

Strengthening Peace and Resilience in Nigeria (SPRING)

Policy Brief

The Nexus between Mining and Violence in North Central and North West Nigeria

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About the Research

This report responds to growing concerns that competition over mineralised land and informal mining economies may be fuelling violent conflict, organised crime, and tensions in North Central and North West Nigeria. By providing evidence on the scale and nature of different mining operations (both artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) and large-scale mining (LSM), the key actors involved along mineral supply chains and their respective influence and exposure to conflict, and the root causes and manifestations of fragility and violence, the study aims to support the Strengthening Peace and Resilience in Nigeria (SPRiNG) Programme's objective of promoting evidence-based programming and policymaking for peacebuilding. It focuses on the States of Benue, Plateau and Kaduna. This policy brief presents the key findings from the study and offers recommendations for policy formulation and action.

Research Methodology

This study was delivered by a consortium of Levin Sources (which delivered technical steering, harmonisation of findings, developed policy recommendations and conducted quality assurance); the Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies (CECOMPS) (which conducted the research in Plateau and Kaduna States); and the Centre for Peace and Development Studies (CPDS) (which conducted the research in Benue State). This study took a qualitative, approach that moved beyond simplistic narratives about mining and violence. ASM was examined not only as an economic activity but also as a socio-political phenomenon embedded in histories of marginalisation, ethnic and religious tensions, limited rural livelihood opportunities, and weak formal authority capacity.

The study focused on Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Benue, Plateau, and Kaduna States, which were selected for their prominence of mining and its intersections with insecurity. LGAs were selected gradually, on the basis of feedback from stakeholders on the localities of (growing) mining activities and related fragility and / or violence. The study was conducted in three key stages:

- *Inception phase:* This phase established the research approach, scope, objectives, data collection methods (including interview and focus group guides), and workplan. CECOMPS and CPDS applied the same methodology to ensure comparability across the three States.
- *Field and desktop research:* CECOMPS and CPDS led fieldwork in the three States, conducting interviews and focus group discussions in October 2025, while Levin Sources carried out complementary desktop research.
- *Analysis and reporting:* CECOMPS and CPDS prepared State-specific reports, which Levin Sources triangulated with interview transcripts and literature review findings to produce a consolidated study report.

Key Findings

Expansion of mining in Benue, Plateau, and Kaduna intersects with existing patterns of insecurity and governance issues, though the nature and intensity of violence differ across the three States. This study finds that violence linked to mining is generally sporadic rather than structural. However, recurring tensions offer early warning signs that more systematic conflict could develop, particularly as powerful stakeholders, including foreign investors and local business elites, expand their influence in areas operating largely outside state oversight. At the same time, the findings highlight the potential of mining as a stabilising force in previously insecure areas. Because mining economies rely on a minimum level of security to function, many who have adopted mining as a primary livelihood have clear incentives to maintain stability.

This dynamic was evident during periods of state-imposed mining bans: the suspension of mining activity was associated with increased violent clashes and criminal behaviour, which subsided once mining resumed. However, these stabilising effects also underline the importance of strong institutions (formal and informal) that govern land allocation, resource access, environmental and social impacts, and the mediation of disputes. Without such structures, the stability generated by mining remains fragile and can quickly erode under pressure.

In Benue, conflict around mining is driven less by organised violence than by perceptions of exclusion and competition. In the LGA of Gboko, tensions linked to an industrial cement plant's workforce, largely hired from abroad, have triggered protests met with heavy-handed military responses. In Kwande LGA, community disputes emerged when foreign investors began mining operations without meaningful consultation with local communities. Logo LGA is deemed a more volatile area as overlapping land claims and competition for access to sites have reportedly led to arms proliferation as miners attempt to protect pits.

In Plateau, violence around mining is relatively limited as most mining groups collaborate under relative stability. Some conflict is concentrated to specific LGAs. In Bokkos, feelings of exclusion among specific ethnic groups and ethnic-religious segregation at mine sites have fuelled friction, though violent clashes remain localised. In Barkin Ladi, community systems governing access and benefit sharing have in fact helped prevent conflict. Parts of Plateau often experience raids from banditry groups on mine sites.

In Kaduna, mining is more closely entangled with non-state armed activity. Bandits, especially in Birnin Gwari LGA, have shifted in recent years from sporadic mine site raids to systematic taxation as they consolidated control, creating coercive stability while maintaining illicit gold flows. Localised violence also persists in the LGAs of Birnin Gwari, Jema'a, and Sanga, where disputes over mine ownership, reprisal killings, extortion, and criminal infiltration shape mining-related insecurity. This study identified several key trends of how fragility and violence interact with mining (as well as mineral trade) in the region. The below table summarises these trends.

Trend	Description
Tension and violence between host community members and mining actors	Rapid population inflows, environmental damage, unmet development expectations, and weak consultation processes fuel mistrust between communities and mining actors. These pressures sometimes manifest in protests, blockades, and occasional violent confrontations.
Tension and violence between mining actors due to competition for resources – economically motivated	Competition for pits and market control, often intensified by foreign investors and informal buyers, regularly sparks threats, intimidation, and sporadic violence between those directly involved in the sector. Crowding, contested ownership, and bypassing of local governance arrangements drive repeated small-scale clashes, sometimes prompting military intervention and heightening site-level instability.
Tension and violence between mining actors due to competition for resources – socio-culturally motivated	Ethnic and religious divisions sometimes influence who can mine, manage sites, or collect fees. Perceived inequities may trigger retaliatory takeovers, attacks, and mineral theft. While generally localised and short-lived, these disputes reinforce mistrust and deepen pre-existing social tensions in mining communities.
Violence due to the involvement of bandits or other non-state armed groups in mining and mineral trade	Bandit involvement typically evolves from opportunistic raids to structured taxation and (partial) control of sites and smuggling routes. Coercive stability masks ongoing abuses, including forced labour, child labour, and arms-for-gold exchanges. Crackdowns often shift, rather than dismantle, these criminal economies.
Harassment by public security forces of mining actors	Some security agencies may act as informal gatekeepers, extracting bribes, imposing arbitrary arrests, or engaging in illicit mining activities. These practices weaken accountability, fuel mistrust, and incentivise miners to seek armed protection, inadvertently strengthening armed groups and undermining formal state oversight.
Violence by public and private security of perceived mine site intruders and / or other threats	Excessive force by soldiers, police, private guards, or vigilantes is common around LSM sites and some ASM zones. Heavy militarisation sometimes fosters fear, escalates tensions, and normalises violent responses to disputes, contributing to arms proliferation and rights abuses.
Coercion and exploitation of vulnerable mining actors	Unsafe conditions, absence of regulatory oversight, and unequal power relations expose miners, including women and children, to hazardous work, exploitation, and coercion. Bandits may impose forced labour, while powerful financiers can trap miners in cycles of debt bondage. Women face barriers to participation and risks of sexual exploitation.

Policy and Programming Recommendations

These recommendations are designed for policymakers, service providers and peacebuilding and development practitioners to address conflict risks associated with mining in North Central and North West Nigeria, and instead foster a more peaceful, equitable, resilient and development-positive sector. The study outlined entry-points across five complementary intervention areas (see Figure 1). No single category can address the drivers of fragility and violence

alone; impacts will be greatest when interventions reinforce one another and are implemented in close collaboration across authorities, traditional institutions, civil society organisations, and private-sector actors.



Figure 1: Five main interventions areas to address drivers and root causes of fragility and violence in the mining sector of North-Central and North-West Nigeria.

Peacebuilding Interventions

Mining in North-Central and North-West Nigeria sits at the centre of historic grievances, weak dialogue between communities and authorities, and a history of heavy-handed security responses. Because minerals are high-value and extraction expands quickly, the sector attracts powerful actors and is creating new pressures. Disputes typically escalate faster and in more volatile ways than in other sectors, and standard peacebuilding tools often overlook these political and economic realities. Mining therefore needs a specific approach that could be integrated into existing peacebuilding interventions. These include:

- *Strengthening community-level dialogue and mediation.* Use and support existing fora to resolve disputes around land access, influx pressures, and benefit sharing, providing basic mediation training and ensuring women, youth, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and other marginalised individuals participate.
- *Strengthening policing and police reforms, including community safety partnerships.* Improve rights-based, gender-sensitive policing in mining areas and strengthen coordination with community authorities and informal security groups to reduce abuses and better manage security incidents.
- *Linking demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) interventions to the mining sector.* Channel ex-combatants into regulated ASM through training and coordination with ASM support programmes.
- *Integrating mining indicators into local early-warning systems.* Incorporate mining-specific triggers and train community actors to flag concerns early, linking alerts to State mechanisms for timely mediation and prevention.
- *Increasing advocacy and awareness campaigns within ASM communities.* Support campaigns on rights, safety, environmental risks, child labour, and drug use, using community associations and women's groups to ensure inclusive outreach and safe access to information.

Socio-economic Development Interventions

Socio-economic interventions matter because insecurity around mining is closely tied to limited and unstable livelihoods and dependence on informal and exploitative actors. When people lack stable incomes, access to fair markets, or the means to improve their operations, they are more easily drawn into exploitative arrangements that fuel tension and, in some areas, strengthen armed or criminal networks. Improving the economic resilience of mining communities helps reduce these pressures. Interventions could include:

- *ASM professionalisation and continuous improvement support.* Build miners' technical, organisational, and commercial capacity, through safer methods, training, and more secure land tenure, while recognising that miners may not operate fully formally at the outset but can progressively improve their practices.

- *Enable greater access to formal finance for ASM operators.* Develop accessible financial products with banking institutions and utilise existing channels such as the Solid Minerals Development Fund to reduce reliance on predatory financiers and support organised groups or cooperatives to access credit aligned with ASM realities and cash-flow patterns.
- *Exploring realistic and demand-driven alternative livelihood support.* Co-create complementary livelihoods, such as rehabilitation-based agroforestry, service-sector opportunities, and targeted enterprise support for women and youth, based on genuine local demand, without assuming communities will shift away from mining entirely.

Gender and Social Norms Interventions

Mining areas across the region face deeply embedded gender and social norms that shape who has voice, who faces what kind of risk, and how men and women navigate power. These norms influence safety, cohesion, and vulnerability in ways that directly affect fragility. Interventions may involve:

- *Reducing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) risks and strengthening women's collective agency.* Support community sensitisation, SGBV-prevention training, and stronger women's groups so women can participate in decisions, organise collectively, and access safer, more accountable mechanisms in mining communities.
- *Addressing harmful masculine norms.* Work with boys and young men through trusted community actors on behaviour-change, reshaping norms around violence, dangerous behaviour, and transactional (sex) relationships, paired with skills training and safer economic opportunities to reduce reliance on harmful (mining) camp cultures.

Mining Sector Governance Interventions

These interventions will only reach their full potential with broader reforms to Nigeria's regulatory framework for mining, particularly the barriers that make it difficult for ASM operators to operate formally. A clearer, more realistic ASM regulatory framework that is underpinned by a long-term, development-focused vision for ASM sector governance, and stronger oversight, transparency, and coordination are essential to reduce reliance on militarised enforcement and corruption risks, clarify roles and responsibilities across government levels, and give miners predictable, formal pathways, that reduce incentives to engage with coercive actors and help de-escalate tensions.

- *Co-design a national ASM vision and regulatory roadmap.* Develop a realistic framework that aligns Federal-State-LGA roles, offers viable formal pathways for artisanal miners, reduces criminalisation and exclusion of miners, and closes governance gaps that allow coercive actors and corrupt networks to influence the sector.
- *Review and realign Federal-State mining laws to clarify mandates and revenue flows.* Address legal misalignments that undermine transparency and give States and LGAs limited incentive and authority to manage ASM.
- *Undertake targeted security sector reforms to reduce militarised responses to ASM.* Shift security forces from punitive crackdowns on informal mine sites to proportionate engagement with miners, helping rebuild trust, reduce coercive actor influence, and support transitions into formal systems when paired with viable legal pathways.

Knowledge-building

Strengthening evidence is essential for designing interventions that are conflict-sensitive, politically and economically realistic, and targeted to the specific dynamics of each State, LGA and mineral supply chain. Mining economies are highly localised, politically complex, and fast-changing; without deeper, site-specific analysis, programming risks missing key actors, incentives, or risks. Targeted research would help policymakers, service providers, and development practitioners tailor interventions to real conditions rather than assumptions. Priority areas for further research could include:

- *Better understanding the legal and practical challenges of current governance frameworks.* Analyse regulatory gaps and enforcement constraints to identify reforms that realistically reduce informality and conflict risks.
- *Deepening analysis of cross-border dynamics affecting mining.* Study cross-border flows (both interstate and internationally) of people, minerals, arms, and traders to understand external pressures shaping mining economies.
- *Mapping supply chains and actor incentives in priority LGAs.* Document mineral routes, traders, financiers, and coercive actors to clarify incentives and vulnerabilities across different mineral supply chains.

- *Assessing community development agreements (CDAs) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices of mining companies as conflict-mitigation tools.* Review existing CSR and CDAs to determine what strengthens community benefits, reduces grievances, and supports more stable mining relations.
- *Deepening analysis of banditry influence in mineral supply chains.* Examine how armed actors tax or control ASM sites and intersect with illicit economies to identify disruption points.
- *Understanding gendered dynamics more fully.* Research how risks, roles, and opportunities differ for women, girls, men and boys across mineral supply chains.
- *Analysing local governance and legitimacy.* Identify which formal and informal authorities actually set and enforce mining rules locally to inform engagement strategies and anticipate resistance.
- *Mapping civil society entry points.* Identify credible civil society organisations (CSOs), mining associations, women's groups, youth and religious actors capable of anchoring interventions in mining communities.

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