

Strengthening Peace and Resilience in Nigeria (SPRING)

The Nexus between Mining and Violence in North-Central and North-West Nigeria

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Levin Sources

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SPRiNG

The Strengthening Peace and Resilience in Nigeria (SPRiNG) Programme is a four-year (2024-2028) UK-funded initiative designed to support a more peaceful and climate-resilient Nigeria. SPRiNG is grounded in a politically informed, evidence-based approach that integrates environmental science, political economy, and conflict analysis. By addressing the root causes of conflict and vulnerability, SPRiNG works to reduce violence, strengthen local systems, and promote inclusive governance across conflict-affected areas in North West and North Central Nigeria. The programme is implemented by Tetra Tech International Development in partnership with Nextier SPD (Nextier), the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD).

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Acronyms

ASM	Artisanal and small-scale mining
CECOMPS	Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies
CJTF	Civilian Joint Task Force
CPDS	Centre for Peace and Development Studies
CSO	Civil society organisation
DDR	Demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration
FGD	Focus group discussion
GESI	Gender equality and social inclusion
GIS	Geographic Information System
IDA	Ikyurav-ya Development Association
IDP	Internally displaced person
KII	Key informant interview
KADIRS	Kaduna State Internal Revenue Services
KADMENR	Kaduna State Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources
KMDC	Kaduna Mining Development Company
KVGN	Kaduna - Vigilante Group of Nigeria
LGA	Local government area
LSM	Large-scale mining
MCO	Mining Cadastre Office
MID	Mining Inspectorate Department
MIREMCO	Mineral Resources and Environment Management Committee
NEITI	Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
NESREA	National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency
NGSA	Nigerian Geological Survey Agency
NMMA	Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act
NPF	Nigeria Police Force
NSCDC	Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps
PAGMI	Presidential Artisanal Gold Mining Initiative
PEP	Politically exposed person
PMDC	Plateau Minerals Development Company
PPBA	Plateau Peacebuilding Agency
PPE	Personal protective equipment
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SPRiNG	Strengthening Peace and Resilience in Nigeria

Executive Summary

This report responds to growing concerns that competition over mineralised land and informal mining economies may be fuelling violent conflict, organised crime, and social tensions in North-Central and North-West Nigeria. By providing evidence on the scale and nature of different mining operations (both artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) and large-scale mining (LSM), the key actors involved along mineral supply chains and their respective influence and exposure to conflict, and the root causes and manifestations of fragility and violence in mining, the study aims to support the Strengthening Peace and Resilience in Nigeria (SPRING) Programme's objective of promoting evidence-based programming and policymaking for peacebuilding. It focuses specifically on the States of Benue, Plateau and Kaduna.

Mining and Conflict in North-Central and North-West Nigeria

Expansion of mining in Benue, Plateau, and Kaduna intersects with existing patterns of insecurity and governance issues, though the nature and intensity of violence differ across the three States. This study finds that violence linked to mining is generally sporadic rather than structural. However, recurring tensions offer early warning signs that more systematic conflict could develop, particularly as powerful stakeholders, including foreign investors and local business elites, expand their influence in areas operating largely outside state oversight. At the same time, the findings also highlight the potential of mining as a stabilising force in previously insecure areas. Because mining economies rely on a minimum level of security to function, many who have adopted mining as a primary livelihood have clear incentives to maintain stability. This dynamic was evident during periods of state-imposed mining bans: the suspension of mining activity was associated with increased violent clashes and criminal behaviour, which subsided once mining resumed. However, these stabilising effects also underline the importance of strong institutions (formal and informal) that govern land allocation, resource access, and the mediation of disputes. Without such structures, the stability generated by mining remains fragile and can quickly erode under pressure.

In Benue, conflict around mining is driven less by organised violence than by perceptions of exclusion and competition. In the Local Government Area (LGA) of Gboko, tensions linked to an industrial cement plant's workforce, largely hired from abroad, have triggered protests met with heavy-handed military responses. In Kwande LGA, community disputes emerged when foreign investors began mining operations without meaningful consultation with local communities. Logo LGA is deemed a more volatile area as overlapping land claims and competition for access to sites have reportedly led to arms proliferation as miners attempt to protect pits.

In Plateau, violence around mining is relatively limited as most mining groups collaborate under relative stability. Some conflict is concentrated to specific LGAs. In Bokkos, feelings of exclusion among specific ethnic groups and ethnic-religious segregation at mine sites have fuelled friction, though violent clashes remain localised. In Barkin Ladi, community systems governing access and benefit sharing have in fact helped prevent conflict. Parts of Plateau do experience raids from banditry groups on mine sites.

In Kaduna, mining is more closely entangled with non-state armed activity. Bandits in especially Birnin Gwari LGA shifted in recent years from sporadic mine site raids to systematic taxation as they consolidated control, creating coercive stability while maintaining illicit gold flows. Localised violence also persists in the LGAs of Birnin Gwari, Jema'a, and Sanga, where disputes over mine ownership, reprisal killings, extortion, and criminal infiltration shape mining-related insecurity.

Trends of Fragility and Violence Associated with Mining

This study identified several key trends of how fragility and violence interact with mining (as well as mineral trade) in the region. The below table summarises these trends.

Trend	Description
Tension and violence between host community members and mining actors	Rapid population inflows, environmental damage, unmet development expectations, and weak consultation processes fuel mistrust between communities and mining actors. These pressures sometimes manifest in protests, blockades, and occasional violent confrontations.
Tension and violence between mining actors due to competition	Competition for pits and market control, often intensified by foreign investors and informal buyers, regularly sparks threats, intimidation, and sporadic violence between those directly involved in the sector. Crowding,

for resources – economically motivated	contested ownership, and bypassing of local governance arrangements drive repeated small-scale clashes, sometimes prompting military intervention and heightening site-level instability.
Tension and violence between mining actors due to competition for resources – socio-culturally motivated	Ethnic and religious divisions sometimes influence who can mine, manage sites, or collect fees. Perceived inequities may trigger retaliatory takeovers, attacks, and mineral theft. While generally localised and short-lived, these disputes reinforce mistrust and deepen pre-existing social tensions in mining communities.
Violence due to the involvement of bandits or other non-state armed groups in mining and mineral trade	Bandit involvement typically evolves from opportunistic raids to structured taxation and (partial) control of sites and smuggling routes. Coercive stability masks ongoing abuses, including forced labour, child labour, and arms-for-gold exchanges. Crackdowns often shift, rather than dismantle, these criminal economies.
Harassment by public security forces of mining actors	Some security agencies may act as informal gatekeepers, extracting bribes, imposing arbitrary arrests, or engaging in illicit mining activities. These practices weaken accountability, fuel mistrust, and incentivise miners to seek armed protection, inadvertently strengthening armed groups and undermining formal state oversight.
Violence by public and private security of perceived mine site intruders and / or other threats	Excessive force by soldiers, police, private guards, or vigilantes is common around LSM sites and some ASM zones. Heavy militarisation sometimes fosters fear, escalates tensions, and normalises violent responses to disputes, contributing to arms proliferation and rights abuses.
Coercion and exploitation of vulnerable mining actors	Unsafe conditions, absence of regulatory oversight, and unequal power relations expose miners, including women and children, to hazardous work, exploitation, and coercion. Bandits may impose forced labour, while powerful financiers can trap miners in cycles of debt bondage. Women face barriers to participation and risks of sexual exploitation.

Policy Recommendations

These recommendations are designed for policymakers, service providers and peacebuilding and development practitioners to address conflict risks associated with mining in North-Central and North-West Nigeria, and instead foster a more peaceful, equitable, resilient and development-positive sector. The study outlined entry-points across five complementary intervention areas (see Figure 1). No single category can address the drivers of fragility and violence alone; impacts will be greatest when interventions reinforce one another and are implemented in close collaboration across authorities, traditional institutions, civil society organisations, and private-sector actors. These include:

- Strengthening policing and police reforms, including community safety partnerships. Improve rights-based, gender-sensitive policing in mining areas and strengthen coordination with community authorities and informal security groups to reduce abuses and better manage security incidents.
- Enable greater access to formal finance for ASM operators. Develop accessible financial products with banking institutions and utilise existing channels such as the Solid Minerals Development Fund to reduce reliance on predatory financiers and support organised groups or cooperatives to access credit aligned with ASM realities and cash-flow patterns.
- Co-design a national ASM vision and regulatory roadmap. Develop a realistic framework that aligns Federal-State-LGA roles, offers viable formal pathways for artisanal miners, reduces criminalisation and exclusion of miners, and closes governance gaps that allow coercive actors and corrupt networks to influence the sector.
- Deepening analysis of cross-border dynamics affecting mining. Study cross-border flows (both interstate and internationally) of people, minerals, arms, and traders to understand external pressures shaping mining economies.
- Mapping supply chains and actor incentives in priority LGAs. Document mineral routes, traders, financiers, and coercive actors to clarify incentives and vulnerabilities across different mineral supply chains.

Recommendations for SPRiNG

This study's recommendations outline how SPRiNG could meaningfully engage with Nigeria's mining sector by identifying practical entry points that address the links between fragility, violence, and mineral economies. Broader reforms to Nigeria's mining regulatory framework, particularly the barriers that constrain ASM from operating formally and harmonise oversight across different levels of government, are also crucial, though these fall largely outside SPRiNG's mandate but remain essential for sustained sector-wide impact.

- Peacebuilding interventions could involve strengthening community-level dialogue and mediation, strengthening policing and police reforms, including community safety partnerships, linking demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) interventions to the mining sector, integrating mining indicators into local early-warning systems, and increase advocacy and awareness campaigns within ASM communities.
- Advocacy for socio-economic development could include advocating and collaborating with policymakers for ASM professionalisation and continuous improvement support, as well as advocating for greater access to formal finance for ASM operators. It could also involve exploring realistic and demand-driven alternative livelihood support.
- Interventions that address gender-specific risks and social norms could focus on reducing SGBV risks and strengthening women's collective agency, while addressing harmful masculine norms.
- Finally, further knowledge building is beneficial to ensure interventions of the SPRiNG programme, as well as policymakers, are supported by strong evidence to guarantee these leave a lasting impact. Areas for further research could include better understanding of the legal and practical challenges of current governance frameworks, deepening analysis of cross-border dynamics affecting mining, mapping supply chains and actor incentives in priority LGAs, assessing community development and CSR practices as conflict-mitigation tools, deepening analysis of banditry influence, understanding gendered dynamics more fully, analysing local governance systems and their legitimacy, and mapping civil society entry points.

1. Introduction

This study report is prepared for the SPRiNG programme on the nexus between mining and violenceⁱ in Nigeria's North Central and North West regions (specifically Benue, Plateau and Kaduna States). The study responds to growing concerns that competition over mineralised land and informal mining economies may be fuelling violent conflict, organised crime, and social tensions. By providing evidence on the scale and nature of different mining operations (both artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) and large-scale mining (LSM), the key actors involved along mineral supply chains and their respective influence and exposure to conflict, and the root causes and manifestations of fragility and violence in mining, the study aims to support SPRiNG's objective of promoting evidence-based programming and policymaking for peacebuilding.

The study was conducted in three key stages (see Annex A for further detail):

- *Inception phase*: This phase established the research approach, scope, objectives, data collection methods (including interview and focus group guides), and workplan. CECOMPS and CPDS applied the same methodology to ensure comparability across the three States.
- *Field and desktop research*: CECOMPS and CPDS led fieldwork in the three States, conducting interviews and focus group discussions in October 2025, while Levin Sources carried out complementary desktop research.
- *Analysis and reporting*: CECOMPS and CPDS prepared State-specific reports, which Levin Sources triangulated with interview transcripts and literature review findings to produce this consolidated study report.

The report is structured as follows. Chapter 2 provides a contextual overview of mining in North-Central and North-West Nigeria, outlining the scale, key features, and mineral supply chains examined in this study. Chapter 3 discusses mining sector governance at Federal, State, and local levels, identifying major gaps and issues contributing to fragility, informality, and the involvement of criminal or conflict actors. Chapter 4 analyses observed trends of fragility and violence linked to mining in the three states, while Chapter 5 presents a stakeholder analysis, examining how different actors influence, and are affected by, these dynamics. Chapter 6 synthesises the key findings in light of lessons from comparable contexts, and Chapter 7 provides recommendations for the SPRiNG programme and Nigerian policymakers. Annex A details the research methodology.

2. Contextual overview of mining in North Central and North West Nigeria

Nigeria's mining sector remains small relative to its mineral endowment. Following the discovery of oil in 1956, investment and policy attention shifted almost exclusively to oil and gas, leaving the solid minerals sector underdeveloped. Today, mining contributes less than 0.5% to GDP, a significant decline from 4-5% in the 1960s-70s.¹ The sector is now largely dominated by ASM, which accounts for an estimated 90% of all mining activity. Some key facts about ASM in Nigeria include:

- Between 400,000-500,000 people are directly employed in ASM, with about 2 million reliant on it for livelihoods (although these are likely underestimates, considering the informality of the ASM sector).²
- ASM is pursued for diverse reasons: e.g., as a traditional livelihood, an alternative to limited formal employment, under coercion by armed actors, or as seasonal work for farmers during the dry season or when mineral prices are favourable.³
- ASM primarily targets gold, tin, niobium, tantalum, barite, lead, zinc, and gemstones, as well as industrial minerals, often using rudimentary tools and informal organisational structures.⁴
- Production is highly dispersed, seasonal, and difficult to regulate or monitor, and most minerals (~80%) leave the country unprocessed and unregistered.⁵
- Migrant labour is common, with miners arriving from nearby West African countries such as Mali, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Chad, Niger, Ghana, and Senegal.⁶ Additionally, migrant labour into ASM also includes inter- and intra-State migration with miners from neighbouring States such as Taraba, Nasarawa, Niger, Ebonyi and others moving where mineral deposits are discovered in Benue, Kaduna and Plateau States.⁷
- Nigerian women are deeply involved in ASM as a pathway for economic empowerment but face structural and socio-cultural barriers including limited access to capital, equipment, and decision-making. They are often

ⁱ In the context of this study, insecurity refers to conditions of fragility that heighten vulnerability to violence, as well as the actual occurrence of violent incidents. Fragility reflects weak or contested governance, social tensions, and limited state presence, while violence refers to the use or threat of force by state or non-state actors.

concentrated in lower-value roles such as carrying ore, washing, crushing, and providing goods and services at mine sites. Many women involved in ASM have limited education or come from social and religious contexts that constrain their ability to access formal rights.⁸

ASM mineral value chains in Nigeria are typically short and informal, with minimal value addition. Beneficiation, where it occurs, is rudimentary: e.g., cassiterite is processed using ground sluicing boxes and water pumps to separate lighter waste from heavier tin, niobium, and iron tailings. Tungsten production, conducted in several States including Kaduna and Plateau, is poorly documented and not supported by significant domestic processing capacity. Recent discoveries of high-grade lithium deposits in several States, including Plateau, have reportedly driven a surge in ASM production, yet there is no formal market or value-adding infrastructure in place.¹⁹

There are several high-level issues associated with ASM in Nigeria:

- Limited institutional capacity, corruption and involvement of politically exposed persons (PEPs) in ASM make it difficult to transparently monitor production, enforce environmental and labour standards, or collect revenues.¹⁰
- Market access remains largely informal. Although the Federal Government has reportedly begun re-establishing formal mineral buying centres, initially focusing on Plateau and Niger States, progress has apparently been slow, awareness among miners remains limited, lack of formal licenses amongst miners creates a barrier to sell through formal channels, and concerns about corruption persist. As a result, many ASM producers continue to sell through informal channels.¹¹ Market access may be dependent on miners' proximity to buyers, armed or criminal groups controlling mineral supply chains, which at times can create coercive, high-risk environments that reinforce fragility and expose miners to exploitation and violence.
- Intermediaries often pre-finance miners, creating dependency and leaving miners vulnerable to exploitation and volatile prices.¹²
- Poor mining practices and pit rehabilitation led to widespread soil erosion, water contamination, deforestation, and land use conflicts between miners and farmers. The 2010 lead poisoning crisis in Zamfara, killing over 400 children in 6 months, highlights the human cost of unregulated ASM and the urgent need for safer practices; a similar incident occurred in Niger State in 2015.¹³ There have not been similar wide-scale incidents in Nigeria since the two cases mentioned above, but across the States, it has been reported that poor mining practices continue to expose miners, farmers and host communities to health and safety hazards. Some hazards include unrehabilitated mine pits collecting water and becoming breeding grounds for water-borne diseases and sites of drowning; improper excavation of mines leading to pit collapses; blasting at mine sites causing cracked walls and building collapses, as well as dust particles polluting air, water sources and damaging crops; and mercury exposure, water contamination and soil contamination due to washing and processing minerals in and near local water sources.¹⁴
- Social risks are equally significant: child labour is common, with boys engaged in heavy digging and ore transport while girls often wash ore and sell goods at mine sites. Mining rushes are often associated with rapid changes in the social fabric of host communities, incl. due to substance abuse.¹⁵

Benue

Benue State is rapidly emerging as a new frontier for ASM in the North-Central region. Although historically known as the country's 'food basket' due to its fertile agricultural base, the discovery of commercially valuable minerals, including gold, barite, zinc, lead, fluorite, tantalite, and more recently lithium, has rapidly transformed parts of the State into active mining zones.¹⁶ A major cement company operates in Gboko LGA as a large-scale and licensed operation, extracting commercial quantities of limestone in the area. ASM takes place across numerous local government areas (LGAs). However, mining activity in Benue remains largely informal and unregulated, taking place alongside agriculture rather than replacing it entirely. Many farmers engage in mining seasonally or as a coping strategy during economic hardship or displacement. This dual dependence on farming and mining reflects both the erosion of agricultural livelihoods, due to land degradation and displacement, and the lure of quick cash from mineral extraction.¹⁷ The result is growing competition over land and water resources, particularly in areas where mining encroaches on farmland or contaminates rivers used for irrigation and daily family usage.¹⁸

ⁱⁱ Though there has been little formal production of lithium, the Nigerian government has adopted a 'value addition policy' for lithium production, tying the approval of mining licenses to midstream and downstream investments in refining, processing and battery production. The House of Representatives has also presented the motion that a 'Nigerian Lithium Production Agency' should be created to develop a roadmap for infrastructure development of lithium mines and a vertically integrated lithium industry. Manidhar, A (2024). Unlocking Nigeria's Lithium Potential for Sustainable Economic Growth. *Energy & Utilities*. Available at: <https://energy-utilities.com/unlocking-nigeria-s-lithium-potential-for-news124789.html#:~:text=Lithium%20essential%20for%20the%20global,which%20the%20country%20currently%20lacks.>; Vanguard (2024). Reps move to upscale lithium production in Nigeria. *Vanguard*. Available at: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/12/reps-move-to-upscale-lithium-production-in-nigeria/>

In Kwande LGA, attention has turned to lithium and alluvial gold. ASM operations are mostly small-scale and family-based, involving shallow pit excavation and riverbank washing. However, unregulated mining has reportedly damaged farmland and polluted water sources.¹⁹ Since the 2017 discovery of gold in Kwande, parts of the LGA have experienced rapid environmental degradation as villagers convert productive agricultural plots into mine sites. Despite the State government's ban on mining activity in March 2024ⁱⁱⁱ, extraction continued informally, facilitated by weak enforcement and limited alternatives.²⁰ Kwande's location, bordering Cross River and Taraba States and sharing an international frontier with Cameroon, makes it a corridor for movement of displaced populations. Field data indicate the presence of more than 1,000 Cameroonian refugees in Kwande, many of whom have joined mining-related daily wage labour. Their arrival has intensified competition for jobs, housing, and land, heightening local tensions and contributing to sharp increases in rent and land values. As miners and other supply chain actors compete for limited accommodation, families are increasingly selling land, deepening pressure on already strained resource-sharing arrangements.²¹

Logo LGA exemplifies how mining interacts with broader fragility dynamics. Sitting within Benue's 'conflict belt' (driven primarily by farmer-herder conflicts, which drives displaced farmers away from their homes), Logo hosts 13,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), many of whom have turned to mineral extraction in areas such as Anyiin, Ayilamo, Uja, and Agni.²² These activities are carried out by informal cooperatives and local youth groups working without protective equipment or oversight.²³ Minerals including iron ore, fluorite, lead, and zinc are extracted manually or using hired excavators. Private firms are also present, though oversight and community engagement remain weak.²⁴ In Oju LGA, notably around Oho-Oboru and Oboru-Ofada, artisanal miners extract barite, zinc, coal, and lead using rudimentary methods. These sites sustain hundreds of households, yet they similarly operate outside formal oversight. In Gboko LGA, ASM is less extensive but linked to scavenging of limestone fragments around Dangote's cement plant.²⁵ See Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of minerals produced (at significant scale) and supply chains in Benue State.

LGA	Mineral(s) produced
Gboko	Limestone
Supply chain description	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mbayion (near Gboko town) hosts one of Nigeria's largest industrial-scale cement production site: the Dangote Cement Gboko Plant. The operation was previously owned by Benue Cement Company (a State-owned enterprise), later privatised and acquired in 2000 by Dangote Cement. Dangote Cement is a publicly traded company operating in 10 African countries; it is a subsidiary of Dangote Industries, founded and chaired by Aliko Dangote (Africa's richest person) and the largest conglomerate in West Africa. Dangote owns 85% of Dangote Cement.²⁶ Dangote Cement introduced increased extraction, modern blasting techniques and expanded quarry zones into residential and farmland areas. Limestone is transported away from the area by trucks – interviewed community members estimate at least 100 trucks leave the area each day. The quarry is heavily guarded by government military forces against perceived intruders. ASM of limestone used to present in the area but now barely occurs. Some individuals 'steal' limestone from the plant's tailings. It is unclear where and how they sell their limestone. 	
Kwande	Gold; Fluorite; Iron ore
Supply chains description	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fluorite and iron ore are mined semi-mechanically in several locations across Kwande, mainly by companies, which may lease out land to (unregistered) miners. Two main supply chains exist: (1) operators purchase raw material from artisanal miners, process it in washing plants, bag it (50 kg), and load it into trucks; (2) artisanal miners independently wash, bag, and sell fluorite to local traders, who move it to Lagos and Port Harcourt for export. Mining tasks are divided among excavators, washers, baggers, loaders, and transporters, each organised in small cooperatives^{iv}. As fluorite replenishes, previously exploited areas are typically re-mined later. Gold was first discovered along the Rivers Inhiin and Amile by a local prospector, around 2001. Artisanal mining surged between 2021 and 2023, initially led by migrant miners from northern Nigeria, later by external investors. Many individuals abandoned farming to engage in mining due to the skyrocketing mineral prices. Mercury is allegedly used in the gold extraction process, polluting soil and water resources, though little information exists on these practices.²⁷ 	
Logo	Fluorite; Iron ore; Zinc; Lead; Magnesite; Tantalite; Barite
Supply chains description	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mining takes place through shallow open-pit methods across several communities, particularly in Ayilamo, Anyiin, Uja and Agni in the Tombo, Mgbagber and Tsarev/ Uemberagwa districts. Artisanal miners conduct 	

ⁱⁱⁱ The ban was lifted in April 2025.

^{iv} Respondents often refer to both 'unions' and 'cooperatives' as entities that represent and/or organise different groups in the ASM sector. This report will use primarily the term 'cooperatives', given that the NMMA explicitly recognises 'mining cooperatives' as a formal entity in which small-scale miners can organise themselves and apply for mining permits and licenses.

extraction manually, supported by excavators, wheelbarrow pushers, washers, and loaders, before bagging ore for sale to traders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barite is also a mineral extracted in Ayilamo, where barite is crushed to retrieve by-products such as fluorite, quartz, galena and pyrite. These minerals are then dried and sold in raw form or powder form. Licence holders register coordinates and obtain exploration rights but leave sites idle; miners typically lease land from these licence holders or local family landowners. Some mining firms maintain offices locally and buy processed minerals from artisanal miners for export. Security personnel are stationed at mine sites to safeguard operations and reportedly mediate between licence holders, investors, and community miners. In some cases, particularly in Ayilamo and Anyiin, security personnel are utilised by ASM operators to protect against herder groups and the Jukun militia, which mainly operates in the neighbouring Kwana-an area in Taraba State.
Oju	Barite; Zinc; Lead; Gold

Supply chains description

- In Oju LGA, mining activities involve full-time local miners, farmers supplementing their income, and itinerant traders and workers from Cross River and Ebonyi States. Traditional leaders play a coordinating role between miners, landowners, and traders, helping to manage access and mediate disputes.
- Gold and barite are the suspected main minerals extracted using a mix of underground and shallow open-pit methods suited to vein and cavity deposits. It is reported that the minerals mined in Oju are yet to be properly identified as mining activity typically happens at night and miners lack the technical capacity to test the materials mined. The covertness of operations also contributes to tension in the community and suspension of mining activity.²⁸
- After extraction, barite is crushed to remove associated minerals such as fluorite, quartz, galena, or pyrite, then dried and sold as powder or in raw form to traders.

Source: CPDS, 2025.

Plateau

Plateau State has a long mining history, with tin and columbite production dating back to pre-independence times.²⁹ In 2019, Nigeria reportedly produced 2,437 metric tonnes of cassiterite (tin) and 1,703 metric tonnes in 2020, with almost two thirds of total production coming from Plateau State, and Nigeria producing 2% of global tin. However, these production volumes may be incorrect as there are discrepancies between statistics from the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) and national production statistics.³⁰ Large-scale tin mining, once a cornerstone of the State's economy, has largely ceased, leaving behind abandoned mine sites and degraded landscapes.³¹ Whilst agriculture remains the primary economic activity in the State with yams, potatoes, maize and rice being the main crops harvested, ASM has flourished, with miners exploiting remaining tin tailings as well as new deposits of gold, gemstones, barite, lead and zinc.³² Oftentimes, ASM acts as complementary income to agricultural livelihoods. Jos and surrounding LGAs serve as hubs for mineral trading, with Plateau considered one of Nigeria's key ASM centres.³³ The proliferation of mining is driven by high mineral demand, declining agricultural opportunities, and low ASM entry barriers. While ASM provides income to thousands, environmental issues, including soil erosion, deforestation, water pollution and land degradation are widespread in Plateau. The absence of formalised markets has encouraged the dominance of informal traders and intermediaries, resulting in price distortions and significant loss of tax revenue.³⁴

Table 2: Overview of minerals produced (at significant scale) and supply chains in Plateau State.

LGA	Mineral(s) produced
Riyom	Tin; Columbite; Gemstones
Supply chain description	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mining occurs using open pit methods and is usually informal, with operations characterised by the use of rudimentary tools, a lack of safety measures and little environmental regulation. Buyers may provide miners subsistence wages in return for exclusive buying rights of minerals extracted. This may be established through formal production sharing agreements, where buyers provide capital for mining operations or less formal agreements.
Bassa	Tin (cassiterite); Columbite; Calcium carbonate
Supply chain description	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mining in Bassa is characterised by both large-scale and ASM operations using open-cast methods.

- Large-scale operations typically process ore on-site, including mechanised shing, crushing and concentration. ASM producers tend to use simpler forms of processing which include washing as-mined minerals in local water sources.
- Informal buyers and licensed mineral traders are typically located around mine sites and buy minerals either directly from miners or through local buying centres. When insecurity is heightened, tin may be stored in tin sheds and sold at a later date.

Barkin Ladi	Tin (cassiterite); Columbite
Supply chain description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tin mining in Barkin Ladi is conducted by both LSM and ASM and accounts for the majority of tin mined in Plateau State. • ASM producers typically extract tin (cassiterite) and tin informally using rudimentary methods that are largely unmechanised, and labour-intensive. Miners often dig vertical shafts and horizontal excavations (adits) to access mineral deposits (wash level). • The supply chain is largely informal and involves a network of local participants including miners, women haulers, middlemen/ offtakers, and processing companies. These offtakers are usually located around mine sites and act as intermediaries between miners and larger buyers and / or processors. • Informal mineral buyers typically sell tin and columbite to mineral processing companies located in the nearby Jos-Bukuru metropolis.
Bokkos	Tin, Gold, Gemstones
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASM in Bokkos is largely informal and typically uses rudimentary mining techniques which often leads to health and safety hazards. Tin is the most-commonly mined mineral in the LGA. • Very little processing of tin occurs at ASM level, this usually involves washing as-mined materials in local streams and ponds. Makeri Smelting Company acts as a larger-scale processing company in the LGA. • Miners mostly sell tin in local markets or transport small quantities of the mineral to local commercial villages such as Tenti to sell.

Source: CECOMPS, 2025.

Kaduna

Kaduna State hosts significant and rapidly expanding ASM activity, particularly in Birnin Gwari, Chikun, Kachia, Giwa, and Kagarko LGAs.³⁵ Gold is the most widely extracted mineral and is valued for its quick cash returns, though tin also holds an important position in the State's mining economy. Respondents reported extensive informal extraction across the LGAs visited, noting that while large volumes are mined, the sector remains underdeveloped due to limited state investment and oversight. Most minerals are sold unprocessed or smuggled out of the State, including to Niger and Mali as well as to neighbouring States, with little value addition and minimal contribution to formal revenue channels.³⁶

Mining in Kaduna typically operates alongside agriculture rather than replacing it, attracting local youth as well as migrants who move between sites as deposits are discovered or exhausted.³⁷ The lack of formal market structures means production flows almost entirely through informal trading networks.³⁸ 'Offtakers' or dealers play a central role, financing miners by providing daily subsistence, transport, and accommodation in exchange for exclusive purchasing rights.

These arrangements give miners predictable but low, fixed prices for their output and can create friction when miners attempt to sell small quantities to alternative buyers offering higher rates. Minerals (especially tin and tantalite) purchased by overseers are often transported to Jos for processing before entering broader markets.³⁹ Other sources of conflict emerge between miners, host-communities, herders and local government due to land and water disputes and environmental degradation, which will be explored further in Chapters 4 and 5.

In efforts to combat informal markets, improve the gold supply chain and harmonise with the Presidential Artisanal Gold Mining Initiative (PAGMI) programme (see Chapter 3.1), the State government established Kaduna State Mineral Buying Centres to purchase gold directly from licensed miners and cooperatives at fair prices. These buying centres aim to reduce smuggling, increase State revenue and provide formal market access to miners.⁴⁰

Tin mining has gained particular prominence in Kagarko LGA, where a USD 60 million processing factory was recently established. This site now reportedly generates more revenue than the States' gold sites, despite gold being more widely mined. Community acceptance of the factory was initially limited, and State authorities had to negotiate extensively with local residents before construction proceeded.⁴¹

Table 3: Overview of minerals produced (at significant scale) and supply chains in Kaduna State

LGA	Mineral(s) produced
Jema'a	Gemstones (sapphire, emerald); Tin; Gold
Supply chain description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASM production of sapphire and gold is largely informal, typically use rudimentary mining techniques and exposed to unsafe working conditions. Miners extract rough sapphires from weathered pegmatites near Gurmana and workers hand-sort blue and green sapphire crystals from gravel at dig sites. For mined gold, miners wash alluvial sediment in pans to isolate gold flakes. Recently, mechanised processing has become commonplace instead of manual panning. Miners sell to local agents at local markets. Miners are often underpaid and make a fraction of final mineral value, which is captured by other intermediaries in the supply chain. Agents may also buy sapphire lots and gold dust at markets in Kafanchan. Most products are transported to Jos, Plateau State for processing.
Sanga	Mica; Tin; Tantalite
Supply chain description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mica ASM is typically informal and labour-intensive with miners, often using basic tools like hammers and chisels, extracting mica flakes from shallow pits or weathered rock outcrops in villages like Gwantu and Fadan Karshe. Miners also dig small pits near riverbeds or hillsides. The raw mica is then transported to local processing sites, typically near villages. At these sites, the mica is spread on mats outside family homes with women and children manually cleaning, sorting, and grading the flakes by size and quality, removing impurities like dirt and quartz. Local agents buy the sorted mica directly from miners or processors at village markets or collection points. Agents may also visit weekly markets in Sanga town or remote villages. These agents then collect the mica bought and sell it to larger regional buyers or exporters based in cities like Kaduna or Kano, for the cosmetic, electronic, and paint industry.
Giwa	Gold; Manganese; Kaolin
Supply chain description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gold miners, often use pans, shovels, and simple sieves to extract alluvial gold from riverbeds and shallow pits in villages like Kwaga and Kuchiko. Miners also dig alongside riverbanks and wash what is gathered in pans or basins to trap heavy gold flakes. Processing is typically rudimentary and involves mercury amalgamation near mining sites. Gold mining has expanded into Tsohon Garin Galamida, with miners using ball mills as a processing method. Workers mix crushed ore with mercury to form a gold-mercury amalgam, which is later burnt, releasing toxic fumes. Local agents often buy gold at village markets or directly from miners. Agents also visit weekly markets in Giwa town or Kuchiko to buy gold dust, weighing gold dust and paying cash. Agents sell their aggregated gold supply to larger buyers in Kaduna or Lagos.
Kachia	Tin; Columbite; Monazite
Supply chain description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Miners often operate informally and use rudimentary tools such as picks, shovels, and simple sieves, extracting minerals from weathered pegmatite veins in villages like Kachia town, Goran, and Sabon Sarki. Miners dig shallow pits or trenches in farmland or along riverbeds, targeting mineral-rich gravel. The ore is then transported to local processing sites near mining areas. Here, women and children manually crush, wash, and sort the minerals. Workers also use water and sieves to separate heavier cassiterite and columbite from lighter gangue and sometimes monazite, is handpicked. Local agents purchase the concentrated minerals at village markets or collection points. Agents also visit weekly markets in Kachia town or Goran to buy tin. Monazite is a less popular mineral sold due to its radioactivity. Minerals are then aggregated by agents and sold to larger regional buyers in Kaduna, Lagos or Jos for industrial and tech products. Local buying centres, like Dogon Dawa in Kachia, offer cash advances, binding miners to exclusive sales. Prices may be 20-40% below market rates and minerals are usually aggregated before transport to Kaduna city, Abuja or Jos.
Birnin Gwari	Gold; Iron ore; Manganese
Supply chain description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mining is typically informal and labour-intensive with miners digging pits 20m deep. Miners / license holders / pit owners may employ "shaqa" (informal labour gangs) to carry out mining activities. Miners may be pre-financed by sponsors who cover subsistence fees, mining and exploration costs in exchange for gold proceeds. Mined material moves directly from mine site to buyers at pitheads or local processing sites where manual hammering or diesel-powered ball mills are used.

- 'Offtakers' typically transport minerals from mine / processing site to their next destination. This can either be in small quantities using a motorcycle or larger quantity using trucks. Gold may be transported / smuggled to the UAE, Niger and / or Benin.
- Minerals such as tantalite are typically transported to China and gemstones to India.

Source: CECOMPS, 2025.

3. Mining governance structures and regulatory frameworks

Overview of Federal and State level mining governance

The Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act (2007) (NMMA) is the principal legislation governing mineral exploration, licensing, revenue management, and land and mineral ownership. Mining falls under the Federal Government's 'Exclusive List', giving it full ownership of mineral resources, although this has created ambiguities as to who is responsible for enforcing mining regulations at State level (see Chapter 3.2).⁴² Key institutions include the Ministry of Solid Mineral Development, the Mining Cadastre Office (MCO), the Nigerian Geological Survey Agency (NGSA), the Mineral Resources and Environmental Management Committee (MIREMCO), and the Mining Inspectorate Department (MID).⁴³ An ASM Department oversees registration of mining cooperatives and buying centres, supervision of artisanal producers, organisation of miners into recognised groups, and facilitation of access to finance. It also promotes coordination between government, development partners, and other stakeholders.⁴⁴ Security agencies now also play a prominent role in the governance of mining, reflecting the increasingly militarised stance of government authorities toward ASM. For example, in March 2024, the Federal government deployed a specialised unit of around 2,200 Mining Marshals to protect mine sites and curb unlicensed operations. It also authorised a ₦2.5 billion investment in satellite monitoring technology to detect illegal mining activities and underreported mineral output.⁴⁵

The NMMA defines several mining titles: reconnaissance permits, exploration licences, Small-Scale Mining Leases (for ASM), Mining Leases (for medium to large-scale operations), and Quarrying Leases. These titles are issued exclusively at the Federal level (in Abuja) by the MCO. Applicants must provide evidence of community and landowner consent (Community Development Agreements), pre-feasibility reports, evidence of technical and financial capability, and adherence to occupational safety and environmental standards under the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA).⁴⁶ As set out in Section 19 of the NMMA, MIREMCO acts as a statutory platform that comprises of the three tiers of government – Federal, State and local – in all 36 States. A chairman is drawn from each State and serves the purpose of promoting inclusion for the States and Local Government in the management of mining issues and conflict resolution between Mineral Title Holders and Host Communities.⁴⁷

In Nigeria's legal system, artisanal mining inherently operates outside the formal framework. The smallest officially recognised scale of mining is classified as 'Small-Scale', covering land areas exceeding five acres – far larger than what most artisanal miners work on. Because of this, and the explicit criminalisation of all mining not licensed under the Mining Act, all artisanal mining is technically illegal.⁴⁸ This makes Nigeria's legal framework one of the least favourable worldwide for miners seeking to operate through formal channels.^v Government policy at both Federal and State levels has largely focused on policing and controlling ASM rather than fostering development of the sector and professionalisation. For example, the various mining bans placed across Plateau and Benue States to curb 'illegal' operations; the introduction of Mining Marshals, a militarised response to ASM operations; and State Mining Companies favouring medium- and large-scale operations for revenue opportunities and simultaneously neglecting opportunities for ASM development. Although ASM professionalisation has received more attention in recent years, few practical or realistic routes exist for artisanal miners to meet legal requirements. One flagship programme, the Presidential Artisanal Gold Mining Initiative (PAGMI) launched in 2019, was designed to bring artisanal gold miners into the formal economy. Yet progress has been slow, and most miners involved report limited access to the financial and technical assistance needed to improve their operations.⁴⁹

^v This report refers to mining primarily as informal, rather than illegal. Although the majority of secondary literature treats the Nigerian ASM sector as illegal (as does the Nigerian legal framework), illegality and informality are distinct concepts. Illegal mining refers specifically to mining that is explicitly prohibited by law (e.g., if it takes place in a protected area like a national park, or on a concession that someone else legally owns). Informal mining refers to operations that do not fully comply with all legal or regulatory requirements (e.g., when operators lack a permit or do not meet safety standards). When a LSM company falls short of fulfilling regulatory requirements (e.g., environmental or labour standards) or if an individual employee is linked to criminal behaviour, the company itself is usually still treated as a formal entity rather than labelled as illegal. This same flexibility is not always granted to ASM.

Benue

The Benue State Ministry of Lands, Survey and Solid Minerals, along with the Bureau for Mines and Solid Minerals, oversees mining activities in the State, including registration of cooperatives, environmental monitoring, and revenue collection through levies.⁵⁰ To promote investment, the state established the Benue State Geo-Mining Company to identify viable deposits, attract investors, and encourage environmentally responsible mining.⁵¹ However, its progress in advancing the sector remains unclear. Growing tensions around unregulated mining led the State government to impose a blanket ban on mining activities from March 2024 until April 2025, during this period, informal extraction continued in several areas of the State.⁵² More recently, the government has sought to strengthen oversight by appointing a Principal Special Assistant and a Special Adviser on Mining and by deploying Mining Marshals to support the MIREMCO in monitoring compliance.⁵³ Despite these efforts, State policy remains heavily focused on curbing “illegal” mining and increasing revenue collection, with limited emphasis on building capacity, supporting cooperatives, or creating pathways for artisanal miners to improve their operations.⁵⁴ Local community and miner’s associations in Kwande, Logo and Gboko have stepped in where State and Local Government efforts have been lacking, with some groups mediating disputes in mining areas, petitioning for government oversight and expelling unruly actors. However, the capacity of these groups remains limited due to limited technical, legal and financial capacity.⁵⁵

Plateau

At the State level, mining regulation is shaped by the dual framework of the NMMA, which vests exclusive authority over minerals in the Federal Government, and Plateau State’s Executive Orders (notably Executive Order 001 of 2023 and 2025), which allow the State to address informal mining, enforce environmental protection laws, and respond to localised security concerns. This creates a space in which the State can act on issues of compliance and local impacts even though it does not control licensing. In practice, gaps created by this split authority are often filled by traditional institutions (e.g., district heads, clan leaders, and community associations) who mediate between miners, license holders, and investors. While this can help prevent escalation, it also introduces informal governance dynamics where access to mining rights may depend more on influence and local alliances than on formal procedures.

Plateau State imposed a ban on all mining activities in February 2025 through Executive Order 001 (See Annex B), citing escalating insecurity and the need to reassert State control over mining. The order was lifted in May, when 159 companies were cleared to resume operations.⁵⁶ Alongside this, the government took several steps to address the link between mining, violence, and criminality. A Technical Committee on Mining Reform was established to formalise artisanal miners into cooperatives, improve oversight, and strengthen monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. This Committee has also sought to verify licences, identify designated mining areas, and strengthen coordination between State agencies.⁵⁷ Previous efforts included the Nde John Gobak Committee (2017), which investigated mining-related violence, and collaborations with the Plateau Peacebuilding Agency (PPBA) and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue to map and mitigate conflict-prone mining areas.⁵⁸ Non-state actors such as the Plateau Peace Practitioners Network complemented these initiatives through dialogue, early warning, and community-led peacebuilding.⁵⁹

Plateau State works in collaboration with several ministries such as the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Mineral Development and the Plateau State Internal Revenue Service to enforce State-level regulations (including new executive orders), regulate the environmental and social impacts of mining, ensure environmental compliance and implementation of Community Development Agreements to ensure benefits for host communities.⁶⁰ Physical developments at mine sites must be approved by the Ministry of Environment.⁶¹ The Plateau Minerals Development Company (PMDC), created in 1994 by the State Government, remains central to these efforts. Its mandate includes acquiring mining rights, conducting exploration and extraction, processing minerals into (semi-)finished products, promoting exports, and providing geological and consultancy services.⁶² According to key information interviews (KII), PMDC acts as both regulator and market participant, purchasing minerals from miners for export while supporting the organisation of ASM into cooperatives and building their capacity.⁶³ Recent initiatives include a partnership with the ImPPPact Nigeria Alliance to develop a Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping abandoned mine sites⁶⁴ and a training workshop for artisanal miners on safety, environmental management, modern techniques, and community development.⁶⁵

Kaduna

Kaduna’s approach to mining governance is comparatively proactive and development oriented.⁶⁶ The State has passed new mining bills^{vi}, strengthened collaboration with Federal agencies such as the Nigeria Security and Civil

^{vi} A Bill for a Law to Establish the Kaduna State Mining Development Company, 2025 and A Bill for a Law to Provide the Establishment of the Kaduna State Tertiary Institution Regulatory Agency and for Other Related Matters, 2025. (Abdullahi, M. (2025). Kaduna State Assembly Passes Bill to Establish Mining Company. *Mining Review Africa*. Available at: <https://von.gov.ng/kaduna-state-assembly-passes-bill-to-establish-mining-company/>)

Defence Corps (NSCDC) Mining Marshals to curb informal operations,⁶⁷ and initiated programmes to formalise artisanal miners.⁶⁸

The Kaduna State Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (KADMENR) is the primary agency in which mining is monitored, facilitated and supported. Some functions of KADMENR include liaison and facilitation between miners and Federal agencies, data collection and registration, monitoring and enforcing of mining regulation, revenue collection and technical assistance of miners. The agency also works in collaboration with MIREMCO, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Local Government Affairs and the Kaduna State Internal Revenue Services (KADIRS) on ASM issues. The Kaduna State chapter of MIREMCO is rated the best performing chapter in the country by the Ministry of Mines and Solid Minerals. As the link between the Federal, State Government and the mining host communities, Kaduna MIREMCO has facilitated the growth and development of mineral resources, conflict resolution and sensitisation of the mining host communities. Kaduna MIREMCO also successfully resolved the initial resistance to the establishment of the USD 6 million Kagarko Company.⁶⁹

The Kaduna Mining Development Company (KMDC) was established in 2015 as a State-owned enterprise to drive the exploration, development, and management of Kaduna's mineral resources. It is an institution that operates under KADMENR. Operating on a commercial basis, KMDC partners with private (incl. foreign) investors to promote mining and mineral value addition. Its policy priorities include licensing and permitting reform, community development, environmental monitoring, research and innovation, and the creation of robust data systems to underpin investment and governance decisions.⁷⁰ KMDC works directly with licensed and unlicensed miners to organise them into cooperatives, providing technical support, guiding them through the licensing process, and promoting awareness of the benefits of formalisation.⁷¹ Cooperatives are being registered across several LGAs, and a pilot programme is underway in one LGA to professionalise ASM operations.⁷² However, implementation remains in early stages, with only one desk officer per LGA and limited technical capacity at the local level. The State has also tried to set up mineral buying centres, initially in Birnin Gwari, to improve transparency and revenue collection, however, this pilot fell through due to security threats.⁷³ It is hoped that with steady improvement in the security situation in the area due to the State government's peace initiatives, the project will be revived.⁷⁴ Some key initiatives of the KMDC include partnering with the Nigerian Export Promotion Council to discuss formalising artisanal mining by improving data collection and facilitating access to markets,⁷⁵ the development of a State-wide Mining Development Roadmap⁷⁶ and the creation of the Jemaa Resource Project, a 'Special Purpose' vehicle aimed to develop newly discovered deposits of gold, lithium, copper, nickel, tantalum, niobium and associated tin/tungsten.⁷⁷ Partnerships with international actors such as the World Bank and FCDO's PACE programme support these efforts through technical advice and funding.⁷⁸

Additionally, local government are increasingly involved in mining activity in LGAs such as Birnin Gwari, Giwa, Kachia, Jema'a, and Sanga. Though their policy-making power is limited by Federal jurisdiction, they hold active operational and administrative roles in ASM production. Such roles include implementation of State and Federal directives by identifying ASM sites and data collection and managing land allocation. LGA officials, comprising of Chairmen, Councillors and Traditional Leaders, are often the first point of contact for land disputes between miners, host communities, herders and farmers and often facilitate and foster community agreements. Albeit the success of these mediations varies from incident to incident.⁷⁹

Gaps and issues in mining governance

There are several governance gaps and issues associated with Nigeria's mining sector that directly or indirectly facilitate the integration of armed and violent actors into mineral supply chains and / or drive fragility, including⁸⁰:

Limited decentralisation and weak institutional coordination



Oversight of ASM remains heavily centralised, with licence applications processed exclusively in Abuja by the Mining Cadastre Office (MCO). This arrangement is expensive and impractical for miners operating far from the capital, discouraging compliance and slowing formalisation. Although a digital platform for licensing has been introduced, limited internet access and insufficient awareness among miners and local officials have constrained its reach. Coordination across Federal, State, and local bodies, including regional MCOs, remains limited, which means that information sharing and on-site enforcement proves difficult between various institutions. At the community level, limited understanding of land rights and licensing processes often leads to competing claims and disputes. Mining governance gaps has also given rise to overlapping tax systems and administrative fees, increasing the cost of doing business and incentivising miners to remain informal. Federal licensing operates largely in isolation from local governance, allowing companies and miners to secure titles in Abuja without genuine community consultation, for example where companies obtain signatures only from individual landowners rather than entire host communities, or where they misrepresent the exact location of operations to secure approval.

Competition between authorities to control the mining sector



Persistent ambiguity over the division of authority between the Federal and State levels has created overlapping mandates and inconsistent policy execution. Mining falls under the Federal Government's Exclusive Legislative List, yet land allocation is controlled by the States under the Land Use Act. This has fuelled recurring tensions between mineral rights and land governance. It has been reported that in the absence of consistent Federal oversight over solid minerals in previous decades, some State and local governments issued mining permits independently, creating a patchwork of competing claims. Consequently, while Abuja retains licensing power, in the current legislative framework, subnational governments and communities may be excluded from decision-making. Additionally, this may also sideline customary and traditional leaders who play central roles in local land management.

Corruption and hybrid governance systems



Poor enforcement and corruption have created a fragmented system in which diverse actors, including bandits, security agents, and some foreign investors, exert parallel control over mining. In this vacuum, informal taxation systems have emerged, and allegedly some local elites, officials, and security agents collect rents at multiple stages of mineral production and trade. These revenues circulate within opaque networks rather than supporting community development or public budgets, sustaining a shadow mining economy.

Security-driven management of artisanal mining



Because the legal framework for mining is unviable for most small operators, artisanal mining is routinely categorised as "illegal." This criminalises artisanal miners in ways not experienced by other informal workers. The government's reliance on security agencies to manage ASM has further reinforced this marginalisation. In practice, such approaches can normalise rights abuses under the pretext of combating criminality.⁸¹ Evidence from other States in North Central and North West Nigeria demonstrate that when artisanal mining is treated primarily as a security threat by militarising responses to ASM activity, mine sites become further enveloped in conflict. Oftentimes, mine sites in these States are protected by armed groups which act on behalf of violent or criminal actors. This creates instances where non-state actors have increasing influence over mining areas, contribute to the proliferation of arms, perpetuate cycles of informality and exploit the vulnerabilities of miners.



Limited awareness and uncertainty of regulations

Many artisanal miners have little understanding of the complex legal and administrative steps required for formalisation. Regulatory information is often inaccessible due to technical terminology, poor communication, and limited outreach by authorities. Frequent changes to mining laws and policy directives at both Federal and State levels contribute to uncertainty, discouraging long-term investment and planning. The absence of an artisanal mining category in law, coupled with high registration fees, lengthy approval timelines, and overlapping taxes, further entrenches informality. In practice, these structural barriers make compliance unattainable for most artisanal operators.



Exclusion of marginalised groups from sector governance

Government engagement on gender equality within the mining sector remains limited. Although the Ministry of Solid Mineral Development introduced a gender strategy, its implementation has apparently stalled. Women and young people, who make up a substantial proportion of the ASM workforce, are reportedly rarely considered in policy initiatives, and little is known of the specific impacts of the current mining economy on these groups. Their exclusion reinforces economic precarity and reduces opportunities for inclusive development and peacebuilding within mining communities.

4. Trends of fragility and violence associated with mining in North Central and North West Nigeria

Across North Central and North West Nigeria, mining and insecurity have historically intertwined through issues such as governance fragility, organised crime, and social tensions. Violence and instability around extractive activity have evolved from sporadic local disputes into more complex conflict economies.⁸²

- In the early 2000s, the liberalisation of mining licenses without effective oversight created a vacuum in which informal mining expanded rapidly. As the oil sector overshadowed solid minerals, the Federal government's withdrawal from enforcement left much of the mining economy self-regulated or dominated by traditional authorities, local elites, and security providers.
- By the 2010s, climate change-induced land pressure, population growth, and shrinking rural livelihood opportunities deepened contestation over access to mineral-rich lands. Disagreements over mining areas often took on ethnic or religious dimensions. Weak regulation allowed politically connected investors to acquire licenses without meaningful community consultation, while artisanal miners, many of whom were initially displaced farmers and IDPs, were criminalised and excluded from formal markets. This produced 'silent fragility': mistrust, fragmented authority, and escalating grievances rather than open conflict.
- From the mid-2010s, the rise in gold prices and the spread of artisanal mining across forested zones drew in a mix of new actors. In some parts of especially the North West, bandit groups expanded from attacking mining sites to establishing more systematic control, collecting taxes from miners and traders and regulating access to mine sites. In other areas, local business elite, security providers, and traditional authorities began profiting from the sector, including by mediating between miners, investors, and government officials. These arrangements created a patchwork of informal control, where authority often depended on financial power or armed coercion rather than law. As a result, an environment was shaped in which violence became increasingly organised rather than episodic, with disputes more frequently mediated through weapons and the threat, or use, of force.

Overall, the relationship between mining and insecurity in North-Central and North-West Nigeria varies significantly across the region. In some areas, such as Zamfara and parts of Kaduna, mining has become directly entangled with organised violence. However, in most places across the States, insecurity currently takes less visible forms, and violence is not everywhere directly associated with mining. Where violence is not yet structural or even visible at all, tensions may still accumulate beneath the surface, shaping fragile relationships that can quickly harden into open conflict. At the same time, in places where mining is governed well (even through informal mediators seen as legitimate representatives, e.g., traditional authorities) and mechanisms and institutions exist to ensure that everyone can benefit equitable and has a meaningful voice, mining is also shown to have a stabilising effect as different groups need to come together to collaborate for their livelihoods.

It is important to recognise the tension between *legality* and *legitimacy* in this analysis as it directly shapes who communities accept as having a rightful place and / or authority at mining sites. State-recognised actors such as licence holders, public security agencies or companies may lack legitimacy locally, while those viewed as legitimate (e.g., traditional authorities, cooperatives, self-defence groups) might operate outside the legal framework. Legitimacy also shapes who is considered a 'rightful' miner in a given area, often privileging indigenes over perceived 'outsiders' (e.g., individuals from other communities, LGAs, States or even countries), which influences whose presence is tolerated and whose is seen as threatening or provocative. Understanding who is considered a legitimate actor by local communities is important because legitimate actors, not necessarily legal ones, are the ones who likely have the greatest influence over daily decision-making: who can access a site, how disputes are settled, what security arrangements are accepted, and whether tensions are defused or escalate into violence. Understanding these dynamics is essential to explain why some mining areas remain relatively stable while others may become sites of fragility and conflict.

With regard to the focus States:

In Benue, insecurity around mining primarily takes the form of social tension rather than structural violence. In Gboko, tensions centre around the operations of the cement plant whose influx of outside workers changed the social fabric and fuelled feelings of exclusion within the host community. This situation occasionally sparked protests that have been met with heavy-handed military responses. In Kwande, disputes emerged as foreign investors began operating in mineral-bearing areas without proper consultation, leading communities to feel excluded from decision-making and cheated over land access. Logo is considered most volatile, where overlapping land claims and access disputes have led to arms proliferation as miners want to protect their sites.⁸³

In Plateau, violence around mining is generally limited and highly localised, with most incidents concentrated in Bokkos LGA where Fulani groups have, at times, felt excluded from mining activities. Tin mining has long shaped the State's social landscape. ASM in Plateau dates back to the early 1900s, when tin was first discovered, and the collapse of mechanised mining in the 1970s pushed most activity into unregulated artisanal methods that remain dominant today. In Bassa LGA, violence is common but mostly unrelated to mining, which remains limited and underdeveloped.

By contrast, in Bokkos LGA, ethnic and religious segregation at mining sites has at times contributed to friction, although incidents remain relatively localised. In Barkin Ladi LGA, where most mining takes place, local systems for managing access to mine sites and sharing benefits from mining have reportedly helped prevent conflict and even fostered cooperation among previously divided groups. However, elsewhere, competition over mineral sites and lingering ethnic and religious tensions still affect where and when people can mine, with insecurity at times halting operations entirely.⁸⁴

In Kaduna, the intersection between ASM and organised crime and violence is particularly well-reported.⁸⁵ Since at least 2016, bandit groups have targeted especially gold mining sites and traders, with violent raids recorded mostly during 2016-2018.⁸⁶ Over time, as bandit groups consolidated control in parts of Birnin Gwari, tactics shifted from sporadic attacks to systematic control and rent extraction.⁸⁷ In areas where bandit groups consolidated control over ASM sites, attacks on civilians sometimes decreased – not necessarily because tensions resolved or objectives changed, but because these groups shifted from violent raids to taxing miners and traders more consistently. Bandit groups appear to maintain a degree of order to protect their revenue streams, creating the impression of stability. This can ease tensions with local communities, yet the relationship remains coercive, with human rights abuses (including child labour), environmental damage, and illicit gold flows continuing.⁸⁸ Recent security operations have reportedly weakened their control in Birnin Gwari, restoring some access to mining areas and a sense of relative peace.⁸⁹ These dynamics sit within a wider history of fragility in Kaduna shaped by long-standing ethno-religious divisions, farmer-herder conflict, and weak state presence in rural areas, all of which make mining-related disputes more combustible. In places such as Giwa, bandit groups are also linked to cross-border smuggling networks that move gold into Niger to finance arms procurement, further entangling mining with organised criminal economies.⁹⁰

Fieldwork findings confirm that ASM also exacerbates local violence in focal LGAs such as Birnin Gwari, Jema'a, and Sanga. In Birnin Gwari, resource-related violence remains acute: for example, on 16 October 2025, armed bandits killed 17 people in Kuyello village in reprisal for the killing of a bandit leader known for extorting artisanal miners. In Jema'a LGA, neighbouring communities have clashed over ownership of mining sites, including in Zankang village (Godogodo district), resulting in some violence and regular evening assaults on miners as criminal gangs attempt to seize their production. In Sanga LGA, recurrent fighting at mine sites and the influx of outsiders posing as miners but engaging in robbery prompted the LGA Chairman to suspend mining activities entirely.⁹¹

This study identifies seven key trends in how mining intersects with fragility and violence across North Central and North West Nigeria. While the nature and intensity of these dynamics vary across States, and LGAs, with some forms of violence more visible than others, together they illustrate the ways in which mining has become both an important livelihood strategy and a source of tension in an increasingly insecure environment.

Table 4: Trends of fragility and violence associated with mining: key drivers and descriptions.

Trend	Key drivers	Description
Tension and violence between host community members and mining actors <i>State(s) where this tension and violence is most visible:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Benue ▪ Plateau ▪ Kaduna 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Corruption and weak oversight normalise non-compliance, leaving environmental and other harms unremedied. ▪ Unclear land ownership and weak community representation make it difficult to agree on who can give consent for mining, causing overlapping claims and disputes within communities. ▪ Weak coordination between Federal, State, and local authorities leads to inconsistent enforcement and unclear responsibilities to resolve disputes around land use and mining impacts. ▪ Profits from mining are often captured by local business elites, some government officials, or foreign investors instead of benefiting the host community, feeding resentment. ▪ Many households increasingly depend on mining because farming and other livelihoods have been disrupted by land loss, pollution, and insecurity, increasing both reliance on and frustration with mining. ▪ Promised jobs and community development projects rarely materialise, while better-paid positions go to outsiders, worsening perceptions of exclusion. ▪ Security forces are often deployed to protect sites rather than mediate; their presence can intimidate residents and inflame tensions. ▪ Lack of transparency about mining rights, revenues, and company commitments fosters mistrust. ▪ Weak or inaccessible grievance systems push people to protest or block operations when their concerns are ignored. ▪ Civil society organisations have limited reach in many areas, leaving communities without neutral actors to support dialogue or accountability. ▪ Unresolved land and resource disputes resurface when mining expands, triggering localised conflict. ▪ Sudden cash flows, drug abuse, and informal labour around mining sites fuel fights and rivalry among especially youth groups. 	<p>Tensions between host communities and mining actors are widespread in the region. Firstly, in many communities, the arrival of large numbers of artisanal miners, traders, and labourers (in LSM operations) from other regions disrupted local cohesion by bringing rapid population growth and new social habits that local structures struggle to absorb. Increased drug abuse and alcohol use, petty crime, and the spread of prostitution have been reported in several mining areas, alongside concerns over a rise in school dropouts as young people are drawn to quick income opportunities. Traditional authorities and community associations often feel sidelined in managing these changes. Secondly, environmental degradation has also caused grievances. Host communities describe loss of farmland, deforestation, water pollution, and health problems due to mining, negatively affecting agriculture and livestock rearing and forcing more households to rely on mining while resenting its destructive impacts. This is compounded by the poor health conditions and limited access to health care in many of these areas. Thirdly, economic dissatisfaction compounds these tensions. Both artisanal and industrial operators are criticised for failing to deliver on employment or infrastructure promises. Finally, a lack of transparent consultation and consent procedures fuels perceptions of exploitation. In several cases, mining companies or investors negotiated directly with individual landowning families, bypassing broader community agreements. While violence remains localised, protests, site blockades, and occasional deadly confrontations underscore deep mistrust.</p>
Tension and violence between mining actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A rapid influx of migrant miners and mobile ASM teams increases competition for pits and processing sites. 	Competition over access to minerals and control of the market often causes tension, threats, and occasional violence between

<p>due to competition for resources – economically motivated</p> <p><i>State(s) where this tension and violence is most visible:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Benue ▪ Plateau ▪ Kaduna 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overlapping or unclear licenses and pit boundaries cause frequent disputes between license holders, cooperatives, and informal miners. ▪ Buyers often set fixed prices and give miners cash in advance (pre-financing); selling to someone else can lead to arguments or reprisals over unpaid debts. ▪ Different groups, such as cooperatives, security agents, and local elites, collect informal taxes, creating disputes over who has the right to collect money. ▪ Some investors or semi-mechanised operators bypass community or cooperative agreements and deal directly with landowning families, displacing existing ASM arrangements and causing conflict over access to minerals. ▪ The use of private security at sites sometimes leads to clashes. 	<p>mining actors. Flashpoints include disputes over pit ownership and unclear boundaries, efforts by wealthy, often foreign, investors to take over productive areas, and conflicts when artisanal miners sell minerals outside exclusive agreements with buyers. In several places, the arrival of many migrant miners in small areas has led to crowding, stricter control by local ASM cooperatives, and occasional fights. Where licensed companies and/or foreign operators bypass community or cooperative governance structures, miners have organised blockades and expulsions, sometimes leading to military interventions and site clearances (e.g., in Benue). Although this form of violence is not necessarily structural or organised, repeated small-scale confrontations (e.g., fights at sites, intimidation, assaults, and occasional killings or kidnappings linked to mine dispute) show increasing instability that could worsen.</p>
<p>Tension and violence between mining actors due to competition for resources – socio-culturally motivated</p> <p><i>State(s) where this tension and violence is most visible:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plateau ▪ Kaduna 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Longstanding ethnic, religious, and communal divisions shape access to land and minerals, influencing who is seen as a rightful miner or outsider. ▪ Historical boundary disputes between neighbouring groups or States occasionally resurface/exacerbate when minerals are discovered. ▪ Unequal participation of ethnic groups in mining cooperatives or site allocation creates perceptions of exclusion or bias. ▪ Migrant or ‘outsider’ miners are sometimes viewed with suspicion, especially when they operate without approval of traditional leaders or consultation with the community. 	<p>Socio-cultural tensions in mining areas often occur between different ethnic or religious groups who share the same territory. Disputes typically arise over who has the right to mine, manage sites, or collect fees, and when one group is seen to dominate access or profits. In Plateau, mining areas have at times been informally divided along ethnic or religious lines. Where allocations are seen as unfair, this has led to retaliatory takeovers, night-time attacks on rival pits, or theft of minerals. Conversely, arrangements that ensure all ethnic groups receive some access have helped reduce friction. While confrontations are usually short-lived and localised, they reinforce mistrust and deepen existing divisions. There is no evidence of sustained or coordinated violence linked directly to these tensions.</p>
<p>Violence due to the involvement of bandits or other non-state armed groups in mining and mineral trade</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Armed actors seek to dominate mines and transport routes to consolidate territorial power. ▪ Record international gold price and ease of smuggling incentivise armed groups to capture and control mining areas. ▪ Limited state presence and corruption allow impunity and enable collusion with officials and security actors. ▪ Limited livelihood opportunities force especially young men to rely on or collaborate with bandit-controlled mine sites. ▪ Absent government security provision pushes license holders to negotiate or ally with bandits for protection. 	<p>Violence typically evolves from opportunistic raids on minefields to structured rent extraction and, in some localities, full or proxy control of sites and trade. Gold is most affected by banditry involvement. In Kaduna (e.g., Birnin Gwari), bandit factions that once looted miners and traders shifted toward gatekeeping access, taxing production, and using local intermediaries at pits and buying points. Consolidation can temporarily reduce violent attacks while still entrenching coercion under the threat or actual use of violence, including forced and child labour. Control of smuggling routes (often in forested areas) linking mining zones</p>

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<p>State(s) where this violence is most visible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Kaduna 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unregulated, cash-based mineral markets attract criminal and armed group involvement. ▪ Smuggling routes used for minerals can also be used for arms, drugs, and other contrabands, making it logically attractive. ▪ Bandits exploit local frustration over land and ethnic tensions, framing mining as resistance to state and elite control. ▪ State crackdowns and mining bans cut off livelihoods, driving miners to collaborate with bandits for site access and protection. 	<p>to cross-border markets sustains arms-for-gold exchanges. Security crackdowns and mining bans disrupt some flows but often mostly just raise ‘protection’ fees or displace operations to adjacent LGAs/States.</p>
<p>Harassment by public security forces of mining actors</p> <p>State(s) where harassment is most visible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Benue ▪ Plateau ▪ Kaduna 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Low pay and poor supervision create incentives for some security actors to extract informal payments from miners and transporters. ▪ Limited training and guidance on human rights standards, such as the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights, increases the risk of abuses and excessive use of force during security operations at mine sites. ▪ The criminalisation of artisanal mining legitimises heavy-handed responses in public discourse, reinforcing the use of force rather than mediation or regulation. ▪ Lack of sufficient accountability mechanisms enables extortion and abuse to persist without sanction. 	<p>Public security forces are frequently accused of harassing and extorting mining actors, although the issue was rarely identified by respondents as a major source of tension. Soldiers, police, and civil defence officers deployed to monitor or secure mining sites often act as informal gatekeepers, charging fees from miners and transporters. In some areas in Benue, miners reported harassment and arbitrary arrests aimed at extracting bribes, as well as the use of excessive force. Security personnel have also been linked to illicit involvement in mining and trade, especially in Plateau, using their position to profit from mineral extraction or transport. These overlapping enforcement and profiting roles undermine accountability. The result is an environment of impunity and mistrust that weakens state oversight and contributes to wider instability in the sector. The militarised approach to ASM has, in especially Kaduna, inadvertently strengthened local bandits, as miners seek paid ‘protection’ from crackdowns and extortion.</p>
<p>Violence by public and private security of perceived mine site intruders and / or other threats</p> <p>State(s) where this violence is most visible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Benue ▪ Plateau ▪ Kaduna 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Weak oversight of public and private security deployments at mine sites allows excessive or arbitrary use of force to occur without sanction. ▪ Mining companies rely on armed protection rather than dialogue to manage community grievances. ▪ In artisanal areas, limited formal security provision has led to the rise of vigilante groups guarding pits and equipment, contributing to local militarisation. ▪ The absence of effective accountability or grievance mechanisms enables violent behaviour to persist. 	<p>Violence from public and private security actors ‘protecting’ mine sites is most visible around large industrial operations and, to a lesser extent, in ASM zones. In Benue, protests near the cement company have reportedly often been met with excessive force, including shootings by soldiers stationed around the plant. The heavy militarisation, ostensibly to protect company assets, has created fear and deepened community resentment. In artisanal zones, vigilante groups or bandits also guard pits against theft, contributing to the spread of small arms and an increasingly militarised mining economy. While these incidents remain localised, they have normalised violent approaches to mine site management and created an environment where human rights violations and abuses occur.</p>

<p>Coercion and exploitation of vulnerable mining actors</p> <p><i>State(s) where coercion and exploitation is most visible:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Benue ▪ Plateau ▪ Kaduna 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ State oversight of ASM remains minimal, allowing coercion and exploitation to persist unchecked. Existing mining bans and security deployments are aimed at tackling 'illegal mining' rather than improving working conditions and development outcomes. ▪ Lengthy, costly, and centralised licensing processes complicate the ability of miners to operate within the formal system, incl. access to formal finance, leaving them dependent on financiers or local business and political elites for access to land and capital. ▪ Limited rural employment and agricultural decline push economically insecure groups into unregulated mining, where survival needs override safety concerns. ▪ Exclusion of women and other marginalised groups from leadership, training, and equitable profit-sharing reinforces exploitative relations. 	<p>Across sites, miners, and especially those most marginalised (e.g., women), may face coercion and exploitation that is built into everyday work. Working conditions are typically unsafe and largely unregulated: pits collapse often occur and dust and exposure to harmful chemicals cause health problems. Miners usually have little or no personal protective equipment (PPE) or training. Hazardous practices (including use of dynamite and rudimentary machinery) increase the risk of injury and death. Miners operating in bandit-controlled zones are reportedly forced to work or pay levies under threat of violence. Women play significant roles in washing and bagging but are largely excluded from decision-making and profit-sharing, and economically insecure women and girls face sexual extortion or transactional sex as conditions for access to work. Children and adolescents are also working at mine sites, and some leave school during mining booms, creating multi-generational cycles of dependency on unsafe and exploitative labour.</p>
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5. Stakeholder analysis along mineral supply chains from North-Central and North-West Nigeria

This chapter identifies the main stakeholders in ASM across Benue, Plateau and Kaduna and outlines their roles, motivations, incentives, power and exposure to risk along mineral supply chains. It shows how these factors shape patterns of fragility and violence in mining areas.

Artisanal and small-scale miners



Figure 1: Informal ASM operation in Plateau State.⁹²

Across Benue, Plateau and Kaduna, people choose to engage in ASM through a mix of motivations: for some, it is a survival strategy amid poverty, displacement and shrinking rural livelihoods; for others, it is an attractive source of quicker or higher income, or a perceived opportunity to 'move up' quicker compared to farming or casual labour.

- Survival amid conflict and displacement: For example, in Benue, in Logo and Kwande LGA, many miners are IDPs who fled herder-farmer and banditry violence and now depend on mining to survive. Farming has become unsafe or impossible in many areas, so whole households (including women and children) turn to digging, washing and bagging minerals as their main reliable income source.⁹³ A similar pattern is visible in Plateau, where recurrent herder-farmer violence, particularly in Barkin Ladi and Bokkos LGAs, has pushed many households out of farming due to fear of attacks and into mining.⁹⁴
- Higher and faster earnings than agriculture: Mining offers daily cash in a way that seasonal crops usually do not. In Kwande LGA, Benue, for instance, the gold rush turned Agenogo into a commercial hub where locals suddenly earned 'unprecedented' sums; prices of staples household goods in the area subsequently rose creating problems for those not involved in mining. Similar dynamics appear in Plateau and Kaduna, where young people choose mining over farming or study because it promises quicker returns. In Kaduna, profitability has also increased with the availability of affordable crushing machines and metal detectors, which enable faster and higher extraction.⁹⁵
- Collapse of agricultural livelihoods and environmental stress: In Benue, previously fertile cassava and sweet-potato farms in Kwande LGA have been abandoned or destroyed as villagers dig for gold and other minerals. Flooded pits and polluted water sources undermine the possibility of resuming farming, pushing even those who previously relied on agriculture into mining as one of the only remaining livelihood options. This accelerates the shift away from agriculture and further entrenches dependence on ASM.⁹⁶

- Low entry barriers and informal labour demand: ASM typically requires limited upfront capital (especially for shallow and alluvial sources) and uses simple tools. Youth can start as carriers, washers or baggers; women can enter as washers, baggers and food vendors. In Kaduna, artisanal miners with geological know-how and basic tools are actively recruited by investors and license holders because they can locate and exploit deposits cheaply. In Plateau, similar patterns exist: long-standing local experience allows miners to identify mineral-rich areas without geological equipment, making entry even easier and sustaining high demand for informal labour.⁹⁷
- Perceived opportunity and social pressure: In several sites in Plateau and Benue, parents report that “no child wants to farm or study anymore.” Mining is seen by many young men as the main route to status and upward mobility, with peers’ earnings and spending (motorbikes, drugs, nightlife) reinforcing pressure to join.⁹⁸
- Long-standing history of mining: In some areas across the North West and North Central, ASM has been practiced for decades and is viewed as a normal, inherited way of earning a living. This makes mining an acceptable alternative to farming or wage labour in some areas.⁹⁹ In Plateau, for example, some miners have been active since the 1950s, passing the trade on to their children, turning ASM into a family inheritance.¹⁰⁰
- Claims of community ownership: In some areas, especially where distrust of government is high, miners may frame their activities around the idea that minerals located on ancestral land belong to the community rather than the government. These beliefs are often shaped by experiences of marginalisation and weak state presence and are used to legitimise continued extraction outside formal regulatory systems.¹⁰¹
- A perceived pathway away from armed (banditry) activity: In parts of the region, shifting young men out of armed groups has been linked to the availability of mining as a livelihood. This was specifically seen in Kaduna and Plateau, as well as in other States in the North West (e.g., Katsina) Community leaders have argued that removing access to mining without offering alternatives risks pushing unemployed youth back toward violent economies. Some former bandits have described mining as ‘cleaner’ or more dignified than banditry, because earnings are seen as legitimate and not derived from coercion.¹⁰² For example, in Plateau, between February and May 2025, when the State suspended mining activities, criminal activity reportedly increased; once mining resumed, such incidents declined again, suggesting that ASM can act as a stabilising livelihood for especially young men.¹⁰³
- Different forms of forced labour: Alongside voluntary participation, some miners, particularly young men, are drawn into ASM through coercive arrangements. Bandit groups in especially parts of the North West, and in some cases powerful mineral buyers, may force miners to work in exchange for ransom waivers or repayment of debts. These dynamics can trap miners in exploitative, high-risk conditions.¹⁰⁴

Understanding why people mine is essential for developing any meaningful policy or security response. In Nigeria, where the legal framework does not recognise artisanal mining and/or ASM is widely portrayed as ‘illegal’ or criminal, public discourse often overlooks that for many households it is a central livelihood, not a deliberate act of wrongdoing. Without recognising these motivations, government interventions risk defaulting to militarised crackdowns that merely displace miners, deepen informality and heighten vulnerability. A grounded understanding of why people mine is a prerequisite for designing interventions that protect citizens, reduce harm, and create safer, more regulated livelihood pathways, rather than penalising communities for pursuing the opportunities available to them.

In Benue, artisanal miners work within networks of local buyers, cooperatives and investors who shape access to pits, machinery, credit and markets. For many households, especially those displaced by herder-farmer and banditry violence in Logo LGA and parts of Kwande LGA, ASM is both a survival strategy and one of the few activities that can generate meaningful daily income. Several sites have become important local economic hubs, attracting buyers, transporters and food vendors, and offering returns that often exceed farming. At the same time, the sector operates with minimal safety measures: frequent collapses in Logo and Oju LGAs, bare-handed digging by women and children in Anyiin and Ayilamo, contaminated water from processing, and flooded pits that damage farmland and heighten lead-poisoning risks. Public security forces and government officials mainly appear as (formal and informal) payment checkpoints rather than providers of security or oversight. As a result, mining sustains households in crisis but exposes them to significant health hazards, erodes agricultural land and contributes to school dropout, leaving families reliant on a livelihood that is simultaneously profitable and precarious.¹⁰⁵

In Plateau, ASM is central to local economies and social life. Young people are heavily involved – some even hold licences – and mining is widely viewed as one of the most accessible ways to earn cash. Income gains are significant, and several respondents emphasised that mining has improved their household finances. But this also comes with social strain: some schools have reportedly closed as large numbers of young boys leave education for mining, and many miners noted that earnings are often quickly spent (incl. on drugs and alcohol) rather than invested. Mining areas are organised through cooperatives and local companies that allocate land and structure access to pits. Respondents indicated that equitable allocation across ethnic groups helps maintain stability, while perceptions of favouritism, particularly when Fulani groups are believed to be advantaged, can trigger violence, including attacks on miners or transporters after they leave sites. Fieldwork also shows that ethnic relations vary significantly across LGAs: in many communities miners of different ethnic and religious backgrounds work together without segregation, while in Bokkos LGA, some pits remain informally divided between Hausa/Fulani miners and indigenous groups, reflecting wider tensions.¹⁰⁶



Figure 2: Artisanal mining (dredging) operation in Plateau.¹⁰⁷

Views diverge on who benefits most from ASM in Plateau: some point to exporters, others to overseers (see Chapter 5.6), and others to miners themselves who receive daily payments regardless of investor losses. Overseers play a decisive role in shaping mining conditions. Some provide drugs to workers to sustain long hours, a practice widely recognised by miners themselves. This contributes to fights, injuries and unpredictable behaviour at sites, and reinforces dependence on overseers who control both access to work and to substances. Camp environments can become volatile as a result. Security actors add another layer of complexity. Military personnel posted to manage farmer–herder tensions are reported to leave their posts to supervise mining through intermediaries, benefiting financially from extraction while providing limited security to surrounding communities. Mining Marshals, meanwhile, are present at some tin-producing sites and are accused by miners of harassment (bribery) (see Chapter 5.12). Environmental and safety conditions mirror these governance gaps. Unreclaimed pits, unstable tunnels and contaminated water sources expose miners and farming households to significant risks, yet communities emphasise that no formal health assessments have been undertaken.¹⁰⁸

In Kaduna, ASM is also deeply embedded in local economies. Artisanal miners are widely recognised as the backbone of the State's mining sector: they locate deposits, judge the risks of pit collapse and guide extraction for licence holders and investors. In Jema'a LGA, many artisanal miners migrate in from abroad or elsewhere in Nigeria and settle permanently, working alongside residents with reportedly little ethnic tension. In other communities, however, the arrival of outsiders has generated unease and disputes over land and benefits. Overseers and investors play a central coordinating role. They provide start-up support (food, transport, accommodation and small loans) and in return secure exclusive purchasing rights at fixed prices. These arrangements help miners enter the sector but also lock them into unequal terms and can create friction when miners try to sell part of their output elsewhere. Licensing and land access are also major sources of tension. Consent procedures typically involve only the landowner and traditional chief, even when mining expands onto land belonging to others. In several LGAs, licence areas have been moved or enlarged without informing affected households, resulting in encroachment disputes. Environmental and safety risks are also severe. In Sanga LGA, miners dig long, interconnected underground tunnels stretching kilometres beneath settlements; repeated collapses have already been recorded, and chiefs warn that deeper excavation without reclamation will trap people underground. Across Kaduna, abandoned pits, whether left by LSM or ASM, remain unreclaimed despite community development agreements that require restoration.¹⁰⁹



Figure 3: Artisanal mining (dredging) operation in, Lagga, Kacia LGA, Kaduna State.

The absence of active civil society organisations (CSOs) that focus specifically on issues of mining and violence means many incidents and impacts go undocumented. This absence can be explained by the sensitivity and complexity of the mining sector in Nigeria. Most CSOs therefore focus on inter/intra-communal violence, resource-based conflict, human rights impacts, etc. without looking specifically how these issues interact with mining. Market dynamics add further strain. Daily earnings remain low, and minerals move through opaque chains dominated by unlicensed traders (often very active on social media), making traceability difficult and reinforcing informality.¹¹⁰

Women are deeply embedded in ASM economies as a unique livelihood opportunity for economic empowerment but remain disproportionately exposed to risk and exclusion. Field data across all three States highlight women's economic vulnerability: many depend entirely on daily mining income to support households, leaving them with limited ability to refuse exploitative conditions. Women described exposure to harassment, pressure to engage in transactional or unprotected sex, and heightened risks of STIs and unwanted pregnancies - outcomes that can severely limit their future earning capacity, especially given the physically demanding nature of mining work. Respondents also noted that sexual violence, when it occurs, often takes place away from mining sites rather than within them, making it harder to document and address.¹¹¹

In Benue, women are central to daily production: washing, bagging and transporting minerals in Kwande, Logo and Gboko LGAs, selling food and water at sites, and shouldering care responsibilities, especially among IDPs who have lost access to farmland and rely on "any job" available. Yet mining is widely perceived as a "men's space": women's voices are not represented in cooperatives and community meetings, and in places like Oju LGA, they cannot speak publicly without male permission.

Transactional sex is reported around pits, with men paying girls and women for sex or demanding it in exchange for access to work, fuelling exploitation. These patterns reflect broader structural barriers, including cultural and religious norms, that limit women's agency even when they participate actively in mining.¹¹²

In Plateau, women also participate at almost every stage, from washing and trading to buying minerals for resale, and in some sites, they are decision-makers, yet they work in the same hazardous, drug-fuelled environments as men, where overcrowded camps, substance abuse and uneven power relations heighten risks of exploitation that are not always openly discussed. Field findings show that women also mine, process and transport minerals to tin sheds, and work as petty traders at sites. Some women engage in substance abuse similar to men, and prostitution is described as widespread because men earn daily cash income and women, local or brought in from nearby areas, often rely on it as a survival strategy. Respondents emphasised that while exclusion of women is not always deliberate in Plateau, limitations arise from the physical demands of digging and from women's lower access to tools, capital, or the ability to finance mining activities – factors that shape who can participate in the most profitable roles.¹¹³

In Kaduna, women are also involved "at all levels," from labour to small-scale trade, but formal decision-making over land, licences and pricing remains controlled by male landowners, chiefs and investors.¹¹⁴

Across all three States, no concrete evidence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) at mine sites was found; however, rising transactional sex, highly informal site environments, and the absence of women's representation or adequate government or civil-society oversight create social conditions in which women are increasingly viewed as sexualised rather than equal actors – a warning sign for environments where SGBV is likely to be under- or unreported rather than absent.

Children are also significantly affected: for instance, in Benue, in Agenogo and Ayilamo, large numbers have left school to dig, wash or scavenge minerals in unsafe pits, exposing them to collapses, dust and contaminated water and creating what community members describe as a "lost generation" tied to precarious mining livelihoods.¹¹⁵ A similar pattern is visible in Plateau, where community leaders report high numbers of boys abandoning school for tin mining, raising concerns about long-term educational loss and multi-generational vulnerability.¹¹⁶

Youth face specific vulnerabilities too. In many sites, young men perform the most physically demanding tasks, such as bagging and loading 50kg sacks onto trucks (seen in Benue). This workload, combined with poor nutrition and long hours, drives widespread reliance on drugs to maintain stamina, which miners themselves say weakens their health over time. High daily earnings also encourage patterns of risky behaviour, including substance abuse and transactional sex, with few safeguards in place and limited access to health services.¹¹⁷



Figure 4: Women and men engaged at a mining site in Plateau State.

Large-scale miners

LSM operations in Nigeria's North Central region are limited in number but exert significant influence. As mining rights are controlled by the Federal Government, these companies are typically given exclusive access to large mineral deposits, often with limited inclusion of surrounding communities in decision-making. In this context, LSM actors shape both the economic and social fabric of affected areas, determining who can access land, who benefits from mineral production, and how communities can access information, give or withhold consent, and generally exercise their rights. When grievances remain unresolved, these companies can become driving forces of localised fragility and violence, particularly where extraction intersects with exclusion of local community members from economic opportunities, highly militarised security arrangements with little attention for human rights, and unaddressed environmental harm.

In Benue State, Dangote Cement Plc is the dominant industrial mining actor, operating a large limestone quarry in Mbайon, Gboko. The company holds the only formal quarry lease in the area, granting it a monopoly over limestone extraction. Local communities describe the operation as exemplary of centralised control, where decisions about land use, employment, and benefit sharing are made without meaningful community participation. Before its privatisation, the site was managed by the Benue Cement Company, a state-owned enterprise that reportedly employed many local residents and formed an important part of the community's economy. When the company acquired the operation, it recruited 'expert workers' who the host communities considered as 'outsiders' (migrants from other regions or countries), fuelling a sense of dispossession. Residents consistently report feeling excluded from skilled and permanent employment opportunities, as most are engaged only as daily labourers at the quarry.¹¹⁸

Hundreds of sealed trucks reportedly pass through the community each night, creating widespread unease over what is being transported. While there is no verified evidence linking these operations to illicit activity, the secrecy surrounding them has fuelled rumours of arms trading and clandestine dealings. The large number of non-resident workers has altered local social dynamics. Their presence is associated with increased drug use and petty crime, contributing to perceptions of insecurity even in the absence of organised violence.¹¹⁹

Community relations around the plant are also strained by environmental degradation and perceived neglect. Air and noise pollution from blasting, coupled with (unverified) reports of water contamination, are the most frequently cited

grievances. Repeated explosions have reportedly cracked more than 150 houses and damaged several schools, forcing some children to relocate and disrupting access to education. Market activity has dwindled as households struggle with the cumulative social and economic costs of pollution and restricted mobility. The company operates a scholarship scheme to support local education, but respondents view it as opaque and insufficient, describing unclear selection criteria and scholarship amounts that fall below the actual cost of schooling. These frustrations are compounded by the absence of transparent grievance channels: communities report having no trusted avenues to raise complaints without fear of reprisal.¹²⁰

Interviews suggest that corporate engagement is perceived as extractive and disingenuous. Community members expressed ‘interview fatigue’, noting that multiple company-sponsored consultations and surveys over the years had yielded no tangible improvements. Many believe that information gathered by consultants or NGOs is relayed to the company and then used to identify and suppress dissent. This has bred a sense of collective hopelessness: respondents describe themselves as “helpless” and distrustful of both State and traditional leaders, who are viewed as compromised through collusion or bribery. The result is an environment of mistrust where even genuine efforts at dialogue are interpreted through a lens of suspicion.¹²¹

The relationship between the company and local residents has periodically turned violent. Protests against the company’s practices have been met with the use of force by soldiers stationed at the plant. In October 2025, clashes reportedly resulted in civilian deaths. The militarisation of security around the site reinforces community perceptions of exclusion and coercion. In this setting, the company’s reliance on armed guards has become both a symptom and a driver of fragility: it deters dialogue, legitimises violence as a tool of control, and embeds fear into everyday life.¹²²

In Plateau State, similar patterns of environmental degradation and regulatory neglect appear, though with less intensity. In Plateau, abandoned pits from old industrial tin operations have caused livestock deaths. Some residents also reported some benefits, noting that unreclaimed pits occasionally provide water for irrigation during the dry season. Across Kaduna State, fieldwork also revealed extensive land degradation, including linked to larger operations. Several old mining sites remain unrehabilitated across all five LGAs visited, illustrating a major gap in environmental protection and post-mining land management. These sites pose long-term safety risks, constrain agricultural recovery, and reinforce community distrust of mining actors. Although overall reclamation remains limited, some efforts are reportedly underway to rehabilitate selected sites (see Figures 5 and 6).¹²³



Figure 5: An unreclaimed mining site in Kaduna South.¹²⁴



Figure 6: An old mining site undergoing reclaiming in Kaduna South.¹²⁵

The growing global demand for lithium has also intensified outside investment in Nigeria's industrial mineral sector. In Kaduna State, a lithium processing plant was launched in 2024. The project was expected to generate thousands of jobs and community investments, but one year on, the plant remains only partially operational. Local residents report few visible benefits and express concern about possible pollution and lack of transparency around the source of lithium being processed, raising fears it could incentivise informal extraction in the State. While KMDC claims to hold valid community agreements, the uneven delivery of promised benefits has fuelled scepticism.¹²⁶

Foreign investors and semi-industrial mining companies

Foreign investors are increasingly active in Nigeria's mining landscape, reshaping local mining economies through capital-intensive but generally opaque operations. Their involvement spans semi-mechanised extraction of fluorite and iron ore, mineral buying from artisanal miners, and the use of intermediaries to secure land access. While these operations inject capital and machinery into mining economies, they are commonly perceived as exploitative, environmentally destructive, and socially divisive.¹²⁷

Although relatively little is known about the operational practices of these foreign investors and mining companies, the little available information obtained through this study indicates they mirror patterns observed elsewhere in other States in Nigeria and the broader West Africa (as well as further afield, e.g., Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania).¹²⁸ These are typically:

- Environmentally destructive and semi-mechanised, characterised by minimal geological surveying, fast-paced extraction, and the widespread use of chemicals such as mercury and cyanide. These practices cause severe land degradation and leave unreclaimed pits, leading to accidents and health risks linked to polluted soil, water, and air.
- Operating parallel economies, as many outsider-owned ventures import their own machinery, inputs, food supplies, and labour, while maintaining separate mineral supply chains. This limits local participation and reinforces perceptions of exclusion.
- Opaque and coercive, often relying on informal or private security arrangements that use violent enforcement methods.
- Corruption-prone and enabling impunity, sustained by weak legal enforcement and the protection of influential political patrons. Reports indicate that some politically connected Nigerians collaborate with external operators, including lobbying for the release of detained foreign nationals.¹²⁹

Two forms of engagement were reported between external operators, who belong to other nationalities, and local miners in the States under study.

1. In the first, foreign companies acquire direct (or indirect, via intermediaries) control over land by negotiating access with traditional leaders or landowning families, often in exchange for cash payments or promises of community projects. They then use these agreements to obtain formal mining or exploration licences from the Ministry of Solid

Mineral Development. Once authorised, they establish semi-mechanised processing operations on the land, bringing in their own machinery and staff. These companies typically purchase raw minerals from local artisanal miners, process the material at their own plants, and then transport the refined ore in sealed trucks for export.¹³⁰

2. In the second, external actors participate primarily as mineral traders. They buy bagged ore directly from local middlemen or artisanal miners who extract and package the material themselves. The traders then consolidate these purchases, sometimes reprocessing or grading the ore, and sell it in bulk to exporters, typically through networks based in Lagos.¹³¹ In Plateau State, respondents noted that while few outsider-owned companies operate mines directly, they play a dominant role in export markets, particularly for tin. Local miners reported that foreign buyers often pay higher prices and negotiate less aggressively than other traders, making them preferred buyers despite their control over pricing and trade networks.¹³² This arrangement allows them to profit from price differences along the supply chain while avoiding the costs and scrutiny associated with holding mining licences or operating extraction sites.¹³³

This structure embeds the capital of other nationals deep into artisanal supply chains. Transactions occur largely in cash, with no visible reinvestment in community infrastructure or development.

The relationship between foreign operators, local ASM operators and entities, and host communities has become a source of tension in some areas in the North Central and North West, although most evidence was found in Benue State. Traditionally, any mining activity required collective community consent, verified through signatures by traditional and district leaders and accompanied by an agreement outlining community investment plans (see Chapter 3.1, Community Development Agreements). Foreign-owned companies, however, increasingly circumvent these processes by negotiating directly with individual landowning families instead of community institutions. These side agreements, offering immediate cash rather than longer-term community benefits, have at times fractured social cohesion. Families who agree to such deals are accused by their neighbours of undermining collective interests, while traditional leaders are sidelined. In Kwande LGA, Benue, for example, these divisions have even generated intra-community conflict and eroded local authority structures, particularly as expectations of compensation rise alongside perceptions of exploitation.¹³⁴

In Kwande LGA, Benue, foreign-owned companies reportedly operate semi-mechanised mines in Nyihemba (Menakwagh) community, extracting fluorite and iron ore. Field data indicate that around ten to twenty trucks depart daily, each carrying roughly 1,000 bags of ore. Local respondents estimated that transporters pay combined levies of ₦3-5 million per truck to a mix of local authorities, security actors, and other political intermediaries. However, almost none of these revenues are channelled back into the community. Residents described a system of informal payments that enrich local elites while providing no visible social investment or public benefit. The result is an extractive model where wealth steadily leaves the community causing widespread anger and feelings of exclusion.¹³⁵

In other parts of Benue, such as Logo and Oju LGAs, foreign involvement follows similar patterns but with varying intensity. In Sankara, Logo, some of these foreign-owned companies reportedly established offices and secured coordinates^{vii} from communities before obtaining exploration licences from the MCO in Abuja. In several cases, communities allegedly consented without fully understanding the implications, later discovering that companies had acquired extensive rights without follow-through on promised investments. Many of these foreign (as well as Nigerian, see Chapter 5.7) licence holders operate as speculative brokers rather than mine themselves, profiting by leasing their permits to artisanal miners.¹³⁶

Community fears are also increasingly shaped by rumours and expectations of coercion. In several focus group discussions (FGDs) in Benue, respondents warned that foreign investors might one day bring in private security or even bandits to displace resistant communities and take over resource-rich land. While such incidents have not yet occurred in Benue, the perception that foreigners could operate with impunity, and possibly under government protection, has heightened insecurity and mistrust.¹³⁷

In Kaduna, officials reported that government teams were unable to access certain insecure areas, whereas foreigners moved in freely to conduct exploration and business. Field visits also confirmed their presence in zones considered unsafe for locals. Although no direct link to violence was established, communities speculated that these foreigners operated with Federal government backing, fuelling local resentment.¹³⁸ Recent arrests of some foreign nationals involved in informal mining in Plateau, including four convicted and deported in early 2025, show that enforcement does occur but appears ad hoc and selective, doing little to dispel perceptions of impunity.¹³⁹ At the same time, fieldwork in Plateau indicates that foreigners' involvement has not been accompanied by direct violence: respondents noted that some foreign workers move around mining LGAs without confrontation, and no incidents of violence perpetrated by these foreigners were recorded.¹⁴⁰

^{vii} Respondents often refer to 'securing' or 'writing down' coordinates – a practice in which investors or their intermediaries visit a site to identify and record its precise geographical boundaries. These coordinates are then submitted to the MCO in Abuja as part of an application for an exploration or mining licence.

Evidence from other parts of North West Nigeria, particularly Zamfara, illustrates also how some foreign operators have become entangled in violent and criminal political economies. During and after the 2019 mining ban in Zamfara, reports indicated that certain foreign-linked ventures continued operating under the protection of armed groups, allegedly through payments that included both cash and, in some cases, weaponry. While such accounts remain contested, analysts have warned that revenues from foreign-associated mining activities may sustain bandit networks or other non-state armed actors.¹⁴¹ Although these dynamics have been most clearly documented in Zamfara, stakeholders in especially Kaduna cautioned that similar patterns of informal protection and complicity could potentially emerge there.¹⁴²

Host community members

Across Benue, Kaduna, and Plateau, host community members experience varying degrees of environmental degradation, livelihood disruption, and social fragmentation. The form and intensity of violence differs greatly, including between sites hosting large-scale industrial operation and those where artisanal or semi-mechanised mining predominates.

Mining across Benue, Plateau, and Kaduna has profoundly reshaped social cohesion and traditional community structures. The influx of cash-based mining economies has weakened collective norms of labour sharing and land stewardship, replacing them with more individualised pursuit of income and access to investors. Traditional leaders increasingly struggle to mediate disputes or enforce community rules, as authority increasingly shifts to those who control mining sites, licences, or trading relationships. For example, in Benue's Agenogo community, the arrival of more than 300 migrant miners during a gold rush rapidly transformed the area into a bustling commercial hub. Food prices rose sharply, motorcycles became symbols of wealth, and traditional livelihoods gave way to quick-profit activities. The rapid social change bred insecurity: a Hausa miner's kidnapping and killing triggered retaliatory violence, while youth rivalries, robberies, and prostitution escalated as schools emptied and children joined the mines. The intervention of the Ikyurav-ya Development Association eventually restored order by expelling most migrants, but the episode left lasting divisions and mistrust between residents and outsiders.¹⁴³

In Plateau, the social impacts are similarly disruptive. In Bokkos LGA, unfilled mining pits have become hazards for both people and livestock, with repeated incidents of Fulani cattle falling into abandoned sites and sparking violent clashes with local farmers. Community members described frustration at the visible destruction of their environment and the absence of any efforts to restore the land. Alongside this, long-standing tensions between Fulani herders and farming communities have intensified as mining expands. Respondents explained that when tin is discovered in certain locations and local groups proceed with mining without involving Fulani communities, particularly where grazing routes or shared land use is affected, Fulani groups feel excluded from resource-use decisions, and this sense of marginalisation has led to outbreaks of violence. This contrasts with earlier decades, when such tensions were far less pronounced. Mining has also introduced stark, new inequalities: while some residents earn quick income, most see little benefit and face higher living costs due to inflation associated with rapid in-migration. Young people who gain from mining are often accused of wasting their earnings on alcohol or drugs, fuelling moral tension and resentment between generations. The breakdown of shared livelihoods and the decline of collective farming is reportedly also weakening long-standing community cooperation.¹⁴⁴

In Kaduna, the fragmentation of community life is reinforced by perceived neglect of the government and the absence of civil society monitoring. Across mining-affected areas (e.g., Sanga), residents described how pits stretch for kilometres under their towns without reclamation, creating daily fears of land collapse. While open conflict is rare, anxiety dominates local sentiment. People no longer expect environmental or social remediation. The lack of visible oversight or advocacy has contributed to a pervasive sense of abandonment, where grievances remain unaddressed and local cohesion weakens.¹⁴⁵

In Gboko, Benue, host community members bear the social and environmental impacts of mining activities, including cement dust, blasting, water contamination, and cracked or collapsed buildings (see Chapter 5.2). Many report respiratory problems and damaged farmlands, with livelihoods in farming and petty trade severely disrupted. Exclusion from employment and decision-making fuels resentment, while protests and grievance efforts are met with intimidation and force. The heavy military presence around the site and perceived collusion between company, government, and traditional leaders have deepened mistrust, leaving residents feeling unsafe and powerless despite the operation's prominence in the local economy.¹⁴⁶

In Benue's ASM zones, particularly Logo and Kwande, tensions are rooted in land leasing and intra-community rivalries. Family heads increasingly bypass traditional councils to sign private deals with investors (to give their consent to use land for mining purposes). These arrangements create rifts within communities: families who receive payments are seen as betraying collective interests, while others bear the environmental and social consequences of mining without any benefit. In Kwande, these strains are compounded by the arrival of Cameroonian refugees and IDPs seeking mining work, intensifying pressure on land and fuelling perceptions that 'outsiders' are benefiting from deals that bypass community structures. Youth groups often respond to broken promises of mining entities, such as unfulfilled road or

school projects, by blocking access to mine sites or threatening company representatives. While such incidents rarely escalate into sustained violence, they reflect deepening social fragmentation.¹⁴⁷

Across the three States, women in host communities experience distinct and often heightened risks linked to mining. For example, in Kaduna, the degradation of farmland from mining and the absence of land rehabilitation leave many women, whose livelihoods depend on small-scale farming, without viable income sources, pushing them into precarious, low-paid roles around mine sites or into informal trading with little protection. In Plateau, particularly in Riyom and parts of Barkin Ladi LGAs, women who have lost spouses to past violence described turning to commercial sex work around mine sites at night, taking advantage of anonymity in other communities to avoid stigma; this exposes them to health risks, exploitation, and further insecurity.¹⁴⁸

Thus, across all three states, host communities face widening social divides and declining trust in both customary and government institutions. Even where large-scale violence is absent, everyday tensions, fear, and resentment are eroding the foundations of local cohesion. Mining continues to transform community relations in ways that heighten fragility and undermine social stability, rather than enabling communities to share meaningfully in the economic gains generated by the growing mining economies.

Landowners

Landownership dynamics in Benue have become a central source of tension. Under the State's customary tenure system, land is held by families rather than individuals, giving family heads significant authority over mining consent. In LGAs such as Kwande and Logo, these landowning families increasingly lease land directly to mining investors or companies, often without the endorsement of traditional councils or the wider community. This has fragmented communal decision-making and produced recurring disputes within and between families over compensation. Artisanal miners also pay landowners directly for access to small plots. Such payments reinforce the authority of landowning families while excluding other residents from benefits, especially those without land rights. Landowners are also emerging as economic brokers, storing bagged minerals in their compounds for a fee and informally mediating transactions between miners and buyers. In Gboko, similar patterns are observed, where negotiations for land acquisition reportedly occur directly with families rather than through government or traditional channels. These practices undermine collective ownership norms and weaken traditional authority, as financial gains accrue to a few households while environmental and social costs are borne collectively. The result is a subtle but pervasive shift in power: from community-based governance to private control over land and resource access.¹⁴⁹

Similar tensions are visible in Plateau. Here, land disputes at mining sites are shaped by a long history of competition over scarce land. The dual legal framework, which vests authority over minerals in the Federal Government while customary law recognises community and individual land rights, creates confusion over who can legitimately grant access, negotiate compensation, or authorise mining. These dynamics shift decision-making power away from community structures. In this uncertainty, landowners, traditional leaders and external actors (e.g., foreign investors) sometimes collaborate to open sites without formal licences or community consent, fuelling perceptions that mining proceeds at the community's and government's expense.¹⁵⁰

Buyers, financiers and other intermediaries

Information on the roles, motivations, ways of working and influence over violence from buyers and other intermediaries in Benue, Kaduna, and Plateau is relatively limited. The focus of this research on a wide range of minerals also limited the study's ability to identify specific supply chain dynamics; to learn where power sits and how it is used. However, the few insights gathered through fieldwork, combined with patterns observed in other Nigerian States, suggest broadly similar dynamics. Across all three states, intermediaries occupy a central position between artisanal miners and end buyers, shaping how minerals are financed, priced, and traded. They are often referred to as 'overseers'^{viii} by artisanal miners and are recognised as instrumental players in the mining economy.¹⁵¹

In Kaduna, respondents described a system where 'oftakers' or dealers finance miners by covering food, accommodation, and transport costs during mineral exploration. In return, miners are obliged to sell all extracted minerals to these sponsors at a pre-agreed price. While this arrangement provides short-term livelihood stability, it also creates dependency, as miners become indebted to sponsors and lose bargaining power.¹⁵² This pattern was consistent across all five Kaduna LGAs visited. Furthermore, in Birnin Gwari LGA, for example, miners reported that buyers also routinely pay far below market rates - sometimes as little as 70% of the gold's value - taking advantage of miners' isolation (limited access to other buyers and information on pricing) and lack of scales (to weigh the gold and determine value). Buyers' control extends beyond pricing and financing: many decide who can work at a site, back specific miner

^{viii} The term overseer was used by miners to describe primarily mineral buyers, however, at times, they implied that these buyers were also the license holders. They will hold licenses, allowing artisanal miners to mine on their concession under the agreement that the extracted minerals are sold to them.

groups, or broker informal access to land. Their political and security connections allow them to operate with relative impunity, and some pay informal ‘taxes’ or protection fees to corrupt officials or, in certain areas, to armed actors. These dynamics place intermediaries at the centre of the local mining economy, shaping who benefits and how risks are distributed.¹⁵³

In Benue’s Logo LGA, where middlemen buy different minerals from local miners and transport them for resale, sometimes to Rivers State for export. These buyers also act as gatekeepers of information and capital, determining which miners gain market access.¹⁵⁴

In Plateau, field findings show similar dynamics. Artisanal miners repeatedly described feeling “surcharged” by buyers who unilaterally set prices. Because buyers control cash flow and miners depend on daily income, negotiations are effectively one-sided. Miners noted that they have little influence over valuation, and agreements on pricing or purchasing volumes are often revised or ignored by buyers. This reinforces dependency and leaves miners with few alternatives, deepening the imbalance of power between those who extract minerals and those who finance and trade them.¹⁵⁵

Evidence from other parts of Nigeria indicates that such intermediary structures are common. Mineral traders, often referred to as ‘sponsors’, advance cash or goods to miners in exchange for exclusive purchasing rights, recovering their investment from production. These informal contracts establish strong personal dependency and allow sponsors to control pricing and production levels. Transactions rely on trust rather than formal oversight, taking place within tight-knit networks of local buyers, larger regional traders, and international brokers. Prices are generally set by buyers higher up the chain, leaving miners and local sellers with little influence over valuation. When production is low or prices fall, miners may remain indebted to sponsors across multiple mining cycles, creating conditions of debt bondage (a form of forced labour) in which miners must continue working to repay advances that can rarely be cleared.¹⁵⁶

As most intermediaries act primarily as economic facilitators, their control over capital and access to markets gives them considerable influence. In many areas, they maintain informal relationships with local security forces or politically connected individuals who help protect their business interests or ease the illicit movement of minerals. These networks, however, reinforce unequal power structures, as intermediaries with the right connections can operate freely while smaller traders and miners face barriers and higher costs. Weak regulatory oversight and widespread insecurity exacerbate these dynamics: traders frequently report being stopped at checkpoints where security personnel demand informal payments or confiscate their goods. Such practices raise transaction costs, reduce profits for those lower in the supply chain, and entrench reliance on informal arrangements rather than transparent market systems.¹⁵⁷

Overall, even with limited data from Benue, Kaduna, and Plateau, it is likely that similar systems of patronage structure mineral trade across these states. The dominance of sponsors and dealers ensures capital flow but concentrates profits and decision-making power in the hands of a few intermediaries.

License holders

Across Benue, Plateau and Kaduna, mining licences are held by a mix of individuals, families, and small or medium-scale companies. Fieldwork across all three States indicates that this consent process is often incomplete or represents only a small segment of affected landholding families, particularly where licence boundaries extend beyond the plots of those who signed. For example, in several Benue communities, companies and politically connected individuals secured coordinates from local landowners and later registered them in Abuja, sometimes before communities fully understood the implications. These licences are frequently held by actors who do not mine themselves but lease the rights to other companies or artisanal mining groups.¹⁵⁸

Once a licence is granted, licence holders typically determine how extraction will proceed within the concession. For example, in Kaduna, most artisanal miners work without licences and operate under informal arrangements with licence holders. Licence holders may provide basic assistance, such as food, transport, or accommodation, while miners conduct the actual extraction. Output must then be sold back to the licence holder or their assigned buyer at a pre-agreed price. Similar patterns are found in Benue and Plateau, where local miners work on land controlled by licence holders, while hired managers manage daily operations. In some locations, families who own land within concessions receive payments for access but are not involved in mining activities.¹⁵⁹

Tensions occasionally arise when licence holders seek to protect their claims. In Logo LGA, Benue, respondents described situations in which licence holders brought security personnel to prevent miners from bypassing them or to restrict others from accessing licensed coordinates. In areas where speculative licences have accumulated, such as Logo and Kwande, confusion over overlapping claims has discouraged new investment and contributed to sporadic disputes between licence holders, artisanal miners, and landowning families.¹⁶⁰

Health and safety conditions within licensed areas vary but are often shaped by the informal extraction systems used. Pit collapses and unregulated expansion of mining pits, reported particularly in Kaduna and Plateau, occur where

oversight is minimal and where subcontracted groups operate without clear safety responsibilities. In several Benue sites, licence holders rely on local intermediaries to organise extraction and sales; these intermediaries, rather than the licence holders themselves, typically interact with miners, making accountability for environmental safeguarding and labour conditions difficult to trace.¹⁶¹

Banditry groups

In Kaduna, the intersection between banditry and mining is most visible in gold-bearing LGAs such as Birnin Gwari, Giwa, Chikun, Kachia, and Kagarko. Since at least 2016, banditry groups have repeatedly targeted minefields and mining communities, with violence around gold sites forming part of a broader pattern of kidnapping, cattle rustling, and rural attacks that has produced hundreds of deaths and large-scale displacement in recent years.¹⁶² In Kaduna, such incidents were particularly associated with Birnin Gwari LGA. For example, the Bugai minefields, around 13 kilometres from Birnin Gwari town, are now widely described as a high-risk “axis of danger and hazards” along the Kaduna-Katsina-Zamfara route.¹⁶³ Armed groups operate in and around these sites, using the surrounding forests as cover and exploiting the concentration of unbanked cash and easily movable gold.¹⁶⁴ In most other LGAs in Kaduna, banditry violence is reportedly mostly not associated with mining, with some exceptions. For example, in Giwa LGA, bandits reportedly often cross the State border from Katsina, reside in the forests, and regularly attack miners.¹⁶⁵

Birnin Gwari LGA has thus become an epicentre of both mineral extraction and insecurity. Initially, armed groups entered mine areas as opportunistic predators: they raided pits, seized gold and cash from miners and buyers, and used violence to assert control. These attacks mirrored patterns documented across the North-West, where bandits besiege artisanal sites, kill miners, and take away ores, often causing surviving miners to abandon pits entirely. Over time, bandits shifted from sporadic raids to more continuous involvement in how minefields function.¹⁶⁶ Two large gangs, based in the Kamuku Forest and linked to jihadist actors in the North East, now use Birnin Gwari and its surroundings as a base for raiding minefields, markets, and transport routes, including along the Kaduna-Niger and Kaduna-Katsina corridors.¹⁶⁷

In line with trends seen in Zamfara, local accounts describe levies imposed on miners and buyers as a condition for accessing forest mines, sometimes calculated as a share of processed mineral or monthly income. These payments are not negotiated ‘services’ but compulsory charges enforced under threat of renewed attacks or kidnapping, and miners who cannot meet the terms often reduce production or leave the sites.¹⁶⁸ Reporting suggests also that in some parts of Kaduna, armed factions have started to take over specific mining areas directly. For example, around the Kurega area, banditry groups have reportedly expelled licensed companies and begun working pits themselves for precious stones and silver. This deepens their role from external tax collectors to de facto operators, blurring the line between bandit and miner, and giving them more direct control over how production and sales are organised at site level.¹⁶⁹

The involvement of bandits in mining is driven by several incentives and enabling factors.¹⁷⁰

- **Lucrative and liquid gold economy:** Across the North West, gold is viewed as more reliable than kidnapping or cattle rustling: it offers a constant flow of value, can be quickly monetised, and is easily smuggled. Gold in the wider region is also predominantly alluvial and relatively easy to extract. As armed groups have expanded in size, revenues from kidnaps are increasingly spread thin, pushing commanders to seek more stable income. Gold also functions as a key medium of exchange for arms, where buyers arrive with weapons and leave with gold.¹⁷¹
- **Smuggling corridors and cross-State links:** Kaduna’s mining areas are connected to wider trading and smuggling routes. Gold and cash taken from minefields around Bugai are moved along routes such as Bugai-Sabon Layi-Bassawa-Faskari into Katsina, and via Bugai-Gwaska-Doka towards Zamfara. These corridors link into broader networks running through Borno, Niger and onward into Niger and other Sahelian states, facilitating both onward export and the inflow of arms and other contraband.¹⁷²
- **Weak regulatory presence and fragmented local governance:** ASM operates with little formal oversight and an environment in which theft, assault and ad hoc ‘security’ provision were already common before bandit involvement. This ‘crime-friendly’ setting, combined with slow or absent public security responses, has created room for these armed groups to move from hired guards to primary powerbrokers at minefields. In Birnin Gwari, bandits now use proxies in Old Birnin Gwari, Bugai and Dogon Dawa minefields to extract gold, some of whom were abducted and forced to mine (forced labour), while others work for financial gain.¹⁷³ In the same LGA, traditional leaders do sometimes engage with bandits, especially when violence is reported, to mediate issues.¹⁷⁴
- **Economic hardship in the area and perceived injustices:** Long-standing neglect, high rural unemployment and limited agricultural returns make mining one of the few accessible income sources in Kaduna and the wider North-West. Armed groups frame their involvement as a way of reclaiming resources that do not belong to the government alone, tapping into grievances over lost grazing routes, land concessions for farming and mining, and historic failures to protect pastoralist communities from violence and cattle theft. These narratives help justify continued extraction and coercion in the eyes of some recruits.¹⁷⁵

- Embedded government officials' interests: Evidence from across the region indicates that some PEPs and members of public security agencies have long-standing financial interests in informal mining and gold smuggling. Armed groups describe being initially hired by such actors to guard their minefields and later becoming partners or successors at those sites. Corruption within security institutions, including alleged arms sales and facilitation of cross-border passage, lowers the risks associated with bandit involvement in mining and weakens incentives for robust enforcement in affected corridors.¹⁷⁶
- Legal and regulatory contradictions: Federal-State level tensions over mineral ownership, combined with overlapping mandates under mining and land laws, create ambiguity over who is responsible for regulating ASM and securing mining areas. This ambiguity contributes to a vacuum in which bandit groups and their local collaborators can assert authority over site access and trade.¹⁷⁷

However, our field research also suggests that bandit roles have begun to shift in response to State-led peace initiatives, including those supported by MIREMCO as well as by traditional and local authorities. Violence has reportedly subsided in parts of Birnin Gwari, Giwa and Sanga, although bandits continue to exert influence through taxation and 'protection' arrangements. In some areas, they now demand a share of extracted minerals or cash payments in exchange for allowing artisanal miners to operate; where miners refuse, bandits seize goods outright. While overt attacks have become less frequent, these practices still entrench coercive control and keep armed actors embedded in mining economies.¹⁷⁸

A particularly harmful dimension of bandit involvement in mining across the North West, is the reported use of women and girls as sex slaves, informants, labourers and smugglers – although this dynamic was not found during field research in Kaduna, though this may also be because of the sensitivity of the topic preventing respondents from speaking about this openly. However, public reporting shows that bandits in Kaduna have used women and girls for arms and ammunition smuggling. In 2021 and 2022, police arrested women transporting rifles and nearly a thousand rounds of AK-47 ammunition from Plateau into Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara, indicating that women's roles in bandit-linked smuggling networks are an established trend in the region.¹⁷⁹ Women and girls in other North-West States (e.g., Zamfara, Katsina) are also known to be deployed by bandits to move gold and arms between border regions and minefields because they tend to face less scrutiny at checkpoints and can be paid less than male couriers. Many are drawn in by poverty or recruited under the guise of employment, while others are abducted and kept in mining camps where younger girls are reserved for commanders. The broader crisis of out-of-school children in northern Nigeria, with a high proportion of girls affected, deepens this vulnerability: school closures and kidnappings for ransom in the North-West have left many girls in prolonged captivity, where they are absorbed into bandit-controlled mining and smuggling economies. Girls' exposure to hazardous mining environments, lead dust and camp-based abuse carries severe health consequences and clearly violates international conventions on child labour and the worst forms of exploitation.¹⁸⁰

In Plateau, bandit involvement in mining varies by locality. Around Barkin Ladi town, where miners from different groups work, bandits are not a major presence. Further from town, however, some mining sites have reportedly been raided at night by armed banditry groups seeking to seize already-processed minerals for resale. In Bokkos LGA, bandits sometimes take control of mineral-bearing areas and mine them directly or are hired by miners to secure exclusive access to pits. Field reports indicate that when bandits take over sites, miners rarely resist because they lack weapons, typically abandoning pits rather than confronting armed groups. This dynamic reduces the likelihood of open clashes but deepens miners' vulnerability and normalises bandit control over mineral production.¹⁸¹

In Logo LGA, Benue, bandits are present near mining areas in nearby LGAs but there is no evidence that they target mines or trade routes. Communities expressed concern that external investors may, however, in the future, enlist bandits to displace residents for access to land, noting that previous bandit attacks in the area did not affect foreign miners (hinting at a potential collaboration between bandits and foreign actors).¹⁸²

Self-defence and vigilante groups

Self-defence and vigilante formations play another role in the security landscape around mining in Kaduna, Plateau and Benue, although very little is known about the scale of their involvement, their ways of operating, and their impacts on fragility and stability. Respondents were generally not open to discussing informal protection of mine sites, likely due to the sensitivity of the issue. Self-defence and vigilante groups in mining areas can range from small groups of (typically) young men appointed by a licence holder, cooperative leader, or individual miner to carry weapons and guard a site, to more established community-based vigilante formations with historical roots in local (informal, private) security structures. From public literature, we know that in Kaduna, the most prominent structures are reportedly the Kaduna - Vigilante Group of Nigeria (KVGN) and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), alongside numerous community watch groups. The KVGN operates State-wide, is volunteer-based, and has tens of thousands of members, including women. Its role includes first response to bandit attacks and community policing, although funding gaps limit its role. The CJTF, smaller and more neighbourhood-focused, also provides crime prevention, school protection, and dispute resolution. Some CJTF members have received police training, but the exact nature of their relationship with security forces remains unclear.¹⁸³ Community sentiment towards these groups is reportedly largely positive, with residents describing

vigilantes as the only reliable responders when bandits strike. However, there are also credible reports of abuses and instances where elements within security agencies and vigilante structures benefit from criminal economies, including cattle rustling and informal mining protection.¹⁸⁴ However, little is known about their role – if any – in mineral supply chains.

Additional studies highlight that vigilante formations in Kaduna, including Yan Banga, the Kaduna State Vigilante Service (KADVS), and the CJTF, have evolved into highly organised structures with defined hierarchies and operational strategies. Their local knowledge and community trust reportedly make them effective in crime detection and in securing mining corridors, particularly in rural LGAs where mining overlaps with banditry hotspots. At the same time, their growing influence raises concerns around accountability and unregulated use of force, including occasional clashes with public security agencies. Their prominence reflects broader governance gaps: informal actors are increasingly filling security vacuums in resource-rich but fragile areas.¹⁸⁵

In Plateau, miners reportedly often employ local (private) guards or hire armed groups to prevent rival access, embedding vigilante-style protection directly within mineral competition.¹⁸⁶

In Benue, vigilante groups reportedly guard pits at night and protect miners from bandit incursions or rival claims, especially in Kwande and Logo LGAs. Their proliferation has, however, contributed to arms circulation and a militarisation of the mining economy. Clashes between vigilantes and herder militias occasionally occur around contested mining zones. Field research from Benue further indicates that foreign miners and traders have at times adopted 'divide and rule' strategies, hiring private security personnel and recruiting local youth gangs as informants. These practices have contributed to arms proliferation and prompted communities to establish their own armed community security groups to protect themselves from both invading herders and perceived external exploitation by foreign miners.¹⁸⁷

Experiences from other North West Nigerian States illustrate the risks associated with widespread vigilante involvement in mining. Groups such as the Yan Sakai emerged as community self-defence actors in Zamfara but became entangled in mining economies as insecurity around gold sites increased. Their protection roles often expanded into fee collection and gatekeeping of access to pits. In some areas, vigilantes fortified mining camps or embedded long-standing ethnic rivalries into site-level security arrangements, contributing to tensions between Hausa and Fulani communities. This occurred when predominantly Hausa vigilante groups controlled access or enforced rules at sites used by Fulani miners or herders, making security provision appear ethnically biased and heightening mistrust. While these groups enabled mining to continue in insecure areas, their involvement also triggered reprisals, introduced armed extortion dynamics, and further weakened state authority. These patterns show that vigilante participation in mining economies can bring short-term protection but carries structural risks of entrenching non-state armed authority.¹⁸⁸

Traditional and community leaders

Traditional authorities and community associations are very important to how mining is governed in several of the study areas. In Benue, traditional institutions fill formal governance gaps by mediating between miners, investors, and host communities. They function as both gatekeepers and mediators in mining: granting consent, collecting levies, and brokering relationships with companies and government actors. Their involvement often helps prevent escalation of disputes. However, some stakeholders also noted that their roles (as well as of local officials) are usually limited by constitutional provisions that place limitation on their authority over the mining sector.¹⁸⁹ Community-based organisations also play a particularly visible role in Benue. In Agonogo (Kwande LGA), the Ikyurav-ya Development Association (IDA) serves as a quasi-regulatory body. It enforced local discipline, including expelling migrant (northern and foreign) miners after community unrest, and established a peace and monitoring committee. In Agenogo and Nyihemba, IDA has also acted as a de facto regulator amid tensions between formal license holders and informal artisanal miners over boundaries and taxes. In Logo LGA, local chiefs reportedly help form miners' cooperatives and settle land-related disputes. At the same time, field reports highlight growing frustration with some chiefs accused of taking 'coordination fees' from exploration or mining companies to sign for community consent. This has contributed to perceptions of elite capture, as traditional leaders negotiate consent and collect fees without meaningful community involvement.¹⁹⁰

In Plateau State, traditional leaders also play important mediating roles in mining-related conflicts. Fieldwork highlighted cases in Bokkos, Barkin Ladi, and Royom LGAs where such leaders responded to rising tensions by temporarily closing mining sites to prevent escalation, reopening them only after dialogue and intervention. Their authority is reinforced by the influence of senior figures such as the Plateau State Council of Chiefs and Emirs, who play a wider role in ensuring mining activities benefit their communities and in maintaining peace and security across their domains. Their involvement alongside security actors has reportedly helped stabilise disputes and maintain order around contested pits.¹⁹¹

In Kaduna, field findings show that the role of traditional authorities is significant as well. Across all visited LGAs, traditional authorities regularly mediate between miners and government agencies, resolve land disputes, and regulate

mining activity through customary consent processes. In Birnin Gwari LGA, emirs have facilitated negotiations between gold miners and surrounding communities; in Giwa LGA, district heads collect informal community levies from miners; in Kachia LGA, traditional rulers coordinate with security actors to protect miners from banditry; in Jema'a LGA, chiefs enforce customary rules to limit environmental damage; and in Sanga LGA, traditional leaders organise miners into cooperatives, improving their access to markets and financial services while maintaining local order. These roles thus position traditional authorities as central actors in preventing escalation and addressing emerging forms of mining-related violence in Kaduna.¹⁹²

Government officials

Government officials at Federal, State, and local levels shape the political economy of mining in North Central and North West Nigeria. Their influence is defined not only by formal mandates, but also by structural resource constraints, overlapping legal frameworks, and the practical realities of operating in insecure environments. These factors help explain why informal actors often operate with impunity, and why regulatory enforcement remains uneven, contested, and susceptible to capture in the region.

A central challenge highlighted in literature and interviews is the dual governance structure of Nigeria's mining sector. The Federal Government retains exclusive authority over minerals (licensing, regulation, enforcement), while State and local governments are tasked with land administration, community engagement, and environmental oversight. In practice, this division produces ambiguity: State and local officials are held responsible by communities for problems arising from mining activity yet lack the mandate or resources (funding, staff) to regulate mining effectively. This gap encourages informal bargaining at every level as officials attempt to exert influence where their legal authority is limited.¹⁹³

For example, in Benue, these constraints have meant that environmental assessments on mining operations are rarely carried out and, when they occur, are often treated as procedural steps rather than substantive regulatory checks. Monitoring agencies reportedly lack vehicles, funding, training, and political backing, limiting their ability to challenge well-connected operators. Officials interviewed described reluctance to intervene in cases where political elites or foreign investors were involved, reflecting both capacity limitations and the political risks of challenging powerful actors.¹⁹⁴ This combination of limited mandate, limited resources, and high political sensitivity reduces State presence at mining sites and allows informal operators to dominate.

Interview data also highlights the burden of overlapping levies. Licensing, taxation, and transport payments are imposed by different Federal, State, and local institutions as well as community associations and informal checkpoint actors. In Benue, a single truck transporting ore may pay up to ₦5 million in combined formal and informal charges. These payments create perceptions of extractive rather than developmental governance, particularly as they are rarely accompanied by visible reinvestment in roads, clinics, or local services. Many miners and traders therefore avoid formal channels not because they outright reject regulation, but because the perceived cost-benefit ratio makes informality more viable. This dynamic inadvertently strengthens the role of informal actors who can guarantee smoother passage or lower costs.¹⁹⁵

Governance gaps also heighten the risk of localised conflict. In Kwande LGA, overlapping tax demands and inconsistent enforcement have created disputes over who has legitimate authority to control transport routes and site access. Communities interpret these inconsistencies through the lens of pre-existing political and ethnic tensions. As different authorities attempt to impose levies, some groups have armed themselves to protect revenue streams or defend their land from perceived encroachment. High licensing costs, opaque procedures, and weak coordination further push miners into unregulated activity, leaving disputes unmediated and grievances unaddressed.¹⁹⁶ In Kaduna, institutions such as MIREMCO and the Mining Marshal have intervened at times to mitigate violence or mediate disputes at mine sites. Recent peace initiatives have contributed to reduced banditry in some areas, enabling miners to re-enter locations previously considered too dangerous. Notably, Kaduna has begun experimenting with more holistic ASM governance reforms, including ASM cooperative support, new ASM legislation, and capacity-building through the KMDC. Although early-stage, this approach signals a shift toward integrating security, regulation, and development – an approach less visible in Benue and Plateau, where responses have tended to rely more on heavily on security-led interventions.¹⁹⁷

Patterns of how government officials are embedding themselves in mineral supply chains from elsewhere in the North-West suggest that similar risks may emerge in Benue, Kaduna, and Plateau. In Zamfara, Katsina, and Sokoto, government officials and PEPs have played direct and indirect roles in informal mining systems, ranging from ownership of mining sites and partnerships with informal foreign operators to involvement in gold smuggling and the use of armed groups to guard their assets. Some State and local officials reportedly appointed companies or intermediaries to extract minerals on their behalf, while public figures were linked to gold holdings and informal extraction. Officials in several North-West States have also been accused of intervening to protect foreign operators or facilitate cross-border mineral flows, embedding political actors within transnational illicit trade networks. In some areas, political elites reportedly armed or contracted bandit groups to secure mining sites, only for those groups to later assert independent control. Security personnel at checkpoints were also reported to collect informal payments from miners transporting ore.¹⁹⁸

Public security forces

Public security forces, including the police, Mining Marshals, and military, have at times been found directly involved in the day-to-day functioning of mining areas through informal taxation (bribery) and protection arrangements. While formally mandated to provide security and regulatory oversight, interview data shows that their presence frequently embeds them directly into mineral supply chains. These practices reinforce distrust in government institutions, and, in some areas, push miners and host communities to seek protection from non-state armed groups, including bandits and vigilantes.

In Benue, some security forces act as de facto gatekeepers of mineral transport. Police and soldiers stationed along mineral transport corridors allegedly, at times, charge 'monitoring fees' or escort fees. In Kwande and Logo LGAs, miners reported some harassment, arbitrary arrests, and intimidation designed to compel bribe payments. In Gboko LGA, the presence of soldiers around the plant restricts movement and has resulted in deadly confrontations during protests. Interviewees described violent protests in October 2025 during which soldiers shot and killed community members. Communities noted that complaints about these human rights violations receive little response, deepening perceptions of impunity and abusive behaviour by some government forces.¹⁹⁹

In Plateau, public security forces are reportedly also involved directly in mining activities. The Mining Marshal's zonal office is located in Jos, and Marshals work closely with the State government to oversee the mining sector. However, some military officers stationed in Barkin Ladi LGA, initially deployed to manage farmer-herder tensions, allegedly frequently leave their posts to 'supervise' extraction at nearby sites. In reality, they reportedly make deals with local diggers to mine under their instructions, taking a share of the proceeds. These arrangements generate informal income for some of these officers and also divert them from their security responsibilities, leaving surrounding communities more vulnerable to attacks. Some Mining Marshals in Plateau have also been accused of harassment and rent extraction, though their presence has also improved state oversight and increased the volume of tin formally channelled through State buying centres. This is because Marshals require miners to sell through these centres as part of their enforcement role.²⁰⁰

In Kaduna, the role of public security forces varies by location. Along transport routes, miners report routine extortion when moving minerals from LGAs toward Jos, with public security agents reportedly, at multiple checkpoints, taxing vehicles transporting mined goods along the Birnin Gwari-Kaduna, Kaduna-Kachia-Jos, Jema'a-Jos and Sanga-Jos roads. In Birnin Gwari LGA, Mining Marshals are seen as exploitative but peaceful, whereas in Sanga LGA, they are perceived as useful first responders to violent incidents.²⁰¹ Militarisation in Kaduna, including Federal operations such as Sharan Daji, Harbin Kunama, Diran Mikiya and Puff-Adder, have also produced arrests and seizures but also displaced bandit groups into new areas, with some arguing that this has had limited long-term stabilisation effects.²⁰²

6. Recommendations

These recommendations are designed for the SPRING programme and policymaking as it considers whether and how to engage in Nigeria's mining sector. They outline potential entry points across four complementary intervention areas: peacebuilding, socio-economic development, gender and social norms, and knowledge-building (see Figure 7). No single category can address the drivers of fragility and violence alone; impacts will be greatest when interventions reinforce one another and are implemented in close collaboration with State and Federal authorities, traditional institutions, civil society organisations, and private-sector actors. These interventions will also not reach their full potential without broader reforms to Nigeria's regulatory framework for mining, particularly the barriers that make it difficult for ASM operators to operate formally. Such reforms lie largely outside SPRING's mandate and should be led by government and specialised partners. SPRING could, however, play an advisory role, for example, by informing UK government engagement on ASM policy issues.

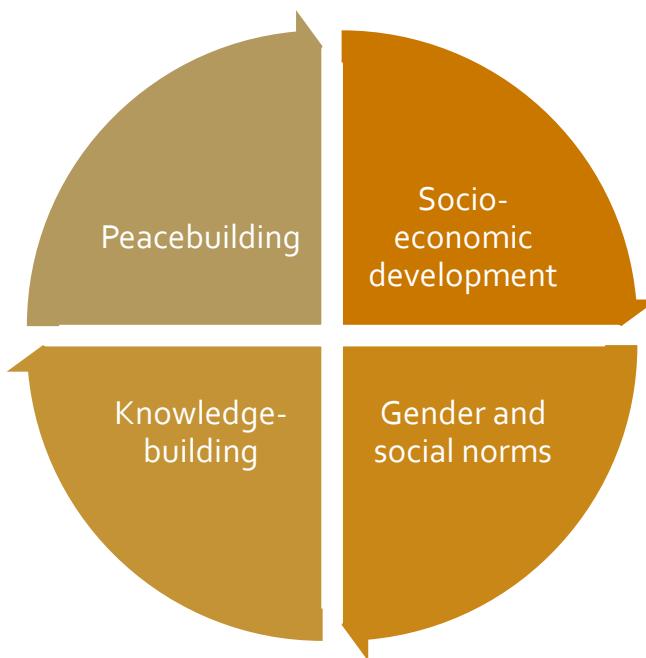


Figure 7: Four main interventions areas for the SPRiNG programme to address drivers and root causes of fragility and violence in the mining sector of North-Central and North-West Nigeria, in line with the programme's main objectives and mandate.

Peacebuilding Interventions

Mining in North-Central and North-West Nigeria sits at the centre of historic grievances, weak dialogue between communities and authorities, and a history of heavy-handed security responses. Because minerals are high-value and extraction expands quickly, the sector attracts powerful actors and is creating new pressures. Disputes typically escalate faster and in more volatile ways than in other sectors, and standard peacebuilding tools often overlook these political and economic realities. Mining therefore needs a specific approach that could be integrated into existing peacebuilding interventions.

Strengthen community-level dialogue and mediation

- Support, create or expand local platforms where miners, landowners, license holders, traditional leaders, youth representatives, and women representatives can address day-to-day disputes before they escalate.
- Rather than creating new structures, SPRiNG, as well as policymakers, should ideally work through existing dialogue forums and customary systems, helping them include mining communities and ensuring that marginalised groups (especially women, IDP, and ethnically marginalised miners) are represented.
- These platforms can handle issues such as land access, influx of outsiders, profit-sharing expectations, and early signs of tension around pits or buying points. This should also reduce reliance on vigilantes or other armed security and gives communities more predictable pathways to manage conflict. In order to strengthen their role, SPRiNG and partners could also support basic training for community mediators in negotiation and conflict-resolution approaches tailored to mining contexts.
- Strengthen the role of customary and community authorities in dispute resolution, recognising that traditional leaders often play effective mediating roles in mining-related conflicts when supported with clear mandates and transparent processes.

Strengthen policing and police reforms, including community safety partnerships

- SPRiNG can work with partners already engaged in policing and justice-sector reform to strengthen rights-based, community-centred policing in mining areas, where poor handling of security incidents can quickly heighten tensions and undermine trust. The focus could be on improving the capacity and conduct of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) and other legally recognised policing bodies.
- Training and support should emphasise de-escalation, proportionality, gender-sensitive conduct, and safe operational practices in crowded mining environments, helping police respond effectively without disrupting legitimate livelihoods.

- Given the prominent role of informal security actors (e.g., vigilante groups, community guards) in many mining communities, SPRiNG can also help facilitate community safety partnerships that improve coordination between police, local authorities, and these informal groups. This can help reduce abuses, strengthen accountability, and ensure that informal actors operate in ways that complement, rather than undermine, formal policing structures.

Link demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) interventions to the mining sector

- Mining can serve as a pull factor for bandits and other armed actors to lay down arms, as many may see it as a viable and stable source of income. SPRiNG can work with State authorities and community leaders to channel ex-combatants into safer, more regulated forms of ASM, paired with training in basic responsible mining practices.
- This reduces incentives for armed activity, supports economic reintegration, and helps stabilise mining areas. Reintegration must be coordinated with broader efforts to professionalise ASM and reduce exploitative or coercive labour arrangements.

Integrate mining indicators into local early-warning systems

- Local early-warning systems reportedly insufficiently track mining dynamics, even though tensions often build long before violence occurs. SPRiNG can help communities include mining-specific triggers, such as contested land allocations, new actors entering a site, or abrupt security deployments, and train traditional leaders, cooperative leaders, and women's groups to flag concerns quickly.
- Linking these alerts to State mechanisms allows mediators to intervene before disputes harden. This shifts responses from reactive crisis management to proactive conflict prevention.
- Participatory mapping exercises can be expanded to help communities identify conflict-prone sites, overlapping land claims and areas where pressures are building, and use this information to guide dialogue and local decision-making.

Increase advocacy and awareness campaigns within ASM communities

- SPRiNG could support a set of coordinated awareness campaigns, ideally led by the Ministry of Solid Mineral Development (ASM Department) with State governments. One could focus on informing miners both about health and safety risks, environmental hazards, and existing government programmes they can access, as well as rights and accountability mechanisms so host communities, miners, and marginalised groups can better engage with policymakers.
- An awareness campaign could focus on promoting community-based sensitisation on the rising number of out-of-school children, leaving education for mining, and the long-term risks this poses for community stability and inter-generational wellbeing.
- SPRiNG could facilitate grass-roots campaigns, through community associations, traditional leaders, and women's groups, on the dangers of drug use in mining camps, which has been linked to violence and social breakdown.
- Crosscutting: Ensure women are specifically targeted in these campaigns, acknowledging their exposure to substance abuse and harassment, and offering safe pathways for support and information.

Advocacy for Socio-economic Development Interventions

Socio-economic interventions matter because insecurity around mining is closely tied to limited and unstable livelihoods and dependence on informal and exploitative actors. When people lack stable incomes, access to fair markets, or the means to improve their operations, they are more easily drawn into exploitative arrangements that fuel tension and, in some areas, strengthen armed or criminal networks. Improving the economic resilience of mining communities helps reduce these pressures.

Advocate and collaborate for ASM professionalisation and continuous improvement support

- Professionalisation means building miners' technical, organisational, and commercial capacity, through safer methods, training, access to formal finance, and more secure land tenure, while recognising that miners may not operate fully formally at the outset but can progressively improve their practices over time.
- A continuous improvement approach to professionalisation focuses on long-term wellbeing: better working conditions, reduced environmental harm, stronger gender inclusion, and breaking cycles of poverty and marginalisation. It strengthens links to local economies and avoids pushing miners prematurely into rigid legal frameworks that are not commercially viable. It also allows miners to sell into more responsible (and therefore often more reliable) markets, based on their commitment to improvement of standards.
- Experiences from a wide range of countries that host significant ASM operations, including in conflict and high-risk settings (e.g., Colombia, Burkina Faso, the DRC, Mozambique, Philippines etc.) show that when support is practical and phased, miners are able to adopt better practices and see the benefits so are incentivised to do so.

- For SPRiNG, advocating with policymakers to support ASM professionalisation can directly address several drivers of fragility. Access to formal finance (e.g., through mobile banking and microcredit agencies) and business training reduces dependence on exploitative dealers; safer processing and basic environmental management lower community grievances; clearer organisation around sites helps prevent disputes; and stronger local economic benefits reduce incentives for youth to collaborate with armed actors.
- Any professionalisation programme requires beginning with detailed supply chain mapping to understand who holds power (e.g., investors, traders, licence holders, security actors) and to ensure they are involved in programme design and implementation. Excluding them risks retaliation against miners who participate or the programme itself). There is also merit in identifying existing ASM cooperatives in the region that would benefit from targeted support. SPRiNG's focus on evidence-based policymaking presents an opportunity for the programme to support policymakers in gathering the necessary data to design effective interventions.
- SPRiNG could also explore collaboration or learning linkages with the PAGMI programme, where relevant, while recognising its limitations to date.
- SPRiNG could also advocate for a more suitable legal and regulatory framework for ASM formalisation. Current frameworks reportedly do not offer realistic pathways for artisanal miners to obtain legal status, contributing to widespread informality and associated issues. Supporting policymakers to review licensing thresholds, reduce administrative barriers, and create phased or tiered formalisation models would help align regulation with on-the-ground realities and reduce the space in which exploitative actors operate.

Advocate for greater access to formal finance for ASM operators

- Most miners rely on informal financiers for cash to open pits, buy equipment, or afford their living costs. These arrangements lock miners into exploitative pre-financing cycles that deepen indebtedness and economic vulnerability and strengthen the influence of malign actors (sometimes including armed groups).
- SPRiNG could support policymakers in exploring whether reputable financial institutions with rural presence are willing and able to design low-barrier financial products for ASM cooperatives or other organised groups. This would require careful scoping: many banks may lack the risk appetite, due diligence capacity, or understanding of ASM dynamics.
- Lessons from the DRC, where banks have begun piloting tailored ASM loan products, show that responsible finance can reduce reliance on predatory intermediaries and create space for professionalisation.
- Any exploration would need to proceed slowly, with substantial consultation with miners, cooperatives, and local leaders to ensure products match real needs and do not expose banks or miners to unintended risks. This is likely a medium- to long-term option and would require partnership with an organisation experienced in ASM financial models.

Explore realistic and demand-driven alternative livelihood support

- Alternative livelihood programmes in ASM areas across the world often fail because they overlook a basic reality: few sectors offer the earning potential or flexibility of artisanal (especially gold) mining, and agriculture becomes even less viable where land is degraded or insecure.
- SPRiNG could therefore explore an alternative livelihoods programme, not as substitutes for mining, but as complementary to ASM professionalisation: targeted, realistic, and tailored to those who genuinely want to diversify.
- Opportunities could include i) rehabilitation-based livelihoods, such as reforesting exhausted pits with fruit trees or community-managed agroforestry that provide medium-term income while restoring land, ii) support service-sector and small-enterprise development around mining, offering vocational training and start-up assistance for trades already in demand as well as targeted entrepreneurship support for women and youth through tailored training and small grants.
- Any intervention must be realistic, demand-driven, and grounded in local economic conditions, rather than assuming communities will leave mining altogether.

Gender and Social Norms Interventions

Mining areas across the region face deeply embedded gender and social norms that shape who has voice, who faces what kind of risk, and how men and women navigate power. These norms influence safety, cohesion, and vulnerability in ways that directly affect fragility.

Reduce SGBV risks and strengthen women's collective agency

- Evidence across ASM communities points to heightened risks of SGBV. Women and girls frequently lack meaningful participation in decisions that affect their work or safety. This creates conditions in which exploitation can occur quietly, without clear avenues for support or accountability.

- A practical entry point for SPRiNG is a community-based programme focused on sensitisation and gender inclusion. This should combine awareness-raising with men and boys, targeted SGBV-prevention training, and direct support for women to organise, including helping them form or strengthen women's groups and build leadership skills in cooperative structures.
- Strong partnerships with Nigerian women's organisations, both national actors such as Women in Mining Nigeria and credible local groups in mining communities, are important to ensure interventions are trusted and anchored in local realities.

Address harmful masculine norms

- In many mining areas, young men are drawn into camp cultures shaped by risk-taking, drug and alcohol use, hyper-masculinity centred on physical dominance, transactional sex, and the rapid circulation of cash. These environments promote a narrow and harmful idea of manhood; one that rewards aggression and taking risks with no safety net. The presence of small arms around some sites further normalises intimidation and makes everyday disputes more dangerous.
- This combination puts young men at risk, increases insecurity for others, and creates social conditions that armed groups can easily exploit. It also creates a social environment in which exploitation of women and girls becomes normalised.
- SPRiNG could support sensitisation and behaviour-change programmes that work directly with boys and young men through trusted community actors. Similar programming has been implemented in other contexts, such as a UK-supported programme in Ghana. This should focus on reshaping norms around masculinity, violence, and relationships, using practical discussions, peer mentoring, and role models from within mining communities.
- Interventions should be paired with targeted support, such as skills training, small business support, or roles in safer, more organised mining, to offer young men credible pathways that do not rely on violence or exploitation.

Mining Sector Governance Interventions

These interventions will only reach their full potential with broader reforms to Nigeria's regulatory framework for mining, particularly the barriers that make it difficult for ASM operators to operate formally. A clearer, more realistic ASM regulatory framework that is underpinned by a long-term, development-focused vision for ASM sector governance, and stronger oversight, transparency, and coordination are essential to reduce reliance on militarised enforcement and corruption risks, clarify roles and responsibilities across government levels, and give miners predictable, formal pathways, that reduce incentives to engage with coercive actors and help de-escalate tensions.

- Co-design a national ASM vision and regulatory roadmap. Develop a realistic framework that aligns Federal-State-LGA roles, offers viable formal pathways for artisanal miners, reduces criminalisation and exclusion of miners, and closes governance gaps that allow coercive actors and corrupt networks to influence the sector.
- Review and realign Federal-State mining laws to clarify mandates and revenue flows. Address legal misalignments that undermine transparency and give States and LGAs limited incentive and authority to manage ASM.

Undertake targeted security sector reforms to reduce militarised responses to ASM. Shift security forces from punitive crackdowns on informal mine sites to proportionate engagement with miners, helping rebuild trust, reduce coercive actor influence, and support transitions into formal systems when paired with viable legal pathways.

Knowledge-building

Strengthening evidence is essential for designing interventions that are conflict-sensitive, politically and economically realistic, and targeted to the specific dynamics of each State, LGA and mineral supply chain. Mining economies are highly localised, politically complex, and fast-changing; without deeper, site-specific analysis, programming risks missing key actors, incentives, or risks. Targeted research would help SPRiNG and partners tailor interventions to real conditions rather than assumptions. Priority areas for further research could include:

Better understand the legal and practical challenges of current governance frameworks

Analyse gaps and contradictions across Federal, State, and local legislation to support harmonisation efforts and advocate for conflict-sensitive, evidence-based regulatory reforms. This should include assessing how institutional mandates, capacity constraints at lower government levels, and enforcement practices shape informality and insecurity. The aim would be to identify which regulatory reforms, whether by Federal, State or local authorities, would most effectively reduce conflict risks. Findings could inform UK government engagement and provide evidence-based recommendations to institutions, including relevant Nigerian ministries.

Deepen analysis of cross-border dynamics affecting mining

Investigate how cross-border movement of people, minerals, arms and other contrabands, and traders shapes mining economies in border-adjacent States.

Map supply chains and actor incentives in priority LGAs

Conduct detailed mapping of mineral routes, trader networks, financiers, transport hubs, and points where armed groups or coercive actors extract value. This should distinguish dynamics across different minerals, recognising that, e.g., gold, tin, lithium, and limestone have different markets and vulnerabilities.

Assess community development and CSR practices as conflict-mitigation tools

Review the quality, effectiveness, and community perceptions of existing CSR and Community Development Agreement practices. Identify what enables or undermines community benefits and how improved, participatory approaches could strengthen acceptance of mining operations and support stability.

Deepen analysis of banditry influence

Build on existing work by conducting focused studies on specific sites where armed actors tax, control, or otherwise influence ASM. Include assessments of how mineral revenues intersect with other illicit economies (arms, smuggling, trafficking) to identify pressure points for disruption. Pay specific attention also to forced labour risks in this context.

Understand gendered dynamics more fully

Investigate how risks, roles, and opportunities vary for women, girls, and men along the supply chain.

Analyse local governance and legitimacy

Examine which institutions (e.g., traditional leaders, cooperatives, vigilantes, local officials) actually set and enforce rules at site level, and how they differ across LGAs. This is key for identifying viable partners and anticipating political resistance.

Map civil society entry points

Identify credible CSOs, women's groups, youth organisations, religious actors, and other community structures that could anchor programming in specific mining communities

Annex A Research methodology

This section is partially based on the final inception report for this study, as prepared by Levin Sources, drawing on the State-specific inception reports as prepared by the Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies (CECOMPS) at the University of Jos (Plateau and Kaduna), and the Centre for Peace and Development Studies (CPDS) (Benue). The research methodology was updated where needed after field research completed.

Research approach and scope

This study took a qualitative, participatory approach that moved beyond simplistic narratives about mining and violence. ASM was examined not only as an economic activity but also as a socio-political phenomenon embedded in histories of marginalisation, ethnic and religious tensions, limited rural livelihood opportunities, and weak formal authority capacity. This perspective recognises that violence is not incidental to mining but often arises from how the sector is organised and governed.

The study focused on LGAs in Benue, Plateau, and Kaduna States, which were selected for their prominence of mining and its intersections with insecurity. LGAs were selected gradually, on the basis of feedback from stakeholders on the localities of (growing) mining activities and related fragility and / or violence. Attention was also given to LGAs where rapid ASM was witnessed, with little negative influence on tension and violence, to assess what factors contributed to such stable and peaceful mining developments to inform conflict prevention and mitigation strategies.

Table 5: Selected LGAs for field research.

State	LGA	Town / village / community
Benue	Gboko	Mbayion
	Oju	Oho-Oboru
	Kwande	Agenogo and Nyihemba
	Logo	Ayilamo, Anyiin and Uja
Kaduna	Jema'a	Godogodo, Zangkang, Dangoma, Nisama, Angwan Amere-Kagoma, Bakin Kogi, Kaninikong, Farin Rawa
	Sanga	Gwantu, Nandu, Gini
	Giwa	Tudun Kudu, Biye, Panhauya, Kaya Idasu
	Kachia	Kachia town, Lagga, Mai Ido Kufai, Mai Gora village
	Birnin Gwari	Kuyello, Rima, Bugai, Gujeni, Kwaga, Damari, Gayam, Udawa, Birnin Gwari town, Kuriga
Plateau	Riyom	Ganawuri, Danwal, Jol, Fass, Vwang
	Bassa	Irigwe-Rukuba
	Barkin Ladi	Fan, Kewa-Bisichi; Ropp (shares boundaries with Bokkos LGA), Heipang, Hurum
	Bokkos	Butura Kampani (shares boundaries with Barkin Ladi LGA), Kuba, Daffo, Maiyanga, Manguna

Throughout the study, we applied gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) and conflict-sensitivity principles. This meant ensuring diverse voices were represented, paying attention to the distinct risks faced by women, youth, and other marginalised groups, and avoiding research approaches that could unintentionally exacerbate tensions or harm participants. Our engagement with stakeholders was neutral and respectful, including with individuals or groups involved in informal activities. Neutrality is critical: the goal was not to label miners as “illegal” or “criminal,” but to understand the structural conditions that lead to informality and how these may increase vulnerability to coercion or exploitation. This enabled a more accurate and balanced understanding of the mining-insecurity nexus and helped identify opportunities for peacebuilding that respect the rights and dignity of all actors.

Research objectives

The research objectives of this study, as per the Terms of Reference,²⁰³ were:

“Examine the relationship between mining activities and violence in North-Central and North-West Nigeria”

1. Examine the correlation between locations of mining activities and violence.
2. Examine the diverse mining activities and their specific relationships with violence.

3. Investigate the interests, motivations and roles of different actors and institutions, including gender and other identity groups, in the mining value chain and their contributions to instigating or perpetuating violence and insecurity.
4. Examine the governance structures and regulatory frameworks for mining activities and how the modes and gaps in these governance and regulatory frameworks contribute to violence and insecurity.
5. Conduct a vulnerability and impact analysis on mining and violence in target locations, highlighting the vulnerable and impacted groups and the implications for stability and resilience.
6. Undertake a comparative analysis of mining activities in similar contexts, highlighting lessons learned in governance and regulatory frameworks for achieving development and stability.
7. Propose policy and practice recommendations for sustainable mining, peace and resilience.

Data collection

Our research combined primary and secondary data sources (such as academic literature, policy documents, and previous assessments, including existing political economy and conflict assessments delivered as part of the SPRING programme). Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with artisanal miners, host community members, traditional leaders, civil society organisations, security actors, government officials, and mineral supply chain participants, as well as FGDs with artisanal miners and host communities and field observations. A total of 15-17 KIIs and 4-5 FGDs were conducted in each State.

Stakeholder identification followed a snowball sampling approach, starting with known actors (using the existing networks of CECOMPS and CPDS) such as government officials, traditional leaders, community representatives, artisanal miners, CSOs, and supply chain participants. Each interview was used to identify additional relevant stakeholders. This method helped surface both formal and informal actors, including those who may otherwise have been overlooked in sampling.

To ensure gender-responsiveness, KIIs and FGDs intentionally included diverse women participants (incl. women of different ages, abilities, means etc.), with separate FGDs organised where culturally appropriate to encourage open participation. Conflict sensitivity was maintained by carefully selecting neutral venues for discussions and avoiding questions that could inflame tensions or put participants at risk.

Research limitations

The following research limitations applied:

- Limited availability of reliable data. There is a general lack of formal documentation on the scale of ASM activities in the three States, the volumes and values of mineral production, and the extent of conflict actors' involvement along mineral supply chains. Much of the sector operates informally, and official statistics are often incomplete or inconsistent. To mitigate this, the research drew on KIIs at Federal, State, and community levels and triangulated insights from multiple sources wherever possible.
- Rapidly evolving context. Both security dynamics and mining activities in the study areas are highly fluid, with sites opening and closing seasonally and control over mining areas shifting between actors. Findings therefore reflect the situation at the time of data collection and may require periodic updating to remain relevant for programming.
- Reluctance to share sensitive information. Some respondents were hesitant to discuss financial transactions, illicit mining operations, or company practices due to concerns about confidentiality or potential repercussions. This constrained the depth of information obtained on commercial dynamics and sensitive governance issues.
- Challenges in triangulation and validation. Given the opacity of ASM value chains and the sensitivities around conflict financing, some data, particularly on illicit mineral flows, may be anecdotal or based on perceptions. The research team sought to validate findings through diverse stakeholder perspectives but recognises that some dynamics may remain only partially documented.
- Limited gender-disaggregated data. Available secondary sources and many stakeholder interviews tend to be gender-blind, limiting the ability to fully assess the differentiated roles of men and women in ASM and related conflict economies. Efforts were made to capture gender-specific insights during fieldwork, but the absence of comprehensive disaggregated data limited definitive conclusions about gendered impacts.
- Access constraints and security risks. Insecurity in some LGAs restricted access to certain sites and stakeholders, potentially leading to gaps in primary data. Where direct access was not feasible, the study relied on remote interviews and / or secondary data to fill information gaps.

Ethical guidelines

To ensure that this research remains of the highest quality, and the research practices aligns with the values on excellence and integrity of the SPRING programme as well as of the respective consortium partners, the following ethical guidelines were upheld:

- Maintain high standards of credible research. The research team upheld the highest professional and academic standards, ensuring findings are objective, nuanced, and grounded in evidence. This included taking reasonable steps to verify information from multiple sources before drawing conclusions.
- Avoid plagiarism and ensure originality. All written outputs are the original work of the research team or appropriately referenced when drawing on external sources, in line with international research ethics.
- Ensure informed consent. Participants were fully briefed on the purpose of the study, how their contributions will be used, and their right to withdraw at any time before being interviewed or participating in FGDs. Written consent was obtained before each interview commenced. The research was disseminated to all engaged stakeholders and relevant institutions who will benefit from using the recommendations for programming or policymaking.
- Guarantee confidentiality and anonymity. Data was documented and reported in a way that protects participants' identities, particularly when sensitive information could put them at risk if disclosed.
- Do no harm. Special care was taken when engaging respondents in volatile or conflict-affected areas, and when engaging marginalised individuals, including avoiding questions that could endanger participants or inflame local tensions.
- Respect the dignity and welfare of all participants. All stakeholders, including those involved in informal or illicit activities, were treated as rights-holders. The research was conducted in a way that respects human dignity and minimises potential stigma or reprisals.

Annex B Executive Order 001, 2023

Office of the Executive Governor²⁰⁴

EXECUTIVE ORDER 001, 2023 FOR THE PROTECTION OF MINING COMMUNITIES AGAINST INSECURITY AND EXPLOITATION

Pursuant to Section 5 (2) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (As Amended) His Excellency the Executive Governor of Plateau State of Nigeria hereby makes the following Executive Order:

WHEREAS the Government of Plateau State considers it necessary to ensure security, welfare, good governance, safety and peaceful co-existence of all mining communities in the State;

AND WHEREAS the Government of Plateau State recognizes the need for all communities endowed with mineral resources in the State to be protected, and in view of the activities of undocumented aliens mostly with atavistic propensities and capacity for mischief and criminality; and in certain cases inducing intractable tension, disputes, restiveness and disagreements between communities and individuals leading to breakdown of law and order, and the need to stop the infiltration of unidentifiable entities and individuals:

NOW THEREFORE, PURSUANT TO THE AUTHORITY VESTED IN ME BY SECTION 5(2) OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA, 1999 (AS AMENDED) AND THE NIGERIAN MINERALS AND MINING ACT AND MY INHERENT POWERS AS GOVERNOR OF PLATEAU STATE OF NIGERIA, DO HEREBY ORDER as follows:

1. COMMUNITY CONSENTS AND DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENTS TO BE VETTED AND CERTIFIED BY THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

By this Order, all Community Consents and Development Agreements made pursuant to Section 116 of the Minerals and Mining Act, 2007 and prior to signing by authenticated Community Heads shall be forwarded to the Ministry of Justice by the Ministry in charge of Environment and Natural Resources in the State to be vetted and certified by the Office of the Attorney General of Plateau State. This is to avoid multiple issuance of Community Consents and Development Agreements to Mining entities and ensure that the community development commitments made therein are not in conflict with the overall master plan of the State. To this end, all Mining Companies along with the Host Communities are to submit all previously signed Community Agreements within 30 days of coming into effect of this Order to the Ministry of Justice through the Ministry in charge of Environment and Natural Resources of the State for vetting and certification.

2. MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT IN COLLABORATION WITH THE SECURITY AGENCIES TO VERIFY STATUS OF ENTITIES AND MINERS WITH LEASE AND LICENSE BEFORE SETTLEMENT IN COMMUNITIES

All mining entities arriving the State with authority of the Federal Government to carry out mining in the State must undergo checks by the Ministry responsible for Environment and Mining and other security agencies in the State to verify their legal status, citizenship and background before settlement in the communities.

3. MINISTRY IN CHARGE OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES AND CLIMATE CHANGE TO PROFILE ALL MINING ENTITIES

Plateau State Ministry in charge of Environment, Natural Resources and Climate Change is hereby mandated to register and profile all Mining entities arriving and doing business in the State for the purposes of documentation and identification of their operational status for peace and security.

4. STATE REVENUES GENERATION FROM MINING SECTOR

The Plateau State Internal Revenue Services in conjunction with Ministry in charge of Environment and Natural Resources is hereby mandated to collect all relevant state-based taxes, levies, fees, charges, etc related to all Mining entities doing business in the State. Such revenues or accruals shall be channelled to the Central Billing System domiciled with Plateau State Internal Revenue Service.

5. REVOCATION AND RESTRICTION ON CERTIFICATES AND RIGHTS OF OCCUPANCY

Communities are hereby restricted from bequeathing Rights of Occupancy of lands to entities intending to carry out mining activities. All holders of mining lease or license are restricted to the powers conferred on them by the Minerals and Mining Act, 2007 and the Land Use Act, 1978 and to ensure restoration and reparation of the integrity of the land and environment as required by the Acts.

6. JOS METROPOLITAN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE MINISTRY IN CHARGE OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TO APPROVE ALL DEVELOPMENTS

All physical developments of structures by Mining entities must be approved by the Regulatory Authority conjunction with Ministry in charge of Environment and Natural Resources.

7. COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT

The Ministry of Justice, Ministry in charge of Environment and Natural Resources and Climate Change, Plateau State Internal Revenue Services, Local Government Councils, Traditional institutions, Security Agencies are mandated to ensure compliance with this Executive Order and initiate investigation and prosecution of any defaulter in accordance with the Law.

8. THE GOVERNOR'S RESULTS DELIVERY UNIT, (PMRDO) TO RECEIVE COMPLAINTS OF INEFFICIENCY OF GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

By this Order, the Governor's Results Delivery Unit (PMRDO) must monitor and report inefficiency and lack of transparency in or by Government Agencies responsible under this Order and in line with the Plateau State Ease of Doing Business Environment policy.

9. EFFECTIVE DATE OF ORDER

This Executive Order takes effect immediately.

Dated this 2nd day of January, 2024

BARR CALEB MANASSEH MUTFWANG, Governor, Plateau State

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