

Illegal Mining of Natural Resources and Fiscal Administration in Nigeria: North-West Region in Focus

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Abstract

Illegal mining is the unlawful extraction of natural resources by individuals or firm. This unwholesome activity has continuously been carried out in the northwest region of Nigeria with less regards to constituted authorities. This research aimed majorly to examine the level at which illegal mining affects fiscal administration in Northern Nigeria, its effects on health and environmental issues, subsequently. The study is principally based on a desk review of relevant articles and publications in order to draw research findings. Key words were used in the extraction of relevant literature. The result after critical analysis shows that illegal mining has affected the fiscal growth of the northern Nigerian hemisphere in a great deal. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that government should make deliberate effort in fixing the economy and make it vibrant so as to naturally discourage participation of the youth in illegal mining as better options of making ends meet will be available for them to choose.

Keywords: *Illegal Mining, Natural Resources, Fiscal Administration, Northern Nigeria*

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Background to the Study

The northwest region which plays host to huge deposit of gold, lithium and other solid minerals of economic importance has become a self-inflicted insurgent environment which makes developmental process futile in nature. Mining of gold and other solid minerals on daily basis has not just impacted negatively on the region and by extension, Nigeria, but has robbed the federal government of several billions which would have been channeled into meaningful developmental strides. Therefore, for every ounce of gold mined illegally, revenue is lost, unemployment, health hazards and insurgency are created.

In Nigeria, mining is an exclusive right of the central government. Africa's creative and small gold quarrying segment have advance prospective. At their optimal level in 2017, these collieries in Niger engaged up to 600,000 workers and fashioned out prospects for indigenous infrastructural expansion. However, these opportunities are weakened by non-state actors who swindled from the segment at the detriment of helpless populaces (Ogbonnaya 2020). A projected 80% of quarrying in the North West region is undertaken illegitimately and on a peasant level by indigenous people. The quarrying of huge unexploited mineral accumulation in the area, particularly gold which has premeditated significance and pecuniary worth is at the top of communal fierceness. Where insurgency thrives, development is farfetched. The entire scenario is a colossal loss to the central government who loses substantial revenue on daily basis arising from the illegal mining process and the negative health and environmental effects. Against this backdrop, it becomes very inevitable to carry out this research work to ascertain the level at which illegal mining affects fiscal administration in the region and Nigeria by extension.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the level at which illegal mining affects fiscal administration in Northwest region of Nigeria.
2. To ascertain if illegal mining has bearing to internal security challenges in the Northwest region of Nigeria
3. To ascertain the effect of ecological challenges associated with illegal mining in the Northern region of Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of clarity and easy assimilation, Elite Theory was adopted for this study. It is a psychological theory propounded by Vilfredo Pareto (1848 – 1923), Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941) and Robert Michels (1876-1936). This theory holds that an insignificant section, comprising associates of the boyant members and strategic design grip the utmost influence and that this influence is distinct of egalitarian choice. By explanation, at state level, the governor is the chief security and head of administration in principle and practice. This ideology holds sway at local government and villages which are directly superintended by Chiefs who reports intermediately to the council chairman and by extension to the state government via clan heads/paramount rulers. So, for a conspicuous activity like mining, which cannot be carried out at a glance to go on without the knowledge of the local/state authorities unabatedly, signifies that, either the miners are under the protection of the

authorities or they are doing so in connivance with the authorities. The application of this theory to the research under review has deepened concern on the activities of illegal mining in Nigeria in rural areas where traditional, political and religious authorities superintend.

Scope of the Study

The study focus is centred on the North-West region of Nigeria that has seven states. They are Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara (Ngwan 2023). The region has a population of about 49 million people (i.e about 23% of the total population of the country). Kano is the greatest populated municipality in this region as well as the second most densely inhabited metropolitan in Nigeria. The region plays host to numerous natural minerals such as gold, gypsum, kaolin, limestone, marble, iron, granite, californium etc. The predominant religion in this region is Islam. Inexpensively, the North West metropolitan zones like the town of Kano plays boosts to the economy of Nigeria whereas major non-metropolitan parts are inundated with little learning proportions and uncertainty.

Methodology

The study employed the use of secondary data which were sourced from journals, online newspapers and senate committee report. These data were analysed using Content Analysis research technique. Emphasis in this paper is to investigate the ills associated with illegal mining and its attendant effects on the economy, health and environment. Highlights of the senate committee report on illegal mining became a catalyst for first hand track trend and holistic understanding of the cultural patterns associated with the phenomenon. It was chiefly on a desk appraisal of significant articles and periodicals in order to determine investigative results.

Literature Review

The role of Mining in Sustainable Development

Mining is the pulling out of geographical resources or other treasured resources from either the top or beneath the soil, typically from a rock build (Sheldon, 2008: Worlanyo and Jiangfeng 2021). It fortifies and reinforces the industrialized growth of various nations. In Africa, both creative and little quarrying have been recognized as an important trade and industrial prospect for the populace in non-metropolitan settings and has added to the cumulative economic prosperity of several African countries. As a fundamental participant in financial advancement, it is a key contributor to every economy, as well as an engine for regional development and value-add generation (Sheldon, 2008). It undertakes a fundamental part in the fiscal growth of countries globally, aiding as a foremost manufacturing that adds to employment, infrastructural expansion, and export proceeds. It has served as a workable course to fiscal revolution in resource-rich nations such as Australia, Canada, the United States, and parts of Africa (Worlanyo and Jiangfeng 2021).

It is anticipated that the pursuit for resource search would continue to swell. However, the influence of quarrying has been theorized into financial, environmentally friendly, and societal relevance. While it is obvious that quarrying has transmuted various countries, it has also affected adversely on the atmosphere which has to be appropriately managed. In Africa,

artistic and little quarrying have been recognized as an important economic offer for indigenous populace in non-metropolitan places and has added to the overall economic gain of various African societies. As a main source of important crystals and assets, mining aids many sectors, from manufacturing to know-how, and is often essential to a nation's fiscal plan (McMahon and Moreira 2014).

The quarrying part's entire influence on socio-economic and human capital advancement in a nation is enhanced partly by the extent and structure of the sector, partly by the amount of economic proceeds made and how it is utilised, and to some extent on how it contributes to overall industrial development of the nation (McMahon and Moreira 2014). Therefore, one would rightly say mining in Nigeria is still a shadow of what it ought to be as the economic positive implications is not felt.

It is important to highlight some important benefits of mining. They include:

1. Job Creation and employment opportunities
2. Economic growth and development
3. Increase in government revenue
4. It creates balance of trade and foreign exchange earnings.
5. Infrastructural investment
6. Technological advancements and innovation spillover etc

If utilized well, the establishment of a mining industry can bring increased employment, trade, and infrastructure. In the same vein can result to a financial and social revitalization, particularly in a depressed region. It is important to note that mining acts as a important force of economic advancement for indigenous settlements, giving employments and encouraging subsidiary industries. The arrival of capital from mining industry may result to enhanced infrastructure, such as roads, schools and healthcare facilities as it is with other economic sectors. Indigenous engagement chances often lead to improved not reusable proceeds, which can boost demand for goods and services. Furthermore, the taxes and royalties paid by mining companies contribute to government revenue, which can be reinvested into community projects. Notably, the local multiplier effect means that the benefits of mining extend beyond direct employment, fostering growth in various sectors such as retail, construction, and maintenance services.

As pointed out by Sheldon (2008), sustainable practices, regulatory frameworks, and community engagement are imperative to ensure that the benefits of mining are maximized while mitigating adverse effects. As countries continue to navigate the complexities of economic growth and environmental stewardship, the mining sector must evolve to align with the principles of sustainable development, driving both economic prosperity and the well-being of communities. Through a balanced approach, mining can indeed serve as a catalyst for lasting economic development in Nigeria.

However, to maximize these benefits, sustainable mining practices are crucial as proposed by regulated authorities. These practices not only minimize environmental impacts but also

ensure the longevity of mining operations, which is essential for sustained economic growth. Choosing best practices in resource management, worker safety, and community engagement can enhance the social license to operate for mining companies. Legislators play an important function in making rules that support decent mining while encouraging indigenous financial gains.

Ecological and Health Harzards of illegal Mining

Unlawful mining is one of the major setbacks in connection with ecological devastation and natural interruptions (Jaiye, 2013). Once outsized numbers of precious stone hunters and gold miners meet in an area and activate their ecologically unfriendly mining undertakings in an overwhelming manner, they ceat untold devastation to the ground, which is often followed by contamination of the soil and rivers (with mercury and cyanide in the case of gold diggers). Lawful actions have shown completely inapt as a means of regulation, because the form of mining involved needs very little apparatus that are greatly moveable, hence providing them good opportunities of escaping regulation. Additionally, monitoring becomes almost difficult when great numbers of such people meet in a place and are disposed to use cohesion in protection of their interests. Thus, harm to the physical and organic surrounding area is complemented by obvious social pressures between the different interest groups.

Jaiye further stressed that:

“Surface mining operations generally alter the morphological makeup of the mining site as a result of digging, quarrying and dumping of debris heaps. Once an abandoned mining site has been left unreclaimed, such area becomes a badland resembling erosional features like canyon, mesa-buties and residual (submorphic) hollows, and their sizes depends on the depth of the targeted mineral and how much of that material has been extracted from the site.”

Amosu and Adeosun (2021) pointed out that the resources and devices which are ecologically hostile but used in quarrying subject the well-being of the populace in the society and the mineworkers in a serious hazard. At the dependence of their superiors, the mineworkers, operating typically in the North West and South West regions of Nigeria use shovels, diggers, axes and hoes to excavate natural resources. This is a very crude mood of mining and has detrimental health effects. In 2023, about 30 mineworkers were exterminated in a landslide caused by the undertakings of illegitimate mineworkers in the Kuje Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The ill-fated development was make known during the first summit between the FCT Minister, Nyesom Wike, and the chairmen of the six area councils on September 8, 2023 (Sunday 2023).

In a recent survey by Akinfehinwa (2024), 94.8 % are of the opinion that excavating undertakings in their villages caused ecological dilapidation, health issues, insecurity and financial deficiency. 87.7 % maintained that illegal quarrying breeds criminality, possibly serving as a funding source for extremism. Non-regulated artistic excavation in Northern Nigeria is leading to illegal weaponization and use of women in carrying out criminality in the country. The above statistics shades lighter on the dangers of illegal mining spanning from unprecedented serious health and environmental issues to economic deprivation.

Haruspice (2025) observed that illegal exaction of mineral resources regularly results to deforestation, water pollution, and soil erosion, diminishing agricultural land and threatening biodiversity. The use of dangerous substances such as mercury and cyanide pollutes local water sources, posing serious health dangers to nearby villages. Moreover, the obliteration of arable land aggravates food insecurity, distracting rural economies that depends on agriculture. It is asserted by Matazu et al (2024) that 400 youngsters died of poisoning in Zamfara state in 2010; others perished in Pandogari and Shikira communities in the Kagara Emirate Council of Niger state, where illicit quarrying had polluted the soil, groundwater and surface water. These are few instances of health and environmental challenges posed by illegal mining which are carried out in the crudest method with no regards to safety measures.

Illegal mining and fiscal economy of the North

As asserted by Oruonye and Ahmed 2018, the excavation of solid mineral deposits is a key driver to economic advancement. In 2019 the then minister of mines and steel development, Abubakar Bawa Bwari, reported that between 2016 and 2018 Nigeria had lost N353 billion (over US\$900 million) to the activities of illegal miners and smuggling syndicates. This phenomenon greatly undermines the fiscal economy of the region and Nigeria in general. It is of great concerns that while the locals and foreign illegal miners continue to plunder several mineral resources in northern Nigeria, the aftermath effects arising from insecurity, banditry, kidnapping and environmental degradation, is left for the apex government to fix and it tantamount to hundreds or thousands of billions expended with no corresponding social or economic benefit in return. Furthermore, unlawful excavation is a security crisis for the country which feasts heavily on the already burdened fiscal economy of Nigeria.

Amosu and Adeosun (2021) stated that Nigeria as a country is endowed with abundant resources of solid mineral that have the capability to trap stakeholders and business investments to enhance economic development in the country. These mineral deposits ranged from Copper, Columbite, Iron, Tin, Gold to Diamond. Regrettably, these natural endowments are being underplayed by incessant illegal excavation by non-state actors including foreigners, adudged to be financed by illegitimate investors. The Nigerian government may have lost billions of naira over the years as a result of illegal activities of operators in her mineral sector. Illicit and non-licensed mineral excavation started getting noticeable immediately after Nigeria obtain political freedom in 1960.

Generally, gold has continually been a store of affluence and as the worth of gold continues to increase, the proceeds accumulating from it rises also. Illicit excavation of mineral deposits and oil bunkering are high stakes game for the players customarily “big boys” and they always fight dirty once they feel their pot of honey is threatened (Brimah 2020). This act contributes greatly to undermining overall national interest in terms of revenue generation and development. According to live spot gold price, the current price of gold per ounce is \$2,864.49 which translates to N4,303,154.95. Significantly, this translates to several millions and perhaps billions, lost daily. Although the Federal government principally has the mining rights but it gives licenses for exploration work, mineral mining and its sales. Where there is no adequate policy, illegal inorganic excavation persists unabated as the federal government misses' royalties and income accruable to it.

In reality, Nigeria loses large portion of her income to unlawful mining of solid mineral deposits on daily basis. It was allegedly stated that two companies robbed the country of over ₦100 billion while the total loss was put at about ₦400 billion in 2017 (Oruonye and Ahmed, 2018). A 2023 report from the Ministry of Mines and Steel Development revealed that more than 80% of mining activities across Zamfara, Niger, and Kaduna states are unlawful and that the Nigerian government loses about \$2 billion in revenue yearly to unlawful mining. Going by the current exchange rate of ₦1,500 per \$1, it translates to ₦3,000,000,000,000, a significant amount that can help finance a year's budget and create impact in the country.

As observed by Ilias et al (2022), quarrying is one of the activities of government that yield huge revenue into its revenue base for the aim of handling its public, fiscal, and administrative affairs. But when these activities of government are abandoned, it, however, fall into the hands of unlawful mineworkers who are not regulated. It is overtaken by dishonest individuals who may want to amass wealth with the aim of encouraging criminality intended to undermining economic growth but upholding insecurity, through banditry which is regarded as terrorism. This illustrates how fiscal economy of the north and the entire country by extension is affected through illegal mining. The senate committee on solid minerals says illegal mining has created a pathway for insecurity in Nigeria, costing the country billions of dollars. (Lawal 2024).

Unlawful quarrying in Nigeria poses a daunting threat to the country's fiscal stability, conservational sustainability, and standard of living of the people (Haruspice 2025). In spite of the nation's rich endowment of mineral deposits, the unlawful mining of gold, columbite, tantalite, and other deposits continually destabilize fiscal sustainability, drain government revenues, and wreak havoc on local villages. Unlawful quarrying in Nigeria rapes the country of billions of naira yearly. These secret activities distract probable income from official channels, contributing to fiscal losses that could otherwise be invested into national development. According to Haruspice, the World Bank assessed that Nigeria loses over \$9 billion annually to unlawful quarrying and trafficking. This untiring issue deteriorates the nation's capacity to gain from the international request for solid minerals, decreases foreign direct stock, and endangers the recognized quarrying production, discouraging authentic operators from advancing in the sector.

It is saddening to observe that unlawful gold mining has become monotonous in Nigeria and both fellow citizen and foreigners are head bent in pilfering the nation's highly treasured deposits, yet Nigeria staggers in foreign debt. (Ajaja, 2021). Above, are few instances showcasing the backdrop of unabated mining of several minerals from the northern region at the expense of the country which indicates fiscal deficits at all fronts.

Factional politics and illegal mining spree

Factional politics and illegal mining have become an industry in northern part of Nigeria. A punch newspaper reporter, Mr. Otuchikere reported that a prominent personality of the ruling All Progressives Congress in Niger State, Jonathan Vatsa, maintained that the two furthestmost profitable businesses in Northern Nigeria are unlawful mining and armed robbery. The former Niger State Commissioner for Information, Culture, and Tourism made

this assertion in a statement on Thursday, titled *"I Am Solidly Behind Comrade Adams Oshiomhole on Illegal Mining."* "The large-scale illegal mining going on in the country, especially in the north, does not only have the full backing of retired military generals but also political elites and the top business class," he said. He further emphasised that illegal mining, which he described as having no economic benefit to the country, is a major contributor to the unending security challenges in the north. Both governmental and customary leaderships in the north, including the top commercial class, are entirely conscious of this unlawful but profitable activity. (Otuchikere, 2025)

The circumstance above calls for serious concern on why illegal mining should be tolerated in the north, enriching a few individuals while the government continues to militarize the Niger Delta region over illegal oil bunkering. This phenomenon accounts to why Vatsa questioned whether gold should not be considered a national resource just like crude oil considering its international market value which is far higher than oil. It is mind blowing how resources of great value and economic importance could be constantly mined and controlled by factional leaders and their foreign collaborators unabatedly at the detriment of the entire nation while the apex government who does not benefit in any way from this mining spree spends billions to address the after effects of the perpetrated illegality.

The issue of authorized or unlawfulness is a function of the prevailing administrative setting and the forces behind any law, decree, by-law and ordinances in a country (Jaiye 2013). Unlawful colliers generally are uneducated and ill-informed about the bureaucratic approach to quarrying activities within the nation. The illicit colliers are not unaware of the current regulations but intentionally disregard such regulations with impunity and sometimes with help from dishonest officers of the federal organizations. It appears some elites in the north see illegal mining as being normal and a money spinning venture rather than a destructive act. The establishment of the Presidential Artisanal Gold Mining Initiative (PAGMI) in 2019 by President Muhammadu Buhari was to grow the sector locally and possible diversification of Nigeria's economy and foreign reserves (Oyeyemi 2020). The Northern region of Nigeria which is rich in gold deposits and other solid minerals has legalized illegal gold mining for Northerners after the establishment of the Initiative thus turning the presidential initiative to a cankerworm of thorns.

Illegal Mining and Insecurity

The mining of inorganic substances, which occurs in some parts of the nation without the needed authorization from the constitutional governing establishments, has continued to cause security concerns (Sunday, 2023). This is not unrelated to the fact that many citizens of Nigeria and even foreign nationalities have in the last few years either been slaughtered or kidnapped by hoodlums at the quarrying sites. He further stressed that partnerships between administratively interconnected persons and Chinese companies in unlawful quarrying of gold and other resources is also accountable for robbery and ferocious local skirmishes in some parts of Nigeria such as the North West, North Central and to some extent, South West. Beyond economic disruption, unlawful quarrying propels local insecurity and systematized corruption. Armed groups, most times operating in mineral-rich parts, exploit these

endowments to finance criminality, additionally subverting already delicate villages (Haruspice 2025). This sequence perpetuates insufficiency and marginalization, averting the unbiased delivery of Nigeria's natural wealth.

An enquiry undertaken by the Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative which was made available in March 2023, revealed that unlawful quarrying was at the centre of armed robbery and guerrilla war fares, particularly in northern Nigeria, with huge amount of illegitimately mined gold said to have been trafficked into neighbouring nations like Niger and Mali (Ujah et al 2025). These illegalities have created a series of violence in communal quarrying sites. For instance, Amnesty International reported that "from January to July 2023, there were more than 2,000 abductions about mining site disputes in Zamfara State alone. Some militants and bandits also impose levies or 'taxes' on miners and local communities, while other actors seize the mining sites for themselves in order to use the proceeds to buy arms and finance their operations."

Matazu et al (2024) noted: " the six governors of the northeastern states: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe, under the auspices of the North East Governors Forum, had resolved to deal squarely with illegal mining in the region at the end of their eighth meeting, which was held in Maiduguri, Borno State on September 9, 2023. The governors stated that proliferation of legal and illegal miners in the region was becoming a problem. They noted that there was a link between mining activities and insecurity, especially the abuse of mining leases; and therefore, resolved to enforce compliance with the provision of local consent as contained in Nigeria's mining policy". Collaboration between politically connected Nigerians and Chinese corporations in illegal gold mining drives rural banditry and violent local conflicts in some parts of Nigeria. This includes the North West, North Central and to some extent South West regions (Ogbonnaya 2020).

Conclusion

This research aimed majorly to examine the level at which illegal mining affects fiscal administration in Northern Nigeria, its effects on health and environmental issues, subsequently. From the foregoing, there is a strong argument bearing to the impact of unlawful mining on the fiscal economy of Northwest region of Nigeria and its attendant effects on health, environment and internal security. The country keeps contending and hoping to surmount them someday. However, it calls for concern when a bold act of criminality is perpetrated unabatedly under the watch of several constituted institutions like the traditional, religious and political institutions. To escalate the level of recklessness of this act is the collaboration of foreigners whose country Nigeria is highly indebted to. This has hindered fiscal administration of the northwest and Nigeria as a whole, thereby making development a mirage. While the fight against internal insecurity becomes tougher, the provision of health care services and environmental preservation is below average.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it was recommended that:

1. Government should be deliberate in fixing infrastructure, revamp the economy and

- make it vibrant so as to naturally discourage participation of the youth in illegal mining as better options of making ends meet will be available for them to choose.
2. Government should develop the solid mineral sector and leverage on its gains. This will create huge legal employment opportunities with safety measures put in place for both health and the environment. The lacuna created by government by not taking full charge of mining process in the country gives room for illegality. Also, a stiffer punishment/sanction should be imposed and offenders should be punished accordingly, irrespective of tribe, religious or political affiliations. This will deter many from this unwholesome act.
 3. The establishment of the Presidential Artisanal Gold Mining Initiative (PAGMI) in 2019 should be abolished as it gives room for thieving of national resources by some unscrupulous elites. Just as oil, gold mining and other solid minerals should take charge by the central government and the proceeds utilized for the benefits of all.

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