

FROM GOLD TO GUNS: RESOURCE EXCLUSION, ECONOMIC SABOTAGE, AND THE CRISIS OF GOVERNANCE IN TARABA STATE'S MINING SECTOR

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Abstract

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) has expanded rapidly across Nigeria's north-eastern Taraba State, creating a paradox of wealth extraction and human insecurity. Drawing on interviews with community leaders, state officials, and field observations in Bali, Gashaka, and Sardauna Local Government Areas (LGAs), this article examines how resource exclusion, economic sabotage, and weak regulatory capacity generate a multidimensional governance crisis. Anchored on Fragility Theory, this study explains how weak institutional capacity, poor governance, and the erosion of state legitimacy create conditions in which informal mining networks thrive. Drawing on interviews with community leaders, government officials, and field observations from Bali, Gashaka, and Sardauna LGAs. The findings reveal that unregulated mining fuels environmental degradation, undermines state revenue, empowers informal cartels and armed groups, and marginalizes host communities. The study further demonstrates that without inclusive governance structures, effective regulatory frameworks, and environmental safeguards, mineral wealth becomes a driver of instability rather than development. In response, the study recommends the establishment of a transparent artisanal mining regulatory system, mandatory environmental assessments and land rehabilitation plans, and the adoption of participatory community-based governance models such as Community Development Agreements to ensure equitable benefit-sharing, strengthen state authority, and reduce the conditions that enable illegal mining and insecurity to persist.

Keywords: *Artisanal Gold Mining; Gold to Guns, Crisis of Governance, Resource exclusion*

Introduction

Natural resource endowments are often viewed as assets for development, prosperity, and national transformation. Yet, across the globe, they have frequently been sources of exclusion, exploitation, and violent conflict, particularly when the benefits of extraction are unevenly distributed, governance structures are weak, and communities are marginalized from the wealth generated beneath their lands. This paradox, commonly called the "resource curse," has been observed in mineral-rich regions across the Global South (Ross, 2012). In parts of Latin America, Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, unregulated artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) has expanded rapidly, filling governance voids and often becoming entangled with illicit networks, environmental degradation, and social unrest (Hilson, 2002; Verbrugge & Geenen, 2020). These dynamics are both developmental and deeply political, raising urgent questions about ownership, justice, and the state's role in resource governance.

Regionally, West Africa has become a focal point in the unfolding crisis between resource abundance and human insecurity. Countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, and the Democratic Republic of Congo have seen artisanal mining sectors co-opted by armed groups, criminal cartels, and terrorist networks, who fund their operations through the control and taxation of gold sites (International Crisis Group ICG, 2019; Lacher, 2020). These non-state actors exploit weak regulatory systems, porous borders, and fragile state capacity, transforming what should

be an economic lifeline into a driver of insecurity, environmental collapse, and human rights violations. The rise of “conflict gold” in these zones underscores how unregulated extraction not only bypasses state institutions but also actively erodes them, replacing formal governance with violent alternatives Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), published in 2016.

In Nigeria, this pattern has found a particularly striking parallel in the oil-rich Niger Delta, where decades of exclusion from the benefits of crude oil exploitation, environmental devastation, and systematic neglect have given rise to militancy and other forms of criminality, ranging from militant insurgencies, oil theft, piracy, and widespread kidnapping (Watts, 2004; Obi, 2009). Despite living amidst some of the most valuable energy resources on the continent, local populations found themselves impoverished, displaced, and politically sidelined. This exclusionary dynamic catalyzed into violent contestation over resource control, thereby weakening the authority of the Nigerian state in the region and spawning a security-industrial complex situations that still lingers today (Okonta & Douglas, 2003; Omeje, 2006). The Niger Delta experience has become a cautionary tale of what happens when natural resource governance fails to integrate justice, equity, and local participation.

Today, a similar pattern is unfolding in Nigeria’s northeast, particularly in Taraba State, where artisanal gold mining is growing rapidly but chaotically. In mineral-rich local government areas such as Bali, Gashaka, and Sardauna, communities have become host to a booming but largely illegal gold mining economy dominated by informal networks, foreign actors, and armed groups (Ahmed et al., 2021; NEITI, 2021). The state is effectively sidelined, unable to tax, regulate, or provide security in these area. Instead, what should be a driver of local development has become a site of resource plunder, violent competition, and economic sabotage. Local communities are systematically excluded from the wealth extracted from their lands, while they bear the full cost in terms of environmental destruction, youth criminality, social dislocation, and increasing insecurity (Taraba State Government, 2023).

Armed actors ranging from bandits to rogue vigilante groups have begun to dominate mining sites, mirroring the Niger Delta’s descent into armed resistance and resource nationalism. Taraba State now finds itself at the intersection of opportunity and crisis. On one hand, its mineral resources could offer a pathway toward inclusive development and fiscal autonomy. On the other hand, the unchecked expansion of artisanal mining has created conditions ripe for conflict, criminality, and governance failure (Ali & Yakubu, 2022). The exclusion of host communities from decision-making and benefit-sharing has triggered local tensions and enabled the rise of informal power structures that operate outside the law. The absence of a coherent regulatory and environmental framework has allowed open-pit mining, deforestation, and water pollution to go unchecked, violating the Environmental Impact Assessment Act (2007, as amended), and turning once-fertile lands into barren wastelands (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2007).

This paper, therefore, interrogates how the convergence of resource exclusion, economic sabotage, and weak governance is driving a deepening crisis in Taraba State’s mining sector. Drawing from global and national precedents especially the lessons from the Niger Delta, this

paper critically examines how artisanal gold mining, in the absence of state control and community inclusion, is fueling a dangerous transition from gold to guns.

Objectives of The Study

- i. To assess the economic implications of unregulated artisanal gold mining activities on revenue generation and local development in Taraba State.
- ii. To evaluate the extent of environmental degradation caused by artisanal mining in violation of the Environmental Impact Assessment Act (2007, as amended), with specific focus on Bali, Sardauna, and Gashaka LGAs.
- iii. To investigate the socio-political consequences of resource exclusion on host communities.

Literature Review

Resource Exclusion

Resource exclusion has remained a persistent feature of natural resource governance in Nigeria, particularly in resource-rich communities where extraction occurs without corresponding social, economic, or infrastructural benefits to host populations. Recent works, particularly the works of Akinola and Adesopo (2021) and Ikelegbe and Umukoro (2022), conceptualizes resource exclusion as a structural process in which host communities are denied meaningful access to decision-making, ownership, and benefit-sharing from natural resources extracted from their localities, even as they disproportionately suffer environmental degradation and social dislocation. Scholars argue that Nigeria's centralized resource governance framework, reinforced by constitutional provisions such as the Land Use Act and the Petroleum Act, has entrenched exclusion by vesting ownership and control of resources in the federal government, thereby weakening community rights and participation (Akinola & Adesopo, 2021; Bulama & Dike, 2025).

Studies by Akinola and Adesopo (2021) on natural resource governance and Bulama and Dike (2025) on benefit distribution in extractive regions demonstrate that Nigeria's centralized and exclusionary resource system has generated significant socio-economic disparities between host communities and non-producing regions that benefit indirectly from national resource revenues. In the Niger Delta, for instance, literature on the oil boom illustrates how oil-producing communities were excluded from the enormous revenues generated from crude oil extraction, while environmental degradation, loss of livelihoods, and social dislocation were concentrated locally. Recent analyses show that despite decades of oil production, host communities continue to experience poverty, unemployment, and infrastructural neglect, whereas oil revenues financed national development projects largely outside the region (Ikelegbe & Umukoro, 2022; Okolie & Eze, 2023). This pattern has become a reference point in Nigerian scholarship for understanding resource exclusion across other extractive sectors.

Comparative studies further reveal that similar exclusionary dynamics are emerging in Nigeria's solid minerals sector, particularly in artisanal and small-scale mining communities. Scholars note that gold-producing areas in northern Nigeria increasingly mirror the Niger Delta experience, where host communities are excluded from decision-making and revenue benefits, while facing land dispossession, environmental pollution, and insecurity (Hilson & Maconachie, 2021; Lawal & Aliyu, 2024). These studies argue that the absence of effective

benefit-sharing mechanisms and community participation frameworks reproduces a pattern of internal resource colonialism, where wealth is extracted from peripheral regions to sustain development elsewhere.

Economic Sabotage

Recent scholarship conceptualizes economic sabotage as deliberate or structurally enabled activities that undermine state revenue generation, disrupt productive economic sectors, and weaken institutional capacity for development (Obi & Rustad, 2021; Ikelegbe, 2022). Within the Nigerian context, scholars argue that economic sabotage extends beyond overt acts such as pipeline vandalism to include systemic practices that deprive the state and host communities of legitimate economic benefits from natural resource extraction. These practices are often embedded within weak governance frameworks, regulatory failures, and exclusionary political economies that allow illicit actors to exploit national resources with minimal accountability (Akinola & Adesopo, 2021).

While early literature focused primarily on the oil sector, recent studies increasingly link economic sabotage to the solid minerals and mining sector, particularly through illegal and unregulated mining activities. Hilson and Maconachie (2021) argue that widespread illegal mining in sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, constitutes a form of economic sabotage because it bypasses formal regulatory systems, undermines revenue mobilization, and weakens state authority over strategic resources. Their analysis demonstrates that unregulated mineral extraction deprives governments of royalties and taxes while simultaneously generating environmental degradation and social instability in host communities.

Empirical studies conducted in Nigeria reinforce this argument. Lawal and Aliyu (2024), in their study of artisanal gold mining in northern Nigeria, demonstrate that illegal mining networks systematically siphon mineral wealth out of the formal economy through smuggling and informal trade routes. They show that these practices significantly reduce government revenue, distort local economies, and contribute to rural insecurity, thereby fitting squarely within scholarly definitions of economic sabotage. Similarly, Abubakar, Mohammed, and Sadiq (2023) find that the persistence of illegal mining reflects weak enforcement of mining regulations and corruption within state institutions, enabling economic losses that undermine Nigeria's mineral-led development agenda.

Scholars further argue that economic sabotage in the mining sector is closely linked to resource exclusion and community marginalization. Studies by Hilson, Sauerwein, and Owen (2022) show that host communities often receive little or no benefit from mining activities occurring within their localities, even as environmental degradation, land dispossession, and livelihood disruption intensify. This exclusion creates conditions in which illegal mining becomes both a survival strategy and a form of resistance, while simultaneously functioning as economic sabotage by diverting mineral wealth away from formal channels of national development.

Comparative analyses between Nigeria's mining sector and the oil-producing Niger Delta further illuminate these dynamics. Ikelegbe and Umukoro (2022) argue that the exclusion of host communities from resource benefits in the oil sector set a precedent for similar governance failures in solid mineral regions. Their comparative political-economy analysis suggests that where communities are marginalized and benefit-sharing mechanisms are weak, illegal

extraction and economic sabotage flourish. This pattern, they contend, reflects a broader crisis of extractive governance rather than sector-specific anomalies.

Crisis for Governance in the Nigeria Mining Sector

The governance of Nigeria's mining sector has increasingly become the subject of critical scholarly and policy examination, revealing a multidimensional crisis characterized by regulatory weaknesses, institutional fragmentation, corruption, and exclusionary practices. Magaji, Shehu, Barau, and Musa (2025) conceptualize the governance crisis in Nigeria's mining sector as a systemic failure in the legal, institutional, and regulatory frameworks responsible for overseeing mineral resource management, enforcement of standards, and equitable benefit-sharing. Magaji et al. (2025) emphasize that the existing Minerals and Mining Act is too broad and inadequately enforced, resulting in legislative gaps that allow unregulated mining activities, especially in gold and other solid mineral sectors, to persist. Such gaps contrast with jurisdictions possessing more specific and enforceable mining regulations, underscoring how legislative inadequacies contribute to governance failure in Nigeria's mining regime.

Empirical studies corroborate these governance weaknesses by demonstrating their direct impact on sectoral dysfunction and socioeconomic costs. Okoli, Chukwuma, and Uhembe (2025) argue that the failure of governance structures has led to unregulated and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources through artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM), thereby posing significant threats to environmental sustainability, economic stability, and human security. Their stakeholder analysis highlights the necessity of multi-stakeholder engagement and strengthened governance systems to transform mining into a vector of development rather than insecurity.

Corruption and regulatory failure emerge as central factors exacerbating the crisis. Experts point to regulatory negligence and corruption as key contributors transforming what should be a pillar of economic diversification into a national crisis. The ineffectiveness of oversight bodies, such as the Mining Cadastre Office, has intensified conflict and undermined sector legitimacy (Independent Newspaper Nigeria, 2025). These institutional failures have facilitated exploitation by foreign investors and powerful local actors, leaving communities and the state with minimal returns and increased insecurity.

A recurrent theme in the literature is the problem of centralization and institutional fragmentation. Since mining is on Nigeria's exclusive legislative list, state and local governments are largely excluded from regulating mining activities proximate to host communities, thereby creating a regulatory vacuum exploited by illegal miners and criminal networks. This centralized governance model limits accountability and responsiveness, aggravating environmental degradation, revenue loss, and social unrest (Cheetahs Policy Institute, 2024).

The interplay between governance deficits and insecurity is evident in regions where illegal mining flourishes in governance vacuums. Although some literature predates the five-year range, contextual analyses reveal that illegal mining has contributed to rural banditry and conflict in northern Nigeria, indicating how governance failures compound security and development challenges in mining areas (ENACT Africa, 2020).

Environmental and social governance failures further exacerbate the crisis. Weak enforcement of environmental standards permits widespread degradation in mining localities, including deforestation and water pollution, which undermine community wellbeing and trigger localized conflicts. These environmental governance gaps reflect a broader institutional incapacity to enforce laws and protect community rights (SunText Reviews, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the State Fragility Theory, propounded by Robert I. Rotberg (2002), and further developed in his later works (2004, 2010), which explore the dynamics of state failure, weak institutions, and governance breakdown in the developing world. The theory emerged within the context of post-Cold War political transitions in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where numerous states struggled to provide security, welfare, and legitimacy to their citizens. According to Rotberg, a fragile state is one that lacks the institutional capacity, political will, and legitimacy to perform core governance functions particularly the provision of security, protection of property rights, regulation of economic activities, and delivery of basic public goods. The central assumption of the fragility theory is that state weakness is not only institutional but also systemic; it arises when the state loses monopoly over the use of force, fails to regulate resources effectively, and is unable to ensure equitable inclusion in political and economic processes. Consequently, fragility manifests in insecurity, corruption, resource predation, and the emergence of non-state actors that fill governance voids.

The basic assumptions of the theory rest on three interrelated premises. First, that the state is the principal guarantor of security and order, and when it fails to perform this role, alternative power structures such as militias, armed groups, or criminal syndicates emerge. Second, that effective governance depends on institutional capacity and legitimacy; where institutions are weak, unaccountable, or corrupt, governance becomes personalized, selective, and exclusionary. Third, that economic marginalization and social exclusion fuel fragility by eroding public trust and encouraging illicit economies that undermine state authority. In fragile contexts, therefore, natural resources such as gold, diamonds, or oil often become catalysts for conflict and economic sabotage, as rival actors compete for access and control outside state regulation.

Despite its analytical strength, the fragility theory has attracted criticism. One major weakness is its Western-centric orientation. Scholars such as Call (2011) argue that it imposes a Euro-American conception of the state on diverse African political realities, where informal institutions and hybrid governance systems often play stabilizing roles. Another criticism is that the theory tends to overemphasize state failure while underplaying local resilience and community-based mechanisms of order, thereby portraying African states as uniformly weak or collapsing. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, the fragility theory provides a robust explanatory framework for understanding the crisis of governance, insecurity, and economic sabotage associated with artisanal gold mining in Taraba State. Its core assumptions about institutional weakness, governance failure, and exclusionary resource politics align directly with the dynamics observed in the state's mining sector, where unregulated extraction and the proliferation of non-state actors have transformed mineral wealth from a source of development into a driver of insecurity.

The application of the fragility theory to this study is both relevant and illuminating. The first assumption that a state's failure to guarantee security creates opportunities for non-state actors to dominate finds clear expression in Taraba State's artisanal mining enclaves, where illegal miners, foreign nationals, and armed groups operate with near impunity due to the absence of effective policing and regulatory oversight. This situation reflects the state's progressive loss of territorial control over mineral-rich zones such as Dogon Yashi in Bali Local Government Area (LGA), Abuja Leda I and II in the Jamtari Ward of Gashaka LGA, and Mayo Ndaga in Ngoruje Ward of Sardauna LGA. Within these areas, unregulated resource exploitation has become a driver of violence, illicit trade, and economic sabotage. The second assumption that institutional weakness erodes state legitimacy and regulatory capacity is equally evident in the poor coordination among enforcement agencies, the prevalence of corruption within task force operations, and the inconsistent implementation of environmental protection orders. The inability of government institutions to enforce mining regulations or collect taxes from artisanal operators underscores the depth of administrative fragility undermining governance in the sector. The third assumption linking exclusion and economic marginalization to state fragility also aptly applies to Taraba State, where local communities remain alienated from resource governance and deprived of the socio-economic benefits of mining activities. This persistent exclusion fosters resentment, weakens citizens' trust in government, and drives unemployed youths toward illegal mining and banditry as alternative survival strategies.

Practically, the fragility theory fits this study because it situates the "gold-to-guns" transition within a broader framework of governance failure, rather than treating it merely as a criminal or economic problem. It explains why resource wealth in Taraba State, instead of strengthening state capacity, has paradoxically deepened insecurity and institutional decay. The theory helps interpret artisanal mining not only as an economic activity but as a manifestation of state weakness where the absence of effective regulation, equitable participation, and credible enforcement has allowed illicit economies to thrive. By linking resource exclusion, economic sabotage, and insecurity to the structural fragility of governance institutions, the theory provides a coherent analytical lens through which the study can evaluate both the causes and consequences of the mining crisis in Taraba State. Thus, the fragility theory remains a fitting theoretical anchor for this research, offering a nuanced understanding of how weak governance transforms resource endowment into a driver of instability and underdevelopment.

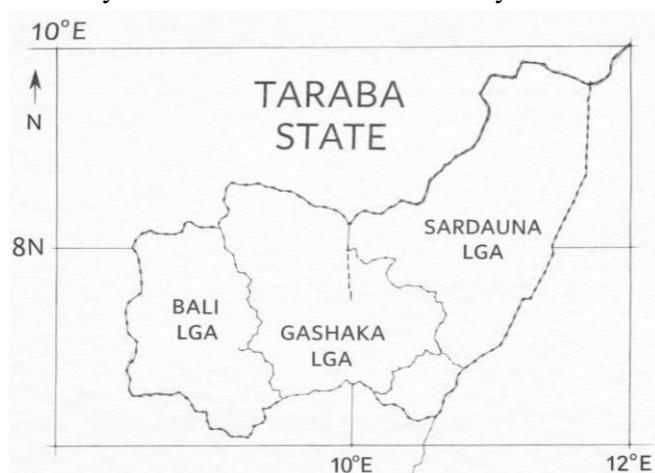
Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both primary and secondary data sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the nexus between gold mining, exclusion, economic sabotage, and governance crises in Taraba State's artisanal mining sector. Primary data for this study were obtained through in-depth interviews conducted with strategically selected key informants. These included a senior officer from the Ministry of Internal Revenue, a senior operative of the State Task Force on Illegal Mining, a community elder from the mining villages, a youth leader, and a local community resident. These participants were purposively chosen based on their direct involvement in, or informed understanding of, artisanal mining activities, local governance processes, and security dynamics within Taraba State. Their insights provided rich, firsthand accounts of the complex and

evolving linkages between unregulated mining, banditry, and government responses. In addition, the study employed direct field observations across artisanal mining sites and in areas identified as hotspots for banditry. These observational visits offered the researcher a grounded appreciation of the environmental, social, and security realities shaping the artisanal mining landscape in Taraba State.

Secondary data was used to complement and contextualize the primary findings. The sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy papers, and conference proceedings on artisanal mining, natural resource conflicts, and state fragility in Nigeria and comparable contexts. Furthermore, official documents such as government reports, security briefings, and publications from NGOs and international organizations were reviewed. These sources offered institutional and policy-level perspectives while also tracing the historical development of artisanal mining governance and related security challenges in Nigeria.

The fieldwork was conducted in three purposively selected Local Government Areas (LGAs): Bali, Gashaka, and Sardauna. These LGAs were chosen due to their significant gold deposits, high levels of exposure to unregulated artisanal mining, and patterns of institutional neglect. They therefore served as critical case study sites for examining the informal extractive economy and the erosion of state authority.



Source: Author, 2025

Data Presentation

Economic Implications of Unregulated Gold Mining Activities on State Revenue Generation and Local Development in Taraba State

Unregulated artisanal gold mining presents profound economic implications for both state revenue generation and local development in Taraba State. In the broader Nigerian context, the solid minerals sector has long been identified as an underperforming contributor to national growth due to weak governance, systemic non-compliance, and illicit operations. Reports indicate that Nigeria loses nearly \$9 billion annually to unregulated mining activities (House of Representatives Committee on Solid Minerals, 2023), while ECOWAS (2022) estimates that up to 91% of potential mining revenue is siphoned away through illegal operations. These losses not only deprive the country of vital revenue but also perpetuate underdevelopment in resource-

rich states such as Taraba. Within this context, the implications of artisanal gold mining in Taraba can be analyzed along two major dimensions: the erosion of state finances and the marginalization of host communities.

The Impact of Artisanal Gold Mining on Government Revenue in Taraba State

Artisanal gold mining across Bali, Gashaka, and Sardauna LGAs has emerged as a major source of revenue leakage for the Taraba State Government. The lack of regulation allows illegal operators to extract and commercialize gold without paying statutory royalties, taxes, or securing licenses. This creates a parallel economy that sidelines the state, weakening its financial base and undermining developmental capacity. Instead of functioning as an economic driver, the gold sector has become a channel of fiscal sabotage, enriching illicit actors while depriving government institutions of essential funds. A senior officer from the Taraba State Ministry of Internal Revenue, during an in-depth interview, lamented the magnitude of financial hemorrhage:

From what we have observed, these mining operations are deeply entrenched and completely outside the tax net. We've recorded massive losses, running into billions of naira annually, because these miners operate in secrecy and under the protection of local cartels. If these activities were properly regulated, the revenue generated could have significantly boosted the state's internally generated revenue. Imagine what could be done in terms of road rehabilitation, rural electrification, and education if even a fraction of that revenue came to government coffers. But right now, it's a free-for-all, and the state is bleeding financially. (Senior Officer, Ministry of Internal Revenue, interviewed on 15 May, 2025)

The interview statement highlights the entrenched informality in artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASM) in Taraba State, which undermines the state's revenue system. As the respondent noted, most operations remain "outside the tax net," leading to substantial fiscal leakages. This reflects broader findings across Nigeria where ASM activities evade formal taxation due to weak regulatory oversight and poor institutional capacity (Ezeani & David, 2021). The Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI, 2020) also confirm that unregulated mineral exploitation consistently undermines government revenue collection, resulting in massive losses despite the sector's potential contribution to development.

The officer's emphasis on "local cartels" resonates with studies that show how illegal mining in Nigeria is often sustained by powerful patronage networks. These groups facilitate smuggling, protect illegal miners, and ensure that activities remain clandestine (Garuba, 2019; Adeoye & Atakpa, 2022). Such cartelisation not only shields operators from enforcement but also entrenches corruption, leaving states like Taraba unable to capture rents from resource exploitation. The secrecy of these networks mirrors findings by Akinola (2020), who argued that artisanal mining economies in northern Nigeria thrive under shadow governance, thereby deepening fiscal leakages.

The statement underlines the opportunity cost of lost revenue for development. The officer imagines the potential impact on roads, electrification, and education if even a fraction of revenues were captured. Regulated mining could significantly boost internally generated revenue (IGR) and finance local development priorities (Osunlaja & Okorie, 2021). As Bello

and Moh'd (2022) observe, integrating ASM into the formal economy through licensing, monitoring, and fair taxation could transform the sector into a major driver of sustainable development. In this light, the officer's remark that "the state is bleeding financially" is consistent with contemporary evidence that the unregulated nature of ASM perpetuates economic sabotage and hinders state-building in Nigeria.

Incorporating the views above, a clear pattern emerges in which unregulated artisanal mining not only undermines state revenue generation but also thrives under the protection of entrenched networks and vested interests. Similarly, a senior operative of the state's Joint Taskforce on Illegal Mining corroborated this concern, stressing the entrenched interests protecting illegal operators and pointing to the formidable challenges that enforcement agencies face in dismantling these networks. He opined that:

From our operations on the ground, it is clear that these mining activities are not only illegal but also thriving under the protection of powerful individuals who have vested interests in keeping them hidden from the authorities. We have repeatedly tried to clamp down on some of these sites, but each time, we face serious resistance either from armed groups or through political interference. These mining sites are not just illegal, they are strategic revenue black holes. No records, no permits, no taxes. Many of the miners use the proceeds to fund activities that compromise state security. The loss isn't just financial; it's institutional. The government is losing both money and authority in these areas. (Senior Operative of the state's Joint Taskforce on Illegal mining, 20th May, 2025).

The statement from the senior operative underscores the deep entrenchment of illegal mining under the patronage of powerful actors, which has been widely documented in recent studies on Nigeria's extractive sector. The description of "powerful individuals" shielding operations from oversight resonates with findings that political elites, business actors, and local power brokers often sustain artisanal mining through patronage networks that prevent enforcement (Akinola, 2020; Adeoye & Atakpa, 2022). Such protection not only enables secrecy but also reinforces a shadow economy in which the state is structurally excluded from exercising fiscal authority. This aligns with broader scholarship that sees resource governance in Nigeria as compromised by elite capture and corruption.

The operative's emphasis on resistance from "armed groups" and "political interference" reflects the insecurities intertwined with illegal mining. Empirical studies show that illegal mineral economies often intersect with organised crime and armed violence, as proceeds from mining are diverted to fund insecurity (Bello & Moh'd, 2022). In states across northern Nigeria, the militarisation of mining sites has become common, as local militias, vigilante groups, or criminal gangs defend their control over deposits (Ezeani & David, 2021). This violent entrenchment mirrors regional evidence that mineral-rich conflict zones often evolve into hybrid spaces where authority is fragmented between state forces and non-state actors.

Marginalization of Local Communities in the Economic Benefits of Artisanal Gold Mining

Alongside its adverse fiscal impact, artisanal gold mining has also deepened the marginalization of host communities in Taraba State. Although extraction occurs within local

villages, the economic benefits are largely monopolized by external actors and powerful intermediaries. Rather than fostering grassroots development, the sector has entrenched patterns of exclusion, leaving residents with environmental degradation, social dislocation, and little to no compensatory benefits. A community elder in Jamtari village, Gashaka, captured this exclusion during an interview:

Thank God you've visited the mining site in the bush you've seen firsthand how terrible the road is. During the rainy season, it becomes almost completely impassable. And if you take a walk around this village, you'll see for yourself: there's no school, no hospital, not even a functional borehole. The mining cartels have provided absolutely nothing. How can resources be taken from our land, yet we receive nothing in return? The blasts from their explosives contaminate our drinking water and lead to illnesses. At the end of it all, what we're left with are broken roads, polluted water, and a degraded environment. Our people are suffering, yet those responsible continue without consequences. (A community elder Jamtari Village, Gashaka, 10th May, 2025)

The statement from the community elder of Jamtari village highlights the paradox of resource wealth and local underdevelopment that characterizes artisanal gold mining in Taraba State. His lament reflects a pattern where natural resources are extracted without corresponding investments in social infrastructure or welfare. The absence of schools, hospitals, and boreholes in the community illustrates a classic case of resource neglect and exclusion, where the costs of extraction are borne locally while the benefits are siphoned away by external actors.

The elder's emphasis on degraded infrastructure roads that are nearly impassable during the rainy season symbolizes the physical disconnection between mining wealth and developmental outcomes. Furthermore, his reference to environmental and health hazards caused by blasting and contaminated drinking water underscores the ecological injustice that accompanies artisanal mining. The community is left with polluted water sources, deteriorating health conditions, and damaged land, all while receiving no compensatory benefits.

The tone of frustration in the statement also speaks to a deeper sense of betrayal and governance failure. Despite repeated appeals, authorities have not compelled mining operators to contribute to community development, thereby reinforcing the perception of exploitation and abandonment. His concluding remark, that "our people are suffering, yet those responsible continue without consequences," captures the impunity under which mining cartels operate, shielded by weak enforcement and political complicity.

During field visits to Jamtari community in Gashaka Local Government Area (10th May, 2025), it was observed that there were indeed no single physical social amenities built for the community, despite the intensity of gold mining activities around them. No visible evidence of schools, healthcare facilities, or potable water infrastructure existed within the settlement. The absence of these amenities starkly confirmed the elder's testimony and revealed the extent of neglect suffered by the host community. This observation validates his claim that while valuable resources are being extracted daily from their land, the community itself remains locked in deprivation and underdevelopment.

Such an observation not only reinforces the authenticity of the interview account but also provides a critical empirical illustration of resource injustice. The contradiction between the

wealth generated from mining and the lack of social amenities in Jamtari is emblematic of a broader developmental paradox in resource-rich but marginalized regions.

Echoing these concerns, a youth leader from Ngoruje in Sardauna LGA pointed to the socio-economic disempowerment of local people, stressing that while outsiders and powerful actors reap enormous benefits from the mining activities, the host communities remain trapped in poverty, he opined that:

There are two major gold mining sites here in Ngoruje, one at Mayo Sinna and the other at Mayo Ndaga. These sites have attracted people from outside the community, mostly foreigners, but their presence has brought more harm than good. They extract the gold and leave, and all we are left with are destroyed farmlands and polluted water sources. Our children have abandoned school, lured by the hope of quick money, yet the little they earn doesn't benefit them or the community. Instead, exploitative cycles have been created, with brothels, drug use, and other vices draining their earnings. No one from our village is involved in decision-making or profit-sharing, and not even our elders have a voice. They exploit the land and leave us to suffer the consequences. (A youth leader from Ngoruje, Sardauna LGA, 12th May, 2025).

The youth leader's testimony highlights the exploitative and exclusionary nature of artisanal gold mining in Ngoruje, where outsiders dominate extraction while host communities bear the environmental and social costs. His observation that "destroyed farmlands and polluted water sources" are the main legacies reflects wider studies showing how unregulated mining degrades agricultural land and contaminates water bodies, thereby undermining rural livelihoods (Ezeani & David, 2021; Bello & Moh'd, 2022). Field visits to Mayo Ndaga confirmed this pattern, as extensive portions of farmland have been dug up and left unreclaimed, while streams used by villagers showed visible siltation and chemical residues. These findings mirror similar accounts from Abuja Leda I and II, where community members equally lament the environmental toll of unregulated mining.

Beyond ecological damage, the statement underscores how mining has disrupted social structures and eroded communal well-being. The leader's concern that "children have abandoned school" aligns with research documenting the lure of artisanal mining as a quick-income alternative that undermines formal education and entrenches cycles of poverty (Osunlaja & Okorie, 2021). Field observation in both Mayo Ndaga and Abuja Leda confirmed this social displacement, with many adolescents found at mining pits during school hours. The presence of brothels in these sites further validates his claim about exploitative cycles: miners' earnings are frequently spent on sex work, drugs, and alcohol rather than invested productively. Researchers have noted this recurring pattern across West African ASM sites, where mining settlements often attract informal economies of vice that drain rather than build local capital (Hilson & Maconachie, 2020).

The leader's emphasis on political and economic exclusion "no one from our village is involved in decision-making or profit-sharing" illustrates how artisanal mining in Taraba operates under asymmetrical power relations. Local voices are sidelined while external actors capture both material wealth and political leverage, leaving communities with degraded resources and weakened social fabrics. Field observations in Mayo Ndaga and Abuja Leda

corroborated this sense of marginalisation, as community elders reported having no role in negotiations or revenue sharing with miners or their patrons. This aligns with broader scholarship that identifies resource exploitation without local participation as a key driver of rural disempowerment and governance crises in Nigeria's extractive frontiers (Adeoye & Atakpa, 2022; Akinola, 2020).

Environmental Degradation in Bali, Gashaka, and Sardauna LGAs Resulting from Artisanal Gold Mining in Violation of the Environmental Impact Assessment Act (2007, as Amended)

Environmental degradation linked to artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) has become a pressing national issue in Nigeria, reflecting a broader pattern of ecological neglect and regulatory failure. Across the country, many mining operations proceed without adherence to the Environmental Impact Assessment Act (2007, as amended), thereby violating key environmental safeguards designed to protect ecosystems and human health. According to the Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI, 2022), the environmental consequences of unregulated mining are far-reaching, including soil erosion, water pollution, deforestation, and loss of biodiversity. In the northern regions, particularly the North-East, these impacts are compounded by weak institutional oversight and the exploitation of natural resources by informal operators. (NESREA, 2019) and subsequent task force investigations have highlighted how artisanal gold mining often proceeds without the required environmental impact assessments, leaving behind open pits, contaminated waterways, and degraded forest reserves.

In Taraba State, specifically within the Local Government Areas of Bali, Gashaka, and Sardauna, artisanal gold mining has been closely associated with severe ecological disruption. The uncontrolled nature of these activities, often carried out without adherence to environmental guidelines, has led to widespread deforestation, soil erosion, and the creation of hazardous open pits.

The extent of this environmental degradation is clearly illustrated in Figure 1. below, which depicts the widespread damage caused by artisanal mining in Abuja Leda I and II in Gashaka, as well as Mayo Ndaga in Sardauna, two of the most severely affected communities.

Environmental Dames Caused by Activities of Artisanal Miners and Pits Left Open With the study Area.





Source: Field Survey, 2025

The images presented in Figure 1 vividly illustrate the environmental degradation resulting from artisanal gold mining activities in Abuja Leda I and II (Gashaka LGA) and Mayo Ndaga (Sardauna LGA), Taraba State. The photos depict deep, unregulated excavation pits and unstable rock formations, which are characteristic of informal mining practices conducted without environmental safeguards. These open shafts, often abandoned without any reclamation, pose serious safety hazards and reflect the widespread disregard for ecological restoration. The disturbed earth, exposed subsoil, and absence of vegetation in the images indicate topsoil stripping and deforestation, key drivers of soil erosion and reduced agricultural productivity in the region.

Studies conducted between 2020 and 2023 highlight that informal mining in Nigeria's northeast frequently results in unrehabilitated landscapes and the stripping of topsoil, which disrupts both ecological balance and agricultural productivity (Abbas et al., 2021; Ezeaku et al., 2022). In many communities within these LGAs, mining pits are left open, turning arable land into dangerous and unusable terrain, while contributing to sedimentation and water pollution during the rainy season (Ismail & Adeoye, 2023). Furthermore, the lack of regulatory enforcement has enabled the proliferation of these destructive practices, with minimal effort made to reclaim mined lands (Obaje & Olorunfemi, 2020; Ibrahim & Hassan, 2023). Local stakeholders have also expressed concern about the long-term implications for farming livelihoods, as fertile lands continue to be destroyed by unregulated excavation and chemical use. These cumulative effects reflect a clear pattern of environmental degradation directly linked to artisanal mining activities.

Furthermore, the disorderly excavation confirms findings from recent studies that artisanal mining in northeast Nigeria has led to unrehabilitated landscapes and the destruction of arable

lands (Abbas et al., 2021; Ismail & Adeoye, 2023). The environmental scars not only degrade the natural habitat but also contribute to water pollution and sedimentation during the rainy season. The unchecked spread of these pits into farmlands and communal spaces underscores the lack of regulatory enforcement and the widespread violation of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Act of 2007 (as amended), which mandates that any excavation exceeding 20 percent below ground level must be properly refilled and rehabilitated. During an interview, a local community leader in Mayo Ndaga voiced serious concern, lamenting that:

What you see here is heartbreaking. These miners come, dig deep holes, and leave without any effort to cover them up. Our farmlands have now turned into death traps. These open pits are not only dangerous to people, but our cows often fall into them, some get badly injured, while others don't survive at all. This has become a serious source of conflict between us, the indigenous people, and the miners. We've made several complaints and had countless confrontations with them, but nothing has been done to address the issue. Even the governor's directive to halt all mining operations has been largely ignored. Mining activities continue illegally right before our eyes. I believe you've been to the site yourself; you must have seen the labourers still digging and mining these resources openly, as if there are no laws or authorities in place. It feels like we've been abandoned. (A local community leader in Mayo Ndaga, Sarduna LGA, 10th May, 2025)

The respondent's account highlights the severe environmental degradation caused by unregulated artisanal mining. The description of abandoned open pits turning farmlands into "death traps" reflects both ecological destruction and livelihood loss. The dangers extend beyond crop cultivation to pastoral activities, as livestock frequently fall into the pits, leading to injuries or death. This situation not only undermines food security but also disrupts the symbiotic relationship between farming and herding, creating further economic vulnerability for already marginalized rural households.

The statement also reveals how unresolved grievances between host communities and miners escalate into tension and conflict. The repeated confrontations with miners, coupled with the miners' disregard for community complaints, illustrate the absence of effective conflict resolution mechanisms. Moreover, the claim that government directives are ignored underscores the weakness of regulatory enforcement and the persistence of illegal mining activities. This gap between official pronouncements and realities on the ground deepens community frustrations and erodes trust in state institutions.

Socio-Political Consequences of Resource Exclusion on Host Communities

The socio-political consequences of resource exclusion on host communities in West Africa have become increasingly apparent amid the rising exploitation of natural resources by foreign and elite interests. Across the region, extractive industries, particularly artisanal and small-scale mining, have often thrived in governance vacuums, leaving communities impoverished, marginalized, and exposed to violence and environmental degradation (Alao, 2021). In Nigeria, this dynamic is historically rooted in the Niger Delta, where decades of oil exploration brought little development to host communities. Instead, widespread environmental destruction, economic marginalization, and state neglect led to militant uprisings, oil bunkering, pipeline vandalism, and hostage-taking, all fueled by the exclusion of locals from decision-making and

benefits (Orji & Adebayo, 2020). The Niger Delta conflict, which once accounted for over 1,000 violent deaths annually at its peak, illustrates how resource wealth can incite grievance, militarization, and socio-political instability when host communities are denied equitable access (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2021).

This pattern has increasingly extended into Northern Nigeria, particularly the Northeast, where artisanal gold mining is generating similarly troubling dynamics. The proliferation of unregulated mining, often dominated by non-local actors, has sparked land disputes, facilitated the exploitation of local youth, and enabled the financing of criminal networks through illicit resource trade (Okoli & Ogayi, 2022). In Taraba State, specifically within the Local Government Areas of Bali, Gashaka, and Sardauna, evidence reveals that host communities face systemic exclusion from the economic benefits of gold mining activities. Residents consistently report a complete absence of basic social infrastructure, including schools, healthcare facilities, clean water, and employment opportunities, despite the intensity of mineral extraction in their environment. This persistent marginalization has fueled growing community tensions, youth disillusionment, and deep-seated intergenerational grievances. Some communities are also contending with severe health challenges linked to environmentally destructive mining practices.

Importantly, the socio-political consequences of resource exclusion in Taraba State can be analytically examined under two major subthemes. The first is the Perceived Exclusion of Host Communities from Decision-Making on Resource Control, which highlights the lack of community participation in decisions over resource governance and benefit-sharing. The second is Resource Exclusion as a Catalyst for Tension and Conflict, which explores how the denial of local involvement and benefits fuels grievances, mistrust, and the potential for violent confrontation. Both subthemes are central to understanding how artisanal gold mining, in the absence of inclusive governance, has become a driver of inequality, instability, and community disempowerment.

Perceived Exclusion of Host Communities from Decision-Making on Resource Control

Artisanal gold mining activities in Bali, Gashaka, and Sardauna LGAs have not only disrupted the ecological and economic landscapes of these communities but have also generated a widespread sense of marginalization and exclusion among residents. Despite being the primary stakeholders and immediate custodians of the mined environment, host communities report having little to no involvement in the planning, licensing, or monitoring of mining operations taking place on their lands. This exclusionary governance structure has eroded local trust and fostered growing resentment toward both the state and mining actors (Hilson, 2002; Campbell, 2009).

In effect, artisanal mining in Taraba State is not just a matter of environmental and economic concern; it is a governance crisis. Without meaningful inclusion of host communities in decision-making processes regarding resource control, mining operations risk perpetuating cycles of disempowerment, inequality, and conflict. As an elder in Dogon Yashi, Bali LGA, lamented:

Whenever we try to complain about the mining activities happening on our land, we are simply told that the miners have a license from the federal

government, as if that gives them the right to destroy our lives. The truth is, what they're doing here is more than just digging the soil. The chemicals they use evaporate into the air, and we've started seeing strange skin conditions, rashes, peeling, even breathing problems, especially among our children. Our farmland no longer produces like before; the crops are stunted, and the soil is weak. We feel abandoned, like our lives don't matter. They take the gold, and we are left with the sickness and suffering. And despite all of this, we are not even considered worthy to sit at the table to discuss how the resources taken from our ancestral lands should be shared. Most of these mining activities are done at the artisanal level, yet the profits only go to a few individuals, mostly outsiders, while we, the real owners of the land, remain in poverty and pain. (An Elder in Dogon Yashi, Bali LGA, 09th May, 2025)

The interview statement reflects the lived realities of communities affected by artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) in Nigeria and across sub-Saharan Africa. The grievances expressed highlight a pattern of environmental degradation, health hazards, and socio-political exclusion that has been consistently documented in recent scholarly research.

First, the respondent's claim that mining activities cause health complications such as skin rashes, peeling, and respiratory issues aligns with empirical findings that prolonged exposure to toxic chemicals, especially mercury and cyanide used in artisanal mining, significantly compromises human health. Studies by Esan et al. (2020) and Fashola et al. (2021) confirm that ASGM often releases hazardous pollutants into the environment, leading to dermatological problems and respiratory complications, particularly among children. From field observation in the study areas, these accounts are substantiated, as miners and community members have shown visible skin rashes and boils, suggesting direct exposure to toxic mining substances.

Second, the respondent's emphasis on declining agricultural productivity resonates with research indicating that artisanal mining contaminates soil and water, undermining agricultural livelihoods. As argued by Hilson, Hilson, and Maconachie (2022), ASGM contributes to soil infertility and crop failure through chemical seepage, making farmlands less productive. This finding is corroborated by Bickham et al. (2020), who report that polluted soils and degraded landscapes are among the most pressing consequences of artisanal gold mining in West Africa.

Third, the statement underscores the feeling of exclusion from decision-making processes. This reflects a broader political ecology of dispossession, where host communities bear the brunt of environmental and health costs while being excluded from resource governance. Ovidia and Oyebamiji (2023) argue that such exclusion reflects the "resource control paradox," where federal licenses to miners are prioritized over the rights of indigenous communities. Similarly, Adebayo and Olaniyi (2021) show that this pattern of exclusion exacerbates grievances and fosters distrust between host communities and the state. The statement illustrates the social injustice and inequality inherent in artisanal mining economies. While communities suffer health and livelihood losses, profits are captured by outsiders and local elites. As pointed out by Hilson and Potter (2022), this unequal distribution of mining benefits entrenches poverty and fuels resentment, reinforcing a cycle of exploitation and marginalization.

The interview statement not only reflects the subjective experiences of respondents but also aligns with broader scholarly findings on the environmental, health, and socio-political consequences of artisanal gold mining, as documented by Hilson (2002, 2016), Banchirigah

(2008), Veiga et al. (2006), and Spiegel et al. (2015). Field observation of skin rashes and boils among miners and community members provides concrete evidence of toxic exposure, validating the respondent's claims. The analysis underscores how artisanal mining, though often presented as an economic opportunity, has become a source of dispossession, ill-health, and ecological damage in host communities.

Another respondent, a youth leader from Gashaka, expressed deep frustration over the ongoing mining activities, stressing that the community is forced to endure the environmental destruction and health hazards that come with them. He lamented that:

The mining here has brought nothing but suffering to us. Before now, the cost of taking a motorcycle to our farms was about two thousand naira at most. But since the mining started, it has risen to ten thousand naira. This is because many outsiders now troop into the area to buy gold, and the young men who ride bikes have increased their charges to take advantage of the demand. Just imagine: this amount is almost half the cost of transportation from here to the state capital. Our land is being dug up without our permission, and the chemicals they use flow into our farms and rivers. We've noticed that our crops no longer grow like they used to, the soil has become weak, and even the taste of our harvests has changed. Some people now suffer from coughing, skin rashes, and other illnesses, especially children. What hurts the most is that we're not even part of any discussions. We are not invited to speak or decide anything, even though it's our land they are exploiting. The people making money from this mining are not from here. They just come, take what they want, and leave us behind to suffer. We feel powerless, like strangers in our community. (A youth leader from Gashaka, 20th May, 2025)

The interview statement underscores the multi-dimensional impacts of artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) on host communities, particularly in rural Taraba. The respondent's concerns reveal an interplay of economic, environmental, health, and socio-political grievances, all of which align with scholarly findings in recent studies.

First, the rise in transportation costs due to the influx of outsiders illustrates the economic disruption mining brings to rural communities. While artisanal mining is often celebrated for creating livelihood opportunities, it also drives inflation in local economies, disproportionately affecting vulnerable households. As pointed out by Maconachie and Conteh (2021), the "mining boomtown effect" can create artificial demand for services, inflating prices of basic goods and services, thereby undermining the affordability of local life. In the case of Gashaka, what was once an affordable fare for farmers now consumes a significant portion of their income, directly eroding their agricultural productivity and household welfare.

Second, the respondent highlights environmental degradation and agricultural decline, noting weakened soils, polluted rivers, and reduced crop quality. These observations correspond with findings from Hilson et al. (2022) and Esan et al. (2020), which show that chemicals such as mercury and cyanide used in artisanal mining seep into farmlands and water systems, reducing soil fertility and contaminating food chains. The claim that "even the taste of our harvests has changed" resonates with studies by Bickham et al. (2020), who demonstrate how heavy metal accumulation in crops alters their quality and safety for consumption.

Third, the statement references health impacts, particularly coughing, skin rashes, and illnesses among children. This aligns with evidence from Fashola et al. (2021) and Ovadia & Oyebamiji (2023), who confirm that communities around artisanal mines often suffer respiratory and dermatological problems due to exposure to toxic dust, contaminated water, and poor sanitation associated with mining activity. Field observation in the study areas substantiates these concerns, as visible skin rashes and recurring coughs were documented among residents, pointing to a direct correlation between mining activities and deteriorating community health.

The exclusion from decision-making reflects a broader theme of socio-political marginalization. Despite being the rightful landowners, the respondent laments that the community is denied any meaningful role in resource governance. Adebayo and Olaniyi (2021) describe this as “participatory exclusion,” where host communities are systematically sidelined from discussions about the resources extracted from their land. This exclusion not only exacerbates grievances but also fosters a sense of powerlessness, reinforcing what the respondent calls feeling like “strangers in our community.”

Resource Exclusion as a Catalyst for Tension and Conflict

Artisanal gold mining activities in Bali, Gashaka, and Sardauna LGAs have not only strained local ecosystems and disrupted livelihoods but have also become flashpoints for social tension and conflict. At the heart of these tensions lies a recurring grievance: the exclusion of host communities from decisions concerning resource control and benefit-sharing. This not only denies communities their rightful stake in resource governance but also fosters a volatile environment in which frustration, mistrust, and confrontation frequently arise.

Such dynamics inevitably give rise to localized disputes. In several cases, residents have recounted instances of verbal altercations, physical confrontations, and even threats to personal safety when attempting to challenge mining operations. The absence of formal grievance mechanisms further compounds the problem, forcing communities to resort to informal resistance, which sometimes escalates tensions (Hilson, 2002; Yakubu & Ovadia, 2021). As a community dweller in Ngoruje, Sardauna LGA, explained:

Here in Ngoruje, we are not blind to what is happening around us. It’s already a known fact that there is a serious crisis going on in Mayo Sinna between the indigenous people and the mining company operating there. Our elders may try to keep it quiet to avoid tension, but we, the younger ones, are fully aware of how some of our people have been chased out of their ancestral homes. These things don’t happen far from us anymore; they’re right at our doorstep. Let me tell you, if care is not taken, our situation here will become just like what we’re seeing in the Niger Delta. You see the signs already: outsiders taking our resources, polluting our land and water, and leaving us with nothing but anger and disease. We’re not included in any decisions, we’re not benefiting from anything, and at the same time, we are the ones suffering the consequences. How long do you think people will stay silent? (A community Dweller in Ngoruje Sarduana, 12th May, 2025).

The respondent’s statement reveals a deep awareness of the unfolding conflict dynamics in Ngoruje and neighboring Mayo Sinna. By referencing the displacement of indigenous people, the speaker highlights the socio-political tensions that often arise when mining companies encroach on ancestral lands without adequate consultation or compensation. This reflects a

broader pattern in resource-rich regions where extractive activities trigger struggles over land ownership, cultural identity, and survival, thereby threatening community cohesion.

Furthermore, the comparison to the Niger Delta underscores the respondent's perception of looming resource conflict. The Niger Delta has become symbolic of environmental devastation, exclusion, and violent agitation, and invoking it serves as a warning that similar trajectories could emerge in Taraba if grievances remain unaddressed. This framing illustrates how local communities interpret mining not merely as an economic activity but as a potential catalyst for instability, displacement, and ecological collapse.

The respondent stresses the exclusion of host communities from decision-making processes, which fosters resentment and amplifies feelings of injustice. The repeated reference to "outsiders" taking resources while locals are left with "anger and disease" captures the essence of the resource curse at the micro level: wealth extraction without development benefits. The rhetorical question, "How long do you think people will stay silent?" suggests that continued marginalization may provoke resistance, signaling that unaddressed grievances could escalate into open conflict.

Discussion of Findings

On objective one, which seeks to assess the economic implications of unregulated artisanal gold mining activities on revenue and local development in Taraba State, the study finds that unregulated artisanal gold mining significantly undermines Taraba State's revenue generation. Although the activity supports local livelihoods, the absence of licensing, tax remittance, and effective monitoring results in substantial revenue losses through smuggling and informal trading networks. Respondents across Bali, Sardauna, and Gashaka LGAs confirmed that the state does not effectively collect mining-related revenue, and illegal operators dominate the sector. These findings demonstrate that weak institutional coordination and poor regulatory oversight have allowed parallel economies to flourish, limiting the state's capacity to benefit from its mineral resources.

On objective two, which seeks to address environmental degradation caused by artisanal mining in violation of the Environmental Impact Assessment Act (2007, as amended), with specific focus on Bali, Sardauna, and Gashaka LGAs, the study reveals severe environmental degradation linked to artisanal mining activities in all the study areas. Violations of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Act were widespread, with most mining sites operating without environmental clearance or rehabilitation plans. Respondents identified deforestation, soil erosion, polluted water bodies, mercury contamination, and declining agricultural productivity as major impacts. Field observations in sites such as Dogon Yashi (Bali) and Abuja Leda (Gashaka) confirmed extensive ecological damage resulting from unregulated open-pit mining. The findings show that weak enforcement capacity and inadequate environmental monitoring have contributed to these outcomes.

On objective three, which is set out to investigate the socio-political consequences of resource exclusion on host communities, the study finds that host communities experience significant exclusion from decision-making, benefit-sharing, and formal mining opportunities. Respondents consistently expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of visible development despite ongoing mining activities. This exclusion has generated feelings of marginalization, weakened

trust in government institutions, and contributed to social tension. Youths in affected communities increasingly turn to illegal mining and related criminal activities due to limited economic alternatives. The findings further indicate that the absence of structured community development agreements (CDAs) worsens grievances and contributes to governance challenges.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that unregulated artisanal gold mining in Taraba State presents a complex intersection of economic potential, environmental degradation, and socio-political exclusion. While the activity provides income and livelihood opportunities for many residents across Bali, Sardauna, and Gashaka Local Government Areas, its informality has resulted in massive revenue losses to the state, widespread ecological damage, and deepening social inequalities. The findings reveal that weak institutional capacity, poor regulatory enforcement, and the exclusion of host communities from decision-making processes have collectively transformed what could have been a catalyst for development into a driver of instability and economic sabotage. The persistent violation of the Environmental Impact Assessment Act (2007, as amended) underscores the fragility of environmental governance in the state, while the alienation of local communities' fuels mistrust and insecurity. Thus, the study concludes that addressing the crisis in Taraba State's mining sector requires a holistic policy framework that integrates fiscal accountability, environmental sustainability, and inclusive governance.

Recommendation

- i. The Taraba State Government should establish a formalized and transparent framework for artisanal mining regulation. This includes creating a state-level database of artisanal miners, issuing mining licenses through simplified registration procedures, and ensuring that revenue from the sector is properly captured through effective taxation and monitoring mechanisms.
- ii. The Taraba State Government, through the Ministry of Environment and the Special Task Force on Environmental Protection, should ensure that all mining activities whether small-scale or artisanal are preceded by Environmental Impact Assessments and guided by sustainable land rehabilitation plans. Enforcement agencies should be adequately funded and equipped to conduct regular inspections, enforce compliance, and penalize environmental offenders.
- iii. The Taraba State Government should adopt participatory frameworks that recognize host communities as legitimate stakeholders in resource management. This can be achieved through the introduction of Community Development Agreements (CDAs), which will guarantee local participation in decision-making, equitable benefit-sharing, and direct investment in social infrastructure such as schools, healthcare, and roads. Engaging traditional institutions, youth groups, and women's associations in mining governance will foster trust, reduce conflict, and discourage the involvement of marginalized youths in illegal mining and banditry

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