

A Journey to the Commune D'Alunguli

These photos capture a recent trip across the Congo River from Kindu to its counterpart on the other side called the Commune D'Alunguli. I say "counterpart" because, in essence, the city/town of Kindu rests on two sides of the river. That causes problems for the people because much of the commerce and trade happens on the Kindu side. Thus, what prosperity there is, and there is very little, is found in Kindu. D'Alunguli remains a very poor cousin on the east side of the river.

Travelling the 800 or so metres across the Congo River is quite perilous because the only boats that make the journey are dugout canoes. Some are powered by motors while others are powered by two guys who paddle while standing up. The current is strong, so often the boats bob and weave in awkward fashion, but the skill of the "captains" is remarkable.

Even so, boats tipping over is an all too common occurrence. While on route to Kindu, I spent a day in Kisingani, which is downriver to the north of Kindu. There the river is even wider with a stronger current. Again, that city rests on both sides, so the same dugouts with the same mix of motors and paddles make their way back and forth. Last week eleven people drowned in Kisingani. I imagine they were a mix of mothers, fathers, children, sisters and brothers.

Some of the dugouts will have as many as fifty people packed in. A trip across the Congo River in Kindu costs 500 Congolese Francs, which is about 60 cents. The 500 Franc note is the largest currency, so American currency can be used for larger transactions. Even so, many of the folks here stick to the Franc, so have, figuratively speaking, traded their wallets for wheelbarrows.

Back to the journey. You will note the ingenuity of how the dugouts are adapted to the modern motor.

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