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# Armed groups and illicit economies in Nigeria

## Insights from Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara mining communities

### Summary

Armed groups' involvement in illegal mining in Nigeria has exacerbated arms smuggling, consequently increasing insecurity and violent conflict in the country and across the Sahel. It's also seen a rise in the kidnapping of women and girls for forced labour in the mines. Governments must deal with the socio-economic and political factors that sustain banditry in Nigeria's North West Region, the involvement of armed groups in illegal mining and the transnational dimensions of the crime.

### Key points

- Armed groups engage in illegal mining due to corruption by state actors and community members, as well as poverty and a lack of opportunities.
- Inconsistencies in Nigeria's mining sector regulations, specifically between the Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act, 2007, and the Land Use Act, 2004, exacerbate the problem.
- Armed groups' control of mining areas undermines government legitimacy and stability.
- Militarisation has been unproductive and security forces are compromised by corruption.
- Illegal mining fuels security problems and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.
- The transnational criminal market for illegally mined gold extends to Chad, India, Lebanon, Niger and the United Arab Emirates.
- The use of girls in mining violates international labour laws.

## Armed groups' control of mining areas undermines government legitimacy and stability

### Introduction

There are three distinct categories of operators in Nigeria's mining sector.<sup>1</sup> The first are corporate miners, including local and foreign mining companies, mostly from China, India and Lebanon. This category engages in formal and licensed operations. They operate under mining leases granted in accordance with relevant sections of the Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act, 2007.

The second category involves small-scale and artisanal miners. These are subsistence miners not officially employed by a mining company, but working independently, using their own resources, usually by hand.<sup>2</sup> Their operations are limited to the use of non-mechanised methods of reconnaissance, exploration, extraction and processing of mineral resources within a Small Scale Mining Lease Area.<sup>3</sup>

The third category of operators are the illegal miners. These are individuals and groups conducting exploration or mining of minerals or carrying out quarrying operations other than in accordance with the provisions of the Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act, 2007.<sup>4</sup> They include locals and foreigners, particularly from China.

Across Nigeria, several Chinese nationals have been arrested and prosecuted for illegal mining activities since 2000. In May 2024, two Chinese nationals were jailed for illegal mining in Kwara State.<sup>5</sup> As a 2023 ENACT study indicated, illegal mining activities by Chinese and other foreign actors are complicating Nigeria's criminal and security landscape.

In a country dealing with diverse forms of criminality, foreign criminals in the extractive sector present a serious challenge.<sup>6</sup> Locals in mining communities accuse the Chinese of collaborating with extremist and militant groups, corrupting government officials, destroying farmlands and polluting water with mercury and lead.<sup>7</sup>

In Nigeria, the line between artisanal and illegal mining is blurred. Over 80% of the country's solid minerals, especially gold, are mined on an artisanal and illegal basis, involving more than two million people.<sup>8</sup> With the illegal mining of up to 95% of Nigeria's gold, it is estimated that the country's \$1.8 billion gold reserves are mined by private individuals<sup>9</sup> with revenues that are not remitted to the authorities.<sup>10</sup>

A 2020 ENACT study found that illegal miners in Nigeria fronted for politically connected people who collaborated with foreign nationals and corporations to smuggle and sell gold through neighbouring countries.<sup>11</sup> This development depicts a well-organised transnational criminal network, with the participation of state-embedded actors.

Illegal mining in Nigeria is exacerbated by the involvement of armed groups, particularly bandits and terrorists. This twist to the country's burgeoning illicit and lucrative underground economies, particularly in the North West, has worsened over the past four years, but isn't new.<sup>12</sup>

A community leader in Anka, Zamfara State, told ENACT: 'The involvement of armed groups in illegal mining has been ongoing for a long time. Government pretended not to have noticed it until now.'<sup>13</sup> This was corroborated by a security officer who told ENACT on condition of anonymity that: 'The bandits involved in illegal mining now did not start as miners. Initially they were not among the miners but were hiding behind hills and trees attacking minefields and mining communities. They were not called bandits then. Gradually they acquired arms and ammunition, enabling them to heighten attacks on communities, displacing mining communities and companies and [seizing] sites.'

Although kidnapping for ransom, particularly of schoolchildren by armed groups, has remained prevalent in Nigeria's North West Region, there has been a steady, gradual shift of the groups into illegal mining activities.

As part of ENACT's ongoing work on violent extremist groups and illicit economies in West Africa, this study focuses on the involvement of armed groups in illegal mining in the Anka, Birnin Gwari and Jibia mining communities of Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara States, respectively. It explores the changing dynamics and dimensions of transnational organised crime in mining communities in the region and how cultural factors enable smuggling and trafficking of illegally mined minerals across border communities in the area. It also examines the implications of the involvement of armed groups in illegal mining on the communities.

## Methodology

The study combined an extensive desk and literature review with field interviews and descriptive analyses on the involvement of armed groups in illicit economies, particularly illegal mining and gold smuggling. This mixed approach provided multiple sources of data for analysis. The literature review included previous ENACT studies and scholarly publications by other organisations and individuals on illegal mining in the North West Region.

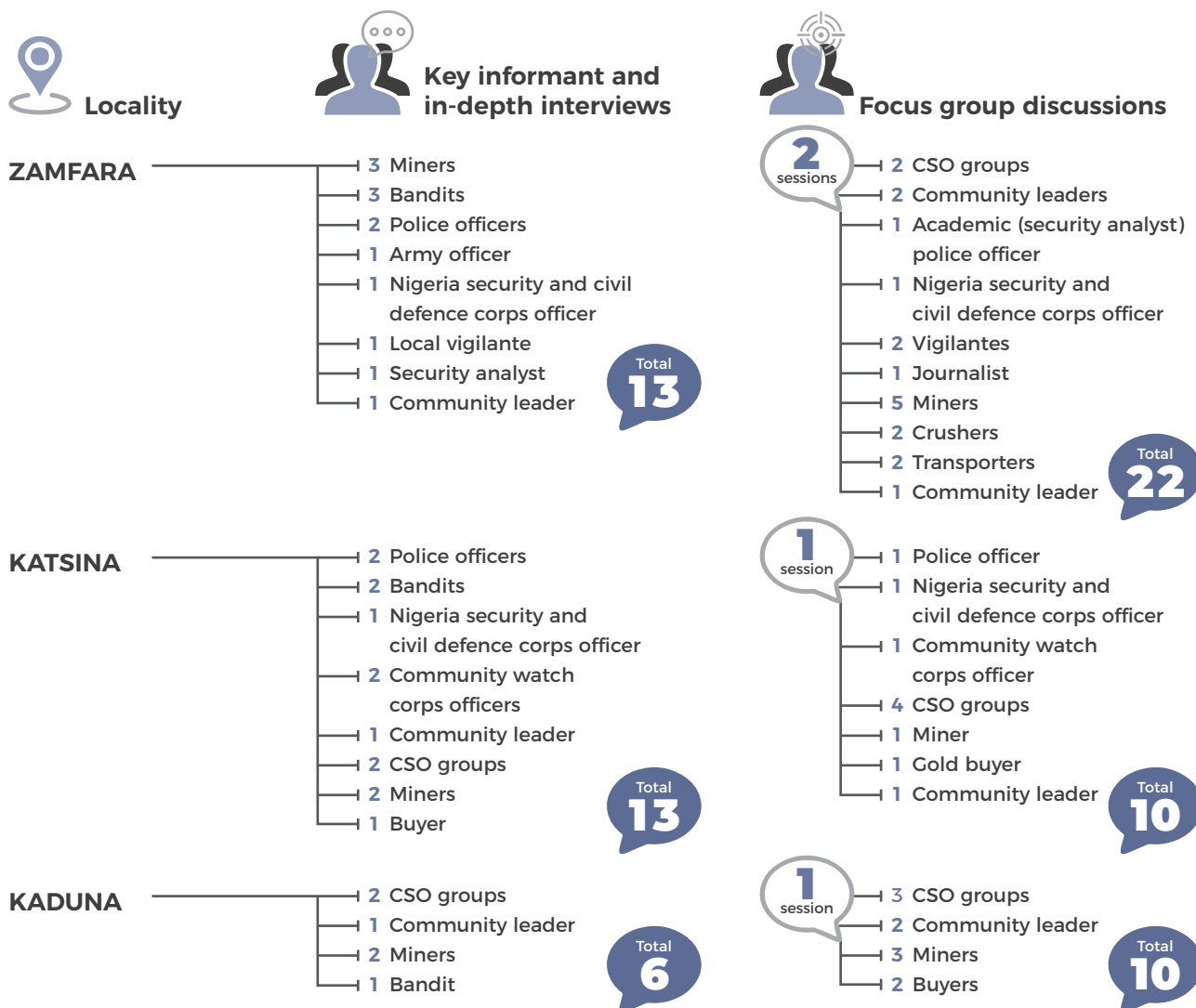
It also included legal and policy materials (legislation, strategies, action plans, etc.), press releases, speeches, official statements or declarations and other relevant policy documents.

Field data was generated through key informant and in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted in Anka, Birnin Gwari, Jibia and other mining communities in the three states. Thirty-two key informant and in-depth interviews and four sessions of focus group discussion involving 40 participants were conducted across the three states.

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Foreign actors  
in illegal mining  
complicate Nigeria's  
security landscape

**Chart 1: Composition of key informant and in-depth interviews and focus group**



Source: ENACT Field Study, 2024

Interviewees and focus group discussion participants included local miners, members of armed groups, academics (security and environmental analysts), security and law enforcement agents, civil society organisations working in the communities, community leaders and residents, among others. Chart 1 shows how key informant and in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were composed:

## Definition of key terms

### Armed group

Unless otherwise stated, the term ‘armed group’ is used in this study to refer to both bandits and terrorists. Notwithstanding the generic usage of the term, bandits refer to an assortment of non-ideologically but economically driven organised criminal groups involved in large-scale illicit economic activities. This includes cattle theft, sexual violence, extortion rackets, kidnapping for ransom, armed robbery, pillage, illegal mining and targeting of road users mostly in Nigeria’s North West.<sup>14</sup>

‘Terrorists’ refer to groups and individuals who unlawfully use violence or threats to intimidate or coerce a civilian population or government, with the goal of furthering political, social, or ideological objectives.

The key difference between bandits and terrorists is the driving factor. While bandits are driven purely by economic imperatives, terrorists are driven by politico-religious ideologies, although both groups employ the unlawful use of force and threats. This study focuses on bandit groups. For the purpose of clarity, in this report, specific bandit groups are referred to as gangs.

## Artisanal mining

The Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act, 2007, defines artisanal mining as mining operations limited to the use of non-mechanised methods of reconnaissance, exploration, extraction and processing of mineral resources within a Small Scale Mining Lease Area.<sup>15</sup> That is an area subject to a mining lease granted under the Act. Artisanal mining, also known as small-scale mining, is a subsistence activity by miners who are not officially employed by a mining company, but work independently, mining minerals using their own resources, usually by hand. It includes enterprises or individuals who employ workers for mining, but generally still use manually intensive methods, working with hand tools.<sup>16</sup>

## Illegal mining

Illegal mining is defined by the Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act, 2007, as the conduct, exploration, or mining of minerals, or the carrying out of quarrying operations other than in accordance with the provisions of the Act. It also includes providing false and misleading statements, false declarations or non-declaration by individuals or corporate organisations, while filing application for mineral title. By the provisions of the Act, illegal mining also includes the deliberate removal, possession or dispossession of any mineral contrary to the provisions of the Act.<sup>17</sup>

## Illicit economy

This refers to a range of state-prohibited economic activities, such as human trafficking, arms smuggling, money laundering and cybercrime.<sup>18</sup> Within the context of Nigeria's North West, bandits are involved in various illicit economies including large-scale cattle rustling, extortion, kidnapping for ransom (particularly of schoolchildren), armed robbery, illegal mining and smuggling of mineral resources, as well as arms and drugs trafficking, among others.

## Armed groups in mining communities

Over the past four years, mining communities in Nigeria's North West have seen increased involvement of bandits in illegal mining activities. This is more prevalent in the border communities of Birnin Gwari, in Kaduna State; Jibia, in northern Katsina State; and Anka, in Zamfara State.

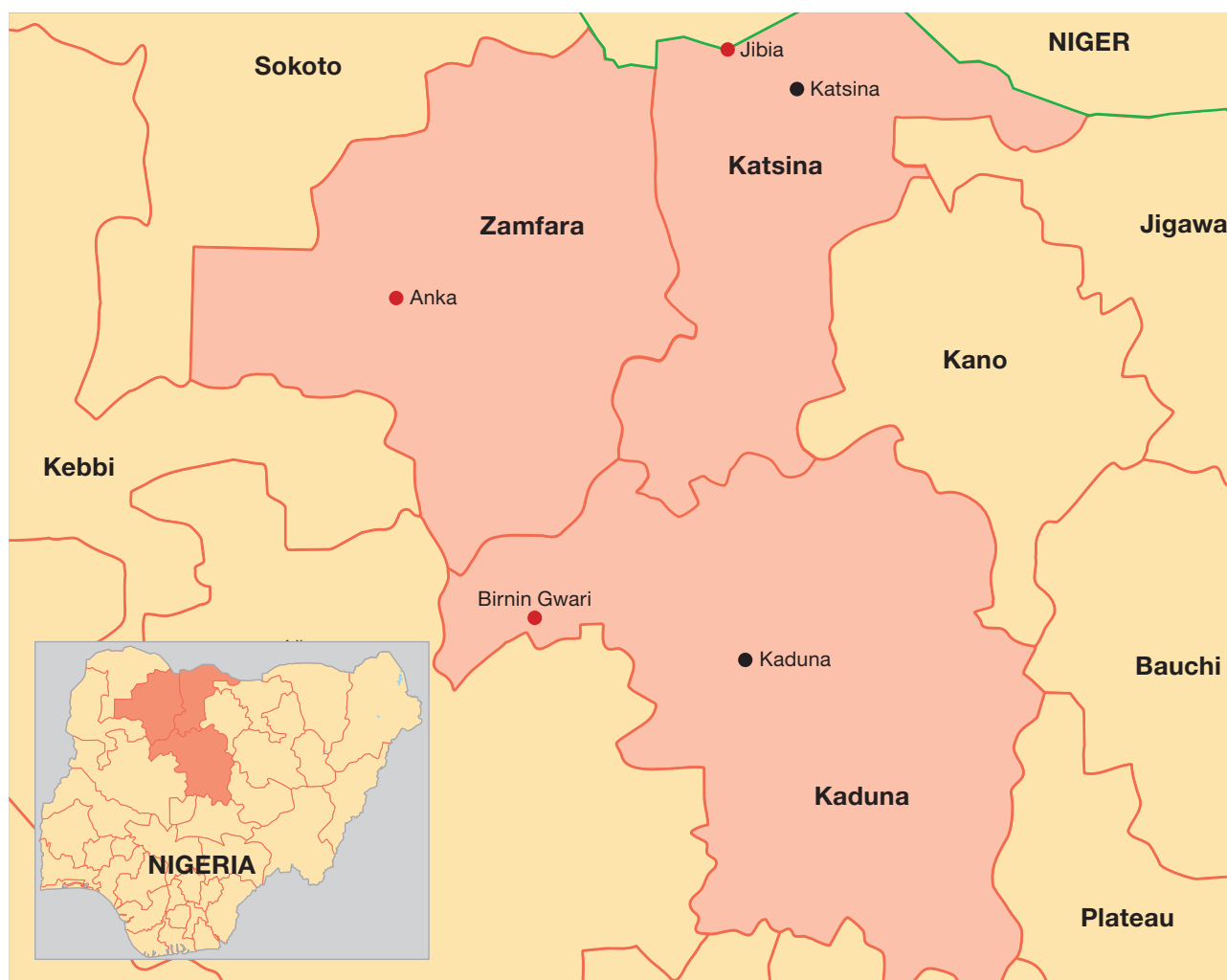
Jibia, Anka and Birnin Gwari share common characteristics. They have large deposits of solid minerals, particularly gold and quartzite, which are the main targets of bandits due to their economic value. The alluvial nature of gold in the region accounts for its attractiveness to illicit miners, including armed groups. Like alluvial diamonds, alluvial gold is easy to mine. It is also highly fungible and easy to smuggle.

Armed groups also target lithium due to its strategic importance. Nigeria has large deposits of lithium in several regions, including North West.<sup>19</sup> This mineral, which is driving the world's renewable energy vision, is used for several industrial applications, including the production of metal and ion batteries.

Jibia, Anka and Birnin Gwari have become the epicentre of banditry and illegal mining in the region. In Jibia, bandits control large expanse of minefields in Wagini community of Batsari, about 54 km from Jibia town, allowing only people who have pledged loyalty to their group to access the fields.<sup>20</sup> In Anka, communities

Bandits target gold and lithium due to their immense economic value

**Chart 2: Map showing Anka (Zamfara), Birnin Gwari (Kaduna) and Jibia (Katsina)**



Source: Created using information provided by ENACT

around the Sumke Forest, especially Bagega and Dan Kamfani, which have large gold reserves, have been overtaken by bandit groups engaging in illegal mining.

ENACT was told that most residents from these two places had been displaced by bandits and were now living in Anka town as internally displaced persons (IDPs).<sup>21</sup> In Kaduna, the minefields in Bugai community, about 13 km from Birnin Gwari town, are controlled by bandits. The area is now referred to as the 'axis of danger and hazards'<sup>22</sup> due to the activities of bandits along the Kaduna-Katsina-Zamfara route.

## Anka

In Anka, four major bandit groups control the minefields. The Kachalla Musa, Maiyaggwai and Tamani gangs control the minefields in Kanye. The Halilu Sububu<sup>23</sup> gang controls the mines in Abare, Bagega, Dan Kamfani, Dareta, Gando, Jarkuka, Tungar Daji, Kirsa and Zugu, some of which share boundaries with Katsina State.

A staff member of a community-based organisation in Anka, the Productive Citizens, told ENACT: 'The Halilu boys are the richest of the bandits in the area because they have many sites under their control and they operate with high-calibre weapons.'<sup>24</sup> Besides Anka, bandits also control the minefields in the state's Bukkuyum and Maradun Local Government Areas (LGAs). It is said that the groups have plans to expand their mining activities to other LGAs, particularly Gummi, which shares boundaries with Anka.<sup>25</sup>

A community leader in Bagega painted a worrying projection. 'At the rate they [bandits] are going, it is possible they would take over total control of most minefields in the state in a few years from now.'<sup>26</sup> Sani Risko, a member of the Halilu Sububu gang and coordinator of the group's mining operations, confirmed the projection: 'For years we have watched people doing mining without our involvement. But that time is gone now. We have come in and we will not leave. We have come to stay.'<sup>27</sup> Sajo Alhaji Isa, another member of the gang, said: 'We are doing mining in about four locations in Anka alone. We control more than half of the mining sites in Bagega, and we are going to cover four other LGAs in Zamfara.'<sup>28</sup>

The group's intention to sustain and expand mining activities beyond its current areas of operation signposts potential expansion of illicit activities within the mining sector. It also highlights the intractability of the security challenges across the North West Region occasioned by the involvement of bandits in illegal mining.

The operations of armed groups, which cut across the entire production chain, including mining, crushing, washing, pricing and others, indicate a well-coordinated criminal enterprise. There are miners, crushers and transporters in the minefields, 'all working for bandit groups.'<sup>29</sup> Illegally mined gold is transported to a well-protected store in Dareta, about 22 minutes' drive from Bagega, through unmanned routes.

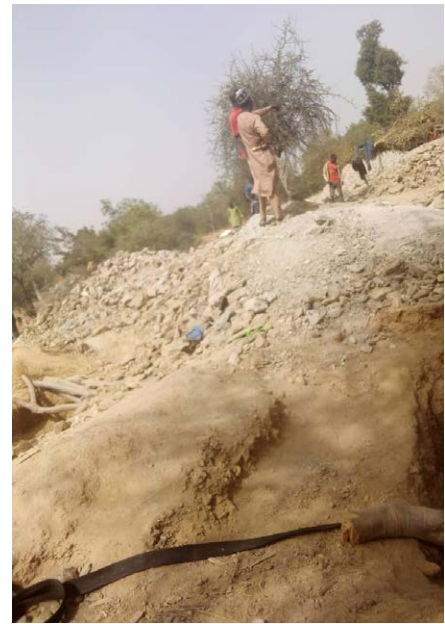
Bandit groups are fully mobile and know the surroundings well. The groups operate amid complex routes and intersections of tracks and footpaths in big forests that house their bases and hideouts. The Dauran route that leads to Gurbin Baure is the shortest route to Katsina from Zamfara, but it is 'characterised by dense forest and complex intersections that are highly confusing for non-natives.'<sup>30</sup> Good knowledge of the environment enables armed groups to move easily while smuggling illegally mined minerals away from routes that are prone to security checks.

Although groups have their designated areas of operation, they also move around. In Bagega, Isa, a member of Halilu Sububu gang, told ENACT that groups 'from other states are joining us to mine gold.' Obviously referring to Katsina State, Isa's assertion may indicate possible collaboration among groups or an intention to expand beyond their current sphere of control and operation.

Manu Yuka, another member of the Halilu Sububu gang, confirmed this. 'Zamfara and Katsina are the same territory,' he said. 'It is only you that [creates] the distinction between them. The bush or the forest, as you want to call it, is the same. The only difference is that it thickens and expands in some locations and contracts and narrows in others.'<sup>31</sup> In Anka, the evident collaboration between residents, particularly community leaders, and bandits in illegal mining and smuggling of gold is well documented.<sup>32</sup> This may well explain the 18 January 2024 Executive Order signed by the Executive Governor of Zamfara State, Dauda Lawal, prohibiting traditional rulers from issuing consent letters for mining in the state.<sup>33</sup>

Although ENACT was informed that some community collaborators were coerced to work for armed groups - 'you either cooperate with them or get killed'<sup>34</sup> - Risko thinks that community collaborators do it for money. 'I don't know about other places, but in Zamfara, all the politically important persons in this state are involved in this mining and we have worked for them at one time or the other. We are still sharing those sites with them. Although they have released most of their stake to us, they still have the most productive sites and pits.'<sup>35</sup>

While Risko's assertion confirms the involvement of state-embedded actors, the apparent complicity of security agencies is more troubling. Although security personnel who spoke to ENACT denied the collaboration, in



Minefields of Dan Kamfani, Bagega

Bagega and Dan Kamfani, military personnel at security checkpoints collect as much as ₦3 000 per truck and ₦2 000 per motorcycle (*okada*) that convey gold from minefields to crushing sites and stores.

## Birnin Gwari

In Birnin Gwari, two major gangs operate under the command of leaders named Yellow and Dogo Gide. Both gangs are based in the Kamuku Forest and operate around Birnin Gwari and some parts of Niger State. Each gang has over 200 members, including women and girls, and they are affiliated to Boko Haram. In the initial stages of banditry in Kaduna State, those who emerged as gang leaders received training from the terror groups.

A member of the Kaduna State Command of the Vigilante Group of Nigeria said, 'There is a close connection between bandits in Birnin Gwari and Boko Haram in the North East. Dogo Gide was a close ally of Boko Haram leaders and was trained by the group before he started operations along the Birnin Gwari axis. [To] date, he smuggles gold to Chad through his agents in Gamborin Gala in Borno State. Those agents are former Boko Haram fighters.'<sup>36</sup>

The Dogo Gide gang, which operates from Kamuku Forest to Tegna in Rafi LGA of Niger State, controls the Kaduna-Niger axis, and is involved in the kidnapping of travellers, students and community residents, for ransom. Gang members also raid minefields for gold and unbanked cash. The Yellow gang operates along the Kaduna-Katsina axis and is more involved in cattle rustling and gold smuggling. They also carry out sporadic attacks and raids on mining sites and markets for gold and cash. The existence of large flows of liquid and unbanked cash at mining sites demonstrates the sector's weak regulation. The cash-based nature of the transactions at mining sites attracts bandits and terrorists, resulting in regular attacks on mining communities and markets.<sup>37</sup>

The collaboration between bandits and terrorists in Kaduna clearly depicts Tosin Osasona's clarification of the 'crime-terror nexus' – which refers to either the environmental or operational convergence of violent non-state actors and terror groups that have divergent objectives and that would naturally use different tactics to achieve their goals.<sup>38</sup>



Kwandago mining site in Madarounfa, Maradi in Niger Republic. The miners are from Nigerian communities.



Citing established sources,<sup>39</sup> Osasona asserted that across the world, criminal and extremist groups had reportedly converged in five ways. The first was through coexistence, which implied the operation of criminal and terrorist groups in the same territorial space. The second was in the appropriation of activity, where criminal organisations deployed terrorist tactics and organisations engaging in criminal activities for strategic advantages.

The third referred to alliances between terrorist groups and criminal gangs, a symbiotic collaboration where criminal and terrorist organisations collaborated and contributed in their areas of expertise to achieve their respective goals. The fourth referred to the merger of criminal groups with terrorist organisations, or vice versa. The fifth was the transformation of criminal gangs into terrorist organisations and vice versa.<sup>40</sup>

However, a sixth mode of interaction between the groups would be competition, including violent competition and clashes over territorial control and influence. In Nigeria, this mode of interaction is rare among bandits and terrorists. Nonetheless, it is prevalent between terror groups, as seen in the fratricidal clash between Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in the North East. It has also been witnessed among bandit gangs. In April 2024, a gang leader, Kachalla Dankaremi, killed another, Sani Dangote, in the Dumbunrun Forest between Batsari and Jibia, in a clash over the control of rustled livestock.<sup>41</sup>

Birnin Gwari also represents a clear case of collaboration between the community and armed groups. Dan-Sani Bala, a member of the Dogo Gide gang, told ENACT that armed groups operating in Birnin Gwari were not directly involved in the mining and buying of gold. They operate through proxies in Old Birnin Gwari, Bugai and Dogon Dawa minefields. Some of the proxies are abducted from nearby villages and are forced to mine for the groups. Others do it for financial gain. Minefields in Bugai have become regular targets of attacks by armed groups.

Gold taken from miners and buyers is smuggled to the Republic of Niger through Jibia. Bala also disclosed that bandits use different routes and diversions when moving from Kaduna to Katsina States. For instance, they use the Bugai-Sabon Layi-Bassawa-Faskari routes. Bugai, Sabon Layi and Bassawa are all in Kaduna State, while Faskari is in Katsina State. These routes help the groups to evade several security checkpoints along the Kaduna-Katsina-Zamfara roads. The consequence is that communities along the routes, particularly Faskari, have come under sustained attack by bandit groups, resulting in human displacement and socio-economic dislocation.

The groups also use the Bugai-Gwaska-Doka route to connect to communities in Zamfara. One such community is Dansadau in Maru LGA, considered one of the operational bases of bandit groups in the state.

## Jibia

In Jibia, bandits control minefields in the Wagini community in Batsari, about 54 km from Jibia town. They also control the Zurmi, Zandam, Korama Magama and Kwandago sites. Kwandago, a border community in Madarounfa, Maradi, Republic of Niger, is about 23 km from Jibia town. The groups also control the fields in Nigeria's Nahuta, which is a dense forest located at the boundary between Batsari and Jibia. The groups have their leadership structure. There are gang and syndicate leaders operating in a given axis. Until the recent killing of Dangote by Dankaremi, both leaders controlled the minefields in the western part of Jibia, the Zurmi-Jibia-Batsari Forest.

## Collaboration between communities and bandits often occurs out of coercion



Minefields of Dan Kamfani, Bagega

Since the death of Dangote, Dankaremi has assumed absolute and unrivalled control of the fields. His gang operates in Shinfida, Eka, Gurbi, Baure and other areas, which serve as connecting and smuggling routes for groups in Kaduna and Zamfara States. More recently, however, another group, the Baleri gang, has begun to operate in the southern part of Jibia. With his deputy, Gagare, Baleri controls all the fields along the Dumburum-Nahuta axis, including Mallama Dan Tudu, Batsari, Zandam, Fafara and Barande communities.

Bandit groups in Jibia, and across the region, have two categories of workers on the minefields – paid labourers and kidnapped victims held hostage for failure to pay ransom. Manu is a member of the Baleri gang. He spoke to ENACT in Zandam, about 14 km from Jibia town, saying bandit groups pay and feed the labourers while the hostages secure their freedom after working in the fields for as long as the gang leader may approve, if ransom is not paid.

‘For labourers, we can use anybody at our disposal. We use anybody and anything available and they must work for us whether they like it or not. For those [who] are kidnapped, working for us is usually a way of getting their own freedom.’<sup>42</sup> Manu’s assertion confirmed collaborations between community residents and bandits, especially in illegal mining activities. However, it reiterated responses during the focus group discussion in Bagega, Anka, that some community collaborators were coerced to work for armed groups: ‘You either cooperate with them or get killed.’<sup>43</sup>



Minefields of Dan Kamfani, Bagega

The use of kidnapped victims for illegal mining by bandits may explain the sustained incidents of kidnapping in the North West, particularly of schoolchildren. Bandits and kidnappers 'arrest rural people, including schoolchildren, at will and demand ransom. Until the ransom is paid, the abducted individuals remain in [captivity], working for bandits.'<sup>44</sup> There are, however, cases of abducted people who stay with the bandits. Kidnapping is also a means through which group members are recruited. Kidnapping of schoolchildren by armed groups is prevalent in Katsina and Zamfara States, turning the Katsina-Kebbi-Zamfara axis into the epicentre of banditry and the axis of danger and hazards.<sup>45</sup>

In Jibia, respondents, including community leaders, believe there is collaboration between armed bandits and state-embedded actors, including security operatives, in illegal mining and gold smuggling. An official of a peace advocacy group in Jibia, Committed to Peace, told ENACT: 'Baleri in Katsina State, Halilu in Zamfara State and Dogo Gide in Kaduna State, were empowered by politically exposed persons and others in government. Baleri and Halilu [have been] using foreign-made guns since they were young. Those guns were bought by politicians, who are also miners, to guard their mining fields for them. The bandits later turned miners.'<sup>46</sup>

Gambo Modi, another member of the Baleri gang, confirmed the collaboration, saying 'politicians have been in gold mining for years. They built their fortunes with gold money. They have accumulated huge amounts of money from gold mining. We gave them the opportunity.'<sup>47</sup>

Although collaboration between security personnel and bandits seemed veiled, a member of the Jibia Peoples' Forum, a community-based organisation, told ENACT that miners working for bandits in the Kwandago minefields bribed the Nigerian military in order to access the fields and the Nigerian border security to smuggle gold.<sup>48</sup> However, the Nigeria Police Force, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps and Nigerian Armed Forces officials who spoke to ENACT on condition of anonymity denied knowledge of collaboration between security officials and bandits in illegal mining and gold smuggling.



Mining site in Kandago, Madarounfa

## Armed groups recruit new members through kidnapping

## Women and girls in mining face exploitation, trafficking and forced labour

### Gendered dimension

A dangerous dimension to the involvement of bandit groups in illegal mining is the use of women and girls, including minors, some as young as 12. Women and girls in minefields are used as sex slaves, informants, labourers and gold smugglers. As sex slaves, the younger girls are the exclusive preserve of group leaders. In Bagega, Risko, who coordinates mining operations for the Halilu Sububu gang, confirmed to ENACT that some of the women on site 'work for the leader alone.'<sup>49</sup>

As informants, women and girls scan the communities and forests for information on the movement of security operatives, which is relayed to the groups. They are also used as labourers in the mining process and to exchange illegally mined gold for arms and ammunition across international borders. Women and girls transport weapons from the border to the mining sites and illegally mined gold from the sites to the border. This is more prevalent in Zamfara State.

In a previous study, ENACT found that armed groups saw numerous advantages to using women and girls to facilitate the exchange of gold for arms and ammunition. First, they are paid far less than their male counterparts to smuggle illegally mined resources across borders. The girls, especially minors, are less susceptible to security scrutiny across the border and could be used to bribe border security officials.<sup>50</sup>

Women and girls, again especially minors, are recruited by armed groups using two key methods – employment and abduction. Some of the women and young girls are engaged by armed groups to work in the minefields for money, as a means of livelihood. As Jibia-based Baleri gang member Manu disclosed, those employed are paid and fed by the groups for their services. Poverty in Nigeria's North West makes women susceptible to recruitment by armed groups.

Armed groups also benefit from Nigeria's massive number of out-of-school children. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the number of out-of-school children in Nigeria rose from 10.5 million in 2017 to 11 million in 2019 and 18.3 million in 2022. A third of Nigeria's children are out of school – 10.2 million at primary school level and 8.1 million at junior secondary school level. Nigeria's out-of-school population accounts for 15% of the global total. Sixty percent of these children are in northern Nigeria, and over 75% of these are girls.<sup>51</sup> It's easy for illegal miners and arms traffickers, including armed groups, to recruit from this pool of out-of-school girls, while also abducting schoolchildren generally.

Another way to recruit is through kidnapping. In Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara and across the North West, bandits have sustained the kidnapping of schoolchildren, including girls, for ransom. Many of the girls have remained in captivity for more than three years,

particularly those whose parents cannot pay their ransom. This has had a significantly negative impact on women and young girls. In Katsina State, for instance, nearly 100 schools remain closed due to attacks by bandits, including the 11 December 2020 abduction of over 300 pupils from Government Science Secondary School on the outskirts of Kankara Local Government Area.<sup>52</sup>

This situation, which is affecting the education of over 30 000 children, including young girls, has worsened the socio-economic conditions of women and young girls. Many of these women have been rendered widows, household heads and breadwinners. This has also exacerbated existing societal anomalies, including high levels of poverty, gender inequality and tensions over income-generating opportunities and land-use resources.<sup>53</sup>

## Implications

The involvement of armed groups in illegal mining has several implications. Using women and girls, particularly minors, in illegal mining has health and legal consequences. It exposes them to lead dust poisoning resulting in health complications and death. A 2020 Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative study found that it disadvantages women socio-economically and exposes those living in mining camps and communities to public health risks and violence, including drug abuse, alcoholism and prostitution.<sup>54</sup>

Legally, using minors violates the International Labour Organization's Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).<sup>55</sup>

Besides the impact on women and girls, the illicit exploitation of natural resources by armed groups also has socio-economic, environmental and public health implications, particularly for mineral-bearing communities. Socio-economically, it leads to displacement and social dislocation in mining communities.

According to a Bagega community leader, 'The population of Bagega was about 7 000 (in 2018) before bandits took over the entire community. But it is now between 2 500 and 3 000 people because of massive displacement. Most of the displaced people are living as IDPs in Anka town.'<sup>56</sup> Zandam village head Nura Sulaiman, and most of the people of that community, now live in Jibia town as IDPs. Bandits have also displaced most of Birnin Gwari's Kamuku Forest zone communities, who now live in Birnin Gwari town as IDPs.

Economically, illegal mining, especially of gold, deprives the state of revenue. According to Jonathan Gaza Gbefwi, Chairman, House of Representatives Committee on Solid Minerals, illegal mining activities, including by armed groups, cost Nigeria about US\$9 billion a year. Only 3% of royalties were paid by the few licensed miners.<sup>57</sup>

Illegal mining also constitutes an environmental crime. Broadly defined, environmental crime includes activities that directly harm the environment – wildlife, biodiversity and natural resources.<sup>58</sup> It also includes the illegal trade in wildlife and hazardous waste, including smuggling of ozone-depleting substances; illegal logging and trade in stolen timber; and illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing. All of these affect the environment.

Illegal miners' use of prohibited equipment, devices or chemicals, including explosives and ozone-depleting substances, expose the Earth's crust to erosion, causing sinkholes; contamination of soil, groundwater and surface water; loss of biodiversity; health risks; and even death. It can also lead to potentially fatal mining-related landslides. In 2010, about 400 children died of lead poisoning in Zamfara State, and many more perished in Pandogari and Shikira villages in the Kagara Emirate Council of Niger State from contaminated water due to illegal mining activities.<sup>59</sup>

Illegal mining  
activities cost Nigeria  
about US\$9 billion  
a year

The exchange of illegally mined gold for arms and ammunition, particularly in border communities, has led to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons across Nigeria and beyond. Deadly conflicts across the North West involving armed groups, including bandits, jihadists, armed robbers, kidnapers and cattle rustlers, fuelled by arms trafficking, has led to the internal displacement of over a million people.<sup>60</sup>

According to the Nextier Violent Conflict Database, between 1 June 2020 and 15 March 2024, the North West was Nigeria's most volatile region, plagued mostly by banditry. It recorded 6 104 cases of death and injury (5 489 fatalities and 615 injured people) and 5 617 kidnap victims from 1 151 violent incidents.<sup>61</sup> With over 250 000 internally displaced persons and over 8 000 deaths in 2023, Katsina State alone accounts for the highest number of victims of insecurity in the North West.<sup>62</sup>

The intersection of illegal mining and rising insecurity across the North West is further complicated by the absence of international mechanisms to counter the cross-border dimension of illegal mining, particularly gold smuggling, to other parts of Africa and further. This highlights the need to strengthen collaboration among border security agencies to adequately address the problem.

## Transnational criminal market

Illegally mined gold in Jibia is smuggled through several routes, including Nielloua, Kandamao, Gidan and Tibiri, and other Nigerien border communities, to Maradi and Agadez for onward export to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), China, Lebanon and India. In Zamfara, especially Anka, it is smuggled to Maradi in the Republic of Niger through irregular routes from Shinkafi and Zurmi. From Bagega to the border with Republic of Niger is about 400 km.

Illegal gold is also smuggled to Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya and Mali through proxies in Borno State. However, some is sold locally in Gusau, particularly at the popular Polo Shopping Complex (Kasuwar Polo). It is also sold in Kano and Katsina to local and foreign buyers, especially Chinese, Indians and Lebanese. The movement of gold from bandit-controlled 'stores' to the borders occurs overnight, between 10 pm and 4 am local time. This movement also comes with frequent attacks on communities along the routes.

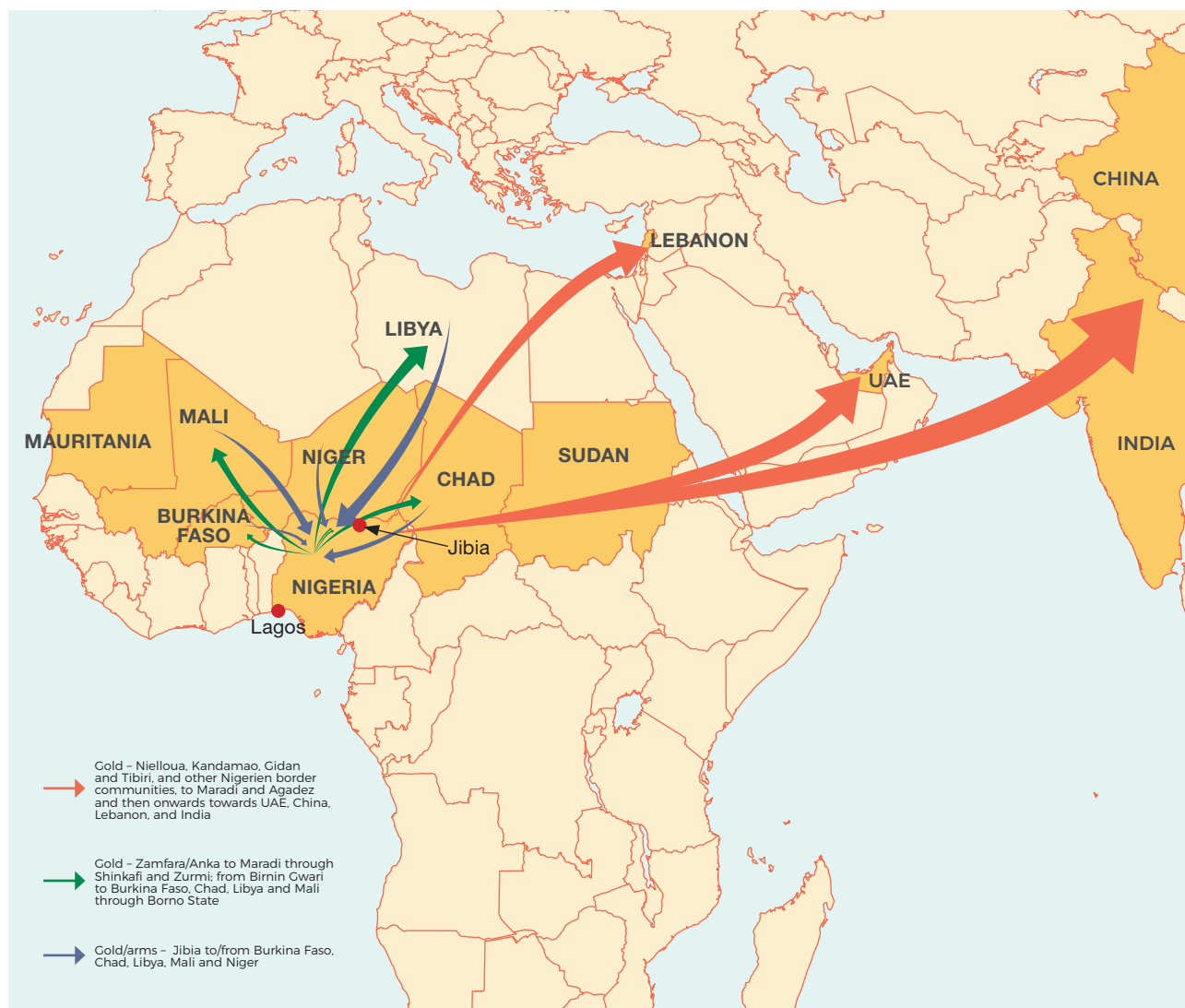
ENACT was told during a focus group discussion session in Jibia that gold sales to foreign buyers in border communities peak in late August. Buyers from Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali and Niger come to Jibia in vehicles loaded with arms, which are exchanged with bandits for gold. A security operative in Jibia who spoke to ENACT on condition of anonymity said: 'What takes place in those transactions is nothing but trade by barter. Buyers bring a large assortment of ... arms for bandits and collect gold in return.'<sup>63</sup>

### Illegally mined gold in Jibia is smuggled through several routes

Besides gold smuggling, Katsina and Zamfara States represent the enormity of the transnational criminal activities, including human, arms and drug trafficking,<sup>64</sup> that take place along the expansive land borders that Nigeria shares particularly with Benin, Chad and Niger on its North West and North East axis. For instance, five regions in the Republic of Niger – Diffa, Dosso, Maradi, Tahoua and Zinder – share borders with six states in Nigeria's North West and North East Regions: Borno, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara. Jibia and Anka are strategically located in this axis of criminality.

Jibia is an international border town that links Katsina State to Mardi Region. It has a weekly market that attracts people from Maradi and beyond. Zango in Katsina also links the state to Zinder Region through Sassoumbroum. Like Jibia, Zango has a weekly market that attracts people from Niger. The markets create a lucrative cross-border illicit economy that enables the smuggling and trafficking of contraband,

**Chart 3: Flow chart depicting gold smuggling from Nigeria to Chad, Niger, China, Lebanon and India**



Source: Created using information provided by ENACT

including illegally mined gold and arms by transnational criminal networks, especially bandit and terrorist groups. Similarly, Zamfara shares a northern border with the Republic of Niger and an eastern border with Katsina State. This enables a network of smuggling and trafficking activities by armed groups along the Katsina-Kebbi-Zamfara corridor up to the Republic of Niger and beyond.

The cross-border illicit economies created along this corridor are sustained by numerous factors, especially the porosity of the borders and the complicity of border security officials. The border's porosity is reinforced by the cultural affinity and biological relationships between ethnic nationalities in Nigeria's North West and North East and in the Republic of Niger.

This was alluded to by a security official who spoke to ENACT on condition of anonymity: 'There is too much informal movement across the Nigeria-Niger border. This has [existed] for centuries. The people from the two countries have much in common, with a long history of coexistence. Some Nigerien communities cross the border to fetch water from Nigeria and some Nigerian communities cross the border to buy raw cow milk from Niger and to attend school. The movement is so frequent that formalising it is almost impossible. Many things, including illicit materials, are smuggled across the border through those informal movements across the two countries.'<sup>65</sup>

## Driving factors

Armed groups' involvement in illegal mining is driven by several factors, including its lucrative nature, misconceptions about territorial ownership, the environment of crime in mining communities and a weak security governance system, among others.



### Illegal mining's lucrative nature

Banditry is predominantly motivated by economic imperatives. Thus, the gradual shift by bandit groups from kidnapping for ransom to illegal mining is a response to the rising cost of gold and its strategic value in the international market. Following a rise in the world market gold price, illegal gold mining activities, including by bandits, have spread across the North West, 'attracting other miners from Mali, Burkina Faso, China and India.'<sup>66</sup>

Thus, gold has become one of the most routinely smuggled commodities in Nigeria. Much of the gold is traded on the international market through neighbouring Niger, Chad and other countries to the UAE by a syndicated smuggling ring.<sup>67</sup> Interactions with locals in Anka, Birnin Gwari and Jibia indicate that the groups consider illegal mining more lucrative than kidnapping for ransom, although some of the abductees, particularly under-aged schoolgirls, are used for illegal mining activities.

Gang member Sajo Alhaji Isa pushed this point. 'The number of people joining us is increasing on a daily basis. We need a lot of resources to cater for our individual and group needs and for us to carry out our operations. There was a time each of us would get between ₦100 000 and ₦200 000 after each operation, but ... the amount has reduced to ₦30 000 or at most ₦60 000 because of the large number of people with us now. We have to look for different sources of income in order to keep going.'<sup>68</sup>

Gang member Modi agrees: 'For now we need gold because we believe that it will give us enough income for our activities. There are buyers everywhere. Gold is like money. The moment you have it you have cash.'<sup>69</sup> This is further corroborated by Mansur Sule, a member of the Halilu Sububu gang in Bagega: 'The gold market is booming throughout the world. Dealers and buyers are trooping to our communities desperately looking for gold from Zamfara and Katsina and even from other states in the region. This has motivated us to get involved.'<sup>70</sup>

The involvement of bandit groups in the illegal extraction of mineral resources not only contributes to the diversification of groups' funding sources to sustain their operations, but also serves as a source of arms and logistics procurement for the group. Besides funding, illegally mined mineral resources are exchanged for arms and ammunition across borders, using women and girls, including minors, as carriers.



### Environment of crime

Locals in Anka told ENACT that armed groups had used the crime environment in the mining sector to get involved in illegal mining. Gold mining in Zamfara has always been 'loose', or informal. The environment was characterised by illegal and criminal activities, including theft, assault, rape and prostitution, among others, long before bandit groups got involved.

This was corroborated by a Halilu Sububu gang member, Isa, who painted a vivid picture of the pre-armed group mining era. 'Mining sites have not been receiving adequate security patrols. We met the sites already loose and vulnerable. Those who started mining were interested in making the sites lawless and chaotic. We met the environment like that when we were hired by the miners to guard their sites against criminals. It was the first thing that brought us to the mining sites. They promised to give us our own sites but they failed to keep their promise until we showed them who we really are. That is the main reason for our involvement in gold mining.'



Isa's assertion validates extant analysis that the mining sector, already characterised by an environment of crime, gave room to 'criminal opportunism, especially since the 2000s, that enabled the participation of armed groups in illegal mining.'<sup>71</sup> Crime, especially in the northern part of Nigeria, is exacerbated by a weak security governance system that has created an enabling environment for bandit and terrorist groups. Security analysts argue that banditry is the fallout of a volatile security context characterised by un(der)governed spaces where state authority is either weak and declining, or state capacity to govern is absent, enabling transnational criminal networks to exercise control over these areas.<sup>72</sup>

Weak security governance in Nigeria is further reinforced by the nature and character of the ruling class elite, including the leadership of security establishments, which in the guise of countering insecurity, loots state resources.<sup>73</sup> Across focal study areas, locals alluded to the embeddedness of state actors, including security operatives, in several dimensions. 'Corruption is a factor. Armed groups bribe state officials at the border to obtain a pass across .... Often, the pass is obtained from the top. Orders would be given for clearance of the offenders and there is nothing anyone can do about it.'<sup>74</sup>



## Embeddedness of state actors and collaboration of local communities

The involvement of state-embedded actors, especially politically exposed persons, members of the security agencies and civil bureaucracies, is profound. Both armed groups and local residents alluded to this. Halilu Sububu gang member Mansur Sule described them as the elite.

He told ENACT: 'Gold mining is hijacked by the elite. They started illegal gold mining in Zamfara State, and they are still in it. They have derived huge monetary benefits from the business and they are still not satisfied. They brought us into the business. They engaged us to guard their sites. They still need us because they cannot be at the sites. We negotiated with them that we need gold, not money. We need our own sites, and they agreed. Some of us, but not in Bagega, are still doing mining for them and providing security [at] all their sites. But here they have their own agents and miners. They are our people who previously worked as their guards, but now as their partners. We don't have a problem with them.'<sup>75</sup>

Gambo Modi, of the Baleri gang, agrees with Mansur. He told ENACT that armed groups 'are only being scapegoated. People in government, including security officials, have been in [mining] for years. They built their fortunes with gold money. They have accumulated huge amounts of money from gold mining. We didn't know all that then and we got involved recently because they brought us in. We are still working with them.'<sup>76</sup> This confirms information provided by other respondents that state actors in the North West are 'interested parties in the criminal network of armed banditry, illegal mining and kidnapping for ransom across the region.'<sup>77</sup>

Besides state actors' involvement, armed bandits in illegal mining are also aided, to some extent, by local residents in mining communities. 'Our miners are mainly from those communities. We use them for mining work and for other purposes, like keeping an eye on the movement of security personnel, vigilantes and our other enemies. Those communities are very useful to us if they are cooperative. We need them. We compensate them with gold sites and protection from attacks by other groups. That is the arrangement.'<sup>78</sup>

However, ENACT was told that not all the mining communities cooperated with the groups. 'Some are secretly plotting against us. It is those communities we are attacking. But those that can keep us safe, we also keep them safe. That is the rule.'<sup>79</sup>



## Poverty, ownership and justice

The North West, with over 49 million people, about 23% of Nigeria's total population, comprises seven states – Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara.<sup>80</sup> It is characterised by

government neglect, that result in low education rates and multidimensional poverty. This has created opportunities for criminal networks, including bandit and terror groups, to operate.

Worsening socio-economic conditions have exacerbated existing societal anomalies, including high levels of poverty, endemic corruption, inequality and tensions over income-generating opportunities and the struggle for land-use resources.

This has turned the region into the poorest in Nigeria, with 65% of children living in abject poverty. Out of this number, 73.9% in Jigawa, Kano and Katsina States are said to be multi-dimensionally poor.<sup>81</sup> Other studies have made similar findings. 'The region that is the [epicentre] of banditry in Nigeria is blighted by endemic poverty. ... [I]lteracy in the region is among the highest in Nigeria, with high levels of substance abuse, a near-total lack of economic opportunities and a high rate of rural unemployment.'<sup>82</sup>

Besides poverty, a misguided sense of ownership of mineral resources by armed groups in the North West has led to their involvement in illegal mining. In Jibia, for instance, when asked why his gang was involved in gold mining, Manu said: 'Our involvement is fuelled by nothing apart from knowing that [gold] does not belong to anyone alone. It does not belong to the governor or to any other person in government alone. It belongs to all of us and we have the right to be involved.'<sup>83</sup>

This is contrary to the provisions of the Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act, 2007. Section 1(1) of the Act empowers the federal government of Nigeria to exercise ownership and total control over all mineral resources in the country, including the mining process. Although this is a contradiction of Section 1 of the Land Use Act, 2004, which vested all land comprised in the territory of each state in the federation in state governors, it does not guarantee ownership of mineral resources by private individuals or groups.

Nonetheless, this sense of ownership by armed groups has occasioned a 'struggle for justice'. Again, Manu argued: 'The people in government have taken over all our grazing routes and yards and given them to their friends and relatives for farming and mining. They kept quiet when our livestock were rustled, our parents and relatives were killed by criminals. How do you want us to survive? What do you expect us to do?'<sup>84</sup>



## Trans-nationality of banditry, underdevelopment of border communities

Banditry, driven mainly by economic imperatives, has assumed a transnational dimension, especially across the central Sahel. The transnational criminal network, especially in illegal mining and arms and drug trafficking, links groups from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria.<sup>85</sup> The groups use the porosity of national borders and lax border security across the region to smuggle illegally mined mineral resources, arms and drugs.

Other studies support this finding. 'When added to failure of governance that is manifested in the poor management regime of Nigeria's international borders, inadequate presence of policing actors, poor policing of rural communities, and past human rights abuses and unresolved communal conflicts, the current security crisis in the region becomes relatable.'<sup>86</sup> This confirms a recent research finding that the underdeveloped nature of Nigeria's border communities creates a conducive environment for cross-border smuggling and other transnational criminal activities across the country.<sup>87</sup>



## Inconsistency in regulatory frameworks

The involvement of armed groups in illegal mining illustrates the structural crisis of inconsistency that characterises Nigeria's mining sector. As mentioned above, Nigeria's laws contradict each other. The Mining Act empowers the federal government to exercise ownership and total control over all mineral resources in the country, including the mining process, while

the Land Use Act vests all land comprised in the territory of each state in the federation in state governors, who shall hold the lands in trust and administer them for the use and common benefit of the people.

Contradiction is further heightened by Section 12(1) of the Land Use Act. This provides that governors can lawfully grant a licence to anyone to 'enter upon any land which is not the subject of a statutory right of occupancy or of a mining lease, mining right or exclusive prospecting licence granted under the Minerals and Mining Act or any other enactment, and remove or extract therefrom any stone, gravel, clay, sand or other similar substance (not being a mineral within the meaning assigned to that term in the Minerals and Mining Act) that may be required for building or for the manufacture of building materials.'

So while governors hold the land in trust for the people, the federal government exercises its ownership of mineral resources, a development that contradicts the principle of property law: *Cuius est solum, eius est usque ad coelum et ad inferos* – i.e., whoever holds the land holds everything in the air above and the ground below. Even in circumstances like in Niger and Zamfara States, where the government seems to be exercising some regulatory controls, including the enforcement of bans on mining activities, such controls have been described as illegal by the Miners Association of Nigeria.<sup>88</sup>

This contradiction, which reflects a deep-rooted structural imbalance in Nigeria's fiscal federal system in favour of the central government, has caused a deliberate refusal by state governments to exercise security control over the mineral resources in their domains. State governments have not only become 'interested parties' benefitting from the proceeds of the criminality in the mining sector;<sup>89</sup> more fundamentally they consider the mineral resources as the property of the federal government.<sup>90</sup>

## State responses: successes and challenges

State authorities have taken several measures to curb illegal mining and the involvement of armed groups. In Nigeria, the Minerals and Mining Act, 2007, criminalises illegal mining. Section 131(a) and (d) provides that anyone who conducts exploration or mines minerals or carries out quarrying operations other than in accordance with the Act's provisions, or removes, possesses or disposes of any mineral contrary to the Act's provisions, is committing an offence. This is punishable by a prison term of no less than five years and a fine of no less than ₦2 million, the equivalent of about US\$1 428.<sup>91</sup> While some people, including foreigners, have been prosecuted under the Act for illegal mining, ENACT was not able to find out if any of those convicted were members of armed groups.

Countrywide, the federal government has also banned mining activities of all sorts. In Jibia, there are statements by state authorities banning mining activities in Shema Quarters, Zandam, Magama and Bakin Korama. Mining activities are virtually suspended at these sites. But whether it is because of the ban is debatable. Modi told ENACT that his gang 'stopped mining because it is no longer profitable for to us to mine in Zandam. There is less ... gold there. We need places with abundance of gold. That is why we stopped mining there. Nobody can stop us from mining there if we want. We are still doing it in some other locations. Let them come and stop us.'<sup>92</sup>

Those other locations include Nahuta in Batsari, about 10 km from Jibia, as well as Kwandago, a border community in the Republic of Niger's Madarounfa Department, in Maradi Region. In Anka, armed groups mine in Dareta, Bagega, Abare, Koli and Kirsu. In Birnin Gwari, mining is taking place in Rima, Bugai and Tsohon Birnin Gwari.

State authorities have implemented several security measures to counter illegal mining and armed groups' involvement. Besides the presence of security personnel, including the military, in all mining communities, security agencies routinely deploy unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) to monitor the movement of armed groups and other illegal miners in the fields. However, these measures seem compromised by the involvement of security operatives in the illegal extraction of mineral resources.

In Anka, Bagega and Dan Kamfani, military personnel at checkpoints accept bribes from truckers and motorcyclists conveying gold from mining sites to crushing sites and warehouses. In Jibia, miners working

for bandits in the Kwandago fields bribe Nigerien military on the border to access the field and smuggle gold. But the excessive militarisation of state responses to illegal mining has been counterproductive. For instance, the military response, especially in the Birnin Gwari area of Kaduna State, led to the movement and extension of banditry to Kebbi and Sokoto States.<sup>93</sup>

In 2019, the federal government launched the Presidential Artisanal Gold Mining Initiative (PAGMI). This was to improve the sustainability of artisanal gold mining operations and promote fair trade practices to ensure that revenues generated from the sector were adequately remitted to the government. According to Jean de Dieu Izerimana and Lakube Sokowonci Godwin, PAGMI was created to buy gold directly from artisanal miners, process it to export standards, and sell it at international market rates to get the proper value to benefit Nigeria's economy.<sup>94</sup> In 2023, a study indicated that despite the institutionalisation of PAGMI, up to 95% of gold in Nigeria was mined illegally, including by bandit groups, resulting in significant loss of revenue for the government.<sup>95</sup>

## Recommendations

- Nigeria's National Assembly should amend the Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act, 2007, to align it with the provisions of the Land Use Act, 2004. This would place ownership and control of mineral resources with state governments rather than the federal government, with a percentage of the revenue going to the federal government. This would also address the structural imbalance of Nigeria's fiscal federal system in favour of the central government that causes state governments to refuse to exercise security control over the mineral resources in their domains.
- Authorities at the state and federal levels should develop a multi-stakeholder approach that includes engagement from traditional and religious leaders, and community vigilante and neighbourhood watch groups, in dealing with armed groups' involvement in illegal mining.
- Governments at all levels should address the ecological, socio-economic and political factors that lead to and sustain banditry and armed groups' involvement. These include poor service delivery, poverty and a lack of income-generating opportunities, especially for young and other vulnerable members of the population, countrywide.
- Military responses to the involvement of armed groups seem unproductive on their own. Besides deploying the military and other security agencies, the federal government should deal with the rising corruption in the security sector, including the prosecution of security officials implicated in illegal mining and the engagement with armed groups for mining purposes.
- The federal government should deal, through diplomatic channels, with the collaboration between foreign nationals and corporations with armed groups in the illicit extraction of mineral resources, and the cross-border smuggling of gold and arms into Nigeria by armed groups and their foreign collaborators.

## Conclusion

Beyond significant income losses to the government, the involvement of bandit groups in illegal mining, especially in the North West Region, is a force multiplier for the region's security problems. Worryingly, the large expanses of territory under the control of armed groups in Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara States translate into government's loss of territorial integrity and sovereignty. This threatens the legitimacy of government and the stability of political regimes.

Governments at all levels in Nigeria should synergise efforts to curb the growing expanse of un(der)governed areas in the country that provide operational havens for armed groups. The country also needs to take steps to deal with the criminal collaborations among state-embedded actors, foreign corporations and armed groups in the illicit extraction of mineral resources.

## Notes

- 1 This report, especially the section on recommendations, benefitted immensely from the following study: M Ogbonnaya, *Illegal mining and rural banditry in North West Nigeria: Responses, successes and challenges*, *ENACT Policy Brief*, Institute for Security Studies (ISS), <https://enact-africa.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/2020-11-19-illegal-mining-policy-brief.pdf>, 2020.
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- 14 T Osasona, *The question of definition: Armed banditry in Nigeria's North-West in the context of international humanitarian law*, *International Review of the Red Cross*, 105(923): 735-749, <https://international-review.icrc.org/sites/default/files/reviews-pdf/2023-06/the-question-of-definition-armed-banditry-in-nigeria-923.pdf>, 2023.
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- 20 Interview with a community leader in Zandam, 25 July 2024.
- 21 Interview with an Alliance for Justice, Peace and Development staff member in Anka, 12 July 2024.
- 22 M Ogbonnaya, *Illegal mining and rural banditry in North West Nigeria: Responses, successes and challenges*, *ENACT Policy Brief*, ISS, p. 1, <https://enact-africa.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/2020-11-19-illegal-mining-policy-brief.pdf>, 2020.
- 23 On 13 September 2024, the Nigerian Air Force announced that a special force had killed Halilu Sububu, together with about 38 members of his gang, in Zamfara State. Although it is too early to tell how this will pan out for the future of banditry in Zamfara State and the wider North West Region, this development does indicate a strategic move by state security forces to dismantle the web of insecurity and criminality that Sububu and other gang leaders have created in that axis of banditry.
- 24 Interview with a Productive Citizens staff member in Anka, 18 July 2024.
- 25 Respondents at the Bagega focus group discussion, 15 July 2024.
- 26 Respondents at the Bagega focus group discussion, 15 July 2024.
- 27 Interview with Sani Risko in Bagega, 14 July 2024.
- 28 Interview with Sajo Alhaji Isa in Bagega, 14 July 2024.
- 29 Interview with a Productive Citizens staff member in Anka, 18 July 2024.
- 30 Interview with a security official in Anka, 17 July 2024.
- 31 Interview with Manu Yuka in Bagega, 14 July 2024.
- 32 F Itodo, *Traditional Rulers Gold Mining and the Rise of Banditry in Zamfara State, Nigeria, 2015-2023*, *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, VII(XI): 1402-1409, November 2023.
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- zamfara-traditional-rulers-from-issuing-consent-letters-for-mining/, 18 January 2024.
- 34 Respondents at the Bagega focus group discussion, 15 July 2024.
  - 35 Interview with Sani Risko in Bagega, 14 July 2024.
  - 36 Interview in Birnin Gwari, 20 July 2024.
  - 37 M Ogbonnaya, Illegal mining and rural banditry in North West Nigeria: Responses, successes and challenges, *ENACT Policy Brief*, ISS, pp.3-4, <https://enact-africa.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/2020-11-19-illegal-mining-policy-brief.pdf>, 2020.
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  - 42 Interview with Manu in Zandam, 27 July 2024.
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