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Blood Mines: Artisanal Mining and Conflicts in Nigeria



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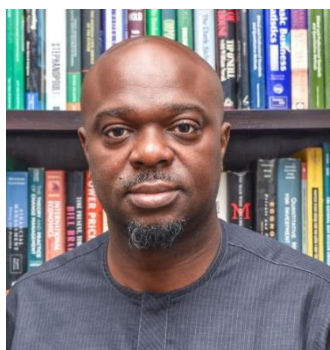
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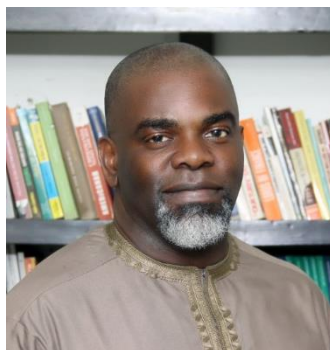
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Editor's Note

PLATFORM FOR DISCUSSIONS

Welcome to the June 2019 edition of Nextier SPD Monthly publication. This magazine is designed to deepen our knowledge and insight on security, peace, and development issues in Nigeria. It brings to the fore, thematic issues such as conflict; peacebuilding, post-conflict reconstruction, security sector reforms (SSR), disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), violent deaths, state building, environmental violence and natural resources-fuelled violent conflicts. Every month, this publication provides a step by-step analysis of security and development issues using different narratives, research philosophies, methodologies and trajectories.

The fundamental objective of this publication is to provide a platform for evidence-based and scholarly discussions of contemporary security issues facing Nigeria in particular and other African countries in general. The publication will provide evidence-driven research and proffer well thought out policy recommendations. It is our desire that policymakers, practitioners, and development partners will use the ideas presented here to engage in discussions to improve their policies, programmes, projects, and operations.

This month's Nextier SPD Monthly examines the various forms of violence associated with mining in Nigeria. Relying on observation and desk research, it traces the origin, history and causes of such mining conflicts, like the on-going mining violence in Zamfara State. The essay identifies various actors and their main roles. Additionally, it also examines the ills and dynamics of illegal extraction of natural resources, especially in fuelling violent conflicts. Subsequently, it interrogates the previous responses to the conflicts by the Nigerian state and proffered measures to reducing and ending illegal mining and its resultant violence.



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Introduction

Nigeria is rich in both metallic and non-metallic minerals such as tin and columbite, iron ore and gold in the North to oil and natural gas, bitumen and coal in the South. Before crude oil became the mainstay of the Nigerian economy, mining of coal at Udi escarpment in Enugu, tin and columbite in the Jos Plateau were the major minerals mined in Nigeria. The agitations that eventually trailed crude oil exploitation owing to the associated environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, the marginalisation of the host communities in the oil business and controversies surrounding resource control brought to the fore the protracted nature of conflicts associated with mining in Nigeria. However, mining conflicts used to be limited to the mining companies and host communities on the one hand, and the unionised workers and mining companies on the other hand. The entry of artisanal miners and illegal refiners of stolen crude oil has changed the mining landscape in Nigeria. Conceptually, artisanal miners and refiners are local groups who manually mined and refined natural resources in small scale using crude methods. Mining, which used to be the exclusive preserve of multinational companies, has become an all comers' affair.

While attention has been focused on crude oil theft and “illegal refining” as well as the military battle against them in the creeks of the Niger Delta, similar “illegal mining” of solid minerals is ongoing in different parts of the country, particularly in the North-West. The widespread lead poisoning and death of countless number of children in 2010 drew the attention of Nigerians and the Federal Government to illegal gold mining in Zamfara State. More worrisome is the fact that illegal gold mining has been associated with the ongoing banditry and widespread killings in the North-West region of the country.

Mining conflict is invariably a land use conflict (Hilson, 2002). The acquisition of land for mining purposes is a frequent cause of conflicts between miners, farmers and local communities. Crieke (2008) reports that mining has been linked to many cases of population and settlement displacements in Africa. Although these may be seen as features of large-scale mining operations, the effects of small-scale artisanal mining are not much different. Because mining area consumes a considerable amount of land, there is bound to be conflicts between miners and other land users such as farmers who depend on the same land for their livelihoods. Mining, depending on the type of mineral involved and scale of operation, also causes unavoidable environmental problems such as the removal of fertile top soil (overburden), open pits, gully erosion, water course sedimentation, water contamination, air pollution, vegetation removal and ecosystem loss which the surrounding communities have to contend with.

Whether as objects of local conflicts between miners and the surrounding communities or regional conflicts such as militancy in the Niger Delta and banditry in the North-West region, mining has continued to play significant role in conflicts and insecurity across Nigeria. Although violent conflicts and insecurity have preoccupied the attention of the Federal Government, security agencies and security analysts, the role of mining in all of this appears not be given much attention in scholarly and policy literature. To situate the role of mining in conflicts and security discourse, this edition of Nextier SPD Policy Monthly explores the role of mining in conflicts and proffers policy recommendations on how to address the problem.



Photo Credit: Fairphone

Theoretical Framework

Natural resource endowment has proven to be more of a 'curse' than a 'blessing' for countries such as Nigeria. This paradox has been captured and expounded in the Resource Curse theory. The theory, which was first introduced by Richard Auty (1993) in his book "*Sustaining Growth in Mineral Economies*", refers to the phenomenon where countries with abundance of natural resources deliver worse development outcomes than comparable countries with fewer natural resources. Auty (1993) showed that these resource-rich countries deliver lower economic growth and even poorly developed democratic institutions.

The Resource Curse theory has been empirically proven. Sachs and Warner (1995) provided statistical confirmation of the negative correlation between resource abundance and economic growth. Indeed, three key models have so far been developed to give an explanatory weight to the Resource Curse theory. Di John (2010) provided the Dutch Disease, Rent-seeking, and Institutions models. Mehlum *et al.* (2006a) argue that resource curse is symptomatic only in countries with weak institutions. This suggests that there is a strong link between resource curse syndrome and institutions.

Strong institutions can turn the potential resource curse into a blessing. Scholarly evidence (such as Di John, 2010 and Azarhoushang *et al.*, 2014) show that efficient institutions can

turn natural resources into a blessing; rather than a curse. Indeed, evidence suggests that resource curses are context specific as they turn out to be symptomatic of developing countries. The problem with the Resource Curse theory is that it only suggests a linear negative correlation between natural resource endowment and economic performance in a country. This suggests that there are some important missing variables in the theory. The theory also fails to explain how the abundance of natural resources can be a source of violent conflicts in a country.

To further emphasize the significance of institutions in Resource Curse analysis, it is important to explore the roles of structure and agencies in the context of mining conflicts. Human agency plays a central role in any form of conflict (Agheyisi, 2019a). The dynamics of artisanal illegal mining (AIM) in the North-West of Nigeria and artisanal illegal refining (AIR) of crude oil in the Niger Delta explicitly draws on the theoretical significance of the relationship between structure and agency in reconstructing the explanations of mining conflicts. The emergent structures and processes of interactions in this informal sector define the relationships amongst the non-state actors in the mining sector. It becomes very necessary to draw from Giddens' (1984) Structuration theory to unpack the social structure that underpins the proliferation of these illegal businesses and which helps to explain the dynamics of mining conflicts in Nigeria.

Structure and Agencies in Mining Conflicts

What is the role of structures and agencies in the context of mining conflicts? The dynamics of artisanal illegal mining (AIM) in the North-West of Nigeria and artisanal illegal refining (AIR) of crude oil in the Niger Delta explicitly draws on the theoretical significance of the relationship between *structure* and *agency* in reconstructing the explanations of mining conflicts. Human agency, which refers to the capabilities of individual human agents to play a central role in any form of conflict. According to Agheyisi (2019a), human agency affects structure but structure enables and constrains agency.

Can the emergent structures and processes of interactions in the informal mining sector be used to define the relationships amongst the non-state actors in the mining sector? Structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) can be used to unpack the social structure that underpins the proliferation of these illegal mining operations and the processes that help to perpetuate and replicate them. The theory states that social structure and human agency are not separate entities, but mutually dependent and internally related. Within the context of illegal mining operation in Nigeria, the theory can be used to explain the roles of individual non-state actors and the social structures they have evolved over time.

Institutions, in the specific context of illegal mining and crude oil theft and refining, represent reproduced rules and

resources which provide the structure within which illegal artisanal miners and crude oil thieves and refiners as human agencies situate and their behaviour influenced. Social 'rules' are those elements of interactions which individuals and institutions routinely implement (Goodwin, 1999). 'Resources', in this context, include both the social environment and relations created and utilised by human agencies. Structure is context specific and usually refers to the material conditions which define the range of actions available to actors (McAnulla, 2002). Human agency refers to the capabilities of individual human agents, viewed as competent and knowledgeable to pursue certain courses of action capable of modifying or transforming their social structure and environment (McAnulla, 2002; Dyck and Kearns, 2006; Dale and Sparks, 2011).

What is the relationship between structure and agency? Which one produces the other? The relationship between structure and agency is no longer debatable except to determine which one exerts the most influence on the other. In an attempt to integrate both structure and agency in the explanation of social dynamism, Giddens (1984) in his Structuration theory argues that structure and agency are not separate entities but mutually dependent and internally related. McAnulla (2002) adds that structure only exists through agency and has 'rules and resources' which facilitate or constrain the actions of agency. The

relative power of agency and structure to affect each other depends on the specific context and situation that may determine the degree of influence of the one on the other (Ling and Dale, 2014). Rather than dichotomising the mutually reinforcing structure and agency, the consensus amongst scholars is that both are two sides of the same coin (Giddens, 1984; Goodwin, 1999). The dialectical interpretation of this approach is simply that agency affects structure, but structure enables and constrains agency (Agheyisi, 2019a). The theoretical significance of the structure and agency framework in mining conflicts lies in the explanatory weight given to the roles of individual non-state actors and the social structures they have evolved over time.



Dynamics of Illegal Mining

Why has illegal mining proliferated in Nigeria? In order to understand the exercise of human agency in mining conflicts in Nigeria, it is important to provide the basis for connecting agency with structural conditions and the patterns of interactions between them. In doing this, attention has to be focused on specific issues such as the capacity of individual actors, how the actions and activities of individual actors connect with social structures in their immediate environment, the market opportunities to which illegal miners responds, the condition or environment under which they flourish and the social interactions between actors. These provide the social context that defines individual and group actions in the informal mining sector.

Crucially, artisanal illegal mining (AIM), oil theft or bunkering and artisanal illegal refining (AIR) of crude oil are all linked to informal sector of the Nigerian economy in which the non-state actors are dominant players. The conflict outcomes of this sector are systematically tied to and shaped by resource curse syndrome. Indeed, the outcome of violent conflicts in the mining sector as an expression of human agency significantly questions the strategies adopted in responding to the social structure and market opportunities created over time.

The internal processes and networks which support artisanal illegal extraction of natural resources do not occur in a vacuum but within structural contexts. To unpack the internal workings of illegal oil refining network in the Niger Delta, Tubodenyefa (2014) isolated identifiable specific actions and activities as expressions of individuals' exercise of agency and how these contribute to the burgeoning illegal crude oil refining activities. These activities are individuals' responses to the opportunities created by the oil complex which Watts (2005) conceptualizes as a configuration of social, economic and political forces centred on oil, again as symptomatic of a resource curse developing country. The key features of this complex are the state's strategic control of oil as a national resource enforced through specific laws and security apparatuses.

Situating the whole mining sector in Nigeria within the analytical framework of "natural resource complex", one can therefore argue that the dynamics of informal extraction of natural resources is what created the social structures and processes of interactions that have shaped the market opportunities to which the expression of agency is now increasingly being directed. For example, Tubodenyefa (2014) situates the proliferation of AIR on the degree of entrepreneurial intents among illegal refiners. He argues that AIR in the Niger Delta is no longer an amorphous collection of AIR activities but a rapidly evolving and organised informal economic activity that has built on itself and integrated itself into the local economic system.

Conflict Outcomes of Illegal Mining

In order to curtail and possibly obliterate these burgeoning enterprises, the Federal Government had declared all artisanal mining and crude oil refining as illegal and adopted a securitised approach for its enforcement. In the Niger Delta, the government had set up a Joint Military Task Force (JTF) with specific mandate to deter oil theft as well as locate and destroy all illegal refining camps. On 7th April, 2019, the Federal Government banned all mining activities in the North-West region with “Operation PUFF- ADDER” mandated to enforce this ban. In a statement released to newsmen through the presidential aide, Bashir Ahmed, President Muhammadu Buhari said that *“in the face of intelligence reports that have clearly established a strong and glaring nexus between the activities of armed bandits and illicit miners – with both mutually re-enforcing each other, the Federal Government of Nigeria has directed that mining activities in Zamfara and other affected States are hereby suspended with immediate effect”* (Jude Egbas, 2019). The then acting Inspector General of Police (IGP) and now the IGP, Mohammed Adamu, also informed the nation that the *“Nigeria Police Force in collaboration with the Nigerian Military and other Security Services has commenced “Operation PUFF- ADDER” which is a full-scale security offensive against the bandits. Consequently, any mining operator who engages in mining activities in the affected locations henceforth will have his licence revoked”* (Jude Egbas, 2019).

The prospects of natural minerals, particularly gold, is exacerbating deep-rooted conflicts among local communities and contributing to border tensions between neighbouring states in the North-West region. The emergence of bandits has further complicated the vulnerability of the region. According to one analyst, *“conflict gold remains a major obstacle to peace and a driver of the black market economy in Zamfara State since 2010. It provides a significant source of income to armed actors from the North-West, who kill and sexually abuse civilians with impunity, while trading gold for weapons and ammunition”* (Inwalomhe, 2019). It has been reported that politicians and retired military generals who act as patrons or owners of gold mines are fuelling the mining conflict.

New findings of gold reserves is also creating new centres of power struggle as armed groups compete for gold mines. Eye witnesses report that the criminal gangs have become law enforcers in the region and they kill any person who they consider to stand in their way. Hundreds of people have been killed and buried in mass graves in Zamfara State since 2016. The modus operandi of the bandits involves raiding villages, burning of houses and kidnapping of people for ransom. If the ransom does not arrive on time, the kidnapped victims are killed. According to a survivor of a similar attack, the bandits numbering about 50 cordoned off the entire area before ransacking the mines, demanding gold and other

precious stones from the miners. The bandits also rustle livestock across villages in the rural areas. The securitised approach has created a volatile security situation in the whole of the Niger Delta and North-West region. Hundreds of death and thousands of injuries have been recorded on both sides of the security officers and illegal miners and crude oil refiners. As the criminal gangs fight back, innocent victims are cut in the middle. Legitimate activities such as farming and fishing are becoming increasingly difficult to carry out in areas where cartels and bandits operate. As a fall out of “Operation PUFF- ADDER”, the traditional rulers in Zamfara State have accused the Nigeria Air Force of missing the actual culprits and bombing “innocent villagers” in misdirected airstrikes (Inwalomhe, 2019).



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Policy Recommendations

Understanding the dynamics of artisanal illegal resource extraction and the roles it plays in the ongoing conflicts in Nigeria, Nextier SPD proffers the following policy recommendations to stem the tide:

First, the individual entrepreneurial intents, ingenuity and innovation in the artisanal illegal resource extraction can be mobilised and harnessed in tackling the endemic poverty and unemployment in Nigeria. The proposed modular refineries in oil producing states should be geared towards this direction.

Second, mining concessions should be based on formalised leases. Areas where mining is to be leased should be surveyed and mapped by the government and the inhabitants duly compensated. Investments in such areas should be planned to help the growth of existing local economy in order not cause backlashes from the locals.

Third, since illegal minerals are known to form parts of the larger trans-national smuggling in the West Africa sub-region, there should be effective policing of our porous borders. Effective multi-layer policing which includes community and state policing will succeed where local intelligence is utilised to curb such trans-national racketing in border and resource host communities.

Fourth, the adopted security approach is not enough. Effective regulatory framework in the mining sector within the context of true federalism is the key to a lasting solution. States with such resources should be active players as means of raising their internally generated revenue (IGR), as such a means of making them get involved in the security and peace needed for such business to thrive.

Conclusion

The proliferation of illegal mineral extraction in Nigeria speaks to the fact that the regulatory framework provides the favourable environment for the non-state actors to operate in the sector. The proliferation represents individual responses to the inequality and socio-economic disparities in the country. Through self-organisation, individuals are attempting to provide indirect access to the mineral wealth of the country. The hyper-unemployment and economic marginalisation in the country provide the valid rationalisation for the proliferation of artisanal illegal mining and crude oil refining. However, artisanal mining and refining are illegal activities that have engendered conflicts and insecurity across the country. They also form parts of the larger trans-border theft and smuggling in the West Africa sub-region. Understanding the dynamics of illegal extraction of mineral resources is the key to finding a lasting solution to mining conflicts in the country.

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