Mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Divin-Luc Bikubanya & Sara Geenen

Published in

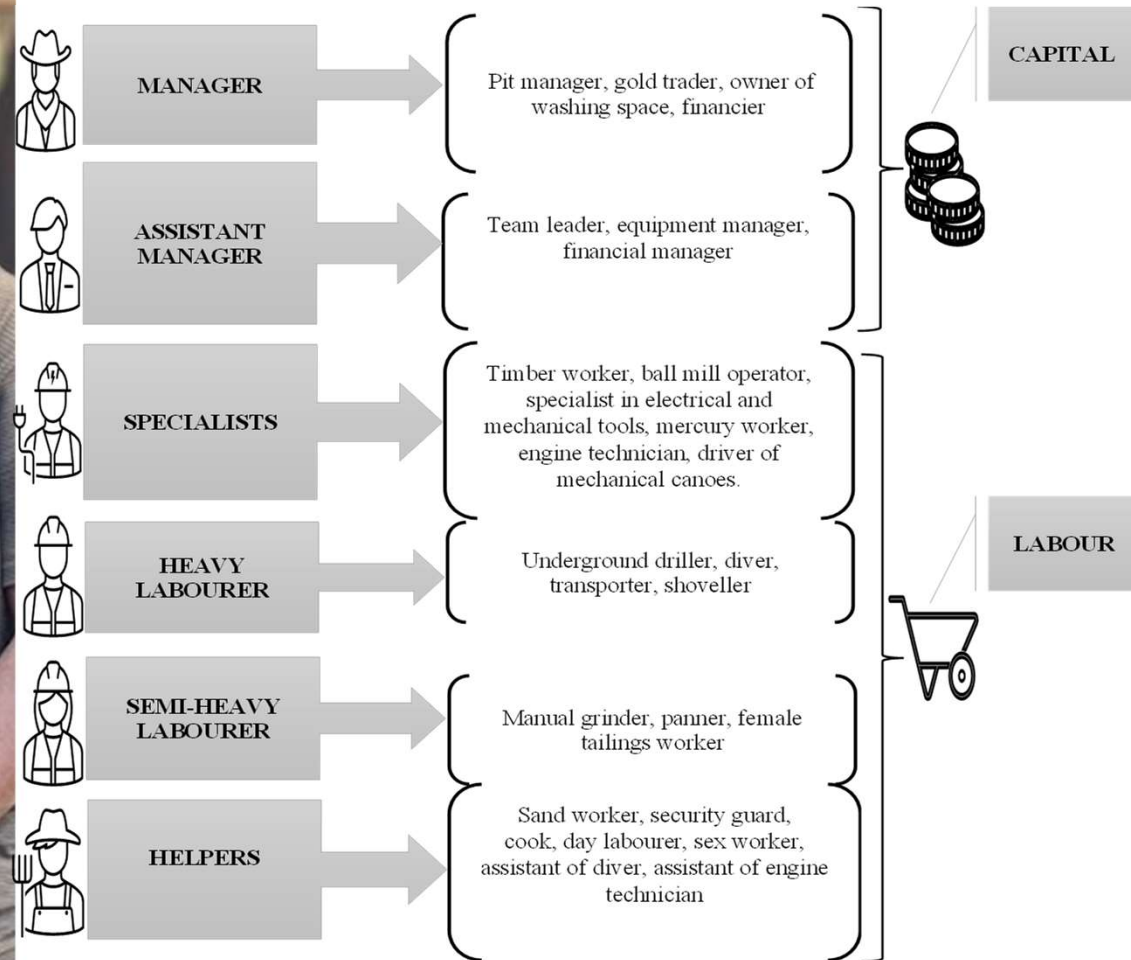*Development and Change*

AIPRIL, 17 June 2024

Source: www.ipisresearch.be

✓ **How to improve their working conditions?**

✓ **How to better protect them?**

✓ **How to enhance their agency?**

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Heterogeneity

CREUSEUR

Picture: Franck Zahinda

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Picture: Gabriel Muhanzi

Operation	Explanation
Alluvial panning	Tree trunks, stones and earth Shovels Plastic or metal pans
Crushing	Tailings/waste Mortars and pestles Ball mills
Washing (loutra)	Tailings/waste Paddle or small pans Water basins
Channelling (débordage)	Wooden channels and reception basins Filtered soil and gold dust Filtering procedures
Dredging	Pontoons Long pipes, sluice and mats Two-hour rotations
Open pit mining	Sand or earth 5 metres deep Shovels, picks and perforators
Underground pit mining	Digging of pits and tunnels Dynamite Wooden constructions

Picture: Philippe Dur

8

Labour agency

Decent work

ILO & the informal economy
4 pillars
Here: focus on contracts,
payments, workers'
representation
& occuptional health
and safety

Critique: agency

Labour agency

Power resources
approach

Structural
Associational
Institutional
Societal

Methods

Source: www.ipisresearch.be
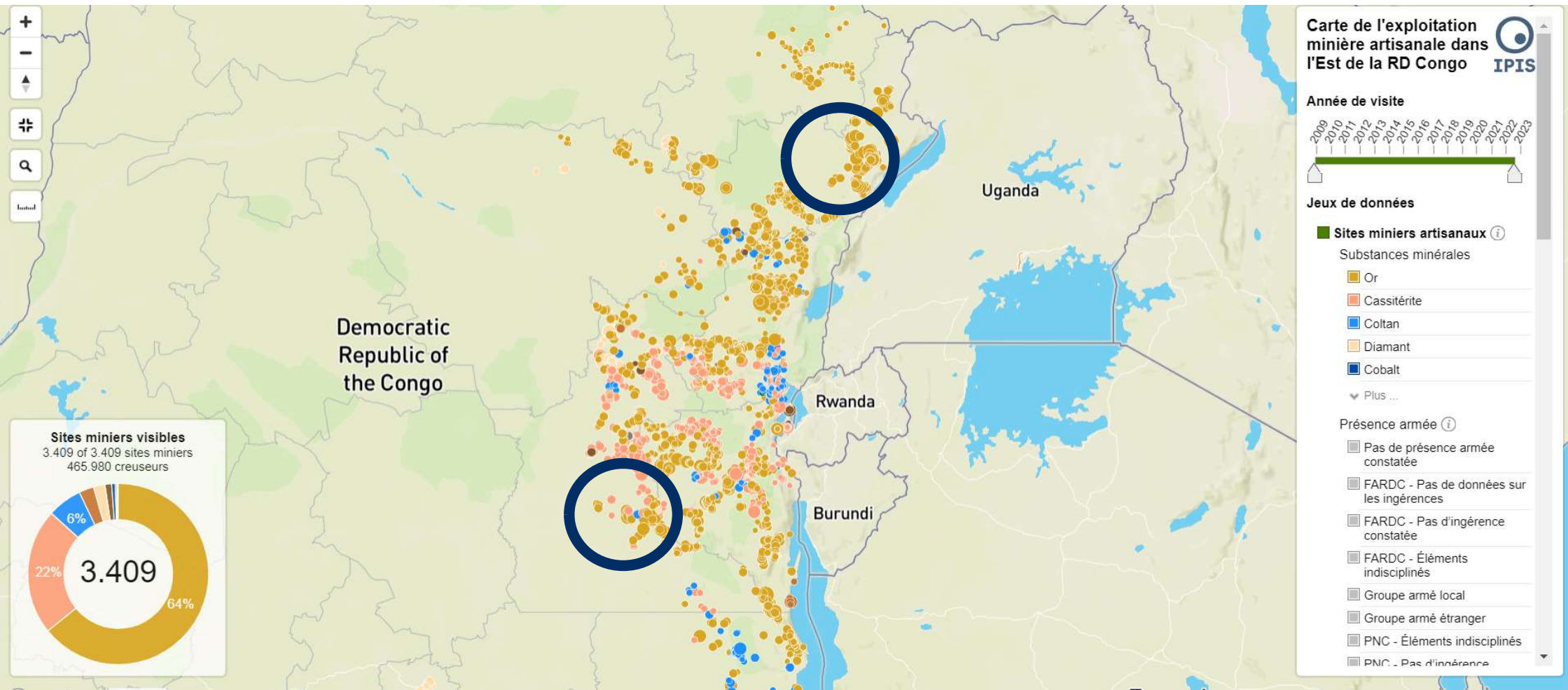
- **Watsa (Haut-Uélé) : 5 weeks in June-July 2019**

- **Shabunda (South Kivu): 4 weeks in March 2020**

- **Individual interviews & focus groups & observation**

- **Watsa: 194 obs.**
Moku-Babarau, Vika Vile-Mbilo and Vika Vile-Were
- **Shabunda: 420 obs.**
Katshungu, Matili-Mungembe and Shabunda-Ndeya

Mining sites list

Types of exploitation

Categories of workers

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Survey headings

(1) **Socio-demographic data**

(2) **Economic situation**

(3) **Experience in gold production**

(4) **Labour relations**

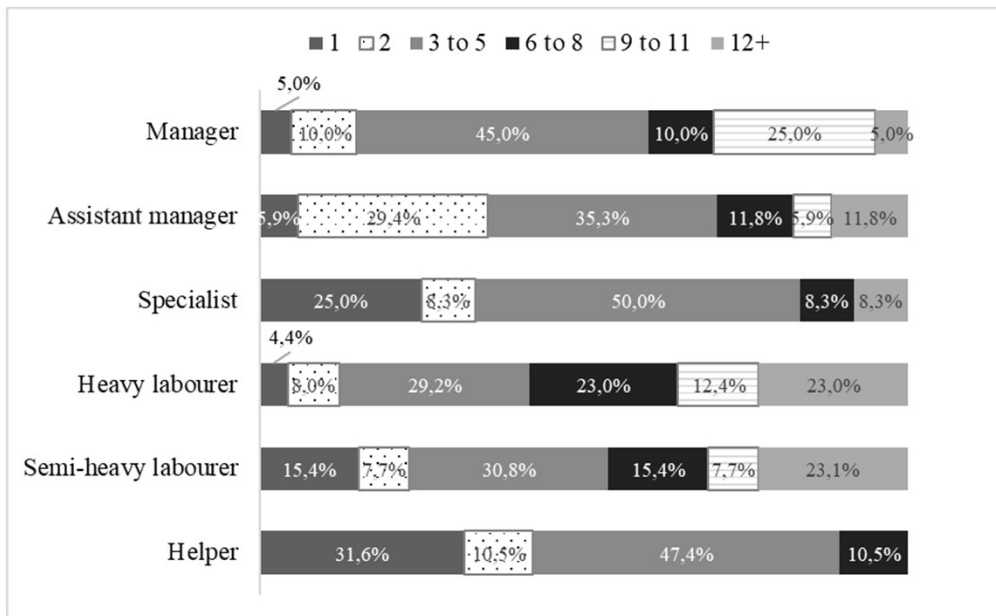(5) **Working conditions**

(6) **Production and income**

Findings

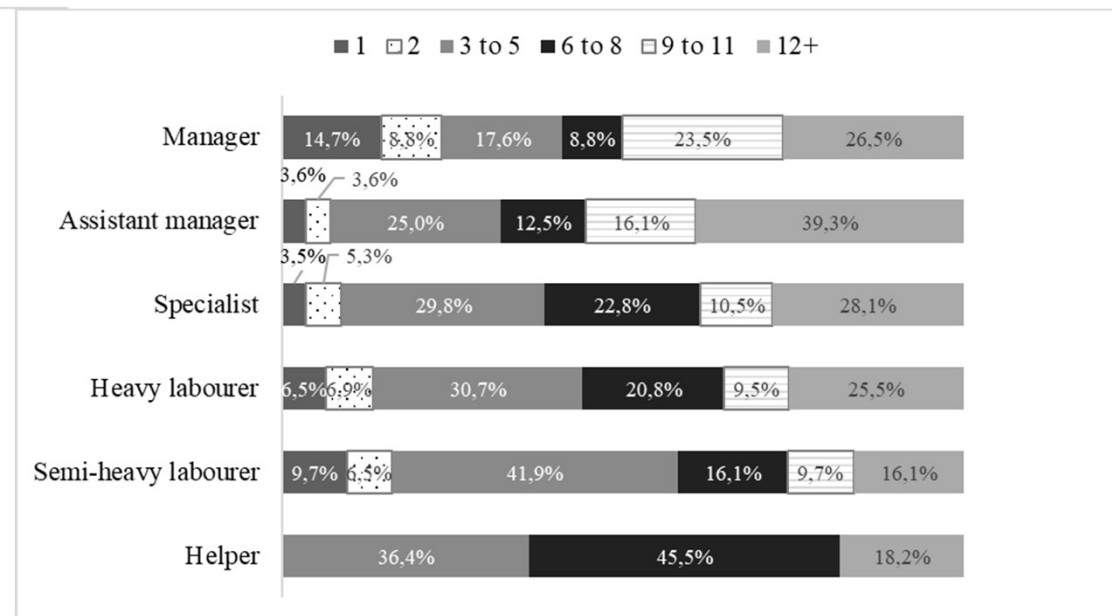# Heterogeneity: mobility

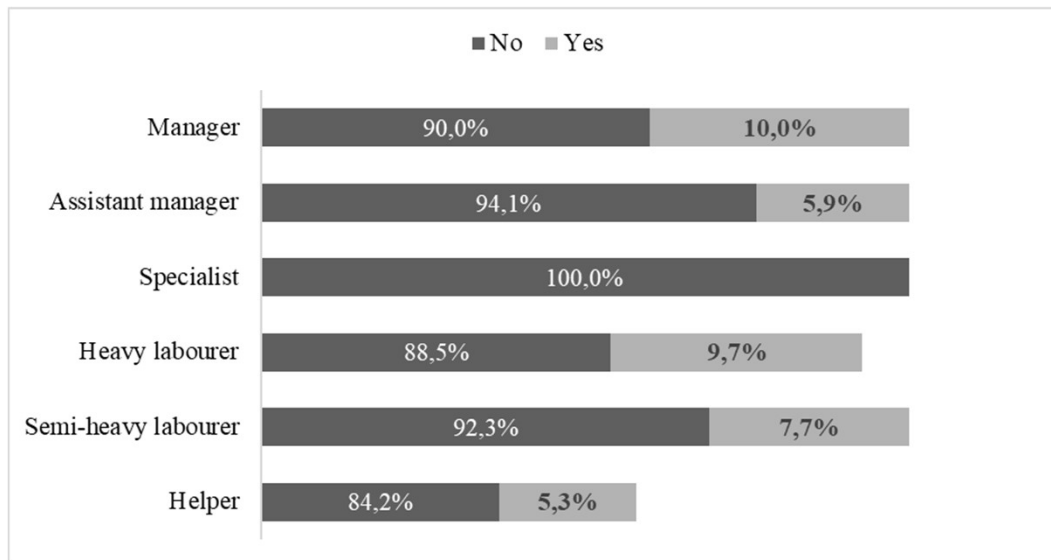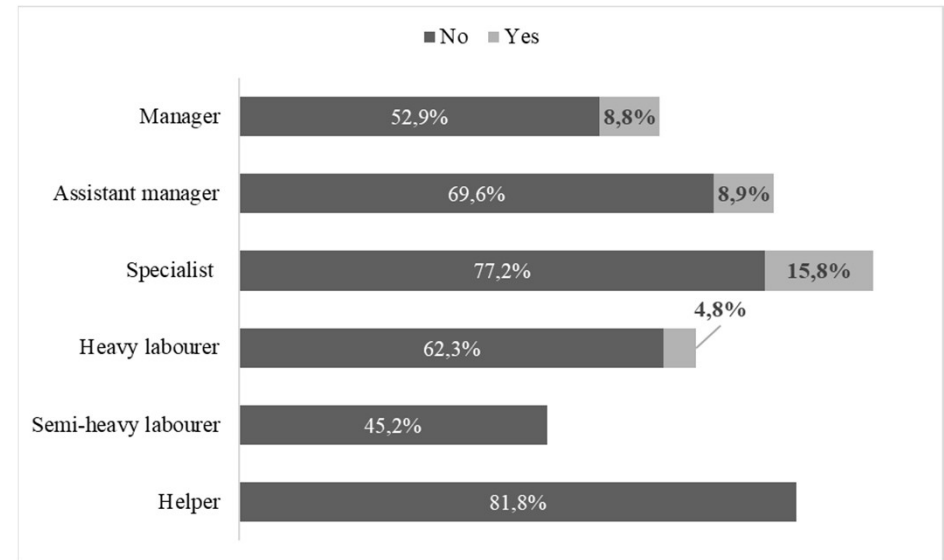**Figure 3 & 4. Mobility (number of sites worked)**

Watsa

Shabunda

Trend: very few formal training/ most self-taught, or from friends

Figure 5 & 6. Percentage of Respondents having received Training

Watsa

Watsa chart — ■ No ■ Yes

Role	No	Yes
Manager	90,0%	10,0%
Assistant manager	94,1%	5,9%
Specialist	100,0%	
Heavy labourer	88,5%	9,7%
Semi-heavy labourer	92,3%	7,7%
Helper	84,2%	5,3%

Shabunda

Shabunda chart — ■ No ■ Yes

Role	No	Yes
Manager	52,9%	8,8%
Assistant manager	69,6%	8,9%
Specialist	77,2%	15,8%
Heavy labourer	62,3%	4,8%
Semi-heavy labourer	45,2%	
Helper	81,8%	

Trend: low cooperative membership, low satisfaction

Table 4. Cooperatives and Associations

	Watsa		Shabunda	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Member of a cooperative				
No	8	4.1	310	73.8
Yes	1	0.5	109	26.0
No response	185	95.4	1	0.2
Status within the cooperative				
Founder	-	-	10	9.1
Member	1	100	75	68.8
Manager	-	-	22	20.1
No response	-	-	2	1.8
Level of satisfaction				
Very satisfied	-	-	4	3.6
Somewhat satisfied	-	-	20	18.3
Neutral	-	-	15	13.7
Not satisfied	1	100	13	11.9
Not satisfied at all	-	-	53	48.6
No response	-	-	4	3.6
Member of a trade union				
No	175	90.20	301	71.7
Yes	10	5.15	107	25.5
No response	9	4.64	12	2.9
Level of satisfaction				
Somewhat satisfied	1	10	2	1.9
Neutral	-	-	4	3.7
Not satisfied	9	90	25	23.4
Not satisfied at all	-	-	73	68.2
No response	-	-	3	2.8

- **Not member of cooperative**
  - 73.8% of workers in Shabunda
  - Only 1 respondent in Watsa
- **Either don't know what cooperative is, or believe it doesn't serve their interests**

Picture: Sara Geenen

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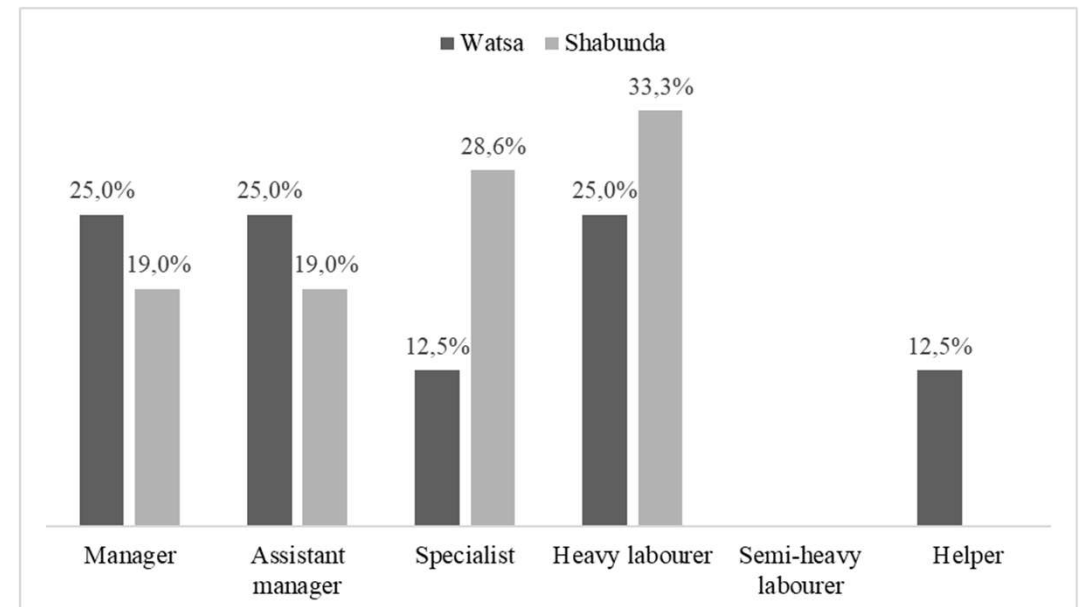BANQUE CENTRALE DU CONGO

10 c

10 c
TEN

DANSEURS PENDE

KUMI

10 c

LE CONTREFACTEUR
EST PUNI
DE SERVITUDE PENALE

Trend: oral contracts => little security

Heterogeneity: dependence on financiers

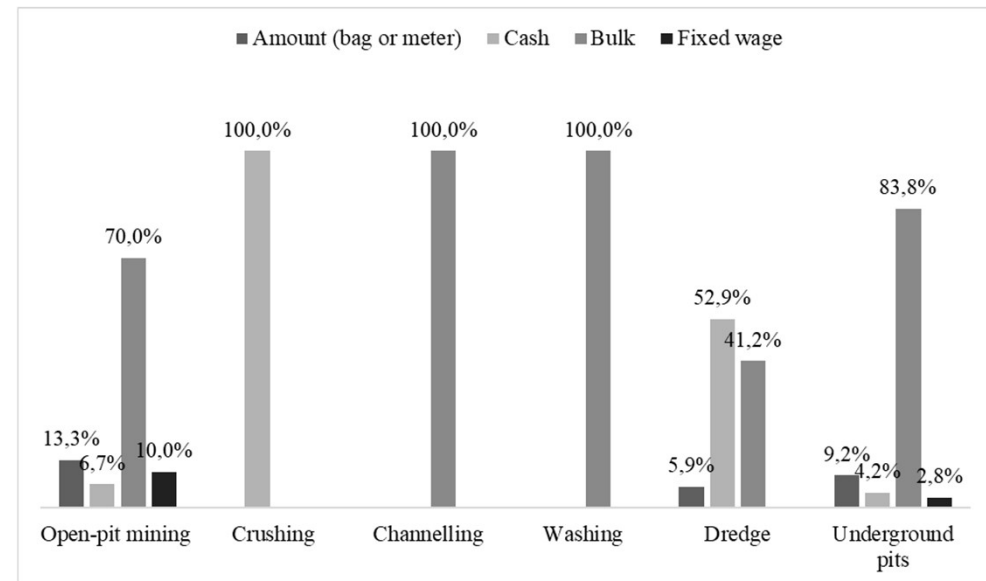Figure 2. Percentage of Respondents having Written Contracts
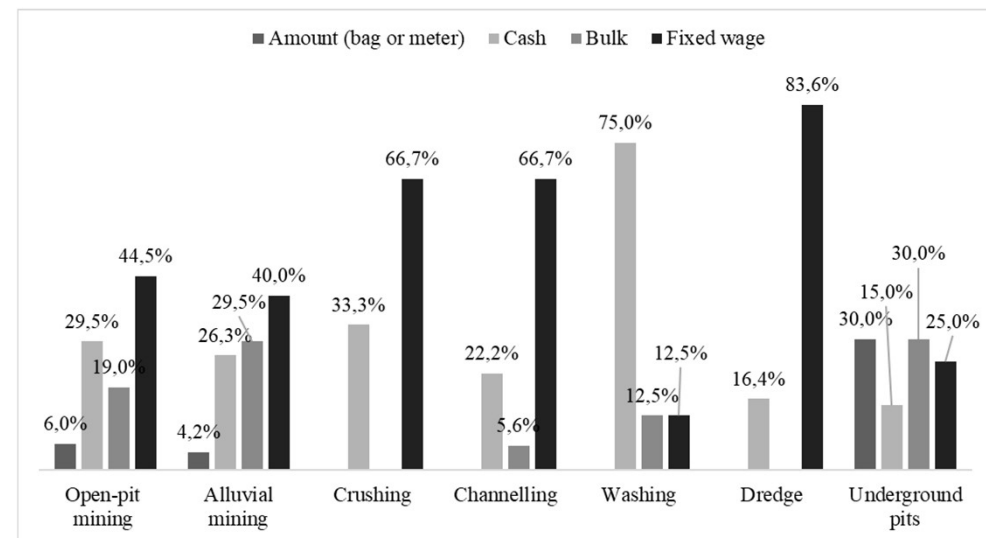
Heterogeneity: payment systems

- Sharing of production in bulk
- Sharing of production in cash
- Sharing in terms of amount

per bag or meter

- Fixed wage

Workers' opinion on "fairness" of the system

Watsa

Shabunda

Occupational health and safety

- Trend: physically demanding work

- Heterogeneity: accidents –

type differs according

to type of operation

- Heterogeneity: level of concern

varies

	Watsa		Shabunda	
	N	%	N	%
Symptoms and pathologies				
Skin problems	15	7.73	190	45.24
Problems with the eyes	14	7.21	135	32.14
Stress, trauma and anxiety	42	21.64	155	36.9
Lungs/breathing problems	79	40.72	196	46.67
Urinary problems	16	8.24	257	61.19
Back, rib and hip problems/generalized muscle pain due to fatigue	152	78.34	375	89.29
Problems with the ears	21	10.82	101	24.05
Other	24	12.36	130	30.95
None	6	1.43	-	-
Types of accidents				
Asphyxiation	12	6.18	5	1.22
Accidents with work tools	-	-	45	10.98
Accidents with machinery	46	23.71	18	4.39
Accidents underwater	7	3.61	17	4.15
Rockfall	19	9.79	26	6.3
Fall	16	8.25	15	3.66
Landslide	8	4.12	6	1.46
Flooding	-	-	4	0.98
Other (accidents related to fights, gold smoke inhalation during gold processing)	-	-	2	0.49

Discussion

Associational power

- Associations: horizontal organizing

Institutional power

- Cooperatives: vertical organizing, legal
- Social protection: mutual health insurance
- Tenure security (artisanal mining zones)

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Structural power

- Financial (flexible financing and micro loans)
- Material and technical support
- Information about prices
- Training to meet ethical standards

Societal power

- In theory
- But in practice moral discourse around

mineral supply chains from DRC

captured by external actors

Decent work agenda that goes beyond formalization

ASGM agenda that goes beyond

licensing and organizing miners in cooperatives