

At least 145 passengers are missing after a motorized boat overloaded with goods and animals sank overnight in a river in the northwestern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), authorities said on Thursday.

About 55 people survived the disaster, authorities said. The boat was heading for the neighbouring Republic of Congo when it capsized on the Lulonga River on Tuesday night near the town of Basankusu.

Jean-Pierre Wangela, president of civil society groups in the region, told reporters that at least 145 people were missing. He blamed the sinking on an overload but said residents had few other options.

“There are no other means of transportation currently in our province and here in Basankusu territory,” he said.

Shipwrecks causing dozens of deaths are all too common in remote areas of the DRC, where travel by road is sometimes impossible. Many boats are overloaded with goods and people who cannot swim. Rescue operations are extremely limited in remote parts of the country.

In October, more than 40 people died on the Congo River in Equateur Province in similar circumstances.