

# Going beyond consensus genome sequences: An innovative SNP-based methodology reconstructs different Ugandan cassava brown streak virus haplotypes at a nationwide scale in Rwanda

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## Abstract

Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD), which is caused by cassava brown streak virus (CBSV) and Ugandan cassava brown streak virus (UCBSV), represents one of the most devastating threats to cassava production in Africa, including in Rwanda where a dramatic epidemic in 2014 dropped cassava yield from 3.3 million to 900,000 tonnes (1). Studying viral genetic diversity at the genome level is essential in disease management, as it can provide valuable information on the origin and dynamics of epidemic events. To fill the current lack of genome-based diversity studies of UCBSV, we performed a nationwide survey of cassava ipomovirus genomic sequences in Rwanda by high-throughput sequencing (HTS) of pools of plants sampled from 130 cassava fields in thirteen cassava-producing districts, spanning seven agro-ecological zones with contrasting climatic conditions and different cassava cultivars. HTS allowed the assembly of a nearly complete consensus genome of UCBSV in twelve districts. The phylogenetic analysis revealed high homology between UCBSV genome sequences, with a maximum of 0.8 per cent divergence between genomes at the nucleotide level. An in-depth investigation based on Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms (SNPs) was conducted to explore the genome diversity beyond the consensus sequences. First, to ensure the validity of the result, a panel of SNPs was confirmed by independent reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) and Sanger sequencing. Furthermore, the combination of fixation index ( $F_{ST}$ ) calculation and Principal Component Analysis (PCA) based on SNP patterns identified three different UCBSV haplotypes geographically clustered. The haplotype 2 ( $H_2$ ) was restricted to the central regions, where the NAROCAS 1 cultivar is predominantly farmed. RT-PCR and Sanger sequencing of individual NAROCAS1 plants confirmed their association with  $H_2$ . Haplotype 1 was widely spread, with a 100 per cent occurrence in the Eastern region, while Haplotype 3 was only found in the Western region. These haplotypes' associations with specific cultivars or regions would need further confirmation. Our results prove that a much more complex picture of genetic diversity can be deciphered beyond the consensus sequences, with practical implications on virus epidemiology, evolution, and disease management. Our methodology proposes a high-resolution analysis of genome diversity beyond the consensus between and within samples. It can be used at various scales, from individual plants to pooled samples of virus-infected plants. Our findings also showed how subtle genetic differences could be informative on the potential impact of agricultural practices, as the presence and frequency of a virus haplotype could be correlated with the dissemination and adoption of improved cultivars.

**Keywords:** cassava; high throughput sequencing; UCBSV; ampelovirus; SNP; Rwanda.

## 1. Introduction

In many African regions, cassava (*Manihot esculenta* Crantz) is considered a key food security crop because of its capacity to cope with suboptimal climatic conditions and to grow on marginal land (Mbewe et al. 2020). The crop ranks as the sixth most important

food crop in the world (Otekunrin and Sawicka 2019) and the third most important in Rwanda, with an average yield of 14.2 tons per hectare in 2021 (FAO 2018; Otekunrin and Sawicka 2019; MINAGRI 2021). However, cassava production is still below its yield potential due to various constraints, including viral diseases

(Tomlinson et al. 2018). Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD) is one of sub-Saharan Africa's most devastating threats to cassava. CBSD was first found in Tanzania in 1936 (Storey and Nichols 1938) and has now spread to ten East and Central African countries where cassava is a vital crop (Legg et al. 2011). The disease is caused by Ugandan cassava brown streak virus (UCBSV) and cassava brown streak virus (CBSV), which are both positive-sense, single-stranded RNA (+ssRNA) virus species belonging to the genus *Ipomovirus* and the family *Potyviridae* (Mbanzibwa et al. 2011b). Both species are widely spread in Central and Eastern African countries, although UCBSV is often more prevalent than CBSV (Ndunguru et al. 2015; Mulenga, Makulu, and Laura 2018; Nyirakanani et al. 2021; Kwibuka et al. 2022). The disease is mainly vertically transmitted through planting material, in addition to the semipersistent transmission by the whitefly vector (Maruthi et al. 2017). After a dramatic outbreak of CBSD in Rwanda in 2014, the import and dissemination of CBSD-tolerant cassava cultivars (Douthwaite 2020) were instrumental in mitigating yield losses. However, the incidence of UCBSV and CBSV remained relatively high (respectively, 61 per cent and 11 per cent) (Nyirakanani et al. 2021).

RNA viruses often exist as a population of closely related mutants due to the low fidelity of RNA polymerases and, therefore, exhibit a fast yet constrained evolutionary rate, enabling modification in virulence and transmissibility as well as a continuous virus adaptation to the changing environment (Duffy 2018). Therefore, studying the evolution of viral populations at different scales is of prime importance in managing a viral disease. For UCBSV, the analyses were mainly carried out on a few partial coat protein sequences. They reported a country-wide nucleotide divergence from under 1 per cent in Mayotte ( $n=8$  sequences) and Kenya ( $n=9$ ) (Roux-Cuvelier et al. 2014; Kathurima and Ateka 2019) to 12 per cent in Rwanda ( $n=24$ ) (Munganyinka et al. 2017). The first complete genome sequences of viruses were obtained by Sanger sequencing of PCR amplicons (Mbanzibwa et al. 2011a). They corresponded to the most frequent nucleotide at each position of the genome. However, this technique is not well adapted to detect minor alleles or Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms (SNPs—under 25 per cent frequency) in the population. Unless coupled with cloning and sequencing of several clones per sample, amplicon sequencing generally fails to detect low-frequency polymorphisms, even though improvements have been made to detect minor alleles in tumors (Lane et al. 2013).

High throughput sequencing (HTS) has become the standard technology for studying virus population diversity, epidemiology, and evolution (Ndunguru et al. 2015). For example, HTS-based profiling of plant virus genomes has allowed the reconstruction of the history of potato virus V evolution and dissemination (Fuentes et al. 2022) as well as deciphering the spread of the turnip mosaic virus along the silk road (Kawakubo et al. 2021). For UCBSV, sixty-three genome sequences have been generated from Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, DRC, Zambia, Malawi, Rwanda, and Burundi (Bigirimana et al. 2011; Mbanzibwa et al. 2011b; Mulimbi et al. 2012; Ndunguru et al. 2015; Alicai et al. 2016; Mbewe et al. 2017; Mulenga, Makulu, and Laura 2018).

Although HTS technologies have facilitated the profiling of virus genomes, most publications only report consensus genome sequences for the detected and identified viruses, even from pooled samples, as done for the devastating viruses causing maize lethal necrosis (Adams et al. 2014). This consensus genome corresponds to the most frequent nucleotide at each position, providing an information level similar to Sanger sequencing technology and underexploiting the extent of sequencing data generated.

Because HTS technologies generate millions of reads, tens to thousands of sequencing reads can cover each base of a viral genome. This sequencing coverage theoretically allows the identification of minor SNPs (frequency under 50 per cent) even at a shallow frequency (below 1 per cent) (Ndunguru et al. 2015). The integration of minor SNPs in the analysis of viral genomes should become the rule rather than the exception, as they can drive evolutionary processes and the biological properties of viruses within their hosts (Simmons et al. 2012; Massart et al. 2014; Cuevas et al. 2015; da Silva et al. 2020). For example, minor variants in the Coxsackie virus have been shown to contribute to virus adaptation (Bordería A et al. 2015). Evolutionary studies on barley yellow dwarf virus (BYDV) showed that several virus populations might share the same consensus sequence while having different low-frequency SNP patterns, highlighting the importance of characterizing virus genetic diversity beyond the consensus level (Tamisier et al.). Therefore, it is critical to profile and report the presence of individual low-frequency SNP present to improve the resolution of viral population analyses and to characterize the contribution of variants to virus evolution and adaptation (changes in viral load, virulence, transmission, host range, etc.).

When analyzing the genetic diversity of a virus species in the HTS dataset at the SNP level, generating the proper reference consensus sequence(s) is essential. Indeed, if the sample was infected by several divergent isolates, e.g. at least 5–10 per cent of divergence, their consensus genome sequence reconstruction is possible using classical *de novo* assembly (Winter et al. 2010; Hanafi et al. 2022; Kim et al. 2022), and several consensus sequences can be obtained. The presence and frequency of SNPs can be further studied for each genome sequence. On the other hand, if the identity between isolates is higher, it becomes difficult to differentiate their genome sequences, and a unique consensus sequence is often generated. The comparison of viral populations using SNP frequencies can be performed with the fixation index ( $F_{ST}$ ) (Weir and Clark Cockerham 1984).  $F_{ST}$  is a measure of population differentiation usually applied to study the population genetics of pooled samples of vertebrates or plants. It has been recently applied to plant virus populations and has enabled an in-depth analysis of the virus population beyond consensus sequences reconstructed from HTS datasets (Tamisier et al.; Wijayasekara and Ali 2021). SNP frequencies can also be used as features for a principal component analysis (PCA) to reduce their complexity and increase their interpretability. SNP-based PCA has so far only been applied to study the evolution of a DNA virus infecting *Drosophila* (Hill and Unckless 2020).

In addition, the association between SNPs can be studied, e.g. if they belong to the same viral molecule. For eukaryotes, a haplotype is a set of genomic polymorphisms that tend to be inherited together. By extension, we can call haplotype a series of mutations present on the same viral molecule compared to the virus's consensus (or reference) sequence. Therefore, identifying haplotypes can improve the characterization of the viral population at the molecular level. SNPs can be associated with haplotypes if they are located close to each other in the genome so that they can be observed on the same sequencing (paired) reads. However, more distant SNPs are more difficult to associate with the short-read (i.e. 50–300 nt) sequencing technologies predominantly used in virus diagnostics and metagenomics studies. The emergence of new sequencing technologies generating long reads can solve this issue. Those technologies have already generated complete genomes of the viruses at high accuracy for small ssDNA circular genomes (Mehta et al. 2019), but it can remain a challenge for longer viral genomes. To solve this challenge and exploit the

massive amount of data generated by short-read technologies, we propose an innovative methodology to reconstruct haplotypes of distant SNPs from short sequencing reads based on their relative frequencies within and between datasets.

In the present study, we aimed to decipher the presence and the genetic structure of UCBSV populations at the SNP and haplotype levels through a nationwide sampling in the major cassava production areas under diverse pedo-climatic zones and cultivar compositions. This study used HTS technologies combined with an innovative bioinformatics methodology based on the SNPs identified from the consensus sequences and their frequencies to reconstruct virus haplotypes.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1 Study area and field sample collection

Cassava is grown on a large scale in the Central and Eastern parts of Rwanda (NISR 2019). Thus, fields with cassava plants at least 6 months old from thirteen cassava-producing districts were inspected for CBSV symptoms and sampled. They included five districts (Ruhango, Nyanza, Muhanga, Kamonyi, and Gisagara) from the Central regions, six districts (Bugesera, Kayanza, Kirehe, Nyagatare, Gatsibo, and Ngoma) from the Eastern regions, one district from Northern province (Gakenke), and one district from the Western province (Nyamasheke). In the latter two provinces, cassava is grown on a small scale. The sampled fields' locations are shown in S1 Fig, and their GPS coordinates are available in S1 Table.

The districts' climatic conditions differ in temperature, rainfall, and altitude. For example, the eastern province is drier flatlands, the Northern province is cool mountains, whereas the low-lying valleys of southwestern provinces are warmer (Nduwumuremyi and Kabirigi 2018). These conditions divide the country into different agro-ecological zones, and detailed agro-ecological characteristics of each district surveyed are found in supplementary table 2 (S1 Fig) (S2 Table).

From each district, ten fields were visited (S1 Fig). They were selected from five main cassava producer sectors (selected purposely), and two cassava fields were selected in each sector, separated by 10 km between them in order to provide a reliable overview of the ipomovirus diversity in those districts. From each field, leaf samples (symptomatic and asymptomatic) were collected from ten plants selected randomly using the two diagonals approach across the field (Rwegasira, Rey, and Nawabu 2011). Samples from the same field were pooled (one field was considered one sample for RNA extraction), totaling 130 pooled samples corresponding to 130 fields visited from 13 districts.

### 2.2 Total RNA extraction

Total RNA was extracted using the cetyltrimethylammonium bromide method (Ling et al. 2013). Considering the cost of HTS, RNA samples extracted from the same districts were pooled using equimolar concentration. Consequently, 13 samples of 100 plants (10 fields per district; 10 plants per field) were prepared for HTS. Bioanalyzer (Agilent) and Nanodrop (ThermoFisher Scientific) determined the RNA integrity and concentration. Supplementary Table 3 shows the RNA concentration with the 260/280 ratio and the RNA integrity number of the used RNA (S3 Table).

### 2.3 RNA-Seq library preparation and sequencing

Samples were processed at the GIGA facilities of Liège University (Liège, Belgium). Ribosomal depletion was performed by Ribo-Zero® rRNA Removal Kit (Illumina kit) following the

manufacturer's guidelines. RNA Library was prepared following TruSeq Stranded Total RNA Sample Prep LS Protocol (Illumina kit) according to the manufacturer's instructions. The libraries were prepared with unique dual indexes (UDIs), and a Free Adapter Removal (Illumina kit) was done on the pooled libraries. The HTS was done on the ILLUMINA NovaSeq 6000 with an S4 flowcell for 2\*150 nt. Adapter removal was done with the bcl2fastq v2.20 program of Illumina.

## 2.4 Bioinformatic analysis

### 2.4.1 Reads processing

First, the obtained raw reads were paired and trimmed using Geneious Prime 2023 (version 10.1.5, Biomatters) software (<https://www.geneious.com>). The low-quality nucleotides showing quality scores below 20 and reads with lengths lower than 35bp were trimmed using BBDuk V38.37 (Kechin et al. 2017). Then, reads were merged, and duplicated reads were removed using the Dedupe V38.37 (Bushnell, Rood, and Singer 2017) plugin implemented in Geneious.

### 2.4.2 De novo assembly, mapping, and phylogenetic analysis

De novo assembly was further performed using the RNA-Spades (Bushmanova et al. 2019) V3.13.0 assembler implemented in Geneious. The obtained contigs were subjected to a BLAST search (Altschul et al. 1990) (blastn and blastx) against the viral RefSeq database (retrieved in September 2020—release 201) to check which contigs matched viral sequences in GenBank. All contigs matching a viral reference sequence in GenBank were extracted. All reads were further mapped (Geneious mapper V10.1.5) on the viral contigs of interest with the parameter 'Low sensitivity/ Fastest' used (10 per cent mismatch). Furthermore, reads were mapped on the closest reference sequence in the database using the same parameters. The obtained mapped reads were used for SNP calling and in-depth analysis. SNP calling (Geneious V10.1.5) was performed using the following criteria: (1) a minimum coverage of 100×, (2) a minimum Strand-Bias >65 per cent ( $P$ -value  $\leq 0.0005$ ), and (3) a minimum variant frequency of 1 per cent.

To rule out the presence of CBSV in the analyzed samples, all samples were processed with Kraken2 (standard database from 06/2020, Version 2.1.1) on Galaxy (Pond et al. 2009; Wood and Salzberg 2014), in addition to the BLAST approach mentioned above, and for positive samples (showing CBSV reads after Kraken results), simultaneous mapping of all reads on the closest CBSV (HG965221) and UCBSV (KX753356.1) reference genomes was performed at maximum 10 per cent mismatch to avoid non-specific mapping of UCBSV reads on the CBSV sequence. In addition, to screen our samples for novel Ampelovirus recently reported to infect cassava in Central Africa and the South-West Indian Ocean Islands, all reads were mapped to the Congolese genome sequence of MEaV-1 Ampelovirus (MT773588) (Kwibuka et al. 2021). MEaV-1 was also tested by RT-PCR and sequencing of the PCR product as described previously (Kwibuka et al. 2021).

### 2.4.3 Phylogenetic analysis

The percentage of identity between the consensus sequences of UCBSV and their polyproteins from twelve districts of Rwanda was conducted in MEGA X (V10.2.6) with the Poisson correction model (Zuckerkindl and Pauling 1965).

The newly generated UCBSV whole genome sequences were aligned with the twenty-three UCBSV genomes from the

NCBI GenBank nucleotide database using Clustal Omega V1.2.2 (Sievers et al. 2011) (release 241, November 2020). Phylogenetic analysis and evolutionary divergence between nucleotide sequences were performed using the new genomes identified in the present study as well as complete or partial coat protein sequences from GenBank isolates of UCBSV using Molecular Evolutionary Genetics Analysis (MEGA-X V10.2.6) under the Neighbor-Joining method (Saitou and Nei 1987). The evolutionary distances were computed using the p-distance method (Nei and Kumar 2000). All ambiguous positions were removed for each sequence (pairwise deletion option).

#### 2.4.4 Nucleotide diversity

SNPGenie (V1, May 2022) (Nelson, Moncla, and Hughes 2015) was applied to the SNP tables to calculate the nucleotide diversity ( $\pi$ ) for each district (sample). It represented a mean number of pairwise differences per nucleotide position in a population of sequences.

#### 2.4.5 Genetic diversity analysis of UCBSV

A recently established methodology was applied for comparing UCBSV populations at both SNP and haplotype levels (Tamisier et al). Two distance measures were calculated using the consensus sequences or the fixation index ( $F_{ST}$ ).  $F_{ST}$  methodology considers all the SNP detected in the UCBSV populations and their relative frequency (if above 1 per cent) to compare samples. The consensus sequence considers only the dominant base (>50 per cent frequency) at every position. For both methods, an index ranging between 0 and 1 was calculated, where differences between populations increase as the index changes from 0 to 1. The  $F_{ST}$  measures were obtained using Popoolation2 version 1.201 (Kofler, Pandey, and Schlötterer 2011). First, the reads of each sample were mapped to the closest reference genome (accession number KX753357.1) as described above. Then, the analysis was performed with a single-window size defined by the size of the reference genome (9,097 bp), a step size of 1, a minimum covered fraction of 0.1, minimum coverage of 50, and maximum coverage of 200,000.

The PCAs used ade4 and factoextra libraries from the R software version 4.0.3 (<http://www.r-project.org/>). The dendrograms were calculated using the hclust function implemented in the package stats (version 4.0.2).

#### 2.4.6 SNP and haplotype validation

Sanger sequencing of the RT-PCR products from the twelve pooled samples and three individual plants of a tolerant cultivar (NAROCAS1) confirmed the presence of selected SNPs and one haplotype. PCR products were purified using a PCR product purification kit (Qiagen, German). A list of specific primer pairs sequences used for PCR amplification and sequencing is provided in supplementary table 4 (S4 Table). In addition, the association between one of the UCBSV haplotypes and a CBSV tolerant cultivar was assessed by checking twelve SNP positions (spanning the whole genome) identified as specific for the selected haplotype.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 UCBSV is detected in nearly all generated datasets at a high abundance

The number of high-quality reads generated per sample ranged from 16,565,194 to 27,211,334, averaging 21,869,253 reads. The number of contigs generated by de novo assembly ranged from 24,503 to 49,784 per sequenced sample. In total, twelve genome sequences of UCBSV (ranging from 8,743 to 9,082 nt) with

complete coding sequence and nearly complete untranslated regions were generated from twelve samples with a near-complete coverage of the reference (KX753357.1–9,097 nt). No UCBSV was found for one sample. The average genome fold coverage ranged between 143× to 963×, and the genome coverage was always >99 per cent (S5 Table).

Complementary analyses using Kraken2 (Wood and Salzberg 2014) identified specific CBSV reads. However, the number of reads did not exceed 25 reads per sample and did not allow the reconstruction of a complete CBSV genome sequence (S2 Fig; S6 Table). In the district of Ruhango, a recently discovered ampelovirus was detected in the dataset with 386 reads (S3 Fig), from which two partial ampelovirus contigs of 12,711 bp and 3,390 bp (OL579727; OL579728) were constructed. They shared 98 per cent of their identity with the MEaV-1 Congolese isolate (MT773588). The presence of the ampelovirus was confirmed by RT-PCR (S4 Fig) and subsequent Sanger sequencing of the amplicons (NCBI reference numbers: OL579729; and OL57973).

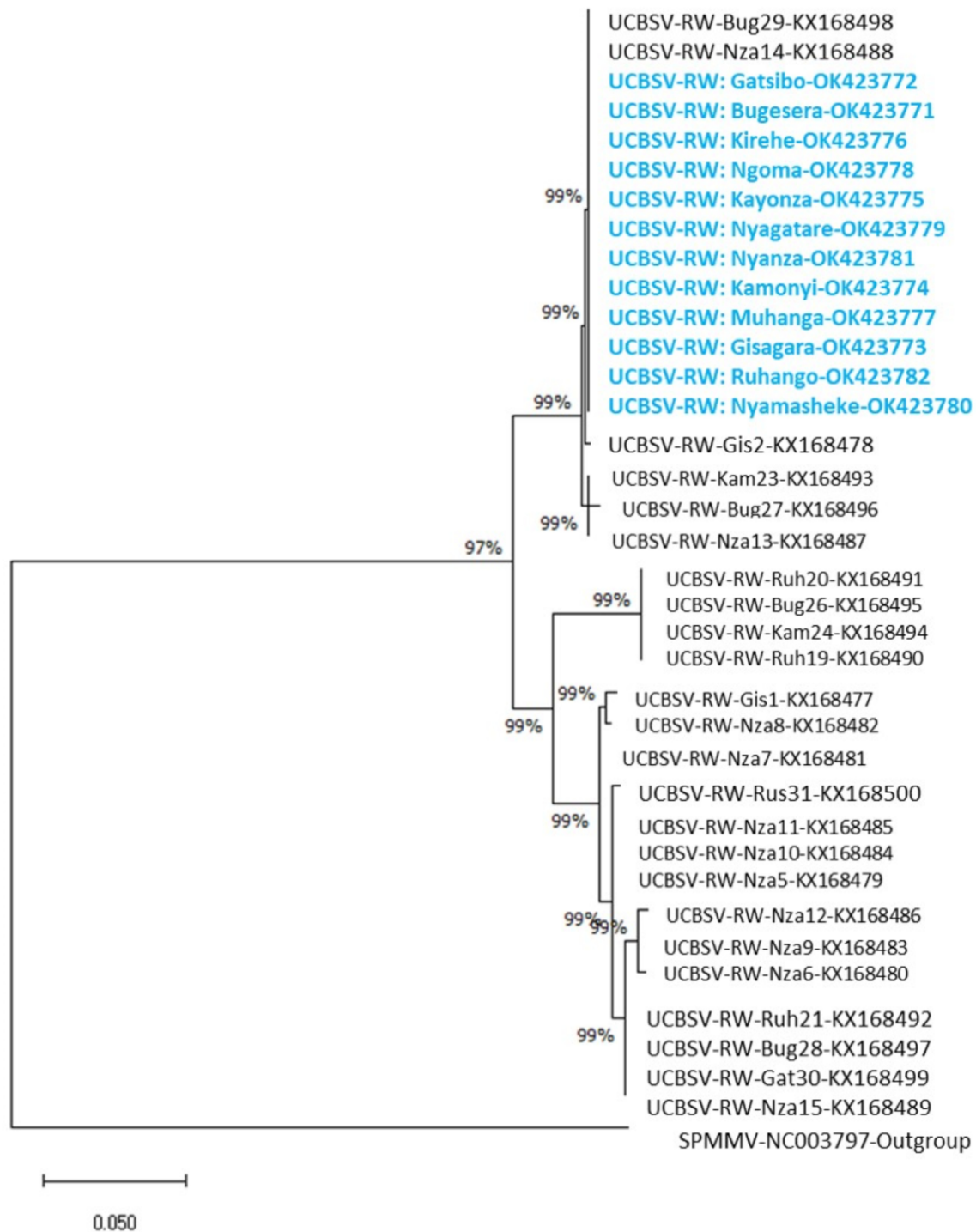
#### 3.2 Phylogenetic analysis of consensus sequences of UCBSV revealed a high homogeneity throughout the sampled districts

The bioinformatics analysis generated a consensus sequence of the nearly complete UCBSV genome for each of the twelve samples (districts). The phylogenetic analysis of the sequenced samples at nucleotide (nt) and amino acid (aa) levels and publicly available sequences clustered the twelve UCBSV sequences in a single group reduction (S5 Fig). The twelve genomes showed very high homology between each other with a maximum of 0.8 per cent and 0.6 per cent of divergence at nucleotide (nt) and amino acid (aa) levels, respectively (S7 Table; S8 Table). All the genomes had a very high identity (97 per cent) with a reference sequence of a UCBSV isolate from Tanzania (accession no. KX753357.1) (S5 Fig).

As UCBSV diversity was analyzed in 2014 based on the amplification and sequencing of twenty-four partial coat protein (CP) sequences (210 nt) (Munganyinka et al. 2017), the partial CP sequences (210 nt) were selected from our twelve genomes. The phylogenetic analysis of the thirty-six sequences revealed that all the CP sequences from the present study clustered in a single group, with only two of the twenty-four CP sequences obtained previously. These sequences originated from Bugesera (KX168498) and Nyanza districts (KX168488) (Fig. 1).

#### 3.3 Validating SNPs by Sanger sequencing

SNPs were identified on 486 positions using all the UCBSV reads (twelve samples) aligned on the closest UCBSV reference genome from Tanzania (KX753356.1). Among them, 192 corresponded to non-synonymous (NS) mutations and 294 to synonymous or silent mutations. The region with the highest NS mutations was CP, followed by Nib protein with 47/192 and 39/192, respectively (S9 Table). The number of polymorphic sites per district ranged from 122 in Kirehe to 225 in Nyanza. Before the in-depth analysis of SNPs, the robustness of the SNP identification was assessed by RT-PCR carried out on the twelve RNA extracts with seven primer pairs. The eighty-four amplification products were subsequently sequenced to check the nucleotides on thirty-five mutated positions scattered on the UCBSV genome. In total, 420 SNP positions (among which ninety-one SNPs corresponded to a mix of two alleles) contributing to the differentiation between UCBSV haplotypes were verified. High-quality sequencing was not achieved for twenty-one positions (5 per cent). Ninety-seven per cent of the other SNPs (387/399) were confirmed, including mixed alleles



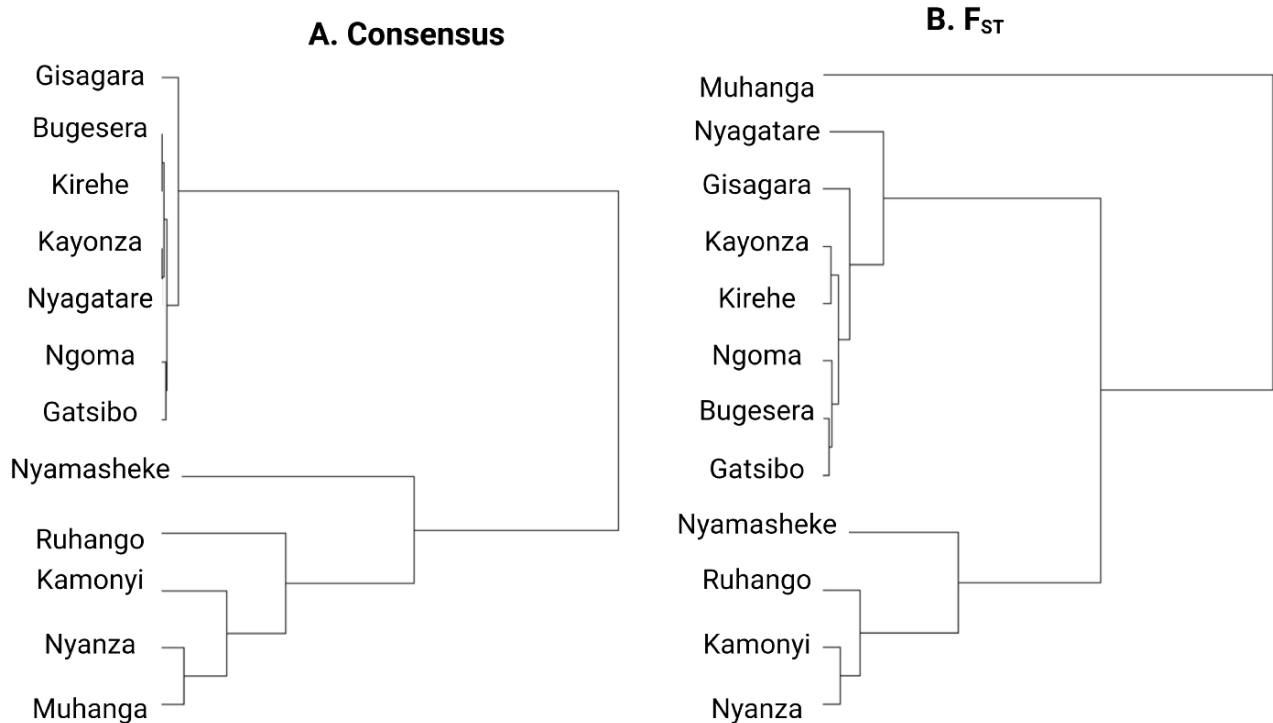
**Figure 1. Phylogenetic analysis.** Phylogenetic tree of the twelve Ugandan Cassava Brown Streak Virus partial coat proteins (210 nt) from the present study (blue) in comparison with twenty-four partial coat proteins previously reported from Rwanda in 2014 (black) (Munganyinka et al. 2017).

for eighty SNPs. For eleven SNPs, only one of the two alleles was observed, mostly the allele with a higher frequency on the genome alignment (S10 Table). This high rate of independent validation by Sanger sequencing confirmed the reliability of the obtained SNPs.

### 3.4 Differences in nucleotide diversity are observed between districts

Despite a high identity of consensus sequences of isolates between districts, the nucleotide diversity ( $\pi$ ) appeared much more

variable. The first cluster of districts (Gisagara, Kayonza, Kirehe, Ngoma, Bugesera, and Gatsibo) presented a  $\pi$  from  $4.4 \cdot 10^{-4}$  to  $6.5 \cdot 10^{-4}$  and corresponded to the district located in the Eastern part of Rwanda. Another cluster of districts, including Nyanza, Ruhango, Kamonyi, and Nyamasheke, presented a  $\pi$  nucleotide diversity that was ten times higher ( $4.6 \cdot 10^{-3}$ ). Three of these districts were contiguous and located in the central part of the country, while the fourth district (Nyamasheke) was the only western district surveyed. In addition, two districts (Nyagatare and Muhanga)



**Figure 2. Analysis of UCBSV diversity.** (A) **Consensus approach:** Dendrogram built from pairwise distance matrices obtained after multiple alignments of the virus consensus sequences. (B) **F<sub>ST</sub> approach:** Dendrogram built from pairwise F<sub>ST</sub> matrices obtained using the entire set of SNPs detected in the virus populations.

presented an intermediate  $\pi$  nucleotide diversity with  $1.3 \cdot 10^{-3}$  and  $8.1 \cdot 10^{-4}$ , respectively (S9 Table).

The variation in  $\pi$  nucleotide diversity across the districts prompted us to conduct an in-depth analysis of SNPs in each sample using an innovative methodology.

### 3.5 F<sub>ST</sub> methodology revealed UCBSV genetic diversity beyond the consensus sequences

To analyze the UCBSV genetic diversity in the sampled districts, the classical measure of distance between samples, based on the consensus sequence generated from each sample, was compared to an innovative approach based on the fixation index (F<sub>ST</sub>). The F<sub>ST</sub> calculation considers all the SNPs (>1 per cent frequency) detected in the UCBSV populations from each sample. Fig. 2A, B shows the dendrograms obtained by both methods, while supplementary figure 6A and 6B show the matrices (S6 Fig). Both methods clustered seven districts together, but the F<sub>ST</sub> method provided better discrimination between identical samples based on their consensus sequences. Nyagatare district was the more distant, although it was identical to Kayonza at the consensus level. This difference aligns with the  $\pi$  2.5× higher in the Nyagatare district compared to Kayonza. Nyamasheke district was also distinct from all other districts independently of the method used. Both methods clustered together Ruhango, Kamonyi, and Nyanza districts also presented similar  $\pi$ . Muhanga district clustered with these three districts based on the consensus approach but corresponded to a specific cluster by F<sub>ST</sub> analysis (Fig. 2A, B), reflecting its lower  $\pi$  ( $8.14 \cdot 10^{-4}$ ) compared to the three districts.

Overall, the discrimination between samples was improved by considering all the SNPs with a frequency above 1 per cent for at least one sample. So, the next step of our analysis aimed to identify the SNPs discriminating the samples from each other.

### 3.6 PCA of SNPs confirmed the clustering by the F<sub>ST</sub> approach

The frequencies of the 486 SNPs detected in the samples from the twelve districts were used as variables to perform a PCA. The SNPs used to create each dimension and their frequencies are shown in supplementary table 11 (S11 Table).

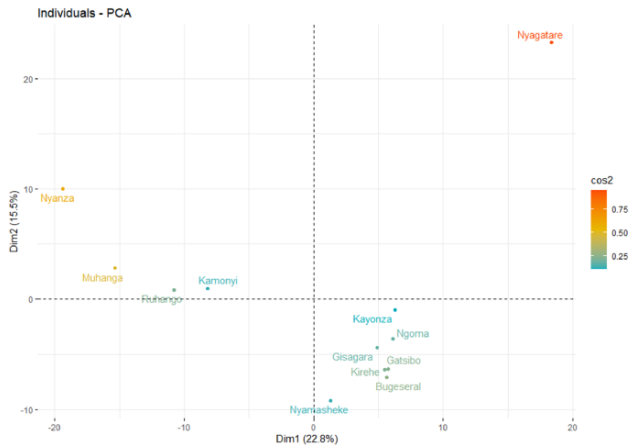
The first, second, and third dimensions explained 22.8 per cent, 15.5 per cent, and 12.7 per cent of the total variation, respectively (Fig 3A, B). Most of the samples were clustered into two groups by dimension 1: (1) Nyanza, Ruhango, Kamonyi, and Muhanga, and (2) Bugesera, Kirehe, Gatsibo, Kayonza, Nyamasheke, Gisagara, and Ngoma districts. Dimensions 1 and 2 discriminated Nyagatare district from the other districts. Dimension 3 separated the Nyamasheke district from the others.

### 3.7 The identified UCBSV haplotypes are geographically clustered

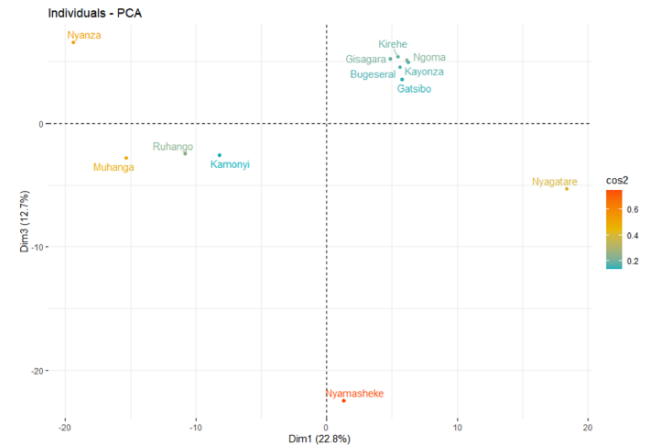
To obtain further insight into the SNPs distribution, the frequencies of the ninety-two SNPs contributing the most to the first, second, or third dimension in each sample were extracted and compared to the previously obtained F<sub>ST</sub> dendrograms (Fig. 4).

The SNP frequencies showed a pattern explaining the dendrogram. Several SNPs were always present at a very similar frequency for each sample and formed a cluster. Three major clusters were identified according to the following criteria: presenting at least ten SNPs with a frequency higher than 10 per cent in at least one sample and with a frequency varying similarly between the samples. Importantly, each cluster included SNPs present along the genome, sometimes at distant locations. For example, the first cluster included the SNPs T-1103 G and T-7529-C

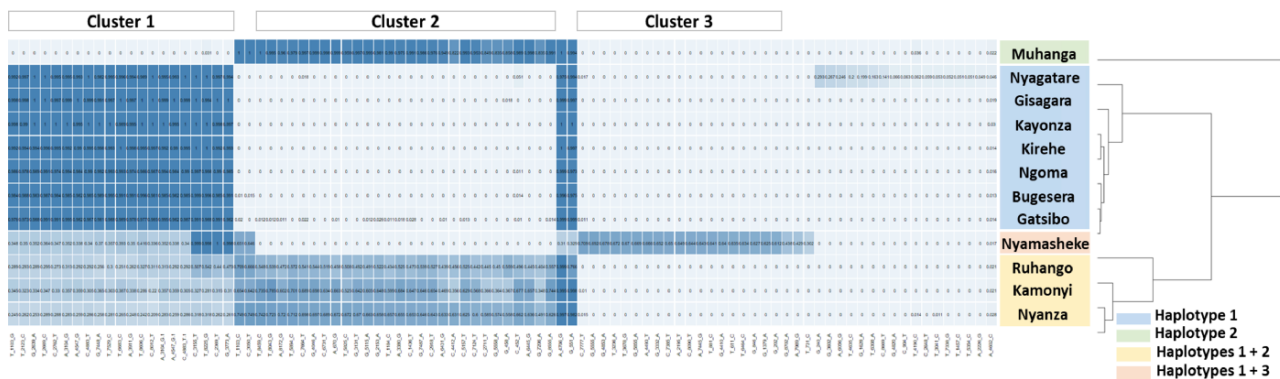
## A. PCA – dimension 1 versus 2



## B. PCA – dimension 1 versus 3



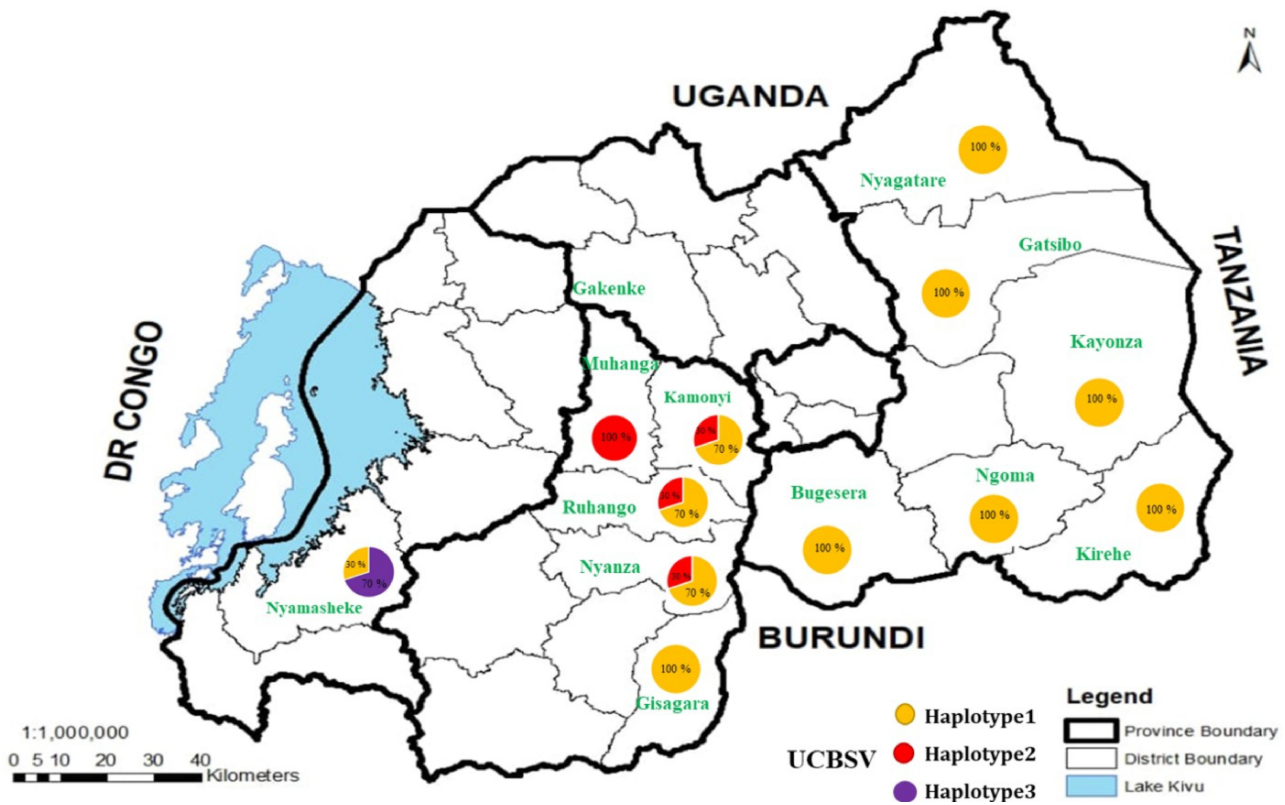
**Figures 3. PCA of the virus populations.** The PCA shows the first, second, and third dimensions obtained using all the detected SNPs as variables for Ugandan cassava brown streak virus sequences from the twelve districts. (A) PCA-Dimension 1 versus 2. (B) PCA-Dimension 1 versus 3.



**Figure 4. SNPs contributing to the differentiation between UCBSV populations.** Dendrograms have been constructed from pairwise  $F_{ST}$  matrices obtained using the entire set of SNPs detected in the UCBSV populations. The frequencies of the ninety-two SNPs contributing to each sample's first, second, and third dimensions were extracted and compared to the  $F_{ST}$  dendrograms. The darker the blue, the higher the SNP frequency.

(SNPs being named according to their position on the genome and reference and alternative alleles) located 6,000 nt apart. Despite these distances, the frequency of the SNPs varied homogeneously between the samples of a cluster, suggesting that they are linked and could constitute a haplotype. Our dataset highlighted three major haplotypes of UCBSV across Rwanda. Haplotype 1 ( $H_1$ ) was defined by thirty SNPs at high frequency in cluster 1 and absent or low frequency for clusters 2 and 3. Among these SNPs, eight were NS and located mainly in the sequences of the P1 protein (3 SNPs) and the coat protein (two SNPs) (S9 Table). The frequency of this haplotype was close to 100 per cent in Nyagatare, Gisagara, Kayonza, Kirehe, Ngoma, Bugesera, and Gatsibo districts (frequency of specific SNPs ranging between 86 per cent and 100 per cent). Its frequency was close to 30 per cent in Ruhango, Kamonyi, Nyanza, and Nyamasheke districts, while it was absent in the Muhanga district. The presence of  $H_1$  in seven samples was consistent with the results of PCA, where dimension one divided samples into two groups, one of the groups being composed of districts showing only  $H_1$  (Bugesera, Kirehe, Gatsibo, Kayonza, Gisagara, and Ngoma). Nyagatare district was slightly different from the other districts, with some minor SNPs in this virus population. This explains why PCA dimension two isolated the Nyagatare district from the others (Fig 3A). The 28 SNPs of cluster 2 defined haplotype 2 ( $H_2$ ), and their frequency was 100 per cent in the Muhanga

district. Among these SNPs, six were NS and two were in the coat protein (Mbewe et al. 2020) (S9 Table). It did not have any of the thirty SNPs similar to  $H_1$ , which could explain why this sample did not belong to any group in the  $F_{ST}$  dendrogram.  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  are mixed with frequencies around 30 and 70 per cent, respectively, in Ruhango, Kamonyi, and Nyanza districts. Haplotype 3 ( $H_3$ ), characterized by twenty-eight SNPs, was only present in the Nyamasheke district, mixed with  $H_1$ .  $H_3$  seemed to share the SNPs C-3155 T, G-6355-A, T-8225 G, G-8636-A, with  $H_1$  as their frequency was 100 per cent.  $H_3$  explained the PCA results where dimension 3 separated Nyamasheke district from the rest of the districts (Fig 3B). Compared to the two other haplotypes,  $H_3$  presented seven NS SNPs located in the P1 protein (Mbewe et al. 2020) and the coat protein (Mbewe et al. 2020) (S9 Table). Importantly, haplotype 1 was widely spread in the Eastern, Central-Southern, and Western regions. In contrast, the haplotype 2 distribution was limited to the Central regions and haplotype 3 in the West of the country (Fig 5). When the three haplotypes were compared, no shared NS mutations existed.  $H_1$ ,  $H_2$ , and  $H_3$  had 8, 6, and 7 unique NS mutations, respectively. For synonymous (S) mutations,  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  had 22 unique S mutations each, while they had only 3 S mutations in common.  $H_3$  had 21 unique S mutations. There were 4 S mutations common between  $H_1$  and  $H_3$  and 2 S mutations common between  $H_2$  and  $H_3$  (S9 Table).



**Figure 5. Distribution of UCBSV haplotypes in Rwanda.** Country-wide distribution of UCBSV virus Haplotypes identified was presented on the Rwandan map. A pie chart was used; single color represents the presence of a single haplotype (100 per cent). Two colors represent the presence of two different haplotypes.

### 3.8 Haplotype 2 distribution appears to be associated with the presence of the CBSD-tolerant cultivar NAROCAS 1

An exciting association was observed between the haplotype  $H_2$  and the NAROCAS 1 cultivar. The NAROCAS 1 cultivar is only present in the central regions (Kamonyi, Muhanga, Ruhango, and Nyanza districts at a frequency of around 25 per cent). The same regions are also the only regions where  $H_2$  was found (S2 Table). The association between  $H_2$  and NAROCAS1 was further verified by sequencing the RT-PCR amplicons from three individual NAROCAS 1 samples using four primer pairs matching the UCBSV genome sequence. In total, twelve SNPs position spanning the whole genome that discriminates UCBSV haplotype  $H_2$  from others were verified and confirmed the presence of  $H_2$  in the three NAROCAS1 samples (S12 Table).

## 4. Discussion

The present study computed SNP frequencies by combining  $F_{ST}$  analysis and PCA to study the UCBSV genome diversity and reconstruct haplotypes. It allowed the discrimination of very close virus isolates (>99 per cent) and the characterization of three haplotypes whose distribution was clustered:  $H_2$  was associated with the presence of tolerant cultivar NAROCAS 1 in the central region,  $H_3$  with the Western region (higher altitude and a specific cultivar, Mushedule was particularly abundant), while  $H_1$  was found all over the country but at different frequencies. Two additional viruses were also detected in the 130 samples, namely CBSV and MEaV-1.

This methodology relies on HTS of pooled samples and a combination of viral sequences analysis tools. First, the pooled plant samples were sampled using a balanced and systematic sampling scheme. The balanced and constant sampling used in the present study was instrumental in comparing the virus diversity between districts. Recent studies have proved that pooling is a cost-effective approach as a pooling of up to fifty samples has enabled comprehensive virome analysis of several virus species on a larger geographical scale in potatoes (Schumpp et al. 2016), *Poaceae* (Maclot et al. 2020), flies, or bees (Roberts et al. 2018; Wallace et al. 2021). Moreover, a recent study on pea viruses reported that while pooling 120 leaves into a single bulk field sample (BFS), viruses present at a low incidence were still detectable by HTS. Three of the BFS were re-tested in-depth by HTS, and no additional plant viruses were identified (Fowkes et al. 2021). Many studies have proven that analyzing minor variants at low frequency is essential to understand the virus diversity, its evolution and its interactions with the host (Le Clerc et al. 2011; Zanini et al. 2015) with examples on individual or pooled samples (Rellstab et al. 2013), with the zucchini yellow mosaic virus (Simmons et al. 2012), or the Chlorovirus (Retel et al. 2022). Some studies above selected SNPs with a relative frequency above 1 per cent, as we did in this study (Le Clerc et al. 2011; Simmons et al. 2012; da Silva et al. 2020). In addition, the obtained genomes were very well covered as they ranged from 142.9 to 963.5 for the analyzed samples.

In several studies, the conclusions remained constrained by the lack of independent validation (McCann et al. 2013; Aimone et al. 2021). In the present study, we independently confirmed the detection of a subset of interesting SNPs spanning the genome



to reinforce the reliability of generated data—a confirmation rate higher than 97 per cent was observed. The unconfirmed mutations occurred mainly in position with a mix of two bases, one minor at low frequency (<30 per cent) that was not observed, probably due to the confirmed lower sensitivity of Sanger sequencing for detecting SNPs at low frequency (Huang 2011).

Our methodology was applied to thirteen pools of plants representing each district and spanning different agro-ecological zones in Rwanda (S1 Fig). Overall, it revealed a low divergence of viral consensus sequences between districts. In addition, partial CP sequences (210 nt) extracted from the twelve consensus sequences presented 100 per cent identity with two sequences obtained in 2014, suggesting a slow evolution of this short region from the UCBSV genome.

A reduction in UCBSV diversity was observed in the current dataset compared to the reported UCBSV diversity in 2014 and should be discussed technically and scientifically. First, the present study used HTS technologies that have improved inclusivity compared to targeted RT-PCR as demonstrated by many publications (Vu and Stankovi 2021; Hanafi et al. 2022; Villamor et al. 2022), so they could theoretically detect a broader range of isolates. Regarding the representativeness of the obtained sequences, the partial CP sequencing was carried out in 2014 using a limited number of plants per district, from one in the Gatsibo district to thirteen in the Nyanza district, thus most probably capturing the most abundant isolates. In contrast, the HTS protocol in the current study was applied to pools of 100 plants per district. Even if rare isolate present in one or a few plants might have been missed out by the sample pooling, Field-Based Sequencing (FBS) applied on pools of 120 plants following a similar protocol demonstrated the ability of HTS technologies to detect the viruses present in such pools (Fowkes et al. 2021) reliably. Our bioinformatic methodology included SNPs with a frequency higher than 1 per cent. Therefore, it theoretically identified other major isolates as the ones detected in 2014. One hypothesis on the observed difference in UCBSV diversity could originate from the strong shift in cassava cultivars experienced in Rwanda following the severe CBSD crisis. The present study used a majority (approximately 60 per cent) of plant samples from the two CBSD tolerant cultivars introduced in 2015 (NASE 14 and NAROCAS 1), while, in 2014, the survey was carried out on local susceptible cultivars. The deployment of these imported cultivars has relied on official distribution to farmers and informal exchanges between farmers within and between districts (Douthwaite 2020).

Beyond the very high genetic homogeneity of consensus sequences observed throughout the country, the genetic diversity within and between samples was analyzed through a combination of bioinformatic tools, including the nucleotide diversity ( $\pi$ ), the calculation of the  $F_{ST}$ , and PCA on SNPs to highlight differences between closely related genomes and to identify haplotypes representing molecules actually infecting the plants. This methodology of haplotype reconstruction on SNPs spanning the entire genome is complementary to the current methodologies based on SNPs shared on sequencing reads that often reconstruct haplotypes spanning partial genome sequences, as recently observed for the *Lolium latent virus* detected in pooled samples (Maclot et al. 2020).

The SNPs discriminating the three haplotypes were mainly synonymous, although each haplotype contained, respectively, 8, 6, and 7 unique and NS SNPs. Such observation deserves further investigation on its consequences as they are located in P1 and CP genes important in plant–virus interactions (Ivanov and Mäkinen 2012; Pablo-rodríguez, Bailey, and Foster 2022).

The H<sub>3</sub> was found only in the Western region of the country with higher altitude, lower temperature, higher rainfall, and the high frequency of the Mushedule cultivar. On the other hand, the H<sub>1</sub> was widely spread with a 100 per cent frequency in the Eastern region, which borders Uganda and Tanzania and is characterized by a lower altitude, less rain, a higher temperature, and a high frequency of NASE14 cultivar. In contrast, the H<sub>2</sub> was restricted to the central regions and was found to be associated with the NAROCAS1 cultivar. However, this confirmatory work could also be carried out for H<sub>3</sub> and H<sub>1</sub> to clarify whether the haplotypes are linked with cassava cultivars or geographical occurrences. The plants analyzed in this study were sampled in the frame of a broad survey including 130 fields around the country. The disease incidence varied strongly (Nyirakanani et al. 2021) while the disease severity on symptomatic plants was more constant across regions. For example, the CBSD mean severity scores were  $3 \pm 0.6$ ,  $2.9 \pm 0.8$ , and  $2 \pm 0.2$  in Eastern, Central, and the Western parts, respectively (Nyirakanani et al. 2021). Noteworthy, in our context of field-based sampling, determining the association of disease severity with specific cultivars and haplotypes will require a new cultivar-based survey combined with greenhouse inoculation assays as recommended for evaluating robustly causal association (Fox 2020).

In the future, the reported SNPs could serve as markers to investigate and decipher the factors impacting UCBSV genetic evolution in Rwanda and the geographical distribution of the three haplotypes. Incorporating testing the presence of these haplotypes on planting material in the regular viral testing should be a priority to ensure the distribution of healthy planting materials, which is an essential control measure in CBSD management. Furthermore, future research activities should investigate the impact of cassava varieties distribution on ipomoviruses diversity and distribution in Africa as well as the association between the identified UCBSV haplotypes and the CBSD severity symptoms on individual cassava genotypes, including the currently widely distributed cultivars NASE14 and NAROCAS1.

Overall, our results provided evidence that a much more complex picture of genetic diversity can be deciphered beyond the consensus sequences with practical implications on virus evolution and its management. Our methodology proposed a high-resolution analysis of genome diversity between and within samples. It can be used at various scales, from individual plants to plants pooled by geographical origin (from field to region) or any other factor (cultivar, phenotype).

## Data availability

The datasets of genome sequences generated and analyzed during this study are available in the GenBank repository under the following accession numbers: OK423771; OK423772; OK423773; OK423774; OK423775; OK423776; OK423777; OK423778; OK423779; OK423780; OK423781; OK423782; OL579727; OL579728; OL579729; and OL57973. In addition, raw data were deposited in SRA (PRJNA768633) and can be found at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/sra/PRJNA768633>.

## Supplementary data

Supplementary data are available at *Virus Evolution Journal* online.

## Acknowledgements

Rwanda cassava farmers are acknowledged for allowing sampling in their fields.

## Funding

The study was carried out thanks to the support of 1. ARES (Académie de Recherche et d'Enseignement Supérieur, Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Belgium)-funded project iCARE (Improved Cassava Virus Resistance mitigation strategies and development of a disease-free seed system), and (2) Inextvir project from European'a Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation program (Grant n°813542).

**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Author Contributions

*Conception and study design:* Sebastien Massart, Hervé Vanderschuren, Chantal Nyirakanani, and Jean Pierre Bizimana; *methodology:* Sebastien Massart, Hervé Vanderschuren, Lucie Tamisier, and Chantal Nyirakanani; *validation:* Sebastien Massart and Hervé Vanderschuren; *Data analysis:* Chantal Nyirakanani, Lucie Tamisier, Jean-Pierre Bizimana, Johan Rollin, and Sebastien Massart; *Confirmatory Sanger sequencing analysis:* Chantal Nyirakanani and Ilhem Selmi; *writing the first original draft:* Chantal Nyirakanani; *review and editing:* Lucie Tamisier, Johan Rollin, Ludivine Laois, Athanase Nduwumuremyi, Vincent de Paul Bigirimana, Sebastien Massart, and Hervé Vanderschuren. *Supervision:* Hervé Vanderschuren, Sebastien Massart, and Ludivine Lassois; *funding:* Hervé Vanderschuren. All authors reviewed and approved the manuscript.

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