

# Navigating the Resource Paradox: A Comparative Analysis of Neocolonial Structures and Domestic Agency in Resource-Rich Africa

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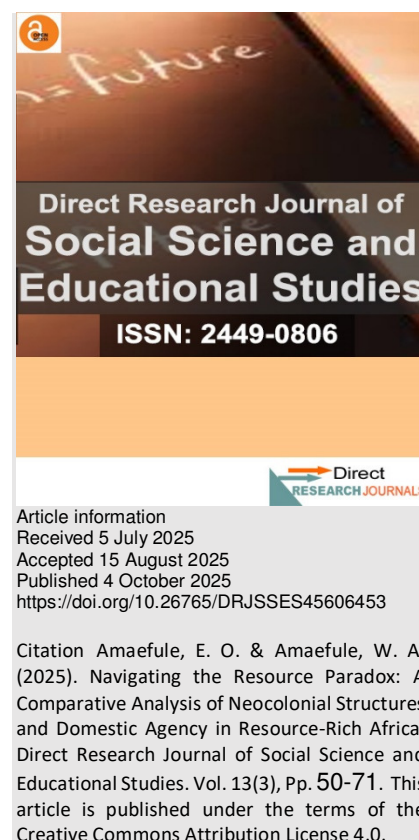
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## ABSTRACT

*This paper novelly reframes the resource curse thesis as a product of enduring neocolonial legacies and contemporary governance failures, rather than an inevitable outcome of resource abundance itself, while uniquely integrating an analysis of international governance frameworks. It challenges the deterministic framing of the resource curse by examining how underdevelopment and environmental degradation in resource-rich African states are shaped more by historical, structural, and neocolonial dynamics than by the presence of natural wealth per se. Using a comparative qualitative methodology, the study draws on academic literature, policy documents, and case studies from Nigeria, Sierra Leone, the DRC, Liberia, and Botswana. Key findings present strong arguments that (1) Natural resource abundance is not inherently a curse; it becomes a developmental liability when managed through weak institutions, neocolonial financial arrangements, and global structural inequities (i.e correlation does not equate causation). (2) International governance frameworks such as the Kimberley Process (KP) and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), while improving transparency, adopt technocratic and depoliticized approaches that fail to address deeper power asymmetries and systemic injustices. (3) National sovereignty, political agency, and institutional autonomy are critical in shaping whether resource wealth fosters development or deepens dependency. Botswana's relative success exemplifies how sovereign control, transparent fiscal management, and inclusive governance can transform resource abundance into sustainable development despite global structural pressures. (4) As the "green" energy transition accelerates, there is a risk of replicating existing patterns of exploitation unless global governance structures are reformed to empower the Global South, protect ecological systems, and democratise benefit-sharing. The paper concludes by calling for a shift toward regionally anchored, justice-oriented governance that centres the Global South in defining sustainable, equitable futures.*

**Keywords:** Resource Governance, Resource Curse, Natural Resource Dependency, International frameworks, EITI, Kimberly Process, Africa, Rent-seeking, Dutch Disease, Neocolonial resource influences



## INTRODUCTION

Natural resources, including oil, gas, and minerals, hold immense potential to drive economic growth, reduce poverty, and foster development in resource-rich nations (McPhail, 2000; World Bank, 2021; Wang and Tian, 2023). However, extracting these resources often presents profound socio-environmental and developmental challenges. For instance, oil exploration in Nigeria's Niger Delta has led to widespread pollution, the destruction of mangrove ecosystems, and persistent gas flaring, devastating local livelihoods (Omokaro, 2024). Similarly, diamond mining in Sierra Leone contributed to the country's brutal civil war by funding rebel groups and displacing thousands (Global Witness, 2006; Cusato, 2020). These cases, as will be explored further in the paper, exemplify how resource wealth can fuel conflict, particularly in regions with weak governance and limited institutional capacity, reinforcing the contested nature of natural resource abundance (Cusato, 2020).

The resource curse thesis, often termed "the paradox of plenty," has dominated scholarly and policy discussions on resource-rich nations (Auty, 2001; Di John, 2011; Bruffaerts, 2015; Cusato, 2020; Narh, 2023; Maheen, 2024). This theory, as will be discussed, links resource abundance to underdevelopment, attributing outcomes such as weak governance, corruption, economic volatility, and conflict to the very presence of natural resources. In response, international frameworks like the Kimberley Process (KP) and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) have been developed as global mitigation efforts for the resource curse with aims of promoting transparency, accountability, and sustainable resource management. However, this study challenges the mainstream assumption that natural resources inherently cause underdevelopment. Instead, it argues that systemic governance failures, historical exploitation, and structural inequities often perpetuated by neocolonial and global power dynamics play a far more significant role in shaping the challenges faced by resource-rich nations, particularly in Africa. By examining the effectiveness of some of these international frameworks, this study evaluates whether these initiatives genuinely tackle the root causes of governance failures or whether they perpetuate dependency and inequities, often prioritising Western geopolitical and economic interests over the sustainable development of resource-rich nations, particularly in the Global South (also Cusato, 2020).

### The objectives of this paper is twofold

1. To critically challenge the resource curse thesis by moving beyond deterministic explanations and examining the structural, historical, and neocolonial factors that shape underdevelopment, governance failures, and socio-environmental harm in resource-rich states, especially in Africa.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of international

governance frameworks, such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and the Kimberley Process, in addressing the challenges of resource exploitation, with particular focus on their objectives, limitations, and impacts on equitable governance, environmental protection, and sustainable development in the Global South.

This approach not only offers a nuanced analysis of why some states succeed where others fail but also contributes to ongoing debates on just, resilient, and locally responsive pathways for energy and environmental governance in a global context shaped by historical inequities and ongoing power imbalances. This paper is organized into five sections. Section 1 introduces the socio-environmental and developmental challenges of resource extraction in Africa, framing them within postcolonial and neocolonial contexts. Section 2 outlines the theoretical framework, examining the resource curse, dependency theory, and structural mechanisms that shape governance outcomes. Section 3 offers empirical case studies of resource-rich nations facing governance and environmental crises due to weak resource management and structures, presenting an argument to counter the mainstream resource curse thesis. Evidence presented spans cases from the following countries, including Nigeria, the DRC, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the CFA Franc-zone, and Botswana. Section 4 critically evaluates the role and limitations of international frameworks such as the EITI and Kimberley Process. Section 5 concludes by synthesizing findings, proposing principles for energy justice and sustainable development, and identifying areas for future research into the interaction between global structures and national agency in resource governance.

## The Resource Paradox

### Understanding the Resource Curse-Dependency Nexus

The resource curse, or "paradox of plenty," describes how nations rich in natural resources, particularly hydrocarbons and minerals, often experience weaker economic performance, institutional decay, weaker development structures, and increased conflict compared to resource-poor states (Auty, 2001; Di John, 2011; Bruffaerts, 2015; Cusato, 2020; Narh, 2023; Maheen, 2024). Rather than ensuring prosperity, resource abundance, as argued by the authors, can lead to macroeconomic distortions like Dutch Disease, elite rent-seeking, corruption, and reduced investment in human capital and non-resource sectors (Auty, 2001; Veisi, 2017). Natural resource abundance, particularly in point-source commodities like oil, has been strongly linked to economic distortions and political fragility. The concept of Dutch Disease illustrates how sudden resource booms can appreciate national currency, undermining non-resource export sectors and deepening

economic dependency (Mueller, 2022). These distortions, when paired with weak institutions, foster rent-seeking, elite capture, and corruption, as shown by Busse and Gröning (2013), who found a strong correlation between resource rents and governance failures. Concentrated resource wealth weakens state capacity and accountability mechanisms, unlike more diffuse sectors such as agriculture that often provide broader societal benefits (Murshed, 2004). Di John (2011) critiques these dominant frameworks, including rentier state and rent-seeking models, arguing that governance quality fundamentally mediates these outcomes. Empirical studies reinforce this, linking resource wealth to growth volatility, inflation, deindustrialization, and political instability (Kuwimb, 2010; Veisi, 2017). Collier and Hoeffler (2005) further contend that resource-fuelled autocracy and low opportunity costs for rebellion intensify the risk of civil conflict in such contexts. However, outcomes are not uniform; countries like Botswana illustrate that strong institutions and diversified economic strategies can mitigate these risks (Auty, 2001; Murshed, 2004). This underscores that resource abundance does not inevitably lead to failure; effective policy and governance are crucial determinants. Siakwah (2017a) warns that focusing solely on national institutions overlooks how a 'globalized hydrocarbon assemblage', the networks of states, transnational firms, technologies, and supranational structures, shapes resource-rich economies. In Ghana, even well-meaning international standards can be neutralized by these global networks, embedding debt patterns or policy volatility (Siakwah 2017b). Understanding why oil-rich nations struggle requires looking beyond national borders to examine the influence of global actors, transnational capital, and market dynamics. This justifies the comparative approach of this study, which seeks to identify structural patterns across cases rather than attributing outcomes solely to domestic governance.

This paper examines the concept of the resource paradox, a term that encompasses what has often been referred to in the literature as the resource curse or resource dependency. While these labels have been used differently across disciplines and studies, they share a common core: the idea that natural resource abundance, particularly in point-source commodities like oil and minerals, can lead to economic, institutional, and political dysfunction when not effectively managed. Rather than treating these as distinct or opposing frameworks, this paper approaches them as interlinked expressions of the same underlying phenomenon. Scholars have argued that the so-called "curse" is a consequence of dependency, specifically, over-reliance on resource revenues at the expense of diversification, institutional strength, and inclusive development.

### **From Dependency to Dysfunction: Mechanisms of the Paradox**

Michael Watts (2009a, 2009b), Paul Collier, and Michael

Ross have all shown how oil and other extractive industries foster economic and political dysfunction. These effects, corruption, authoritarianism, patronage politics, and underinvestment in public goods, are not merely the result of possessing resources but of becoming dependent on them. Ross (2018) argues that the fiscal autonomy provided by oil revenues allows autocrats to avoid taxing citizens, thereby weakening accountability and democratic engagement. Idemudia (2012) further argues that the quality of institutions and governance structures mediates the relationship between resources and development outcomes, pointing again to dependency as the pathway through which the curse materialises.

### **Applicability to International Legal and Institutional Frameworks**

The Resource Paradox Framework also provides a conceptual basis for understanding the emergence and design of international governance mechanisms such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and other global transparency and accountability regimes. These frameworks, often developed in response to widespread concerns over the mismanagement of natural resource revenues, are grounded in the assumption that increased transparency and institutional oversight can mitigate the destabilizing effects associated with resource dependency. Theories of the resource curse and resource dependency thus offer an important analytical lens for examining the motivations behind these global initiatives. At their core, such international mechanisms reflect an implicit acknowledgment of the patterns identified by resource curse theorists: that resource wealth, in the absence of institutional safeguards, can exacerbate rent-seeking, weaken governance structures, and increase socio-economic volatility (Auty, 2001; Collier and Hoeffler, 2005). The Resource Paradox Framework situates these governance mechanisms within a broader structural context, one in which attempts to "fix" the resource curse are often shaped by global power dynamics, normative assumptions about institutional best practices, and the legacy of neocolonial economic arrangements. By emphasizing the interplay between dependency, institutions, and external regimes, the framework helps us interrogate how and why certain legal instruments and institutional architectures were formulated in the first place. It also underscores the importance of viewing these mechanisms not in isolation, but as embedded within the wider political economy of resource extraction in the Global South. This includes the historical contexts that shaped governance challenges, as well as the structural conditions that international frameworks seek to manage. Rather than presenting natural resources as inherently problematic or beneficial, the Resource Paradox Framework positions resource governance initiatives as products of, and responses to, a deeper interaction between domestic vulnerabilities and international policy prescriptions. This theoretical perspective sets the stage

for the subsequent sections of the paper, where specific mechanisms such as the EITI and the Kimberley Process will be examined in more detail in relation to their efficacy, equity, and implications for sovereign resource management. This framework also provides a critical backdrop for interrogating mainstream narratives that natural resources inherently determine a country's developmental trajectory. By situating both theories within broader structural, institutional, and historical contexts, this study challenges the deterministic view that resources alone "curse" or "bless" nations. Instead, it argues that the outcomes of resource wealth are shaped by power relations, governance choices, and the roles of international frameworks, which often reflect neoliberal and externally driven agendas. This framework thus serves not to reinforce the resource curse thesis but to question its foundational assumptions, paving the way for a more nuanced analysis of agency, structural inequality, and justice in resource-rich states.

### **Environmental and Social Impacts of Natural Resource Extraction in Resource-Rich Nations**

This section sheds light on the complex relationship between resource extraction and socio-environmental challenges in developing countries, particularly those affected by the "resource curse." The exploration of environmental degradation, resource-driven conflicts, and the exacerbation of social inequalities aligns with the broader goal of understanding how natural resource management impacts the stability and sustainability of resource-rich nations. Furthermore, it underscores the need for more effective governance mechanisms and international frameworks prioritizing equity, environmental justice, and sustainable development. The inclusion of case studies below serves to add depth to the analysis by providing concrete examples of how resource extraction, specifically diamond mining and oil extraction, has contributed to conflict, social disintegration, and environmental destruction in specific regions. These case studies help contextualize the theoretical discussions of the resource curse and highlight the practical challenges in managing resources in post-conflict environments.

In this section, the environmental and social impacts of oil, gas, and mining in resource-rich nations, highlighting how resource-driven conflicts harm ecosystems, biodiversity, and human rights, alongside the enduring consequences of landmines in post-conflict scenarios are explored (Ibrahimli *et al.*, 2024). Resource-driven conflicts in resource-rich nations, as discussed by Eliana Cusato (2020), often result in severe environmental and social impacts. The exploitation of resources leads to environmental degradation, including deforestation, pollution, and habitat destruction, with lasting effects on ecosystems, biodiversity, and human health (Ekhatior, 2016; Short *et al.*, 2018; Obi, 1997, 2010a, 2010b). These conflicts exacerbate social tensions, inequalities, and violence, fuelling armed conflicts, community

displacement, and human rights abuses (Obi, 1997, 2010a, 2010b, 2014; Hoekstra, 2019; Cusato, 2020). Effective governance of natural resources becomes crucial for promoting transparency, accountability, and sustainable development, particularly in post-conflict settings.

Landmines from post-conflicts, cause extensive land degradation, disrupting ecosystems and denying access to vital resources (Berhe, 2007; Cottrell and Dupuy, 2020). They lead to biodiversity loss, soil contamination, and reduced productivity, as well as posing long-term social risks, persisting even after conflicts end. Landmines used in resource contestations remain in the ground even after troops have withdrawn, creating ongoing risks for various groups such as children, farmers, nomads, herders, refugees, and internally displaced persons (Berhe, 2007), showing how their presence forces difficult choices between risking death for resources or starvation. Landmines are often intertwined with conflicts related to natural resources, as seen in instances like Angola, where landmines were utilized in disputes over diamonds (Global Witness, 2006; Hoekstra, 2019), exacerbating conflicts. The presence of landmines in post-conflict areas, such as Angola, reflects the political ecology of war, where conflicts arise from competing interests in natural resources (Le Billon, 2001; Bruffaerts, 2015; Adams *et al.*, 2019; Cusato, 2020). Landmines deployed in resource-contested zones, like diamond fields, where armed groups are funded, demonstrate how resource conflicts lead to their indiscriminate use (Global Witness, 2006; Hoekstra, 2019). This nexus of conflict, resources, and landmine use perpetuates social inequalities and ecological disruption, underscoring the complex interplay of political, environmental, and social factors in post-war settings.

Obi (1997) discusses how the concept of global security has evolved to include non-military threats, such as environmental degradation and resource conflicts. Scholars like Brown, Ullman, Myers, and Mathews pioneered this redefinition, emphasizing the link between environmental factors and US national security. Homer-Dixon warns of social conflicts due to environmental pressures, while Levy downplays the connection between environmental degradation and national security, focusing only on physical threats like ozone depletion and climate change in the United States (Obi, 1997). This debate reflects how Western debates around resource conflicts arose due to perceived threats to their national security. It also underscores the need to consider whose security is prioritized in addressing the environmental and social impacts of mining and oil extraction in resource-rich developing countries, as discussed later.

### **Case Studies of Resource-Rich Nations Experiencing Negative Impacts of Resource Extraction:**

#### **Mining**

The history of diamond mining in resource-rich developing

nations like Sierra Leone since the 1950s has been tumultuous, marked by conflict, environmental damage, and social inequalities. The diamond trade, controlled by a privileged few, widened the gap between the wealthy elite and the poor majority, leading to increased injustices (Global Witness, 2006; Cusato, 2020). Global demand for diamonds fuelled illegal activities like smuggling and illegal mining, involving rebel groups, government officials, and businesses (Cusato, 2020). These activities, including the trade of "blood diamonds," exacerbated socio-environmental problems and led to violence, forced labour, and displacement in diamond-rich areas. Governance failures allowed rebel factions like the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) to profit from diamond trafficking, exploiting governance weaknesses. The conflict over diamond territories resulted in widespread suffering and ecological destruction, highlighting systemic governance issues (Cusato, 2020). One major international response to conflict diamonds is the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme which will be explored more broadly in a later section (David Rhode, 2014; Bruffaerts, 2015; PRMAL, 2021; Spoto, 2023; Maheen, 2024). But while the Kimberley Process sought to regulate the diamond trade, its narrow focus on preventing conflict diamonds from entering legitimate markets failed to address underlying structural issues like governance and corruption that sustain inequality and conflict in Sierra Leone. The Kimberley Process does not account for the role of state actors or systemic inequalities, which are key drivers of resource-based conflicts (McNeish, 2010). These omissions have limited its ability to transform governance in the diamond sector and support sustainable practices (Bruffaerts, 2015; Cusato, 2020).

Similar stories of nations that have suffered the impacts of violent resource-driven conflicts from diamond mining can be found in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Liberia. Angola, a country rich in both oil and diamonds, have suffered the fate of a "resource curse" from conflict diamonds, contributing to a civil war lasting from 1961 to 2002 and resulting in over 500,000 lives lost, with thousands more heavily brutalized by landmines, and the majority of the diamond mining was controlled by the rebel group UNITA, led by founder Jonas Savimbi (Global Witness, 2006; Hoekstra, 2019). Between 1998 and 2003, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) endured a devastating civil war, primarily concentrated in its eastern region, intricately linked to diamond mining operations (Global Witness, 2006; Ogoti, 2019). This conflict claimed over 3 million lives and was exacerbated by rebel factions supported by neighbouring countries competing for dominance over diamond-rich areas (Global Conflict Tracker, 2024). However, even though the Kimberley Process operates in the DRC, the region is vulnerable to ongoing violence and resource mismanagement because of the process's failure to address the root causes of conflict, which include rooted inequality, poor governance, and a lack of infrastructure, and neocolonial western influences (Fairhead, 2005;

Frankema and Buelens, 2013). These shortcomings show how the procedure ignores the larger political and economic factors that influence resource wars (Cusato, 2020; Adolphe, 2024).

### **Colonial Legacies in Congo's Resource Economy**

In trying to understand the western, neocolonial influences within these regions, we asked the question "To what extent did colonial and post-colonial economic policies of Western powers shape the political economy of resource extraction in the Democratic Republic of the Congo?"

Colonial economic policies in the Democratic Republic of the Congo established a framework in which extractive and exploitative institutions played a central role in resource extraction. Studies of the colonial period describe policies ranging from strategic resource control and fiscal reform to state-private enterprise cooperation; these measures facilitated access to minerals and other commodities through mechanisms such as international agreements, land tenure reforms, spatial partitioning, and infrastructure investments (Frankema and Buelens, 2013). Frankema and Buelens (2013) argue that the colonial legacy in the Belgian Congo left profound structural deficits, including a severely underdeveloped education system, forced labor practices, and extractive agricultural policies that suppressed local capacity and economic autonomy. These conditions contributed to post-independence governance failures, fostering authoritarianism, corruption, and persistent underdevelopment, challenges that continue to shape the DRC's struggles with resource management and socio-economic stability. Mixed economic outcomes emerged, with some accounts noting limited developmental gains alongside exploitation.

Fairhead (2005) highlights how transnational engagement with African resources, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), reinforces neocolonial dynamics and global dependency. The DRC's vast mineral wealth including rubber, uranium, cobalt, tantalum, diamonds, gold, and oil has fueled global industrial revolutions, from the automotive and nuclear sectors to modern technology. These resources have not only driven Western industrialization but also financed prolonged conflicts since 1996, exacerbating exploitation and governance failures. The exploitation of these resources, underpinned by global demand, has perpetuated a structural dependency, where local governance is influenced and often undermined by external economic interests, entrenching a cycle of resource extraction, conflict, and underdevelopment that traces back to colonial legacies. The ongoing exploitation illustrates how the global economic system continues to shape local resource management, often to the detriment of developing nations. In the post-colonial era, research shows that Western influence persisted. Fairhead (2005) report that policy instruments such as foreign aid, support for private mining companies, and interventions by

transnational actors reinforced earlier institutional legacies. Local responses, in the form of political turmoil, corruption, and delegated state functions, combined with a continued reliance on Western modes of intervention (Maton and Lecomte, 2001). The studies consistently link these historical and contemporary arrangements to a political economy of resource extraction characterized by both growth constrained by external dependence and patterns emblematic of the resource curse.

Kisangani (2022) challenges the common view that colonialism was purely detrimental, arguing instead that the Belgian Congo functioned, at least in part, as a developmental state. He claims that despite exploitation, brutality, and inequities, the colonial government achieved significant economic development by investing fiscal revenues in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and political stability. Kisangani contrasts this with both the exploitative Congo Free State (1885–1908) and the post-colonial kleptocratic regimes (1960–2018), suggesting that the failures of post-independence governance are not an inevitable outcome of colonialism, but rather a result of subsequent mismanagement. However, it is good to note that these colonial legacies laid the foundation for authoritarianism, corruption, and governance failures that persist today. These colonial structures created systemic vulnerabilities and institutional weaknesses, making genuine post-colonial self-governance and resource sovereignty difficult.

## Liberia

In Liberia, a similar storyline emerges regarding the utilisation of natural resources, specifically diamonds, and the socio-environmental obstacles that have surfaced as a result. The allure of diamonds in Liberia drew a multitude of players, ranging from rebel groups to corrupt political figures, all seeking to capitalise on the lucrative industry. The quest for control over regions abundant in diamonds heightened hostilities and unrest, fuelling the nation's descent into turmoil and uncertainty (Global Witness, 2006; Beevers, 2015; Cusato, 2020). From 1989 to 1997 and again from 2000 to 2003, Liberia was engulfed in civil conflicts, claiming the lives of over 200,000 individuals and inflicting widespread human rights violations. Throughout these tumultuous periods, Liberia played a pivotal role as a conduit for conflict diamonds and the importation of weapons, further intensifying the chaos. The aftermath of the conflict reverberated across Liberian society, resulting in mass displacement and profound psychological trauma among its citizens. Moreover, the environmental toll of diamond mining manifested in extensive land degradation and harm to ecosystems, exacerbating the country's challenges (Global Witness, 2006; Beevers, 2015; Cusato, 2020). Like other instances, the conflict in Liberia was not solely instigated by external greed or rebel factions' pursuit of resources but was also rooted in inherent inequalities and economic grievances within society (Cusato, 2020, p. 657–658).

Ford and Tienhaara (2010) argue that post-conflict investment contracts, inadequately overseen, resulted in unsatisfactory deals for major resource assets, deepening Liberia's socio-economic struggles. Pailey (2024) highlights how long-standing concession agreements, such as the Firestone deal, eroded government-citizen relations and deepened social inequalities. Furthermore, Davies and Dessy (2012) describe the trade-offs between immediate revenue gains and long-term institutional development, while Lamb et al. (2009) point out the mixed outcomes of policies that also aimed at community benefits. Dey (2008) and related analyses show that economic policies promoting foreign investment frequently favoured transnational interests at the expense of local capacity, affecting mineral extraction practices and broader resource governance. While diamond mining has captured global attention due to its association with civil wars and illicit trade, similar patterns of socio-environmental harm and elite control emerge in oil-rich states. Nigeria provides a vivid example of how oil can entrench inequality and erode governance despite international oversight frameworks.

## Oil, Gas, Nigeria and the Niger Delta

Oil and gas exploration in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has had profound environmental and social impacts, ranking "one of the world's most severely petroleum-impacted ecosystems and one of the 5 most petroleum-polluted environments in the world" (Obi, 2010, p. 221; Ekhaton, 2016). This extractive industry, led by oil multinational corporations (MNCs) led to heavy oil spills, which have impacted ecosystems and biodiversity, exacerbating poverty, conflicts over rights, and health issues among local communities (Ekhaton, 2016).

Notably, Nigeria is a member of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), a global framework aimed at promoting transparency and accountability in the extractive sector. The initiative encourages collaboration among governments, companies, and civil society to publicly disclose revenues and payments in resource-rich countries. While its presence in Nigeria reflects a formal commitment to improving governance, the complex interplay between multinational oil firms, local institutions, and state actors continues to shape the realities of benefit distribution and accountability in regions like the Niger Delta. A deeper analysis of EITI's structure and impact will be explored in later sections. The social fabric has been strained due to displacement, loss of livelihoods, and conflicts over resource control, fuelling violent resistance and further marginalising ethnic minorities (Ekhaton, 2016). There have been instances of poor labour standards within the operations of oil MNCs in Nigeria, leading to concerns about worker safety, fair wages, and working conditions (Ekhaton, 2016). The transnational nature of oil extraction has deepened the sense of dispossession among the local population, highlighting the urgent need for sustainable and equitable resource management practices to mitigate

the environmental and social injustices perpetrated by the oil industry in the region (Ekhatior, 2016). This struggle for dominance over oil resources has not only exacerbated socio-environmental challenges but has also become a battleground for political power and economic control. The concentration of oil wealth has facilitated corruption, authoritarianism and patrimonialism, limiting entry into the ruling political coalition and perpetuating skewed power dynamics (Obi, 1997). As a result, the resource curse in Nigeria has not only deepened social inequalities but has also heightened tensions, leading to violent conflicts and resource-based contestations that threaten national stability and regional security, as seen with the hanging of some oil environmental activists in 1995 (Obi, 1997). The country's integration into the global capitalist system as a dependent, peripheral entity has led to externally defined economic choices (Seteolu, 2017). This dependency is reinforced by multinational oil corporations, which extract significant profits while leaving behind environmental degradation and social inequity (Yange, 2024). The historical roots of this relationship can be traced to the colonial era, where Nigeria was transformed into a raw material exporter, creating an uneven development pattern (Ohiwerei, 1990). The country also was coerced by the IMF to initiate a structural monetary reform, amongst others, and have since not recovered from that blow (Gandy, 2005). Post-independence, the local bourgeoisie, in collusion with foreign interests, has maintained this neo-colonial structure, hindering sustainable development.

This section highlights how resource extraction in Nigeria is not a "curse" but rather is intricately tied to elitism, geopolitical interests, and the dominance of multinational corporations, perpetuating socio-environmental injustices, deepening inequality, and entrenching exploitative power dynamics in resource governance. These cases reveal a pattern of elite capture, institutional fragility, and international frameworks that, while well-intentioned, remain insufficiently equipped to address the structural roots of resource-driven inequality and violence. The next section considers a contrasting case, Botswana, where governance and equitable policies have transformed resource wealth into development outcomes.

Below is a (Figure 1) summarizing key themes across Sierra Leone, Angola, DRC, Liberia, and Nigeria. Figure 1 compares five African countries, Sierra Leone, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, and Nigeria, based on their primary natural resources, conflict periods, key actors, relevant international governance frameworks, and associated governance issues. While all but Nigeria is primarily linked to diamond-related conflicts and fall under the Kimberley Process, Nigeria's oil-related unrest is addressed under the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). The data highlights recurring themes of corruption, elite capture, weak institutions, and marginalization. The next section presents a case of a resource-rich African Nation which has managed, under similar neocolonial influences, to succeed

in managing its natural resources for national development.

### **Botswana's strategies in Navigating the "Resource Curse"**

The concept of the "resource curse" suggests that countries rich in natural resources often experience slower economic growth, political instability, and social challenges. However, this phenomenon is not inevitable. Botswana serves as a compelling example of how effective governance and strategic resource management can transform natural wealth into a catalyst for national development. At independence in 1966, Botswana was among the poorest nations globally, with minimal infrastructure and limited access to education. The discovery of diamonds in 1967 transformed its prospects (De Beers Group, 2015; Benson, 2024). Under President Sir Seretse Khama's leadership, Botswana adopted strict anti-corruption measures and an economic development strategy centred on beef, copper, and diamonds. From 1960 to 1980, Botswana experienced the fastest economic growth worldwide (Figure 2), with revenues reinvested in infrastructure, healthcare, and education, leading to the highest GDP per capita in continental Africa. The diamond industry, contributing 40% of GDP and 90% of exports, operates under government licensing agreements with 80% of revenues reinvested domestically (De Beers Group, 2015; Iredale, 2023; Benson, 2024). Unlike cases like Sierra Leone or Angola, Botswana's approach to diamond governance prioritised transparency, national ownership, and reinvestment into human capital development.

Key initiatives, such as the Debswana joint venture, fund schools and infrastructure development in mining communities, reflecting a commitment to sustainable practices. Education is prioritized, with free primary and secondary education guaranteed for all children. Debswana schools integrate government curricula with holistic development, supporting academics, IT, music, physical education, and special education, ensuring equitable and inclusive growth (Iredale, 2023). The government reinvested mining revenues into infrastructure, healthcare, education, and economic diversification, achieving one of the fastest GDP growth rates globally (Figure 2) and improving living standards significantly. This success can be attributed to a combination of political stability, sound economic management, and prudent financial practices. Since gaining independence, Botswana has implemented careful planning and investment strategies, channelling diamond revenues into infrastructure, education, healthcare, and social services, thereby fostering human capital development (Benson, 2024).

According to reports from institutions like the IMF and World Diamond Council, Botswana's diamond industry has played a pivotal role in its economic growth, significantly contributing to the nation's GDP, fiscal revenues, and

Country	Resource	Conflict Period	Key Actor(s)	International Framework	Governance Issue
Sierra Leone	Diamonds	1991–2002	RUF, Gov't Elites	Kimberley Process	Corruption, Weak Institutions
Angola	Diamonds & Oil	1961–2002	UNITA	Kimberley Process	Elitism, Militarisation
DRC	Diamonds	1998–2003	Rebel Groups, Neighbouring States	Kimberley Process	Poor Infrastructure, Regional Conflict
Liberia	Diamonds	1989–1997, 2000–2003	Rebel Groups, Political Elites	Kimberley Process	Post-conflict Trauma, Corruption
Nigeria	Oil	Ongoing	MNCs, Gov't, Militants	EITI	Elitism, Marginalisation, Environmental Damage

Figure 1: Comparative Analysis of Resource-Rich Conflict-Affected Countries in Africa

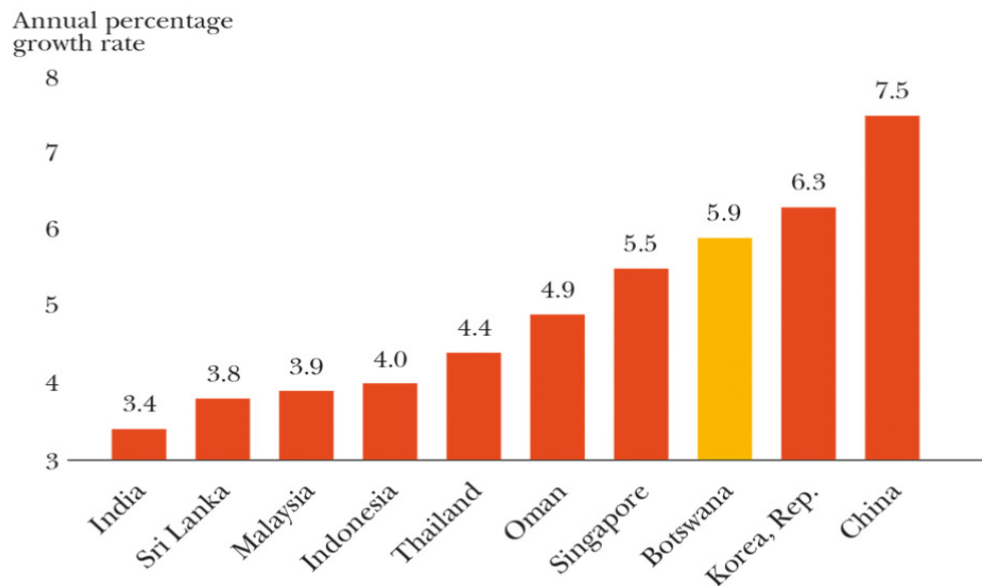


Figure 2: Top 10 countries with the fastest growing GDP PER CAPITA PPP 1966-2014 (De Beers Group, 2015).

Note: Only Countries with complete data sets available between 1966 and 2014 are mentioned, with Oman being the exception, which is missing the latest 2014 data

exports. Diamonds account for nearly 80% of Botswana's exports, about one-third of its fiscal revenues, and approximately a quarter of its GDP, highlighting their importance to the country's economy (Jefferis, 2024; Iredale, 2023; Benson, 2024). To avoid the challenges often associated with resource abundance, commonly termed the "resource curse," Botswana has adopted a

series of strategic policies to manage its diamond wealth effectively (Figure 2). A cornerstone of this strategy is the "Sustainable Budgeting Principle," which ensures that revenues from non-renewable resources, such as diamonds, are reinvested into other forms of capital, including physical infrastructure, human capital, and financial assets (Jefferis, 2024; Benson, 2024).

This principle has guided Botswana's economic strategy, ensuring that diamond wealth is utilized to diversify the economy and reduce dependency on a single resource (Benson, 2024). It has also enabled the creation of the Pula Fund and the Government Investment Account (GIA), both of which function as sovereign wealth funds aimed at stabilizing the economy and safeguarding wealth for future generations (Jefferis, 2024).

Botswana's ability to negotiate favourable revenue-sharing agreements with De Beers has been critical, securing approximately 85% of diamond profits for the country. This substantial share has facilitated the accumulation of financial reserves and helped minimize corruption (Jefferis, 2024). The transparent fiscal framework, underpinned by robust legislation and centralized mineral revenue management through a single company, has further promoted accountability and mitigated risks of resource mismanagement. Botswana's governance model demonstrates that resource-rich nations can effectively overcome the negative impacts of resource dependency, providing a compelling example of sound economic management and governance that starkly contrasts the experiences of other countries grappling with corruption and inefficiency. Challenges remain, including high unemployment, inequality, and over-reliance on diamonds; also issues regarding sustainable practices, including the need for environmental stewardship and the equitable distribution of wealth generated from diamond mining, but Botswana's commitment to economic diversification and private sector growth highlights its focus on sustainable development (DeBeers group, 2015; Benson, 2024). Despite these challenges, Botswana's approach serves as a compelling example, presenting a comparative analysis of how effective governance and strategic resource management can lead to sustainable development, demonstrating that not all resource-rich nations are doomed to experience the adverse effects of the resource curse, thereby presenting a strong argument to debunk the resource curse theory. A critical question emerging from this debate is: If international and neocolonial structures are indeed responsible for the persistent underdevelopment and governance failures in resource-rich nations like Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and the DRC, then how do we explain the relative success of Botswana, a country that has seemingly thrived within the same global system? This question prompts deeper reflection on the interplay between external structural constraints and internal agency, and whether exceptions like Botswana challenge or reinforce critiques of systemic global inequities and presents a critical area for further study.

While this is not the core focus of this study, it is still imperative to bear in mind that while Botswana has been cited as a counterexample to the resource curse thesis, its relative success does not invalidate critiques of international and neocolonial structures. Rather, it serves to present arguments on the importance of domestic agency, leadership, and institutional choices within

unequal global systems. The argument of this study is not to absolve domestic actors of responsibility, but to demonstrate how global political-economic dynamics constrain policy autonomy, influence institutional reforms, and often shape the development trajectories of resource-rich nations in the Global South. Botswana's case, though exceptional, is context-specific, characterized by early investments in public institutions, a smaller population, and relatively homogenous political dynamics. Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and the DRC, in contrast, face compounded challenges of historical extraction, conflict legacies, and externally imposed governance models that rarely align with local realities. This study therefore calls not for blaming international structures in isolation, but for critically interrogating how those structures interact with domestic factors to perpetuate unequal outcomes, and how both must be reformed for genuine progress. While this study provides a critical foundation, it also underscores the need for more comparative and context-specific research to better understand how different configurations of domestic agency and global structures shape resource governance outcomes across diverse national settings. However, there is still need for more focused study into why countries like Botswana succeed while other resource-rich nations fail and struggle under the same neocolonial influences.

### **Tracing Resource Curse to Governance, Neocolonial, and Historical Structures**

This section reframes the resource curse not as an inevitable consequence of resource abundance but as an outcome shaped by three interlocking structural factors: colonial legacies, global economic dependency, and institutional fragility.

#### **Colonial Legacies and Structural Dependency**

Historical and neocolonial structures fundamentally shape how resource wealth translates into development or dysfunction. Allen (2024) highlighted how the resource paradox in Nigeria is more rooted in structural neocolonial dynamics than in the inherent nature of oil wealth itself. The author highlighted how Nigeria's oil industry was established under British colonial rule, with international capital driving its development. The exclusive control of oil prospecting by British Shell BP before independence underscores the early integration of the Nigerian oil sector into global capitalist and imperialist systems. This colonial foundation ensured that, from inception, Nigeria's oil rent streams were configured to benefit external actors rather than domestic development. The legacy of opaque partnerships between local elites and multinational firms further entrenched this dependency. As Klieman (2012) notes, the analysis of the US oil and Nigerian oil companies during the 1960s oil boom shows the interplay of opaque practices by Nigerian elites and international oil companies (IOC).

These non-transparent dealings intensified by the elite competition contributed to the Nigerian Civil War between 1967 and 1970, revealing how historical and structural factors shaped resource governance landscapes. By linking corporate profiteering to political violence, we illustrate how weak institutional checks inherited from colonial structures can spiral into conflict.

Neocolonial influence did not end with independence or the departure of foreign firms. Bassey (2012) highlights how neocolonial structures, including exploitative corporate contracts and international financial institutions, sustained this inequity. These external economic and legal mechanisms continue to exert pressure, dictating the parameters of development and limiting sovereign autonomy. Gandy (2005, p. 46) offers a stark example of this through the IMF's structural adjustment programmes:

*"Under IMF tutelage, Babangida immediately embarked on a full-spectrum Structural Adjustment Programme 'with Nigerian characteristics' slashing tariffs and agricultural subsidies, devaluing the Naira, stripping out what remained of public education provision, deregulating finance, selling off state-owned industries, and indulging in narco-profiteering on a massive scale. Nigeria was hailed as a model African economy by the World Bank, and Babangida banqueted at Buckingham Palace. Meanwhile, 'extreme poverty figures' for the country rose from 28 per cent in 1980 to 66 per cent in 1996," (Onuoha, 2024).*

These institutional reforms, mandated by multilateral lenders, deepened inequality and state fragility while enriching elites and reinforcing dependency on external actors. Carbonnier and Mehrotra (2022) further extend this analysis by situating resource dependency within broader geopolitical and economic inequities. They show how commodity-exporting developing countries, already vulnerable due to colonial legacies, are subjected to external pressures and market volatility. As the authors note, external events like the Russia-Ukraine war have caused significant commodity price volatility and supply chain disruptions, amplifying the vulnerabilities of resource-dependent economies. Such volatility is not merely economic but also political, resource control becomes a tool of geopolitical leverage, leading to what the authors describe as the weaponisation of economics. In this way, resource dependency is not a neutral economic condition but a strategic outcome of global systems shaped by historic asymmetries.

### **Global Market Integration and Resource Volatility**

The integration of globally strategic commodities, such as oil, natural gas, diamonds, cobalt, and lithium, into international trade systems intensifies the exposure of resource-rich countries to price volatility, geopolitical manipulation, and extractive foreign interests (Mignamissi and Kuete, 2021). These point-source resources, unlike

more diffuse and domestically oriented sectors such as agriculture or forestry, are highly sought after by multinational corporations and high-income country (HIC) governments aiming to secure industrial inputs or geostrategic advantage. Their global embeddedness links producer nations to volatile international markets, where they face systemic economic shocks, declining policy autonomy, and dependency. Mignamissi and Kuete (2021) distinguish this exposure from the relative insulation of domestic commodities, highlighting how global market risks disproportionately affect countries with weak institutions. Botswana exemplifies an exception: through sovereign control over its diamond sector and long-term fiscal planning, it has resisted many of the exploitative dynamics common elsewhere (Larsen, 2005).

These trends appear to be mirrored in the renewable energy sector. Qi (2024) in examining how the global race for energy transition minerals, such as cobalt, reshapes state behaviour in Africa, found that cobalt deposits often lead to enhanced government security interventions aimed at preventing non-state actors from controlling these territories. While this may enhance resource access for investors, it reflects a deeper transformation in governance logic driven by external market imperatives. Rather than aligning state priorities with local development or environmental protection, governments are often incentivized to prioritize international investor confidence and global supply chain stability. This reorientation subordinates community interests and environmental justice to geopolitical demands, exemplifying how global commodity integration distorts domestic governance responses. Importantly, these patterns are not unique to fossil fuel systems but are re-emerging in the renewable energy sector. Scholars of energy justice (Hancock and Sovacool, 2018; Leonard et al., 2022) warn of a green resource "curse," in which the extraction of transition minerals like cobalt and lithium reproduces colonial-era logics of dispossession and exploitation. These dynamics challenge the presumption that decarbonization will inherently dismantle historical injustices unless structural reforms accompany the energy transition. The intersection of neocolonial power structures and Western influence within renewable extraction systems has drawn growing academic scrutiny, revealing how extractive asymmetries persist even in ostensibly "clean" energy regimes (Hancock and Sovacool, 2018; Leonard et al., 2022). Leonard et al. (2022) further assert that the vulnerabilities of low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) stem not from resource abundance itself, but from weak institutions, regulatory failures, and structural dependencies on HICs. Their proposed holistic risk assessment framework calls for situating resource governance within historical and geopolitical contexts to prevent replicating fossil-era injustices under the guise of a green transition. Without such safeguards, the renewable sector may simply entrench existing inequalities rather than alleviate them. This concern is echoed by the Financial Times (2024),

which reports that the outcomes of resource extraction, whether fossil or renewable, are determined not by the material itself but by the global governance structures and historical contexts within which extraction occurs. These findings suggest that without transformative policy and institutional redesign, the renewable transition may perpetuate, rather than resolve, long-standing asymmetries between the Global North and South. Carbonnier and Mehrotra (2022) expand this analysis by tying resource volatility to geopolitical instability and global economic asymmetries. Using the Russia-Ukraine war as a recent example, they highlight how external shocks lead to significant commodity price fluctuations and supply chain disruptions, effects that disproportionately destabilise resource-dependent economies in the Global South. These nations, reliant on raw material exports, find themselves caught in a global political economy where control over resources becomes a form of geopolitical leverage. The authors describe how governments in these contexts often struggle to maintain economic stability during downturns in commodity prices, forcing them into dependency on external financial assistance and limiting their policy autonomy. Resource control, therefore, becomes less about development or wealth generation and more about navigating a weaponised global economy where the terms of engagement are set externally. Carbonnier and Mehrotra (2022) add to this argument by situating resource volatility within global economic asymmetries and geopolitical upheavals. Using the Russia-Ukraine war as a case in point, they show how such external shocks trigger dramatic commodity price fluctuations and supply chain instability, effects that disproportionately destabilize Global South economies reliant on raw material exports. In this context, resource control becomes less about wealth creation and more about surviving a weaponised global economy in which the rules are externally imposed. Their analysis underscores the systemic constraints that resource-dependent nations face when trying to exercise sovereignty in a volatile and hierarchical global order.

### Dehistoricised Theory and Deterministic Pitfalls

Many mainstream interpretations of the resource curse operate through a dehistoricised and overly deterministic lens that isolates resource wealth as the primary cause of underdevelopment, corruption, and conflict. Scholars such as Wengraf (2017) argue that while resource-rich countries may exhibit signs of the so-called curse, such as weakened institutions or conflict, the assumption of a causal relationship is flawed. As Wengraf notes, “correlation does not equate causation,” and until that distinction is properly made, the true systemic and structural roots of inequity may remain obscured. Reinforcing this view, the Tax Justice Network-Africa (2011) and Wengraf (2017) argue that the core issue is not the resources themselves but *structural maldevelopment* entrenched through global economic systems.

This argument is further supported by Carmody (2017) and Onuoha (2024), who trace the neoliberal global economy and its trade hierarchies to their colonial roots. These structures were designed to benefit former colonial powers, embedding structural inequalities that continue to distort development trajectories in the Global South. Wengraf (2017) also draws attention to the role of international financial institutions (IFIs), particularly the IMF and World Bank, whose conditionalities and policy prescriptions have often exacerbated inequality under the guise of structural adjustment and development reform. Historian Kiarn A. Klieman (2012) critiques the deterministic logic of the resource curse by contextualizing Nigeria’s oil sector within its colonial and postcolonial history. His analysis of the 1960s oil boom reveals how opaque agreements between Nigerian elites and international oil companies (IOCs), driven by elite competition, contributed to the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970). In this reading, the so-called curse is not embedded in oil itself, but in the exploitative political and economic structures that govern its extraction and distribution.

Recent empirical research continues to challenge deterministic assumptions. Sun et al. (2024) show that mineral and natural resources have often positively impacted economic growth in resource-rich countries such as China, Brazil, and Iran. However, they reject the binary framing of resources as either a curse or blessing, stating instead that “natural resources... do not possess any intrinsic value that inherently benefits or harms specific nations.” Similarly, Yilanci et al. (2021) found mixed results: while high-HDI countries saw no significant impact, some developing countries with point-source resources and institutional weaknesses did exhibit resource curse tendencies, again suggesting that the outcomes depend on broader systemic variables, not the resources themselves. Further reinforcing this conditionality, Mignamissi and Kuete (2021), supported by Entele (2021), examine the relationship between oil and gas rents and subjective well-being. They find that adverse effects, such as reduced levels of happiness, are most pronounced in weak democracies. This contradicts the essentialist narrative that resource wealth leads inexorably to decline and instead highlights the mediating role of political systems and institutional quality. Eibl and Hertog (2024) introduce an important political dimension to this debate, arguing that elites in oil-rich states often deploy welfare programs not from developmental altruism, but as tools to co-opt and pacify subversive threats. Their study shows that only threats targeting the political centre (i.e., ruling regimes) lead to expanded welfare spending. This illustrates how oil rents can be strategically deployed to maintain regime stability, complicating narratives that associate resource wealth solely with neglect or inequality. The authors demonstrate that the effects of oil wealth are shaped by political motivations and threat perceptions, not by any intrinsic logic of rentierism. This framing is further problematized by scholars like Du et al. (2023), Wu et al.

(2023), and Pagel (2025), who speak of “breaking the curse” or “turning the curse into blessings.” While these attempts reflect a desire to reverse the negative outcomes of resource dependence, they also inadvertently accept the premise that a curse exists. Pagel (2025) study on malaria outbreaks in gold-rich provinces exemplifies this: although the health impacts are traced to stagnant water from mining, the framing risks naturalizing blame onto the resource itself rather than the systems of environmental mismanagement and neglect that allow such hazards to persist. This analytical flattening is challenged by Li et al. (2021), who examine the long-term effects of resource wealth in G7 countries. Their study refutes the existence of a universal resource curse by showing how natural resources have strengthened financial markets, such as stock exchanges, within nations with strong institutions. However, they also found that certain financial institutions, like banks, suffered inefficiencies, indicating a more nuanced and dualistic effect. These findings support what they call the “institutional failure hypothesis,” suggesting that the resource curse narrative often overlooks how institutional robustness mediates outcomes. This also underscores the injustice of selective application: why do natural resources “curse” only poorer nations while benefitting wealthy ones?

Schmoll and Swenson (2024) further disrupt deterministic readings by examining Timor-Leste, a state often viewed through the lens of dependency and post-conflict fragility. Their findings show that when local political agency is combined with constructive international engagement, even resource-dependent states under neocolonial pressure can consolidate democracy and resist authoritarian backsliding. This example complicates the blanket application of the resource curse and demonstrates that context, ideology, and governance quality are critical variables. Carbonnier and Mehrotra (2022) also highlight how external shocks, such as the Russia-Ukraine war, exacerbate commodity price volatility and supply chain disruptions. These global shocks disproportionately destabilize resource-dependent economies in the Global South, where governments often struggle to maintain macroeconomic stability and must rely on external assistance. In such cases, the supposed curse is clearly linked to asymmetric global power structures rather than the resource in question. Finally, the Financial Times (2024), drawing from ICMM data (1995–2018), reports that mining-dependent countries were, on average, healthier, wealthier, and better educated than non-mining countries, again contradicting essentialist readings of resource dependence. The paper underscores the role of governance in determining outcomes and calls for resource issues to be situated within broader institutional, historical, and geopolitical frameworks.

Taken together, these insights demand a shift away from essentialist explanations of the resource curse toward a more historicized, systemic analysis. Understanding resource-driven under development requires

acknowledging the embedded legacies of colonialism, neocolonial economic structures, and external governance constraints.

### **The CFA Franc and Neocolonial Resource Dependency**

The CFA franc zone vividly illustrates how colonial-origin monetary arrangements have been repurposed to sustain postcolonial dependency and extractive governance in resource-rich African states. Originally designed to guarantee France’s economic dominance over its colonies, the CFA franc continues to function as a tool of neocolonialism, limiting monetary sovereignty, constraining development, and facilitating the extraction of wealth and natural resources from African states to benefit the French metropole. This financial system, upheld in part through institutions like the World Bank and IMF, reinforces global structural inequalities by preventing African countries from exercising full economic independence.

In regions bound to the CFA franc, resource wealth is tightly woven into a web of external monetary control, which weakens the capacity of governments to leverage their resources for domestic development. This directly supports the broader thesis of this research: that what is often described as a “resource curse” is less about the resources themselves and more about the external systems that manage, condition, and benefit from their extraction. As Pigeaud et al. (2020) assert, “The rich nations do not invest in income-poor nations to make them richer. This extractive process is necessary for the continued material prosperity of the ‘core’ nations and the prevention of realization crises.” Thus, resource governance frameworks must be understood in the context of entrenched geopolitical and financial dependencies that continue to prioritize the wealth and stability of the Global North at the expense of sustainable development in the Global South.

Pigeaud et al. (2020) further expose how neocolonial mechanisms, particularly the CFA franc system, have entrenched structural dependency, elite co-optation, and underdevelopment in resource-rich African states. Despite appearing economically insignificant in France’s overall reserves, the foreign exchange reserves held in the CFA operations accounts are strategically significant. These funds serve as a financial buffer for France, subsidize its debt, and strengthen its global financial standing, revealing a clear economic incentive to maintain the system. Politically, the CFA franc enables direct French control over monetary and exchange rate policy, allowing France to enforce compliance, as starkly demonstrated during the 2010–11 Ivorian crisis, where Paris used financial tools and banking institutions to impose a crippling embargo on the Gbagbo administration. Such capacity reveals how a single official in France can paralyze an entire sovereign economy. This system fosters elite servitude; leaders in

the Franc Zone often align with French interests in exchange for diplomatic protection and regime security, enabling authoritarianism and economic stagnation. Long-standing presidencies in oil-rich states like Gabon and Congo illustrate how leaders, shielded by France, remain in power despite widespread poverty and collapse. Thus, the CFA franc functions not just as a monetary instrument, but as a broader neocolonial apparatus that sustains dependence, undermines democratic accountability, and incentivizes extractive, corrupt governance.

Pigeaud et al. (2020) shows that the franc-zone's "principle of free movement of capital...considerably hinders" member economies by acting as "a mechanism for draining African resources towards the rest of the world: a licence to loot". Between 2000 and 2009, Equatorial Guinea and Congo, two major oil producers, transferred net income payments equivalent to approximately 43 percent and 30 percent of their GDP, respectively, in repatriated profits, interest, and dividends. Even Gabon, Cameroon, and Ivory Coast saw average annual outflows of 7–12 percent of GDP (p.117). Through operations accounts held in Paris and mandatory reserve quotas, France not only secures African foreign-exchange assets, following rules that effectively act as a licence for capital flight and profit repatriation, but also wields political leverage by placing French nationals on central-bank boards with veto rights (Pigeaud et al., 2020). This structure perpetuates economic dependency as key sectors remain under foreign corporate control, financial flows are drained via repatriated profits, debt servicing, and illicit outflows, and national budgetary autonomy is undermined. France exploits intra-African divisions, knowing leaders' interests diverge, to forestall unified calls for reform, ensuring that even opposition parties rarely embrace monetary sovereignty. As a result, franc-zone states struggle to finance development, must continually borrow at onerous terms, and find themselves unable to redirect resource rents toward health, education, or sustainable growth, trapping them in a cycle of dependency and elite servitude. Ndikumana and Boyce,(2011) as cited by Pigeaud et al. (2020) further calculate that for every US\$1 of foreign loans, 60 cents immediately flowed out as capital flight, and debt-related outflows sometimes amounted to many multiples of domestic GDP (p.118). These figures reveal how neocolonial monetary and investment regimes systematically siphon wealth from resource-rich African nations, reinforcing dependency and undermining domestic development. Leaders in heavily indebted states like Nigeria, constrained by the need to service opaque foreign loans, are incentivized to borrow and extract further rents rather than invest in public goods, perpetuating a cycle of debt, corruption, and under-development.

As demonstrated throughout this third section, the diverse case studies, from the conflict-laden diamond economies of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the DRC, to Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta, and the institutional dynamics of the CFA franc zone, collectively challenge the

deterministic framing of the "resource curse." Rather than attributing underdevelopment and conflict to the mere presence of natural wealth, these examples reveal how historical exploitation, entrenched neocolonial structures, weak governance, and elite capture shape the outcomes of resource extraction. In each case, external systems of control, whether through global financial institutions, foreign corporate dominance, or colonial-era monetary regimes, have constrained national autonomy and diverted resource rents away from public good and toward elite or foreign interests. By contrast, Botswana's sovereign control over its diamond revenues, prudent fiscal management, and minimal external debt obligations have insulated it from such extraction, illustrating how institutional autonomy and transparent resource governance may serve as the straw that breaks the neocolonial patterns of resource drain. Taken together, these cases support the central argument of this study, that natural resources are neither inherently a curse nor a blessing. Their impact is mediated by the political, institutional, and geopolitical contexts in which they are managed. The evidence presented thus shifts the analytical focus away from the resources themselves and toward the structures, both domestic and international, that determine how resource wealth is governed and distributed. This understanding now sets the stage for the next section, which critically examines the role and effectiveness of international governance frameworks established to address and mitigate the paradoxes of resource wealth.

### **Analysis of International frameworks established to combat the Socio-environmental impacts of resource-curse**

International legal frameworks and policies play a significant role in resource-rich nations, particularly in Africa, where issues of transparency and corruption persist due to governance challenges. Recognizing this, international organizations, civil society groups, and governments have acknowledged the necessity for robust measures to combat the paradox of plenty issues (Ogoti, 2019). Notably, the extractive companies involved in corrupt practices are predominantly international and primarily based in developed countries (Ogoti, 2019). Local efforts and existing legal structures have often proven insufficient in effectively monitoring resource revenues, allowing the continued exploitation of natural resources. Consequently, there has been a call for increased international community involvement to enhance accountability among governments and extractive companies (Ogoti, 2019, p. 58). The international community initially overlooked resource conflicts in resource-rich developing nations like the DRC, despite escalating casualties (Ogoti, 2019). Despite witnessing violence and human rights abuses linked to the resource curse, they remained indifferent (Ogoti, 2019). It wasn't until these conflicts threatened global trade, peace,

and security, potentially undermining their interests, that they felt compelled to act (Obi, 1997; Ogoti, 2019). The UN Security Council (UNSC) established a Panel of Experts on Illegal Natural Resource Exploitation in the DRC in June 2000 (United Nations Security Council, 2000), aiming to address the issue (Ogoti, 2019).

This marked a significant step forward in the peace process. Since then, other international efforts have been made to tackle the socio-environmental and other impacts of the 'resource curse'. This section assesses different selected international frameworks to understand their benefits and limitations and how just and equitable they are.

### **The Kimberley Process (KP): Structure, Impacts, and Critique**

The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS), established in 2003 and endorsed by the UN Security Council and General Assembly, aims to prevent the trade in conflict diamonds, those used to finance armed conflict and human rights abuses (Bruffaerts, 2015; Ogoti, 2019; Cusato, 2020; Spoto, 2023; Maheen, 2024).

It requires participating states to implement certification systems for rough diamond exports and imports, including sealed containers and official Kimberley Process certificates, and prohibits trade with non-member countries (PRMAL, 2021).

With 71 participants, including the EU and 46 countries, the KPCS involves governments, civil society, and industry in promoting ethical sourcing and regulating the diamond trade (Cusato, 2020). While the KP has enhanced cooperation and transparency in the diamond supply chain, critics argue that a narrow focus on traceability and certification constrains it.

It overlooks deeper structural drivers of conflict, including poor governance, systemic corruption, historical marginalisation, and global economic inequalities (Bruffaerts, 2015; Beevers, 2015; Cusato, 2020). These critiques highlight that the KP operates within Western-defined frameworks of conflict, thereby failing to address broader socio-political and economic dynamics central to the resource curse.

Sierra Leone and Liberia, both emerging from conflicts exacerbated by illicit diamond trading, have seen some institutional improvements through the KP. Reforms introduced in these countries, such as more transparent licensing systems, anti-smuggling initiatives, and revenue reporting, reflect efforts to align with the KP's guidelines (Cusato, 2020).

In Sierra Leone, KP-led reforms supported institutional restructuring, while in Liberia, similar reforms sought to enhance state oversight and reduce corruption in diamond-rich regions.

However, while these steps promote accountability, they remain insufficient in addressing structural root causes such as corruption, poverty, and marginalisation.

### **Structural Limitations and the Role of Western Frameworks**

Despite its contributions, the KP has significant flaws. Certification is applied to shipments of rough stones, not individual diamonds, making it easy for illicit stones to be laundered into the legitimate supply chain (Rhode, 2014; Ogoti, 2019; PRMAL, 2021). While the Kimberley Process (KP) has made strides in regulating the diamond trade and reducing the flow of conflict diamonds, critics argue that its narrow focus on traceability overlooks the structural and systemic issues that drive resource-related conflicts. By concentrating solely on conflict diamonds, the KP fails to address broader governance reforms needed to combat poverty, corruption, and violence in resource-rich nations (Bruffaerts, 2015; Cusato, 2020). Cusato (2020) draws on Johan Galtung's concept of structural violence to argue that the KP neglects systemic inequities such as limited access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and the role of multinational corporations, external actors, and global economic systems that exploit natural resources to benefit a small elite at the expense of broader social welfare, factors that fuel long-term instability. Similarly, Ross (2018) notes that international frameworks often ignore the political economy of natural resource management, thus failing to tackle poverty, corruption, and state fragility.

Post-colonial governance in many African states continues to be shaped by colonial legacies and economic policies imposed by international institutions. The Truth Commissions, bodies established to investigate past human rights abuses, violations, and conflicts in post-conflict societies, in Sierra Leone and Liberia did mention colonialism and its legacies as factors contributing to the conflicts in these countries, albeit very briefly (Cusato, 2020). However, they mostly traced the origins of the contributing causes to domestic factors, including widespread corruption and bad governance (Cusato, 2019). Based on a lack of evidence, it can be argued that they had not mentioned reparative measures for those past injustices, which could have enormously aided in addressing the structural issues and making distribution and access to resources and power more equitable. In both colonial Kenya and Nigeria, diverse ethnic groups were forcibly merged without considering their ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious differences (Ogoti, 2019, Oluwatobi, 2018). This lack of regard for ethnic and cultural distinctions contributed to long-lasting tensions and challenges in accommodating cultural diversity, which weakened resilience in the post-colonial era. It also has made it easier for political elites to play parties against each other based on cultural, religious and ethnic differences. Additionally, during the post-colonial period, international institutions like the IMF encouraged the implementation of structural adjustment programs, which had severe economic consequences. One such impact was the devaluation of Nigeria's currency, which plummeted from being worth more than a dollar to now

being worth less than a cent. These economic policies, coupled with the legacy of colonial exploitation, exacerbated Nigeria's political, social, and environmental challenges, contributing to corruption and economic decay (Gandy, 2005; Oluwatobi, 2018). These factors compound governance challenges and undermine resilience in resource-rich states.

Cusato (2020) suggests that slow violence, violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, often dispersed across time and space (Oluwatobi, 2018), is frequently overlooked, instead focusing on the immediate and visible impacts of resource conflicts like killings and displacement. The KP's reluctance to evolve is evident in its failure to address state-perpetrated violence and human rights abuses within member countries, as it limits its mandate to non-state actors like rebel groups, as it does not account for situations where participant states and their security forces could be perpetrators of diamond-related violence (Bruffaerts, 2015; PRMAL, 2021). Cases of forced and child labour within the diamond industry remain largely unaddressed (Cusato, 2020; PRMAL, 2021). The consensus-based decision-making process within the KP delays reforms, and its voluntary nature means there are no penalties for non-compliance (Ogoti, 2019; Maheen, 2024). African governments, particularly those with shared colonial histories, fear that broader reforms could lead to Western powers using the KP to stunt African development under the guise of addressing human rights issues. This fear and others have further complicated the redefinition debate within the KP to include broader and hopefully more equitable terms (Oluwatobi, 2018, p. 1098). Maheen (2024) identifies further issues, such as the lack of a centralised monitoring body, inconsistent enforcement across member states, and excessive corporate influence, particularly from groups like De Beers. These challenges hinder the KP's effectiveness in regulating the diamond trade and ensuring ethical practices. Suggestions for reform include establishing an independent international monitoring agency, limiting corporate influence, and streamlining the decision-making process to enhance responsiveness and accountability.

### **The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI): Design and Challenges**

Scholars have examined the connection between membership in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and governance outcomes, particularly concerning perceived corruption within the extractive industries (Kasekende et al., 2016). Since its inception at the 2003 Lancaster House Conference, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) has sought to address the so-called "resource curse" by fostering public disclosure of payments and revenues in the oil, gas, and mining sectors (EITI, 2024). Its core aim is to bolster transparency in the extractive sector by encouraging public disclosure of companies' payments and revenues in

resource-rich countries (Kasekende et al., 2016; Le Billon et al., 2020). As a voluntary public-private partnership, the EITI unites governments, extractive firms, investor associations, and civil society under a shared principle of "free, full, and independent" reporting (EITI, 2024; Kasekende et al., 2016). By November 2015, 31 countries had achieved EITI compliance and 49 were designated candidates, collectively disclosing US\$1.67 trillion in revenues across more than 200 reports and securing the backing of over 90 major companies and 84 financial institutions managing US \$16 trillion in energy assets (Sovacool et al., 2016).

### **NEITI: Implementation, Contestation, and National Dynamics**

The Nigeria Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (NEITI) is vital in ensuring transparency and accountability in Nigeria's extractive sector. It oversees due process and transparency among extractive companies, monitors federal government revenue receipts, and attempts to combat corrupt practices in payment processes (Ekhatior, 2016). NEITI conducts regular audits to reconcile company payments with the government's reported receipts, and between 1999 and 2012, five phases of audits were conducted, all in the oil and gas sector. The first audit report showed a lack of transparency between government and oil corporations' transactions, as the government reported a different amount received from money paid by oil companies (Ekhatior, 2016). Despite NEITI's efforts to improve transparency, it has faced criticism for "increasingly becoming toothless and institutionally moribund" (Ekhatior, 2016, p. 23). This may be because their role is more focused on monitoring, reporting, and recommending actions based on audit findings rather than directly enforcing penalties for non-compliance or corrupt practices. This critique of NEITI should be approached with a degree of caution, as empowering international frameworks or transparency initiatives with direct enforcement authority may infringe upon state sovereignty and compromise national institutional autonomy. A more effective alternative could involve enhancing domestic accountability mechanisms, such as parliamentary oversight, civil society participation, and independent judicial review, while positioning international bodies like NEITI as supportive frameworks that guide reform efforts without undermining state authority. Also, the NEITI fourth report was heavily criticised by NNPC (Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation), which rebutted the contentions of the audit report regarding discrepancies in the amount remitted to the federal government. NNPC argues that NEITI overlooks relevant laws, regulations, and contract terms, tarnishing the corporation's reputation (Ekhatior, 2016). The NNPC's rejection of NEITI's audit findings, despite longstanding allegations of mismanagement and corruption, may serve to expose the entrenched resistance of powerful state actors to external scrutiny and reform. This contestation underscores how international

frameworks, when implemented in politically resistant environments, can be easily undermined, revealing the limits of transparency initiatives in the absence of broader domestic political will and institutional accountability.

### Critical Appraisals of the EITI Framework

Despite strong institutional support and wide international adoption, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) has come under increasing scholarly scrutiny for its limited effectiveness in achieving meaningful governance reforms. Sovacool et al. (2016), in a cross-country analysis of sixteen early EITI-compliant states (1996–2014), found no statistically significant improvement in core governance indicators, such as voice and accountability, political stability, or corruption control, compared to non-member peers. They attribute this shortfall to four main factors: (1) the initiative's narrow mandate on revenue disclosure, neglecting areas like public expenditure where corruption is often more acute; (2) its voluntary and non-binding nature, which facilitates "window dressing" by elites; (3) entrenched resistance from political and corporate actors; and (4) a weak civil society base incapable of converting transparency into enforceable accountability. These challenges are particularly visible in Nigeria through the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), which mirrors EITI's strengths and weaknesses. While NEITI has completed five audit cycles between 1999 and 2012 in the oil and gas sector, revealing significant discrepancies between corporate payments and government receipts (Ekhaton, 2016), it remains primarily advisory, lacking enforcement powers. Pushback from institutions like the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) has further undermined its effectiveness, with political will being inconsistent across regimes.

Beyond institutional constraints, critical scholarship highlights the deeper structural and epistemic limitations of the EITI model. Scholars argue that EITI privileges technocratic, donor-driven transparency, focused on financial disclosure, at the expense of broader governance transformation and redistribution (Adams et al., 2019; Öge, 2016). Osuoka (2020) and Moses et al. (2024) go further, critiquing the framework's neocolonial orientation. They argue that EITI reinforces external interests (such as the World Bank Group and donor agencies), often marginalizing local communities, civil society, and grassroots movements that demand substantive reform and social justice. In Nigeria, for instance, public mobilizations like the 2012 January Uprising have arguably done more to expose revenue mismanagement than NEITI's institutionalized but depoliticized approach. Empirical studies corroborate these critiques. Kasekende et al., (2016) show that while EITI improves transparency, it has negligible impact on reducing perceived corruption. Pafadnam (2024) notes that EITI's successes are mostly short-term, rarely producing durable institutional reforms. This disconnect is compounded by NEITI's operational

opacity and its reliance on elite cooperation, which undermines stakeholder trust and limits grassroots ownership. Studies by Ejiogu et al. (2019) and El Hamad et al. (2024) further highlight how NEITI's emphasis on data publication, without making it comprehensible, actionable, or enforceable, dilutes its accountability function. Critics recommend a multi-pronged reform strategy to overcome these limitations. This includes broadening the EITI's mandate to cover contract and expenditure transparency, incorporating binding enforcement mechanisms, bolstering civil society's capacity for independent monitoring, and embedding transparency within a wider institutional reform agenda, such as legislative oversight and judicial accountability. Ultimately, as authors such as Obi (2009), Idemudia (2012), and Ross (2018) have argued, the core issue in resource-dependent economies like Nigeria is not resource abundance per se, but the governance frameworks that mediate extraction and revenue management. The EITI has not been able to change the deeper problems in countries where powerful oil companies and corrupt elites control how resources are managed. Because it focuses mainly on publishing financial data instead of dealing with the real power struggles and unfair systems in place, it may end up reinforcing the very problems it aims to solve. Unless the EITI tackles these root causes, like who controls decisions, how wealth is shared, and how citizens can hold leaders accountable, it will remain a surface-level solution. In the end, it won't bring about the real changes needed for fairer, more sustainable development or for climate justice in countries in the Global South.

### Resource Extraction and International Frameworks

Frameworks like the Kimberley Process and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, illustrate how international frameworks often fail to address the complexities of resource-driven conflicts and governance failures fully. These frameworks assume that increased transparency and traceability will lead to better governance and conflict resolution. However, the case studies of Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Nigeria reveal that these frameworks often overlook the political and economic contexts in which resource extraction takes place. The Resource Curse Theory suggests that resource wealth in these countries does not lead to prosperity but rather exacerbates governance failures and social inequalities. By focusing on narrow, technical solutions like transparency and traceability, international frameworks like the KP and EITI fail to engage with the broader socio-political dynamics that sustain resource dependency and perpetuate inequality. For instance, in the DRC, the exploitation of mineral resources have fuelled both armed conflict and severe environmental degradation, yet international frameworks like the KP have not effectively addressed the underlying governance issues or the role of multinational

corporations in exacerbating these problems. The same issue arises in Nigeria, where oil wealth has led to institutional decay and social unrest despite the EITI's push for greater financial transparency.

Efforts to mitigate the negative impacts of resource extraction in Africa have often centred on international frameworks such as the Kimberley Process (KP) and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). Both initiatives were developed in the early 2000s in response to growing concerns in the Global North about the link between natural resource exploitation and conflict, corruption, and poor governance. However, their primary objectives, enhancing transparency and traceability, are inherently narrow in scope and shaped largely by Western donor priorities, rather than the complex socio-environmental realities of resource-rich countries.

The Kimberley Process, launched in 2003, sought to curb the trade in conflict diamonds by requiring governments to certify the origin of rough diamonds. While it has reduced the flow of diamonds from official war zones, it has done little to address the broader structural injustices in artisanal mining communities, such as exploitative labour practices, environmental degradation, or exclusion from decision-making. Its limited definition of "conflict" excludes violence perpetrated by state or corporate actors, thereby legitimising harms that fall outside its narrow criteria.

Similarly, EITI promotes voluntary disclosures of revenues, contracts, and ownership structures by extractive companies and governments. Though Nigeria, Liberia, and Sierra Leone have participated actively, and some improvements in fiscal transparency are documented (EITI, 2023), these gains have not translated into substantial governance reforms or equitable distribution of resource wealth. Critically, both KP and EITI operate on voluntary participation and non-binding commitments, which constrain their potential to drive systemic change. The assumption that transparency mechanisms can indirectly lead to better governance or environmental protection overlooks the role of domestic political economies, institutional weaknesses, and elite capture. Furthermore, these frameworks often sideline community voices, treating affected populations as data points rather than rights-holding stakeholders. This paper questions whether these frameworks were ever meant to address the full spectrum of socio-environmental or governance failures. While transparency may serve as a precondition for reform, it is not a substitute for it. However, expanding frameworks like KP and EITI to include binding mandates, such as enforcement mechanisms for governance reform, equitable revenue-sharing, or environmental justice, raises critical questions: Who would enforce these mandates? Would such enforcement not reproduce neocolonial dynamics, undermining the sovereignty of resource-producing nations? These tensions highlight the limitations of externally imposed frameworks that prioritize extractive industry stability and investor confidence over transformative justice.

While transparency can create enabling environments for reform, in practice, EITI and KP have had minimal influence on environmental standards, labour rights, or local equity, highlighting the need to distinguish transparency from transformational change.

Ultimately, while KP and EITI reflect an important recognition of the need for oversight, their design and implementation reflect donor interests more than the developmental needs of resource-rich countries. Framing them as pathways to deeper justice risks overstating their capacity and obscuring the need for locally-driven, structurally transformative governance models. The challenge lies not only in transparency, but in confronting the global political economy that sustains extractive dependency.

Ultimately, while the KP and EITI represent significant steps in international governance of extractives, their technocratic designs and narrow structures fall short of addressing the deep-rooted injustices, both historical and structural, that underlie the resource curse in post-colonial states. A way forward for KP could be the redefinition of conflict that includes structural violence, colonial legacies, and state abuses, which may help reshape certification processes to address root causes more effectively. While for EITI, stronger civil society participation, combined with regional monitoring bodies, may offer a more locally legitimate and sustainable model of resource governance.

Building on the structural failures and governance challenges traced across diverse case studies as discussed in earlier sections, from elite capture and violent extraction in Nigeria and the DRC, to donor dependency in Liberia, CFA franc-linked monetary subordination, and the resilience of Botswana's domestically rooted governance institutions, we critique international frameworks like the Kimberley Process and EITI not merely for their technical limitations but for their failure to confront the deeper political economy of extraction.

While these frameworks aim to improve transparency and accountability, the preceding analysis demonstrates that the most persistent drivers of underdevelopment, foreign corporate dominance, opaque loan structures, and external monetary control remain largely unaddressed. The convergence of evidence across cases reveals a key limitation: that these frameworks treat symptoms rather than causes, failing to challenge the neocolonial conditions that continue to structure how resources are accessed, managed, and governed.

Consequently, even in countries that formally comply with these initiatives, the underlying extractive logic often persists.

This calls into question the adequacy of global governance regimes and underscores the need for a rethink for more transformative approaches that integrate domestic agency, fiscal sovereignty, and structural reform into their mandates. One which also empowers developing nation's national sovereignty rather than servitude to western set structures that breed elite capture and rent-seeking.

## Conclusion

This study set out to address two central objectives: first, to critically interrogate the resource curse thesis by moving beyond deterministic explanations and exploring how structural, historical, and neocolonial forces shape underdevelopment, governance failures, and socio-environmental degradation in resource-rich states; and second, to evaluate the effectiveness of international governance frameworks, namely the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and the Kimberley Process (KP), in mitigating the harmful impacts of resource exploitation, particularly in the Global South.

In addressing the first objective, the paper drew on a series of African case studies, including Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the DRC, and the CFA franc zone, as well as the contrasting experience of Botswana. These cases collectively challenge the foundational assumptions of the resource curse thesis. Rather than confirming that resource abundance inherently leads to conflict, corruption, or stagnation, the evidence illustrates how such outcomes are mediated by the structural conditions under which resources are extracted and governed. In the cases of Nigeria and the DRC, weak institutions, elite capture, and foreign corporate control channel resource rents away from developmental goals. In Sierra Leone and Liberia, resource extraction has been entangled with violent conflict, exacerbated by the absence of accountable governance and international demand for illicit commodities. The CFA franc zone adds another dimension, highlighting how colonial-era monetary arrangements continue to undermine national sovereignty and fiscal independence, thereby perpetuating external control over resource wealth and constraining development.

Within this landscape of extractive dependency and structural inequality, Botswana stands out not as an exception that disproves the rule, but as compelling evidence that institutional autonomy, prudent fiscal management, sovereign control of revenues, and transparent governance can transform resource wealth into developmental gains. The Botswana case reinforces the broader claim of this study: that it is not the presence of resources themselves, but the systems, domestic and international, through which they are managed, that determine developmental outcomes. These case studies, taken together, provide a coherent critique of the resource curse thesis and demonstrate the central role of governance structures, historical legacies, and global power asymmetries in shaping resource trajectories. Turning to the second objective, the evaluation of international frameworks such as EITI and KP reveals that while they represent important acknowledgements of the need for reform in the extractive sector, they remain limited in their transformative potential. Both frameworks are designed around the logic of transparency and voluntary compliance, focusing on procedural governance and investor assurance rather than addressing the

foundational drivers of inequality, such as power asymmetries, unjust systems, institutional fragility, and environmental injustice. Their apolitical, technocratic approaches risk entrenching the very dynamics they claim to mitigate, offering legitimacy without transformation. Rather than empowering communities or shifting structural relations, they often serve to stabilise investor environments and reproduce western and donor-centric priorities, sidelining local agency and redistributive justice. The study makes a broader claim that international resource governance must move beyond compliance-driven transparency regimes that only maintain western ideologies and embrace a more radical, justice-oriented paradigm that addresses root causes. Achieving energy justice and sustainable resource management in Africa requires a paradigm shift, one that understands governance not merely as a set of institutional arrangements but as a site of political struggle over sovereignty, power, and redistribution. Resource governance must therefore be decolonized, restructured to reflect local contexts, centre affected communities, and challenge the global systems that continue to extract wealth from the Global South.

The implications of this analysis extend to pressing global issues such as energy transition, climate change, and sustainable development. As the world shifts toward renewables and critical minerals, many of the same extractive logics persist, threatening to replicate existing patterns of exploitation under a green guise. Without structural reform, the emerging green economy may simply reinforce the same neocolonial hierarchies that have long defined fossil fuel and mineral extraction in the Global South.

A truly just energy transition must:

- (i) Prioritize domestic ownership and control of resource governance;
- (ii) Confront environmental degradation and social displacement linked to extractive projects;
- (iii) Rebalance power between international investors and local communities;
- (iv) And decolonize global governance frameworks to align with the lived realities, developmental needs, and environmental priorities of resource-rich states.

## Policy Recommendations

To support these shifts, the study proposes the following policy directions:

- (i) Reform the mandates of EITI and KP to move beyond voluntary compliance and adopt binding obligations that address human rights, environmental justice, and redistributive equity.
- (ii) Empower regional institutions such as the African Union (AU), ECOWAS, and NEPAD to lead on resource

governance with clear mandates, accountability mechanisms, and robust civil society participation.

(iii) Establish and strengthen sovereign wealth and stabilization funds, following the example of Botswana's Pula Fund, to safeguard national revenues and invest in long-term, climate-resilient infrastructure.

(iv) Enhance pan-African cooperation and regulatory harmonization to build collective bargaining power, reduce vulnerability to external manipulation, and develop shared frameworks for sustainable development.

(v) Integrate environmental stewardship into extractive governance, ensuring mining and oil revenues directly support public services, green infrastructure, and local livelihoods.

Another critical finding of this study is the performative nature of many international initiatives, which present the appearance of accountability while preserving underlying hierarchies of control. These frameworks often function as instruments of soft power, stabilizing markets for the Global North while marginalizing the very communities they claim to support.

This insight opens up future research directions, including:

(i) Exploring why certain resource-rich states like Botswana successfully resist extractive global structures, while others remain trapped in neocolonial cycles of dependency;

(ii) Investigating how national political coalitions, institutional legacies, and social movements mediate the influence of international frameworks;

(iii) And examining how natural resources, particularly rare earth minerals and battery metals, are becoming central to the 'green' energy transition, creating new forms of extractive dependency and global competition that mirror the dynamics of historical resource exploitation.

This research dismantles the myth of the inherent resource curse and redirects attention to the global, institutional, and political systems that determine how natural wealth is governed. Achieving equitable, sustainable development in resource-rich nations requires more than institutional reform, it demands a fundamental rethinking of who holds power, how benefits are shared, and whose interests' governance frameworks truly serve. The path forward lies in empowering domestic agency, reimagining international cooperation, and building governance models that are not only technically sound, but socially just and historically aware.

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### Author's Contribution

E.O.A. conceptualized the study, conducted the research, drafted manuscript, and collected and analyzed data.

W.A.A. drafted and edited the manuscript.

All authors reviewed the final draft for accuracy and integrity.

### Change of Authorship

The authors agree with all parts of the work, including the final draft for publication and the order of authorship.

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The authors have no relevant financial or nonfinancial interest to disclose.

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