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**ASSESSING NATURAL RESOURCE ENDOWMENT AND CONFLICTS IN AFRICA**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This article evaluates the impact of natural resource on conflicts on Africa and subsequent effect on security in Africa. This study is qualitative and based on secondary data that were analysed textually. Hinged on the greed and grievance, resource curse and political ecology theories, the study explains that the mismanagement of resources, greed and grievance have had endless negative implications on national security, national growth and development. The issues that have come to the fore in resource management in some selected African countries include resentful intergroup relations, militancy, leadership incompetence, corruption and war lordism. The article recommends that effective resource management strategies in Africa are key in curbing the plaguing conflicts resulting from resource ownership on the continent of Africa.*

**Keywords:** *Natural Resources, Conflict, Africa, Resource Curse, Governance, Laws and Norms*

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## INTRODUCTION

Natural resources are the raw materials available in the environment that organisms use for their survival. They may be either biotic such as forests and wildlife or abiotic such as water, soil, air and minerals in nature. The food we eat, the cloths we wear, and the roof over our heads are all necessary for your survival and they come from natural resources. Natural resources are, of course, the physical bases for human life. The biotic resources constitute plants, animals and micro-organisms whereas the abiotic resources include non-living materials such as land, soil, water, metals and minerals.

Natural resources can be defined as those parts of nature that can provide goods and services for humans including opportunities for recreation, the appreciation of scenic beauty, and the disposal of wastes.

Natural resources can as well be defined as all non-artificial products situated on or beneath the soil, which can be extracted, harvested, or used, and whose extraction, harvest, or usage generates income or serves other functional purposes in benefiting mankind. Included in this are land, solid minerals, petroleum, water, water resources, and animal stock. Solar energy and wind are also natural resources that are not tangible, even if their impact is noticeable (Alao, 2007).

Africa is endowed with vast natural resources, including oil, minerals, forests, and arable land. These resources have the potential to significantly contribute to the continent's development. However, the presence of these resources has also been linked to conflicts and underdevelopment, a phenomenon often referred to as the "resource curse" (Auty, 1993). This document explores the complex relationship between natural resource endowment and conflicts in Africa, examining how resources can be both a blessing and a curse.

On the other hand, Alao (2007) defines conflict as a situation of interaction involving two or more parties, in which actions in pursuit of incompatible

objectives or interest result in varying degrees of discord. The irreconcilable difference is between normally harmonious and cooperative relations that result into disruptive adversarial confrontation, culminating at its worst in high intensity violence. Conflict occurs when there is interaction between at least two groups whose ultimate objectives differ. One is likely to find existence of incompatible interest of two units and the units can be individuals, communities, countries, ethnicity, geography, nationality, race, religion, ideology, or a combination of some of these (Alao, 2007).

Alao (2007) contends that conflicts over natural resources are fought on societal, communal, interstate, and interpersonal. Conflicts are grouped into five levels:

- a. Conflicts among communities/groups within the state;
- b. Conflicts between communities across national borders;
- c. Conflicts between communities and central governments;
- d. Conflicts between communities and multinational corporations
- e. Conflicts between governments.

It needs to be pointed out from the outset that overlaps can occur in this categorization, but the division can assist in identifying some of the complex implications through which natural resource conflicts are expressed in Africa.

During the past two decades, owing to the increasing global demand for primary commodities, African natural resources minerals such as oil, gas, water, game parks, grazing resources and forests have become contributing factors to intra- and interstate disputes. As explained in this report, trans boundary disputes have multiplied and endangered peace, security and development in several countries (Economic commission for Africa, 2018). Minerals constitute the essential component to produce a broad range of consumer goods, military equipment, infrastructure and agricultural materials as well as applications to be used in transport, communication and energy.

### Types of Natural Resources in Africa

Africa is endowed with a diverse range of natural resources, which include minerals and metals, fossil fuels, agricultural resources, forestry, and water resources. These resources play a crucial role in the continent's economy and development prospects. Minerals and metals, such as diamonds, gold, cobalt, and platinum, are particularly significant. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), for instance, is home to some of the largest deposits of Cobalt and Coltan, essential for the production of electronic devices (Sovacool, 2021). Similarly, South Africa's wealth in platinum and gold has made it a key player in the global mining industry.

Fossil fuels, particularly oil and natural gas, are another critical resource type found in Africa. Nigeria and Angola are among the continent's largest oil producers, with substantial reserves that contribute significantly to their national economies (Ovadia, 2016). The recent discoveries of oil and gas reserves in East African countries such as Uganda and Mozambique have further underscored the importance of fossil fuels in Africa's energy landscape (Berne Declaration, 2013). However, reliance on these resources has also brought challenges, including economic volatility and environmental degradation.

Agricultural resources constitute another vital category of natural resources in Africa. The continent's climate and fertile land support the cultivation of a variety of crops, such as cocoa, coffee, cotton, and a range of food crops (Ncube et

al., 2014). West Africa, for instance, is renowned for its cocoa production, with countries like Ivory Coast and Ghana being the leading producers globally. These agricultural exports are crucial for the livelihoods of millions of Africans and for generating foreign exchange revenues.

Forestry resources also play a significant role in Africa's economy, particularly in Central and West Africa, where vast tropical forests are located. These forests provide timber and non-timber products and are vital for biodiversity and carbon sequestration (FAO, 2020). However, deforestation and illegal logging pose significant threats to these resources, leading to loss of biodiversity and contributing to climate change. Sustainable management practices are essential to preserving these forests for future generations.

Lastly, Africa's water resources, including major river systems like the Nile, Congo, and Niger rivers, are indispensable for agriculture, drinking water, and hydroelectric power generation (Ashton, 2002). These water bodies support extensive agricultural activities, particularly in arid and semi-arid regions, and are central to efforts aimed at achieving food security. The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on the Blue Nile is a recent example of how water resources are pivotal for national development plans (Casção & Nicol, 2016). However, disputes over water rights and usage remain a challenge in regions where water is scarce. Africa has a variety of mineral resources and the table below is indicative of this potential.

**Table 1: Africa's Share of the World Total Production of Selected Minerals, 2005**

Mineral	Share of the world	Major African producers
Cobalt	57	DRC, Zambia, Morocco
Diamond	53	DRC, Botswana, South Africa, Angola, Namibia
Manganese	39	South Africa, Gabon, Ghana
Phosphate	31	Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, South Africa, Senegal
Gold	21	South Africa, Ghana, Mali, Tanzania
Bauxite	9	Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ghana
Nickel	7.5	South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe
Copper	5	Zambia, DRC, South Africa

### Natural resources as life support solutions

- a. Natural resources consist of raw materials and energy resources used by humans. Usually these are used as inputs into the economic system. These have traditionally been regarded as natural resources. Their examples are minerals, ores, coal and oil.
- b. The natural environment also provides the essential life-support system for humans, including oxygen to breath and water to drink as well as material goods such as food.
- c. Another group of resources comprises parts of the environment that can provide services rather than material goods. They provide the sump into which the waste products of the economic system and human life, in general, are disposed.

Resources are materials that are inputs in the production of goods and services. There are four major economic resources and these are: land, labour, capital, and technology which is sometimes referred to as entrepreneurship. Valuable resources can both fuel violence through competition for territorial control, promoting looting and rent-seeking, as well as sustaining violence through financing conflict. It is difficult to determine the exact role that extractive resources may play in indirectly inciting political violence (Kishi, 2014).

### **Problem Statement**

The impact of uneven distribution of natural resource on the continent of Africa is of much concern in the current period. The uneven distribution of natural resources in Africa poses significant challenges to economic development, social stability, and political governance. This disparity not only creates economic imbalances but also fosters conflict and hampers sustainable development. Resource-rich countries like Nigeria, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) face unique challenges in managing their wealth, often resulting in corruption, poor governance, and social unrest (Olsson, 2020). Conversely, resource-poor nations struggle to achieve similar growth, leading to regional

inequalities and tensions. Addressing the issues arising from this uneven distribution is critical for fostering peace and equitable development across the continent.

The concentration of valuable resources in specific regions often exacerbates existing social and political tensions. In Nigeria, the Niger Delta region's oil wealth has not translated into local prosperity, leading to significant grievances among the local population and fuelling insurgency and militancy (Asuni, 2022). Similarly, in the DRC, the abundance of minerals like coltan and cobalt has attracted both domestic and international actors, resulting in complex conflicts involving multiple armed groups (Stearns, 2023). These examples highlight how resource wealth can become a source of conflict rather than a driver of development, necessitating effective governance and equitable distribution mechanisms.

Furthermore, the dependency on specific natural resources makes African economies vulnerable to global market fluctuations. Countries like Zambia, heavily reliant on copper exports, face economic instability when commodity prices fall, undermining efforts toward sustainable development (Hilson & Maconachie, 2019). This economic volatility underscores the need for diversification strategies to reduce dependency on single commodities and promote resilience. Moreover, the geopolitical dynamics of resource extraction often lead to exploitative practices, where foreign interests override national development goals (Carmody, 2021). Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive policy frameworks that emphasize transparent governance, equitable resource distribution, and economic diversification.

### **Research Objectives**

The primary objectives of this document are:

- a. To assess the distribution and economic significance of natural resources in Africa.
- b. To analyse the mechanisms through which natural resources contribute to conflicts.

- c. To evaluate the role of governance and economic management in mitigating resource-related conflicts.
- d. To examine the influence of external actors on resource conflicts.
- e. To provide policy recommendations for conflict prevention and sustainable resource management.

### Theoretical Framework

Three theories have been used to explain the issue of natural resources and these are:

Resource curse, Greed and Grievance theory as well as political ecology

#### Resource Curse Theory

The resource curse theory suggests that countries with abundant natural resources often experience slower economic growth, less democracy, and more conflicts than resource-poor countries (Sachs & Warner, 2001). This paradox is attributed to various factors, including rent-seeking behavior, corruption, and volatility in commodity prices.

#### Greed and Grievance Theory

The greed and grievance theory posits that conflicts arise either from economic incentives (greed) or social and political injustices (grievance) (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). Natural resources can fuel conflicts by providing financial incentives for rebellion (greed) or by exacerbating existing grievances related to resource distribution and governance.

#### Political Ecology

Political ecology examines the political, economic, and social dimensions of environmental issues and changes. It emphasizes the role of power dynamics and historical context in shaping resource conflicts (Blaikie & Brookfield, 1987).

### Overview of Natural Resource Endowment in Africa

Africa's natural resources include:

- a. **Oil:** Major producers include Nigeria, Angola, and Libya.
- b. **Minerals:** Significant deposits of gold, diamonds, and copper in countries like

South Africa, Botswana, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

- c. **Forests:** Vast forest resources in the Congo Basin.
- d. **Arable Land:** Fertile lands suitable for agriculture across the continent.

### Natural Resources and Conflict

#### Mechanisms Linking Resources to Conflict

Several mechanisms link natural resources to conflict and these include financing of armed groups, grievances and social tensions as a result of unfair distribution of proceeds from natural resources as well as failing state institutions and authority structures.

The relationship between natural resources and conflict in Africa is complex and multifaceted, involving various mechanisms that can exacerbate tensions and lead to violence. One primary mechanism is the financing of armed groups through resource exploitation. Rebel groups and militias often fund their activities by controlling and selling valuable resources like diamonds, gold, and timber. This phenomenon, known as "conflict resources," has been particularly evident in countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, where mineral wealth has fuelled prolonged conflicts (Le Billon, 2020). The illicit trade of these resources provides financial sustenance to armed groups, perpetuating cycles of violence.

Resource wealth can also lead to grievances and social tensions when the benefits of resource extraction are unevenly distributed. Local communities in resource-rich areas may feel marginalized if they do not see tangible benefits from resource revenues. For instance, in Nigeria's Niger Delta, the lack of adequate compensation and environmental degradation from oil extraction has fuelled militancy and unrest (Watts, 2019). These grievances can escalate into violent conflicts as communities demand a fair share of resource wealth and seek redress for environmental damage.

Another mechanism is the weakening of state institutions and governance structures due to

resource wealth. The abundance of resources can lead to rent-seeking behaviour, corruption, and patronage politics, undermining the effectiveness of state institutions (Ross, 2012). This can create an environment where state actors are more focused on controlling resource rents than on providing public goods and services. The weakened state capacity can, in turn, lead to instability and conflict as different factions vie for control of lucrative resources.

Environmental degradation resulting from resource extraction is another critical factor linking resources to conflict. Deforestation, pollution, and land degradation can disrupt local livelihoods, particularly in agrarian and fishing communities. The loss of livelihoods can drive competition over remaining resources, leading to conflicts between different groups (Bavinck *et al.*, 2014). Environmental damage can also lead to displacement, further exacerbating tensions and increasing the likelihood of conflict as displaced populations compete for scarce resources in new areas.

Lastly, international involvement in resource-rich countries can contribute to conflicts. Foreign investments and interventions often prioritize resource extraction over local development needs, leading to exploitative practices and exacerbating local grievances (Carmody, 2016). Additionally, geopolitical interests can lead to external powers supporting different factions in resource-rich regions, further fueling conflicts. The competition for strategic resources like oil and minerals can thus internationalize conflicts and make resolution efforts more complex.

### **Cause and Distribution of conflicts**

Land is undoubtedly the most important natural resource in Africa. Its importance transcends economics into a breadth of social, spiritual, and political significance. Among other things, it is considered as the place of birth; the place where the ancestors are laid to rest; the place which the creator has designated to be passed down to successive generations; and the final resting place for every child

born on its surface. Consequently, every society in Africa sees land as a natural resource that is held in trust for future generations, and the clarity of this trust lies behind most of the conflicts (Alao, 2007).

Overall, the debate linking natural resources abundance or scarcity to conflicts can be related to at least four factors:

- (i) The prevalence of poverty, and the poor record of resource abundant countries in poverty alleviation, which creates grievances of a large sway of disfranchised excluded communities;
- (ii) Near exclusive use of natural resource revenues by the elite to the exclusion of the poor, which tends to alienate local populations and encourages separatist tendencies;
- (iii) Resource abundance retards political change and significantly weakens emerging democratic institutions by repressing opposition parties, encouraging corruption among the elite, and bureaucracy;
- (iv) It widens the inequality gap between the central and regional government by channelling the flow of revenues from natural resources to the centre at the expense of the already underdeveloped periphery.

During the 1990s, conflicts waged during the struggle for democracy and the restoration of human rights often developed into resource conflicts (Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Liberia). Algeria offers an example of a war between secularists and radical Islamists gradually taking the character of resource conflicts involving government and radical Islamists such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Libya and Somalia, and the Niger and Mali.

Natural resource extraction by mining of including oil, diamonds, copper, and cobalt has tremendous positive economic potential for states. However, these resources can also do more harm than good if used towards ulterior motives including corruption,

the unequal distribution of wealth, and to fuel violence. Valuable resources can both fuel violence through competition for territorial control, promoting looting and rent-seeking, as well as sustaining violence through financing conflict (Kishi, 2014).

It is difficult to determine the exact role that extractive resources may play in indirectly inciting political violence. For example, while it is largely accepted that rebel groups used profits from conflict diamonds to finance civil wars in Angola, DR-Congo, and Sierra Leone. It is difficult to measure the extent of the resources effect given its indirect role. By searching for conflict events on oil, mines, diamonds, and resources, one can gain an understanding of resource-related conflict with more direct links for example, the kidnapping of an oil worker, a conflict over access to a specific diamond mine, or the protesting of an oil company.

This increased conflict rate is driven by the higher prevalence of riots and protests relating to extractive natural resources. While riots and protests of this sort occur across Africa, resource-related battles and instances of violence against civilians can be seen primarily in only a handful of countries: Nigeria, Sudan, South Sudan, DR-Congo, and Somalia.

Nigeria consistently exhibits high levels of directly-resource-related conflict, and has experienced a markedly higher number of these events relative to other African countries since 1997. As the 12<sup>th</sup> largest producer of petroleum worldwide, and its 8<sup>th</sup> largest exporter, resource-related conflict in Nigeria revolves around oil. About 5% of violent conflict in Nigeria since 1997 has been explicitly resource-related. About half of that violence, about 2.5% of all Nigerian violence since 1997 is specifically targeted at civilians in terms of oil workers being kidnapped or taken hostage (Kishi, 2014).

South Sudan sees the second highest number of explicitly resource-related conflict during the time period examined. This is especially alarming given

that the country only gained independence in 2011. About 5% of violent conflict in South Sudan since 2011 has been explicitly resource-related. The vast majority of this type of conflict seen in South Sudan comprises of battles, primarily between government forces and rebel groups. Resource-related conflict in South Sudan is also oil-related, and has occurred almost exclusively in oil-rich Unity state. Similarly, Sudan has also experienced a high number of these oil-related conflicts. About half of this conflict is comprised of battles, which occur largely in the highly contested Abyei region. Though citizens of the region are arguably in favour of joining South Sudan, the area remains part of Sudan. Abyei is responsible for about a quarter of Sudan's total crude oil output (Kishi, 2014).

While oil drives resource-related conflict in Nigeria, Sudan, and South Sudan, resource-related conflict in DR-Congo is primarily fuelled by mining of diamonds and cobalt. DR-Congo is estimated to have about \$24 trillion worth of untapped deposits of raw mineral ores, including the world's largest reserves of cobalt. The majority of this type of conflict in DR-Congo is battles, primarily between government forces and rebel groups over gaining control of mines. Somalia sees a high number of directly-resource-related conflicts, largely driven by battles between clan militias over access to and control of land and water resources. In a region with chronically high temperatures year-round and limited/irregular rainfall, these natural resources become even more valuable (Kishi, 2014).

#### **Uneven distribution across countries.**

The uneven distribution of natural resources across African countries has significant implications for economic development, social stability, and political dynamics. This disparity often leads to unequal economic opportunities and developmental outcomes within the continent. Countries such as Nigeria, Angola, and South Africa are blessed with abundant natural resources like oil, diamonds, and gold, which have the potential to significantly boost their economies (Ross, 2015). Conversely, countries



with fewer resources often struggle to achieve similar economic growth and face challenges in meeting the basic needs of their populations.

This disparity in resource endowment can lead to regional imbalances within countries, exacerbating economic and social inequalities. For instance, in Nigeria, the Niger Delta region, which is rich in oil, has been a hotspot for conflict due to perceived and actual marginalization of local communities in terms of resource revenue allocation (Watts, 2004). The benefits of natural resource wealth often do not reach the local population, leading to grievances and fuelling unrest. These regional disparities highlight the need for fair and transparent resource management policies to ensure equitable distribution of resource wealth.

Furthermore, the uneven distribution of resources can lead to dependency on specific commodities, making resource-rich countries vulnerable to global market fluctuations. Countries like Zambia, which relies heavily on copper exports, experience significant economic instability when global copper prices fall (Auty, 1993). This reliance on a single resource can hinder diversified economic development and make countries susceptible to the boom-and-bust cycles associated with commodity markets. Diversification strategies are essential to mitigate these risks and promote sustainable economic growth.

The geopolitical implications of uneven resource distribution are also profound. Countries with abundant natural resources often become focal points of international interest and intervention, sometimes leading to neo colonial dynamics (Carmody, 2011). Foreign investments and influence in resource-rich countries can result in exploitative practices and may prioritize foreign interests over national development. This can perpetuate cycles of dependency and hinder efforts towards achieving economic sovereignty and self-sustained growth.

In conclusion, the uneven distribution of natural resources across African countries presents both opportunities and challenges. While resource-rich

countries have the potential for significant economic gains, the management of these resources is critical to avoid conflicts and ensure equitable development. Addressing regional disparities, reducing dependency on single commodities, and navigating the geopolitical landscape are essential steps for harnessing the benefits of natural resources. Effective governance, transparent policies, and international cooperation are key to mitigating the negative impacts of uneven resource distribution and promoting sustainable development across the continent.

### **Global power relations and natural resource governance**

Like many other aspects of contemporary international politics, natural resources are profoundly amenable to the complex nature of global power relations and competitions. From multinational companies to super powers, natural resources usually tend to attract deep and extensive interests. With this often comes significantly higher likelihood of violent conflict. In order to feed the giant global industrial complex, natural resources have to be extracted, processed and distributed. Because they are mostly located in places far and apart across the planet, the political boundaries of statehood only serve to slow down the logic of access and distribution. Bradshaw (2009) touched on this point when he argued that geographical factors such as the distribution of centres of supply and demand of natural resources could potentially have important implications for state and non-state behaviour. How states perceive their options and how they animate the choices they make with regard to access to natural resources, in turn, shapes the global politics of energy security. Some of the main signposts of the contemporary global politics of extraction include the new role of emerging economies like China, India and Brazil; the role of social movements, business and multilateral institutions in shaping norms; the continuing securitisation of resource extraction; and the gale of resource nationalisms

manifesting in citizens demands for greater control of natural resources and accruable benefits.

Emerging economies and resource extraction Global politics has changed significantly in the last decade with the growing clout of emerging economies like China, India and Brazil in the extractive sectors of many African states. It is now difficult to have a discussion of global power relations and natural resources without engaging with the seismic shift of power towards emerging economies. As the sources of new investment, these countries now wield tremendous power in Africa extractive sectors and will thus be critical to the governance infrastructures that will emerge over the next decade.

As at 2009, for instance, China was responsible for 30% of global growth in the demand for oil, a figure that means by 2030, it will be consuming some 15 million barrels of oil per day.

In order to firmly secure its continued access to natural resources, the Chinese government has linked its growing bilateral infrastructure aid program to mining rights. For instance, China's Export-Import bank funded major infrastructure projects in Angola for \$4.5billion in 2004 in exchange for oil; \$3billion in Gabon in 2006 for manganese exploration; and \$ 6 billion for DRC infrastructure in exchange for copper and cobalt from the Kolwezi Copper Mine in 2008. These investments highlight how China's foreign policy has effectively integrated both its diplomatic goals with the energy security concerns it has in relation to its growing, resource hungry economy.

India is also making similar resource focused investments and foreign policy decisions as illustrated by the Indian Prime Minister's announcement in 2011 of a \$5billion credit line to African States. Prior to that, Indian investments in oil extraction had grown steadily, especially in Sudan through the ONGC Videsh (OVL). According to Large (2010), India's petro partnership with Sudan began in 2003 when ONGC Videsh bought a 25 percent stake in Sudan's main oil consortium.

Further investments made Sudan one of the largest destinations for Indian foreign investment between 1995 and 2005. It fits within the broader energy security logic that these investments focused on securing India's access to resources.

Such investments by emerging economies have not been without controversy. For one, they do not necessarily reflect the economic goals of the states involved but are part of a broader global struggle by new powers to unseat- or at least compete on an equal footing with- key western countries that have dominated global economic politics for decades. In the context of this competition, there seems to be a new scramble for the natural resources of African states. Pdraig Carmody (2011) writes that commodities have been at the very core of this new scramble and that emerging markets are now both the destinations and partners of choice for many African states. One reason for this is that investments from states like China and India are cloaked with a language of non-interference and shared history of marginalization. While this obviously makes them less meddlesome partners, their efficient investments in elite or middle class aspirations for grand infrastructural projects or presidential palaces means that they are often able to quietly take over the space being lost or abdicated by the West.

The governance of natural resources in Africa is heavily influenced by global power relations, which shape the policies and practices surrounding resource extraction and management. These dynamics are often driven by the interests of powerful multinational corporations and foreign governments, particularly from developed countries, seeking to secure access to Africa's abundant resources. The result is a complex interplay of economic, political, and social factors that can impact the sovereignty and development prospects of African nations (Carmody, 2011).

Historically, the legacy of colonialism has had a lasting impact on natural resource governance in Africa. Colonial powers structured African economies around the extraction and export of raw

materials to serve their industrial needs. This has continued in the post-colonial era, with many African countries still relying heavily on the export of raw materials to global markets (Mbaye, 2019). The influence of former colonial powers persists, often manifesting through economic policies and trade agreements that favour the interests of the more powerful nations.

In contemporary times, the role of emerging global powers, particularly China, has become increasingly significant in Africa's natural resource sector. China's investment in infrastructure projects and its growing demand for resources like oil, copper, and rare earth minerals have led to deeper economic ties with African countries (Alden & Alves, 2009). While these investments can drive economic growth, they often come with strings attached, such as favourable terms for Chinese companies and strategic political influence, which can undermine local governance and accountability.

The presence of multinational corporations in Africa's natural resource sector also highlights the imbalance in power relations. These corporations often possess significant financial resources, technical expertise, and political leverage, which can dwarf the capacities of African states. This power asymmetry can lead to unfavourable contracts and terms of trade that disproportionately benefit the corporations at the expense of local communities and governments (Sovacool et al., 2016). Issues such as tax avoidance, environmental degradation, and inadequate compensation for land use are common concerns associated with multinational activities.

Governance challenges are further complicated by internal factors within African countries, such as weak institutions, corruption, and political instability. Effective governance of natural resources requires strong, transparent institutions capable of negotiating fair deals and enforcing regulations. However, in many African countries, these institutions are undermined by corruption and vested interests, which can result in the mismanagement of resources and revenues

(Kimenyi & Lewis, 2016). This internal weakness is often exploited by external actors, exacerbating the challenges of resource governance.

Efforts to improve natural resource governance in Africa have seen varying degrees of success. International initiatives like the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) aim to promote transparency and accountability in the extractive sector by requiring companies to disclose their payments to governments and for governments to disclose their receipts. While these initiatives have had some positive impacts, their effectiveness is often limited by the voluntary nature of compliance and the lack of enforcement mechanisms (Haufler, 2010). Strengthening these initiatives and ensuring greater participation and enforcement are essential for improving governance.

### **Security of access and militarisation**

The security of access to natural resources and the subsequent militarization are critical issues affecting many African countries. Access to valuable resources such as oil, diamonds, and minerals often becomes a contentious issue, leading to conflicts and militarization. Control over these resources is essential for both economic stability and political power, resulting in various actors, including state and non-state entities, vying for dominance (Klare, 2001). This competition frequently leads to militarization as a means to secure and control access to these valuable assets.

Militarization around resource-rich areas is often driven by the need to protect valuable assets from both internal and external threats. Governments deploy military forces to safeguard oil fields, mines, and other critical infrastructure from rebel groups and criminal networks that seek to exploit these resources for their gain (Berman, 2022). For instance, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the military is heavily involved in protecting mining areas rich in coltan and cobalt, crucial for global technology industries. However, this military presence can also lead to human rights abuses and exacerbate local tensions.

Non-state actors, including rebel groups and militias, frequently militarize in their efforts to control resource-rich territories. The competition for resources like diamonds in Sierra Leone and Liberia during the 1990s led to prolonged civil wars, financed by the illicit trade of these resources (Le Billon, 2001). These groups often establish sophisticated networks to smuggle resources, using the proceeds to fund their operations, thereby perpetuating cycles of violence and instability. The militarization by non-state actors thus poses significant challenges to state sovereignty and governance.

The international dimension of resource security and militarization cannot be overlooked. Foreign nations and multinational corporations have vested interests in securing access to Africa's natural resources, sometimes leading to indirect or direct military involvement (Shaxson, 2007). For example, China's growing influence in Africa, particularly in countries like Angola and Sudan, includes substantial investments in infrastructure and security to ensure stable access to oil and minerals. This geopolitical competition can lead to increased militarization and tensions within and between African states.

Militarization for resource security often results in significant socio-economic impacts on local communities. The presence of military forces can disrupt local livelihoods, lead to forced displacements, and result in civilian casualties (Autesserre, 2010). In the Niger Delta, military operations to protect oil installations have led to clashes with local communities, causing environmental degradation and economic hardship for the residents. These socio-economic impacts can fuel further resentment and conflict, creating a vicious cycle of violence and instability.

Efforts to address the issues of security of access and militarization in Africa require comprehensive strategies that include governance reforms, international cooperation, and community engagement. Strengthening legal frameworks and institutions to manage natural resources

transparently and equitably is crucial (Ross, 2012). Additionally, fostering dialogue between governments, local communities, and international stakeholders can help mitigate conflicts and ensure that resource wealth benefits all segments of society.

### **Laws, norms and institutions in the governance of natural resources**

The governance of natural resources is a complex interplay of laws, norms, and institutions that aim to manage resource extraction and distribution in a manner that promotes sustainable development and minimizes conflicts. Effective governance frameworks are critical in ensuring that resource wealth translates into economic prosperity and social well-being. Legal frameworks provide the backbone for regulating resource extraction, setting standards for environmental protection, and ensuring that revenues are transparently and equitably distributed. For instance, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) is a global standard aimed at promoting the open and accountable management of oil, gas, and mineral resources (EITI, 2023).

Institutions play a vital role in the governance of natural resources by implementing laws and policies, enforcing regulations, and managing resource revenues. Robust institutions are essential for preventing corruption, ensuring compliance with environmental standards, and managing resource revenues effectively. For example, Norway's Petroleum Directorate is often cited as a model institution that has successfully managed the country's oil resources through transparent practices and long-term planning (Thurber, Hults, & Heller, 2011). African countries can learn from such models to strengthen their own institutions for better resource management.

Norms, both formal and informal, influence how resources are governed and utilized. These norms can shape the behaviour of various stakeholders, including governments, corporations, and local communities. Formal norms are often codified in laws and regulations, while informal norms may

include traditional practices and community expectations. For example, in many African communities, customary land rights play a significant role in resource governance, influencing how land and resources are accessed and used (Alden Wily, 2018). Integrating these informal norms into formal governance frameworks can enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of resource management policies.

Legal frameworks in many African countries have been evolving to address the challenges of natural resource governance. For instance, Ghana's Minerals and Mining Act of 2006 was designed to attract foreign investment while ensuring that mining activities are conducted sustainably and that benefits are shared with local communities (Ghana Chamber of Mines, 2019). Similarly, Botswana has implemented legal reforms that emphasize the role of diamond revenues in national development, leading to significant improvements in social indicators such as education and healthcare (Acemoglu, Johnson, & Robinson, 2003).

Corruption remains a significant challenge in the governance of natural resources in many African countries. Weak institutions and lack of transparency often lead to the mismanagement of resource revenues, with elites capturing the benefits at the expense of the broader population. Initiatives such as the EITI and national anti-corruption commissions aim to address these issues by promoting transparency and accountability. For instance, Nigeria's participation in the EITI has led to greater disclosure of payments and revenues in the oil sector, although challenges remain in fully implementing transparency measures (EITI, 2023).

International norms and agreements also play a crucial role in shaping national resource governance. Agreements such as the Paris Agreement on climate change impact how countries manage their fossil fuel resources, encouraging a shift towards more sustainable energy sources (UNFCCC, 2015). Compliance with international environmental standards can also affect access to international markets, as consumers and investors

increasingly demand sustainable practices. This global pressure can drive reforms in national policies and practices, promoting better governance of natural resources.

The existence of a plural system regulating land ownership and by extension, access, has created challenges that have consistently contributed to conflicts on the continent. The divergence between indigenous traditional laws and state laws that define ownership of natural resources has led to contentious relations within several countries in Africa (Klaus & Mitchell, 2015). For instance, land is a vital natural resource in Africa and is appreciated for more than its economic value and benefits. Land, is more fundamentally considered as a source of familial and cultural identity; individual and communal, as well as the link between generations – past, present and future. Thus, for the majority of Africans - most of who inhabit the rural areas where most of the exploitation of natural resources occurs – the significance of land extends beyond the comprehension of post-colonial laws that tends to place value and considers ownership and access based on its economic value and benefits.

Regarding arable land, it is becoming a common phenomenon across the continent for the State to acquire vast estates of land from local inhabitants for the purpose of mechanized farming, usually by foreign interests. Such land-grab has occurred with resultant conflicts across the continent with a Rights and Resources Institute (2016) study concluding from a review of 37 case studies from West, East and Southern Africa that 70% of the disputes related to private sector land and natural resource investments on the continent began when communities were forced to leave their land while 30% was related to compensation. When considered against the backdrop of the fact that about 70% of land grabbing occurs in Africa (Deininger et al. 2010).

### **Civil Wars in Africa Related to Natural Resources (1975-2023)**

The period from 1975 to 2023 has witnessed numerous civil wars in Africa, many of which have

been closely linked to the continent's rich natural resource endowments. One of the most notorious cases is the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which has been described as the "world's deadliest conflict since World War II" (Prunier, 2009). The DRC's vast reserves of minerals such as coltan, gold, and diamonds have fueled and sustained conflicts, with various armed groups vying for control over these lucrative resources. The competition for resource-rich areas has resulted in prolonged violence, significant loss of life, and extensive human rights abuses (Stearns, 2012).

In Sierra Leone, the civil war from 1991 to 2002 was significantly driven by the desire to control diamond mines. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) used diamond revenues to fund their insurgency, perpetuating a brutal conflict that left thousands dead and many more mutilated (Smillie, Gberie, & Hazleton, 2000). The term "blood diamonds" emerged from this conflict, highlighting the role of diamonds in financing violence. International efforts to regulate the trade in conflict diamonds, such as the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme, were developed in response to the Sierra Leone conflict (Bieri, 2010).

Angola's civil war, which spanned from 1975 to 2002, also illustrates the link between natural resources and conflict. The war involved the MPLA government and UNITA rebels, both of whom financed their military activities through the exploitation of natural resources. The MPLA controlled offshore oil reserves, while UNITA

leveraged diamond sales to sustain their insurgency (Le Billon, 2001). The lucrative nature of these resources prolonged the conflict, demonstrating how resource wealth can perpetuate violence and instability.

More recently, the ongoing conflict in South Sudan, which gained independence in 2011, underscores the continuing relevance of natural resources in African civil wars. Oil has been a central factor in the conflict between the government and opposition forces, with control over oil fields being a major strategic objective for both sides (Johnson, 2016). The oil wealth in South Sudan has not only fueled the civil war but also complicated peace efforts, as various factions vie for a share of the resource revenues (Patey, 2017).

The Libyan civil war, which began in 2011 following the Arab Spring, further illustrates the connection between natural resources and conflict. Libya's vast oil reserves have been a key factor in the ongoing struggle for power among rival factions. Control over oil production and export facilities has been a major driver of the conflict, with different groups using oil revenues to finance their military campaigns (Lacher, 2020). The international dimensions of the conflict, with various foreign powers supporting different factions to secure access to oil, highlight the global implications of resource-related civil wars in Africa.

**Table 2: Civil Wars in Africa related to Natural resources from 1975-2023**

Country	Period	Natural Resources	Brief Description
Angola	1975-2002	Oil, Diamonds	The MPLA government and UNITA rebels funded their activities through oil and diamond revenues.
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	1996-ongoing	Coltan, Gold, Diamonds	Various armed groups compete for control over mineral-rich regions, fueling prolonged conflict and instability.
Sierra Leone	1991-2002	Diamonds	The RUF funded their insurgency through diamond sales, leading to the term "blood diamonds."
Liberia	1989-2003	Timber, Diamonds	Control over timber and diamond resources fueled the conflict between government and rebel forces.
Sudan	1983-2005	Oil	The conflict between the North and South was significantly driven by disputes over oil-rich regions, leading to South Sudan's independence.
South Sudan	2013-ongoing	Oil	Internal conflict fueled by control over oil fields and revenue distribution among various factions.
Nigeria	2004-ongoing	Oil	Militant groups in the Niger Delta region have attacked oil infrastructure, demanding a greater share of oil revenues.
Ivory Coast	2002-2011	Cocoa, Diamonds	The conflict involved control over cocoa plantations and diamond mines, contributing to the country's instability.
Libya	2011-ongoing	Oil	Rival factions have fought for control over oil production and export facilities, complicating the post-Gaddafi transition.
Chad	2005-2010	Oil	Internal conflict involving rebel groups and government forces, with oil resources being a significant factor.
Mali	2012-ongoing	Gold	Islamist militants and rebel groups have targeted gold mining regions to fund their activities.

**METHODOLOGY**

This assessment is based on a comprehensive review of existing literature, including academic articles, reports from international organizations, and case studies. The document employs a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating insights from political science, economics, and environmental studies.

**FINDINGS**

Recent research has significantly advanced our understanding of the complex relationship between natural resource endowment and conflicts in Africa. One key finding is the strong correlation between the abundance of natural resources and the prevalence of conflict. For instance, a study by Lujala (2010) revealed that regions rich in easily

lootable resources, such as alluvial diamonds, are more prone to conflicts. This is due to the ease with which rebel groups can exploit these resources to finance their activities.

Furthermore, research by Ross (2015) has demonstrated that oil-rich countries in Africa, such as Nigeria and Angola, experience higher levels of civil strife and political instability. The centralization of resource revenues and the lack of transparent management often lead to corruption and rent-seeking behaviors, undermining political stability and fostering conflict. These findings highlight the need for robust governance structures to manage resource wealth effectively and mitigate conflict risks.

Another important aspect highlighted in recent studies is the role of environmental degradation in fueling conflicts. A report by UNEP (2020) indicates that the environmental impacts of resource extraction, such as land degradation, water pollution, and deforestation, can lead to resource scarcity, displacing communities and exacerbating existing tensions. For example, in regions like the Niger Delta, environmental degradation due to oil spills has significantly contributed to local grievances and insurgencies (Watts, 2004).

Research also shows that the distribution of resource wealth within countries can be a significant determinant of conflict. Inequitable distribution of revenues from natural resources can lead to regional disparities and social inequalities, which in turn fuel conflicts. According to Collier and Hoeffler (2004), regions that are marginalized and deprived of resource revenues are more likely to experience uprisings and insurgencies. This underscores the importance of equitable revenue-sharing mechanisms to foster peace and development.

The impact of global market fluctuations on resource-dependent economies is another area of concern. Studies have shown that countries heavily reliant on a single resource are particularly vulnerable to global price shocks, which can destabilize their economies and lead to social unrest. For instance, the volatility of global oil prices has had significant repercussions for the Nigerian economy, leading to economic instability and exacerbating existing conflicts (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2013).

In addition to economic factors, political dynamics play a crucial role in the resource-conflict nexus. Research by Le Billon (2001) suggests that the presence of valuable natural resources can incentivize political elites to engage in corrupt practices and power struggles, further destabilizing the state. This often leads to authoritarian regimes where resource revenues are used to consolidate power rather than to promote development and social welfare.

The role of international actors and foreign investments in resource-rich countries has also been critically examined. Carmody (2011) argues that the new scramble for Africa's resources has led to exploitative practices by foreign corporations, often with the complicity of local elites. This can result in neocolonial dynamics where resource wealth benefits foreign interests at the expense of local development, fueling anti-foreign sentiments and conflict.

Recent studies have also explored the effectiveness of various policy interventions in mitigating resource-related conflicts. According to Mehlum, Moene, and Torvik (2006), countries with strong institutions and good governance practices are better able to manage resource wealth and avoid the resource curse. Implementing transparency initiatives, such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), can help in ensuring that resource revenues are managed in a way that promotes equitable development and reduces the likelihood of conflict.

Another important finding is the impact of regional cooperation and integration on resource management and conflict mitigation. The African Union and regional organizations like ECOWAS have been instrumental in promoting collaborative approaches to resource governance. Asante (2020) notes that regional frameworks for resource management can help in addressing cross-border resource conflicts and fostering collective security.

Lastly, the role of local communities in resource management has gained increasing attention. Research indicates that involving local communities in decision-making processes related to resource extraction and revenue allocation can significantly reduce conflicts. A study by Bebbington (2013) highlights that community-based resource management approaches, which prioritize local needs and ensure fair distribution of benefits, can lead to more sustainable and peaceful outcomes.



## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the uneven distribution of natural resources across African countries underscores the complex challenges and opportunities facing the continent. While some nations are blessed with abundant resources that have the potential to drive economic growth and development, others grapple with scarcity and the associated socio-economic consequences. It is imperative for African governments and policymakers to adopt inclusive and sustainable strategies for managing natural resources to ensure equitable distribution and maximize their benefits for all citizens. Moreover, addressing regional disparities and promoting cooperation among countries can help mitigate conflicts and foster a more stable and prosperous continent.

Furthermore, the management of natural resources in Africa must prioritize the well-being of local communities and environmental sustainability. Too often, resource extraction has led to environmental degradation and social unrest, particularly in areas where communities feel marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes. By incorporating principles of good governance, transparency, and accountability into resource management practices, African countries can foster trust and cooperation among stakeholders and promote long-term sustainable development.

Moving forward, African nations must also look beyond the extractive industries and explore opportunities for diversification and value addition. Investing in sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and technology can reduce dependency on volatile commodity markets and create more resilient and inclusive economies. Additionally, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship can unlock new opportunities for growth and job creation, particularly for youth and marginalized groups. By embracing a holistic approach to natural resource management and economic development, African countries can unlock their full potential and build a brighter future for generations to come.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Effective governance can address problems of water supply, for example by improving storage, preservation, and water quality. Governance can also help ensure a fair and equitable distribution of water resource, as well as limiting total demand through efforts to promote better conservation and more efficient use. These factors all suggest that governance can play a crucial role in whether water scarcity is likely to give rise to violent conflict. Responsive governments may be better able to deal with problems like water scarcity, and thus avert discontent and civil strife caused by environmental factors (Theodora & Amanda, 2010).

### *Democracy*

The expectation is that within the context of democracy in natural resource governance, key principles such as collective decision-making must be embraced and elevated. In applying collective decision making to natural resource governance, decisions leading to the exploration and use of natural resources should take on board the contrasting views of different actors that are expected to benefit or be impacted, by the exploitation of the natural resource. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) laws that govern the exploration and extraction of natural resources is one such law that already promotes the principle of democratic governance, even if the latter is only one aspect towards sound and efficient natural resource governance. The principle of democratic collective decision-making also needs to be consistent across the different cycles of natural resource management, from exploration to production and how revenues are utilised. This will limit the resort to armed violence by local actors and communities constantly jostling to reap the benefit from lax natural resources governance framework. Nigeria's Delta region is one example where the dearth of democratic decision making has triggered violent conflicts with local communities claiming that they are left out of the decision-making process. Even within that mostly restive region, one cannot miss the contract that

the relatively peaceful Akassa community represents as a unique model of community-led approach to natural resource governance. Pro Natura International Nigeria, a community development organization has worked with Statoil; the main multinational oil company operating in Akassa to develop a unique and participatory model that allow communities to audit their own needs, plan projects and monitor their implementation through established structures. This inclusive process can easily be reproduced elsewhere with only slight modifications. The lesson from Akassa is that when systems of democratic inclusions are factored into natural resource governance, there will be fewer incentives for actors to act outside these systems. Therefore, even though grievances over issues such as the impact of exploration and production of natural resources and the distribution of natural resource revenues may arise from time to time, there will always be opportunities to democratically address these grievances before they lead to violent conflicts. The absence or weakness of institutions that manages grievances could pose a risk that could undermine the stability of resource rich countries. Such institutions, as seen in the case study from Akassa, provide a democratic framework for the resolution of conflicts and the allocation of resources at the local level. Therefore, as Africa seeks to develop a new vision that governs natural resources, it is important that this new vision promotes the development of strong institutions that can democratically address the grievances associated with the management of natural resources.

#### **Efficient and equitable management of resource revenues**

The efficient and equitable management of natural resources is at the heart of virtually every initiative to promote the efficient management; including the proposed natural resource governance architecture framework. Although they run through the different principles outlined earlier, they are identified as separate principles for the purpose of clarifying the important of efficiency and equity in the use of

natural resources. One factor that drive grievances and contributes to the emergence of violent conflicts in resource rich countries is the perception of inequity in the distribution of resource revenues. There needs to be a democratic framework that reflects the diversity of interests and actors within resource-rich countries. Such a framework would recognize the needs of local communities where natural resources are extracted vis-à-vis the general population of the country. It will also address environmental concerns and the impact of natural resource production on the livelihoods of local communities where resource production takes place.

#### **Accountability and transparency**

The principle of accountability and transparency is central to natural resource governance. However, there is a need to design a framework of accountability and transparency that reflects the local context and political realities on the continent. There are transparency indexes that seeks to measure accountability and transparency in the use of extractive natural resources in Africa. It is common for African countries to meet some of the requirements of transparency and accountability indexes without embarking on any fundamental or radical reforms agenda in the use natural resource revenues. One reason for this is because the current measures of accountability and transparency have mostly focused on declaring the earnings of natural resources and not in how such earnings have been utilized, or by whom. Beyond reliance on payments to national governments, accountability and transparency must also focus on how such proceeds are used within the countries. Additional proposals may relate to the vetting of personal and corporate investment funds to ensure that they are not illegally obtained from revenues from illicit natural resource governance. This proposal will require the cooperation of the international community. This is because of the nature of the different laws that govern the movement of capital across different countries. These different laws have facilitated the flow of profits from trade in illegally extracted

natural resources. The international community would need to develop a common standard and mechanisms that enhance transparency of financial flows. Again, this is not really re-inventing the wheel as most financial institutions scrutinize funds to ensure they are not from drugs and money laundering. The measurement of transparency and accountability within the context proposed could focus on identifying how much of natural resource revenues go into different sectors that are directly related to development or how a particular natural resource contributes to education, healthcare, infrastructure, arts and culture, and other sectors of the economy beneficial to the ordinary people. Such an approach would ensure that the use of natural resources directly.

#### **Rule of law**

With regards to the principle of rule of law within natural resource governance, the emphases should be on the equality before the law along with unfettered access to judicial and/or administrative systems for dispute resolution. Three elements of

the rule of law make its presence crucial for any legal system; these are the supremacy of the law and the absence of arbitrariness, equality before the law, and constitutional law as part of the ordinary law of the land. Generally, rule of law is often applied in its political context to ensure that political power is not abused. In natural resource governance sphere, the rule of law will function to ensure that laws regulating the sector do not allow individual and/or sectional interests of political actors to disadvantage the citizenry. If it ever does, multinationals are held liable under the laws in the countries in which they operate. Regarding the former, the “above the law” stance of the ruling elite in Africa has contributed immensely to the vicious cycle of corruption in many societies. There is barely any African ruler (and their family) in a country that is rich in natural resource that has not been caught in the web of resource-revenue related corruption. With regard to multinational corporations, there are several examples of locals seeking justice in foreign jurisdictions regardless of the immense.

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