



THE RAPE OF NIGERIA'S MINNING SECTOR

How local cabals collaborate with foreigners to fleece Nigeria of billions of dollars

Every state in the country is blessed with God-given resources such as gold, coal, zinc, limestone, phosphate, uranium, among others but what should be of benefit to the generality of the people is being exploited by few persons. From Zamfara to Benue, Nasarawa, Benue, Bauchi, Kwara and other states, the story is the same of how illegal miners have caused destruction and devastation of the host communities. Apart from the physical damage which the activities of illegal miners are causing in the country, concerned residents of mineral-rich communities are lamenting that farmers have abandoned farming and students are dropping out of schools as they are all joining the army of illegal miners. The activities of illegal miners became a real threat to the point that the erstwhile Muhammadu Buhari administration finally slammed a ban on mining in Zamfara State in 2019 in an announcement by the then National Security Adviser, Maj-Gen. Babagana Monguno. The government also stopped flights to and from the state all in a bid to curtail the influx of illegal miners and their collaborators. But whether those blockades have provided the required solutions is yet to be seen, as the contests for the control of the soul of illegal mining in the state continues unabated even with the clampdown in force.

Illegal miners are the real enemies of Nigeria and the people. They seek devious ways and means to cart away what rightly belongs to the commonwealth of the people and convert same to their personal use. While the state and the people seek to use their God-given resources to create and add value to the nation, these devious elements seek to steal, destroy and sometimes brutally kill in order to make away with the wealth of the nation found in the land, underground and in the water for their pecuniary gains. They come in different ways and with different names but their goal is the same: to steal from the state and the people and become richer and better than any other person. They are brutal and ruthless in their malevolent strides to actualize their evil and wicked scheme and do not spare anyone who may stand on their way

In Zamfara State Illegal mining activity is a growing socio-economic challenge in Zamfara state especially in Bukkuyum and Anka local government areas. This activity has led to loss of ecosystems and increased poverty level especially among peasant farmers who depend solely on environmental resources for a living. Besides gold, Zamfara is richly blessed with other solid minerals, which should bring a fortune to Nigeria, the state and its people but the wealth is largely stolen by criminal



resource forced the Federal Government to ban mining in the state altogether. But that has not halted the struggle among bandits, terrorists and kidnapers to control mining operations in the state, which has led to the massive loss of lives and property in recent years. The government announcement was of no effect. There are claims that the connivance between politically connected Nigerians and Chinese entities in illegal gold mining has driven rural banditry and violence among the local communities in Zamfara and spread to other states in the North West, North Central and to some extent South West regions. This is because at least 80 percent mining in the North West region is carried out illegally and on an artisanal basis by local populations. It is said that the mining

of large untapped mineral deposits in the area, especially gold which has strategic importance and economic value, is at the root of community violence. The government's ban of artisanal gold mining in Zamfara State and across the region, and the deployment of soldiers to enforce the ban since April 2019, appears to be ineffective as illegal mining and its associated conflicts continue regardless. The conflict has been on the increase in Zamfara state since 2014, which eventually spread to neighboring states of Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi and Niger states. As a result of the struggle for control of these priceless resources, Zamfara State is plunged into an escalation of conflicts fueled by bandits and terrorists, who kidnap and maim

elements. Illegal miners have also turned the state into a battleground because of the discovery of gold which is illegally exploited and stolen due to the absence of regulatory framework as in the oil industry. The illegal mining of gold in Zamfara state is usually carried out mostly by local artisans, illegal mine traders from neighboring countries as well as Russia and China. The near absence of laws regulating the sector was one of the factors that led to the lead poisoning outbreak in 2010 which caused environmental hazard and affected some communities in Anka and Bukkuyum local government areas of the state and the death of dozens of children. The theft of gold through illegal mining and the attendant hazards coupled with the spike in the number of criminal groups struggling for the control of the

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Nigeria's mining sector is diverse in mineral resources that make a significant contribution to its gross domestic product. Over the years, policy inconsistencies relating to the extractive sector have created disorder across mining sites and activities. This lack of comprehensive legislation has facilitated the presence of illegal miners. Their activities are characterized by inefficient manual mining techniques, illegal trading of highly priced minerals, severe ecological degradation, spread of diseases and huge loss of revenue for the government through smuggling. This has opened the door for foreign organized criminals to further exploit illicit minerals trade across the country. Most recently, foreign criminals have focused on gold mining. In the banditry-affected communities of Nigeria's north-west and central areas, loose criminal networks engaging in illegal gold mining have ties to foreign actors and facilitate trafficking flows. Most criminal markets for gold in the country are driven by foreign demand but are propped up by local actors. Foreign criminal networks operate similarly to local actors in illegal mining, and have repositioned their activities in the criminal value chain through direct involvement in illicit gold mining in remote villages and forests.

those they suspect, are after their illegal business. In a recent statistic, the state government claimed that over 9,000 people were killed as a result of the insecurity bedeviling the state. A resident, Musa Bagega, lamented the current situation in the state, saying, "Strangers have invaded our villages; they are all into mining. They are in our villages and the surrounding neighborhood. Some have even bought houses for their workers; we feel unsafe with their daily influx."

Aside being a major food production hub, Benue State is also one of the states of the Federation that is rich in solid mineral deposits. It is claimed that some of the mineral deposits found in the state include gold, coal, lead-zinc, barites, limestone, gypsum, clay, phosphate, glass sand, fluorspar, salt, ironstone, uranium, sulphur, graphite, cassiterite, manganese, mica among others. These solid minerals are said to be found in large and mostly commercial quantities in places like Kwande, Ogbadigbo, Logo, Apa, Guma, Ushongo and Gboko. Apart from Owupka where miners are claimed to have been licensed by the federal government to exploit the large coal deposit in the community, activities in most of the communities in the state are undertaken by artisanal and small-scale mines that do not have licenses to carry out extraction practices in the communities. Besides, their activities often result in destructive impacts on the environment. These are people who do not play by the rules and by so doing violate the Minerals and Mining Act, 2007; as well as the Minerals and

Mining Regulation 2011. They are illegal miners largely drawn from the local inhabitants of the community that harbors the mineral deposits. They are supported by external bodies who work collaboratively with them to undertake the illegal venture. Speaking on the activities of these bands of miners, the Legal Adviser to the Task Force on Illegal Mining in Benue State, Mr. Denen Kwen-Orngu said, "If you go to some of these communities and discover the manner parts of the communities are dug by those protecting solid minerals you will weep for them. In some cases, roads are destroyed; houses and farmlands are destroyed by these people all in a bid to prospect solid minerals. "It is painful because these things can actually be done properly and the communities will not feel the negative impact. The communities do not get the incentives they are supposed to enjoy from the Federal government because the miners are

In a country currently contending with diverse forms of criminality, this emerging layer of foreign criminals in the extractive sector presents a serious security challenge. The country's government must accord the same level of importance to solid minerals as it does to oil and gas exploration. Solid minerals are some of the country's most critical national assets and should be guarded through a coordinated security response. If allowed to continue, foreign criminals could funnel illicit financing to armed or terror groups for greater access to minerals. This is particularly so in light of a recent ENACT study that links illicit gold mining in Zamfara to protracted banditry in the country's north-west. Cooperation with China to address transnational illegal mining operations and trading of minerals is important Security and law enforcement agents must prioritize putting the extractive sector on their security radar. It must be closely monitored by security operatives, including the military, police and Nigeria's Security and Civil Defence Corps.

illegal operators," Kwen-Orngu lamented.

In Plateau state, illegal mining has been thriving over the years under the guise of artisanal mining, which takes place during the dry season because there is an assurance that the ground will not cave in to cover the crude miners burrowing under the surface in search of precious minerals. The trade has people of all genders, the young and the old engaging in it but the majority of those going under the surface for mining are mostly school dropouts, young men who are either in need of quick money or have chosen that as an occupation. These people can ply their trade at any time of the day taking turns to go under the surface and to draw out the mineral using locally produced equipment. This is the trade that goes on in the state without any serious inhibition either from the federal, state or local government. Martina Danuk, the Director, Environmental Assessment and Climate



indicate that no fewer than eight local government areas in the state are currently facing environmental challenges thrown up by the illegal mining activities. These local government areas include Karim Lamidi, Bali, Gashaka, Kurmi, Wukari, Zing, Yorro, and Sardauna. While law enforcement agencies are dislodging these syndicates across the state, rural communities where the illegal miners mostly operate from are now witnessing rising cases of kidnappings and banditry. For communities who bear the brunt of these explorations, it is tales of land degradation and environmental woes and there seems to be no end in sight. In Arufu and Akwana, in Wukari local government area,

Change in the State Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Mineral Development laments the tragedy that is associated with illegal mining and asked that something fundamental be done to discourage it. "Our major problem is that the minefields are fraught with all kinds of vices from drugs and the proliferation of arms, illegal immigrants from neighbouring countries and foreigners with shady/sharp practices abound," Danuk said.

In Nasarawa State, which is popularly dubbed as the "Home of Solid minerals", illegal mining has flourished as a way of life and a means of survival for many individuals and corporate entities traversing its vast landscape to exploit the numerous solid minerals that abound in large quantity in the agrarian state. The illegal trade is being actively carried out openly by both locals and foreigners who do not hide their disdain for any form of controlled operation. The illicit business is said to be particularly booming in Nasarawa State due to the active involvement of traditional rulers, community leaders and influential natives in the trade. Illegal mining activities are carried out mostly in the night and at odds hours like weekends, when high revenue-yielding minerals like lithium and precious stones are carted away in large quantities without any molestation by the security agencies. The impact of the unprecedented illegal mining in Nasarawa State has been devastating as farmlands, crops and economic trees are not only destroyed by mining activities but reduce their benefit and values to the residents.

In Taraba State, the activities of illegal miners seem to have gone unchecked for years and the devastating effects are visible in communities across the three senatorial zones. Findings

lands in these communities are no more suitable for farming due to the effect of mining activities. Because of this, it was gathered that families in these communities have now joined the mining business due to the circumstances they have found themselves to cater for their daily needs. Under the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulation 2007, it is expected that after excavation, the miner is supposed to refill that land up to 80%, but that is not the case in these communities. Also in Dogon Yasu, another community in Central Taraba, teenagers who are supposed to be in school are being exploited by the mining companies. They are used for cheap labour. It was gathered that this flagrant disregard for the Child Rights Act, which is currently a law in the state, poses a serious challenge if left unchecked. It was learned that these teenagers are paid between N500 and N1000 and a lot of them skip school just to get the daily stipend.

In Borno State, the presence of high value minerals makes it attractive for illegal miners to fight dirty for the control of the natural resources. Borno being one of the largest states in the North East Nigeria is the worst hit over the unending war, due to some foreign interests on the abundant mineral resources, especially, oil and gas and californium/precious stones available and in large quantities in the shores of Lake Chad and some parts of Sambisa forest. It is even suggested that there is an economic dimension of Boko Haram terrorism, which is based on two interrelated indicators: the attack on the Nigerian oil exploration team in the Lake Chad basin, and the continuous exploitation of oil and gas by Chad, Niger, and Cameroon in the region. It is said that the presence of key minerals is the major



One of the-trucks loading the minerals in Bani

reason behind the current terrorism war being waged by Boko Haram rather than religious interest. According to Professor Umar Maryah of Geography Department, University of Maiduguri, "the Sambisa forest which is the main hideout of terrorists covers an area stretching approximately 60,000 square kilometres across the north east from Borno, Yobe, Gombe, Bauchi states along the Darazo corridor, Jigawa and right up to some parts of Kano State in the far north". This forest according to sources has a lot of mineral deposits, including precious stones which have attracted many foreigners like Chinese who are suspected to be sustaining the insurgency as they hide under that to illegally mine these resources, especially Californium which is said to be very expensive. It is therefore, not surprising why the Borno State House of Assembly in 2022 passed a law, banning illegal mining in some parts of the state, which the lawmakers claimed was causing environmental damage and emission in some parts of Sambisa Forest, Wuyo, Jaradali and Balbaya villages of Bayo Local Government Area in the state. Despite the law passed by the State House of Assembly these illegal mining has continued unabated.

In Niger State, men, women and teenagers are mostly engaged in illegal mining and they seem to have no shame doing the illicit business at any time of the day. In some cases, an entire family- husband, wife, children and even their extended family members residing with them are now deep in the illegal business. It is also noted that children of school age, mostly girls, are deep into the illegal mining business, having dropped out of school due to lack of funds to further their education and fallen back into illegal mining as a means of survival. Also deeply involved in illegal mining in Minna sites are married women with their kids sweating it out under the scorching sun just to get something for their daily survival. Their areas of illegal operation have no bounds as they encroach into peoples' farm lands, school premises, and acquired lands among others. However, the trespass, on several occasions led to violent clashes between the illegal operators and owners of the lands where they are operating. In an interview, some of those engaged in the illegal business said the business was not the best option for them but that they have no alternative than to embark on it. They admitted that the work is not easy especially for women as it is tedious. "My husband is a farmer and the family depends solely on him for survival and that is why I am here under the scorching sun to work and assist him," one of the married women confessed to Vanguard. Another woman simply called Fatima with three of her children surrounding her said, "We have five children and none of them can go to school because there is no money to educate them. Even to feed ourselves at home is not easy and so, the entire families often come here to engage ourselves in this business so that we can at least feed ourselves". No doubt, the effect of the illegal mining had been very devastating on the people within the immediate communities where these illegalities are being perpetrated causing health hazards and other threats to the residents in the areas. Similarly, the people have encroached into the land of individuals and different organisations and this act has constantly led to frictions and other forms of violence between owners of the land and the illegal miners.

Kakanfu village, three kilometres from Lade near Patigi in Patigi Local Government Area of Kwara State has abundant

Lithium, a global natural resource that is in high demand. Lithium is a highly reactive metal that is used to make energy-dense rechargeable batteries for electronics such as laptops, cell phones, electric vehicles, and grid storage. The Lithium, discovered in every nook and cranny of the community by the Director-General, Nigerian Geological Survey Agency, AbdulRazaq Garba, about two years ago was later found to be "high grade" lithium. It was littered with the stones, including the main commodity market in the town, which has now transformed into a lithium market. As a result of the discovery, many farmers have left their farms while children of school age have abandoned their schools in search of lithium as a means of livelihood as the proceeds from it fetch them more money than farming and schooling. It was gathered that in Kakanfu, hundreds of illegal miners with hard drugs, guns and explosives used to dig underground in a large-scale search for lithium with no oversight and few safety measures. It is reported that security operatives and local authorities are easily compromised to turn a blind eye to the nefarious activities of the illegal miners and they continue without control as a result. In the mining operation area, covering several acres of once-fertile farmland, Vanguard gathered that hundreds of illegal miners work tirelessly to unearth the hidden treasure beneath the earth's surface. Large pits now dominate the once-pristine earth, and the air is thick with dust and the smell of chemicals. The natural water sources, once clear and life-giving, now runs murky with pollutants from the mining process, all of which are caused by illegal miners. It is reported that since 2020, when a Chinese mining company began its operations in Kwara communities, it has left dozens of residents with life-threatening health issues. Among several other victims who lost their sight, Rahimi Ajadi recounted how it happened in the fateful afternoon of November 2021. He was returning from the farm with his wife and as they approached Oremeji community where they live, the deafening explosion sent shockwaves through the air when a Quarry unexpectedly detonated a bomb to blast a rock at the mining site along Ilorin-Ogbomosho express way, not far from Eiyenkorin in Asa Local Government Area of the state. His wife collapsed from the impact while Ajadi was engulfed in darkness, unable to see anything amidst the turmoil. These devastating developments have forced the state government to shut the mining operations of the company due to the violation of safety procedures.

In Kano, illegal mining activities by both locals and foreigners are reportedly taking place in Gwarzo, Shanono and Bagwai LGAs of the state. The economic enemies of the state are reported to be carrying out their activities at the expense of the residents of the area who have continued to express their concerns over the illegal mining activities going on in the areas. A top community leader told Vanguard that illegal mining is taking place in two places in Gwarzo LGA, while the locals are the ones conducting illegal mining in the Doganu area. The community leader accused foreigners of spearheading illegal mining in Makawanta (Madadi ward). They operate in the day time. In Shanono illegal miners use sophisticated machines to carry out their operations irrespective of the time of the day. "Since it is an activity that brings unknown people from different places together, the activities of the illegal miners pose a great danger to us in the area as we are now prone to insecurity. And it is also affecting our farmlands," the community leader

lamented.

In Kebbi State, illegal mining is being carried out in no fewer than seven sites which are Libata, Zamare, Laka, Maraban Yauri, Tungan and Zakara in Yauri Emirate of the state. Last year alone no fewer than 60 illegal gold miners were reportedly dead when a boat in Yauri River conveying them to the shore sank due to the weight of the gold it ferried with the miners. According to a resident in one of the communities who preferred anonymity, "the illegal miners keep dying yet they keep digging because of the economic gains of the illegal mining denying the state government the needed revenue".

Some of the effects of the activities of the illegal miners in Bauchi state have sent shock waves down the spines of residents, especially those whose houses, farms and means of livelihood have been threatened or even destroyed by major floods and sand storm. In Tambari, a satellite area in Bauchi metropolis, the activities of illegal miners are posing an existential threat to residents of the area. Some house owners and occupants of buildings in the area have set up remedial measures for their houses hanging on cliffs from erosion encroachment.

In Kaduna State, the activities of illegal miners in collaboration with their foreign partners who were allegedly of Chinese extraction, have continued to rob the state, degrade and deplete natural vegetation and in extreme situations, attract bandits and other criminal elements who posed serious threat to communities close to the mining sites. This could be why Brig-Gen. Iliya Aliyu Yammah (rtd), ruler of Arak Chiefdom in Sanga Local Government Area of Kaduna State, a place where lithium and other precious minerals were found and mined indiscriminately, cautioned his people to desist from unauthorised sale of lands, illegal mining and other acts that could ignite conflict amongst the locals. According to the monarch, "the causes of crises in parts of the state and elsewhere included illegal mining, on which the state government has declared zero tolerance." It will be recalled that illegal miners from China were arrested in Jema'a Local Government Area of Kaduna State for alleged illegal mining activities at the Tsonge

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government reserve.

Nigeria's mining sector is diverse in mineral resources that make a significant contribution to the nation's gross domestic product. The country is endowed with an [estimated](#) US \$700 billion in commercially viable minerals with the capacity to diversify its revenue sources and boost foreign exchange earnings. Its minerals include barite, bitumen, iron ore, lead, zinc, coal, limestone and gold. However, the mining sector is faced with multiple challenges and its current poor performance can be attributed to various factors including opaque extraction, insecurity and organized crime. Nigeria's natural resources have been exploited by foreign criminals for decades, and the extractive sector is the most recent target. Since early 2020, several Chinese nationals have been arrested in Nigeria for their involvement in illegal mining. In April 2020, the Nigeria Police Force in Zamfara State arrested two Chinese nationals for allegedly engaging in illegal [mining](#) in Bukkuyum local government, where the federal government had banned all mining activities to curb killings by armed

bandits. In September 2022, a Chinese national was [arrested](#) by Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) operatives in Ilorin, Kwara State, in possession of a truckload of minerals suspected to be lepidolite. In July 2023, the EFCC arrested 13 [more](#) Chinese nationals for allegedly engaging in illegal mining activities. In August 2023, the Akwa Ibom State Government [closed](#) down an illegal mining company operated by Chinese nationals for the firm's inability to provide authorisation documents for titanium ore mining in Ibeno community. Illegal gold mining is a growing problem in Nigeria that is benefiting terrorist groups, causing violence and increasing pollution. Residents of mining areas blame Chinese nationals who set up and oversee mining and refining operations. Tension continues to rise around these pit mines. Locals accuse Chinese miners of collaborating with extremist militants, corrupting government officials, destroying farmlands and polluting water with mercury and lead. Omololu Afilaka, the traditional ruler of Atorin-Ijesha in Osun State, said

his people are being "conquered" by Chinese miners. "Before the Chinese came, we had artisanal miners.

They could only bite as much as they could chew," he told NTC News as part of an investigation in 2023. "Then came the big players, the Chinese illegal miners, and they came with excavators." A recent report by researchers Oluwole Ojewale of the Enhancing Africa's Response to Transnational Organized Crime (ENACT) project, and Freedom Onuoha, a lecturer at the University of Nigeria, revealed how Nigeria's mining sector is plagued by insecurity and organized crime. "In the banditry-affected north-west and central areas, loose criminal networks engaged in illegal gold mining have ties to foreign actors and facilitate trafficking," said the report, which was published on December 13, 2023. "Foreign networks operate like their local counterparts and have repositioned their activities in the criminal value chain through direct involvement in illicit gold mining in remote villages and forests."

The researchers say that foreign demand drives most of the criminal markets for gold in Nigeria. Nigerian authorities have arrested several Chinese nationals since 2020 for involvement in illegal mining. "Our mining sector has not been accorded much priority by the nation's security actors until recently, when illegal mining was linked to rural banditry," said a Zamfara State senior police officer, who spoke to ENACT on condition of anonymity. "Most of the mining activities are being done by illegal miners because mining sites have been neglected by regulators and security agents. Chinese and other foreigners too are taking advantage of this prolonged neglect by the nation's mining regulators and security agents. It's also the reason why bandits are attracted to the sector."

In April 2023, British newspaper The Times published a stunning report about Chinese companies that gained access to mines by paying Nigerian extremist militant groups, "raising the prospect that Beijing could be indirectly funding terror in Africa's largest economy."

SBM Intelligence, a Lagos-based analytical group, shared videos with The Times of militant leaders from groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province who boasted that Chinese workers in their territory must pay "rent." Chinese mining bosses in Zamfara and Katsina "are perfectly willing to pay off whoever needs to be paid off and have no qualms about it and are allowed to carry out operations," SBM head of research Ikemesit Effiong told The Times.

The Chinese embassy in Nigeria objected to the report but sought to distance itself from the actions of Chinese individuals. "The Chinese government, as well as the Chinese Embassy in Nigeria, have always encouraged and urged the Chinese

companies and nationals in Nigeria to abide by the laws and regulations of Nigeria, and to implement the local rules and guidance on labor, environment, health and safety, etc., and would continue their efforts in this regard," it said in a statement on April 17, 2023. China has a massive footprint in Africa's mining sector, with billions of dollars invested. Chinese nationals are heavily involved in extractive operations across the continent, mining for gold, other precious metals and valuable minerals such as lithium, cobalt and copper. In 2019, China imported nearly \$10 billion worth of minerals from sub-Saharan Africa, according to The Economic Times newspaper. Afilaka is among the local leaders who feel that Nigerians are not receiving their fair share. He also questions how many of the Chinese laborers have permits to work in Nigeria, a common refrain in the communities surrounding mining operations. "There is a lot of darkness in my land," Afilaka said. "If you're coming in here and you're extracting billions of naira worth of



gold, I think the people should benefit from it."

Ojewale and Onuoha called on the Nigerian government to intensify regulation and protection of its burgeoning mining industry. "In a country contending with diverse forms of criminality, the involvement of foreign criminals in the extractive sector presents a serious security challenge," they wrote. "These minerals are among the country's most critical national assets and should be guarded through a coordinated security response."

Nigeria's mining sector is diverse in mineral resources that make a significant contribution to its gross domestic product. Over the years, policy inconsistencies relating to the extractive sector have created disorder across mining sites and activities. This lack of comprehensive legislation has facilitated the presence of illegal miners. Their activities are characterized by inefficient manual mining techniques, illegal trading of highly priced minerals, severe ecological degradation, spread of diseases and huge loss of revenue for the government through smuggling. This has opened the door for foreign organized



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ENACT spoke to various security and law enforcement officials on condition of anonymity. A senior police officer in Zamfara State in north-west Nigeria said the incursion of foreign criminals into the gold mining sector was happening because 'our mining sector has not been accorded much priority by the nation's security actors until recently when illegal mining was linked to rural banditry' in the country. 'Most of the mining activities are being done by illegal miners because mining sites have been neglected by regulators and security agents. Chinese and other foreigners too are taking advantage of this prolonged neglect by the nation's mining regulators and security agents. It's also the reason why bandits are attracted to the sector.'

Government must accord the same level of importance to solid minerals as it does to oil and gas exploration. Echoing this, an Independent Corrupt Practices Commission senior official said the problem was driven by 'endemic corruption, opaque mining regulations, poverty among the residents of the host communities of mining sites and the readiness of Chinese actors irrespective of where they operate to corrupt the system with foreign funds [to] fuel illegal mining activities and its attendant security breaches. They are always ready to compromise the mining regulatory agencies and the local citizens.' The situation is exacerbated by an inadequate visa approval process, driven by incompetence and corruption. Nigerian immigration authorities continue to issue tourist visas to Chinese workers, despite this group of people regularly staying to work in Nigeria beyond the visa expiration date.

In March 2022, the Nigeria Immigration Service in Niger State arrested over 200 Chinese workers who had [reportedly](#) travelled to Nigeria with tourist visas and continued to stay after their travel permits expired. ENACT found that this phenomenon was sustained by cumbersome visa approval processes by Nigerian authorities and outright violations of travel permits issued for Chinese workers by Nigeria.

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and should be guarded through a coordinated security response. If allowed to continue, foreign criminals could [funnel](#) illicit financing to armed or terror groups for greater access to minerals. This is particularly so in light of a recent ENACT [study](#) that links illicit gold mining in Zamfara to protracted banditry in the country's north-west. Cooperation with China to address transnational illegal mining operations and trading of minerals is important. Security and law enforcement agents must prioritize putting the extractive sector on their security radar. It must be closely monitored by security operatives, including the military, police and Nigeria's Security and Civil Defence Corps.

A senior Abuja-based police officer told ENACT that inter-agency collaboration was needed to identify, arrest and prosecute foreign criminals in the extractive sector. Here collaboration with immigration authorities is crucial to stop this criminality at its source. Foreign miners must be properly documented and either granted legal status or deported, depending on their circumstances. Illegal foreign miners may be part of larger criminal networks. Thus, cooperation with China to address transnational illegal mining operations and mineral trading is essential. In some cases, the federal government could enact or amend laws and regulations to address illegal mining and strengthen penalties. Lastly, public awareness and education are essential. Sensitizing local communities about the negative social, environmental and security impacts of illegal mining and encouraging them to report suspicious activities could be part of the strategy.

Oluwole Ojewale, Regional Organised Crime Observatory Coordinator, Central Africa, and Freedom Onuoha, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political Science and Coordinator Security, Violence and Conflict Research Group, University of Nigeria