

An Analysis of the Nigeria Mines Ranger Service Bill, 2023

Maritime Practice Insight

December 2025



P a g e s C O N T E N T

2 Introduction

3 Key highlights from the Bill

5 Comparative Perspective

7 Recommendations

9 Conclusion

1. Introduction

Nigeria continues to face a severe illegal mining problem that undermines national revenue, endangers communities, and fuels insecurity across mineral-producing regions. Reports indicate that more than 500 unauthorised mining sites operate nationwide, involving nearly two million people engaged in informal extraction of gold and gemstones.¹ Many of these sites are unregulated and, in several cases, controlled by coordinated criminal networks that smuggle minerals outside the country.² These activities contribute to land degradation, water contamination, community exploitation, and rising insecurity in rural mining areas.³

The Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act (NMMA) 2007 provides the primary regulatory framework for exploration, mining, and quarrying activities. It sets out licensing requirements, environmental obligations, and safety standards for mining operators. However, enforcement has struggled to keep pace with the scale of illegal mining. The Mines Inspectorate Department, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), and the Nigeria Police Force share enforcement duties, but chronic underfunding, inadequate technical training, weak inter-agency coordination, and overstretched mandates have limited their effectiveness.⁴ As a result, enforcement has often been reactive rather than preventive, especially in remote and high-risk mining corridors.

The consequences of weak enforcement are evident in several documented incidents. In Zamfara State, widespread lead poisoning linked to illegal artisanal gold mining killed at least 500 children between 2010 and 2012 and left thousands needing urgent treatment.⁵ More recently, in June 2024, heavy rainfall caused a mining pit to collapse in Niger State, trapping dozens of miners and leading to multiple fatalities.⁶ These tragedies illustrate persistent breaches of mining and environmental laws and highlight the need for a dedicated agency capable of sustained, specialised enforcement.

-
- 1 Abubakar Bwari, 'Over 2 Million People Engage in Illegal Mining for Survival — *FG*' *Premium Times* (6 August 2018) <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/business/business-news/279108-over-2-million-people-engage-in-illegal-mining-for-survival-fg.html> accessed November 21, 2025
 - 2 Oluwole Ojewale, 'Foreign criminals go for gold in Nigeria' *ISS Today* (8 January 2024) <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/foreign-criminals-go-for-gold-in-nigeria> accessed November 12, 2025.
 - 3 Moyosore Salami, "Why tackling insecurity, environmental devastation is vital to lift mining industry" *The Guardian* (Abuja, December 14, 2024) <https://guardian.ng/features/why-tackling-insecurity-environmental-devastation-is-vital-to-lift-mining-industry/#:~:text=According%20to%20a%20government%20statement%2C,rates%20exceeding%2030%20per%20cent>> Accessed October 29, 2025
 - 4 Ahoo TJ, Ahule BG and Ende DT, 'Illegal Mining and the Development of Nigeria' (2025) 11(1) *Benue Journal of Social Sciences* p. 130.
 - 5 Kabiru Ibrahim Getso, "Prevalence and Determinants of Childhood Lead Poisoning in Zamfara State, Nigeria" (2014) *Journal of Health and Pollution* Volume 4, Issue 6 Pages 1 – 9 <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/full/10.5696/2156-9614-4-6.1> Accessed October 29, 2025
 - 6 Chika Otuchikere, "Buried beyond recovery: Sad story of Niger collapsed mine victims" *Punch Newspapers* (11th July 2024) <https://punchng.com/buried-beyond-recovery-sad-story-of-niger-collapsed-mine-victims/> Accessed October 29, 2025

In response, the Senate passed the Nigeria Mines Ranger Service (Establishment) Bill, 2023 (SB. 235) on 21 October 2025.⁷ The Bill establishes the Nigeria Mines Ranger Service (NMRS), a specialised security and regulatory body mandated to protect mining operations, enforce environmental and safety standards, prevent illegal and artisanal mining, conduct accident investigations, and support emergency response efforts.⁸ The NMRS is intended to strengthen compliance with the NMMA 2007 and address long-standing enforcement gaps in the solid minerals sector.

Mining experts have described the Bill as a necessary step toward improving security around mining sites, reducing environmental damage, and promoting responsible mining practices.⁹ The initiative also aligns Nigeria with other mineral-rich African countries that have adopted specialised mining security models. Ghana's Operation Vanguard and South Africa's proposed specialised mining police unit show how targeted, intelligence-driven enforcement structures can disrupt illegal mining networks and improve sector governance¹⁰.

By establishing a dedicated mining security service, Nigeria aims to address institutional weaknesses, reduce illegal mining activities, and promote a safer, more transparent, and economically productive mining sector. This article reviews the main features of the NMRS Bill and evaluates its potential to strengthen mining-sector enforcement in Nigeria.

2. Key highlights from the Bill

2.1. *Establishment of NMRS as a body Corporate*

The passed bill seeks to establish the Nigeria Mines Ranger Service as a body corporate, granting it legal personality and the authority to sue and be sued in its corporate name. This ensures that the Nigeria Mines Ranger Service (NMRS) has the legal capacity to protect mining operations, enforce environmental and safety regulations, and take legal action against illegal mining activities.¹¹ This introduction would ensure more effective operations as the functions ascribed to the agency, including preventing

7 Tope Omogbolagun, "Bill to create Nigeria Mines Rangers Service passes third reading in Senate" Business Day (Abuja, October 21, 2025) <<https://businessday.ng/news/article/bill-to-create-nigeria-mines-rangers-service-passes-third-reading-in-senate/>> Accessed October 29, 2025

8 Nigeria Mines Ranger Service Bill 2023, Section 3

9 Moyosore Salami, "Why tackling insecurity, environmental devastation is vital to lift mining industry" The Guardian (Abuja, December 14, 2024) <<https://guardian.ng/features/why-tackling-insecurity-environmental-devastation-is-vital-to-lift-mining-industry/#:~:text=According%20to%20a%20government%20statement%2C,rates%20exceeding%2030%20per%20cent>> Accessed October 29, 2025

10 David McKay, "Mantashe unveils plans for "specialised police unit" as Govt seeks to curb illegal mining" (2022) Mining mx <<https://www.miningmx.com/news/markets/50679-mantashe-unveils-plans-for-specialised-police-unit-as-govt-seeks-to-curb-illegal-mining/#:~:text=SOUTH%20Africa%E2%80%99s%20mines%20and%20energy,mining%20industry%20R49bn%20in%202019>> Accessed October 29, 2025

11 Nigeria Mines Ranger Service Bill 2023, section 1(2)a

illegal and artisanal mining, investigating and arresting suspects, would be better achieved. With this corporate status, the NMRS can now more effectively uphold mining laws, secure mining investment, and mitigate environmental degradation, thereby strengthening regulatory enforcement and supporting sustainable mining practices nationwide.

2.2. Power to arrest and hand over offenders to the police.

The bill gives the Nigeria Mines Ranger Service the power to arrest and hand offenders over to the police.¹² The already burdened Nigerian Police Force and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) have been unable to effectively fill this enforcement gap due to notable challenges, including inadequate manpower, limited resources, and operational inefficiencies. These constraints have made it difficult to maintain a sustained, robust presence in mining communities affected by illegal mining activities.

2.3. Nationwide deployment and armed enforcement squad.

Another notable highlight of the Bill is the availability and maintenance of an armed squad within the Nigeria Mines Ranger Service.¹³ This is a critical factor for the service's effectiveness in combating illegal and artisanal mining. The presence of a specialised, armed enforcement team enables the service to operate effectively in often remote, volatile, and sometimes hostile mining areas where illegal mining thrives. This would lead to better prevention and a rapid response to criminal activity, protection during investigations, and the execution of arrests without undue reliance on the overstretched Nigerian Police Force.

2.4. Decentralised Oversight

The bill makes provision that the governor of a state may give to a state commander such directives with respect to the maintenance and securing of public safety and order in the mining areas within the state as he may consider necessary, and it shall be the duty of the state commander to comply with the directives or cause them to be complied with.¹⁴ The authority granted to state governors to issue directives to state commanders

¹² Nigeria Mines Ranger Service Bill 2023, Section 3(1)a

¹³ Nigeria Mines Ranger Service Bill 2023, section 3(2)

¹⁴ Nigeria Mines Ranger Service Bill 2023, section 25(2)

of the Nigeria Mines Ranger Service is another important mechanism introduced by the bill to address challenges in mining areas.¹⁵ This decentralised power allows governors, who have intimate knowledge of the specific security, environmental, and social dynamics within their states, to tailor directives that ensure the effective maintenance of public safety and order in mining regions. This flexibility to issue directives would enable prompt, context-sensitive responses to emerging illegal mining activities or conflicts and strengthen enforcement at the grassroots level. Moreover, this coordination between the federal and state governments would promote more effective resource allocation and enhance community trust and involvement in mining regulation.

3. Comparative Perspective

Several mineral-rich African countries have established specialised security forces to address illegal mining. These experiences offer valuable lessons for Nigeria's evolving regulatory environment, particularly in light of the recent bill establishing the Nigeria Mines Rangers Service. Notable examples include Ghana, South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), whose enforcement models offer useful comparative lessons for strengthening Nigeria's approach to combating illegal mining. More importantly, these cases underscore the great benefits of intelligence-led, well-resourced enforcement in addressing illegal mining.¹⁶

3.1. Ghana – Operation Vanguard

Operation Vanguard was launched by the Akufo-Addo-led administration in 2017 to curb illegal mining activities, also known as 'galamsey' in Ghana. This entailed the deployment of a Joint Military and Police Task Force (JTF) of 400 personnel, comprising 200 military personnel and 200 police personnel. In less than a year, the Minister of Lands and Natural Resources reported that the Vanguard recorded successes: this includes confiscation of 90% of excavators at galamsey sites, the arrest of 347 illegal miners, and the identification of potential terrorists coming from across coastal West Africa and the Sahel to make a living through illegal mining of gold in Ghana.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Danish Institute for International Studies, 'Halt and Vanguard' (DIIS Policy Brief, March 2021) <https://www.diis.dk/en/research/halt-and-vanguard> accessed 30 October 2025.

¹⁷ DefenceWeb, 'Successful Op Vala Umgodi deployment ends in North West province after hundreds apprehended' (November 4, 2024) <https://defenceweb.co.za/security/civil-security/successful-op-vala-umgodi-deployment-ends-in-north-west-province-after-hundreds-apprehended/> accessed 30 October 2025.

3.2. South Africa – Operation Vala Umgodi

Operation Vala Umgodi was launched as South Africa's comprehensive multi-agency initiative to combat illegal mining. This was a strategic response to the growing illegal mining in South Africa, through the concerted efforts of various law enforcement bodies, including the South African Police Service (SAPS), private security companies, and immigration officials, to dismantle criminal mining networks. Its unique approach entails intelligence gathering, tactical operation and inter-agency collaboration to achieve its objectives. This initiative has recorded remarkable successes since its inception in December 2023, including the arrest of over 13,691 suspects and the confiscation of R5 million in cash and uncut diamonds worth R32 million through Operation Vala Umgodi.

3.3. Democratic Republic of Congo: Mining Police

The DRC has a mining police, which is a specialised unit of the Congolese National Police. Mining police are security forces mandated by Congolese law to secure mining areas and to represent national interests in the extractive sector. The primary responsibilities of the mining police include ensuring the security and protection of mining sites across the country, preventing illegal mining, theft and sabotage of mining resources and infrastructure.¹⁸ The operational structure of the DRC mining police demonstrates that specialised mining security agencies require institutional support, clear mandates and operational capacity to perform effectively. This underscores that the effectiveness of the Nigerian Mines Ranger Service, when fully operational in Nigeria, is largely contingent upon sustained funding and continuous professional training of its personnel.

¹⁸ Solomon Bethlehem, *Briefing Note for Information: Examples of Public Security Forces Engaging in Mine Policing* (Centre for International and Defence Policy, Queen's University, 2024) https://www.queensu.ca/cidp/sites/cidpwww/files/uploaded_files/Mine-Policing.pdf accessed October 30, 2025.

4. Recommendations

To ensure the effective implementation and sustainability of the Nigeria Mines Ranger Service (NMRS), several strategic, legal, and institutional measures are recommended:

4.1. Addressing Gaps through Subsidiary Legislation

The NMRS Bill has laid a solid foundation for establishing the NMRS and defining its overarching functions. However, there are fine operational, coordination and enforcement details that remain undefined. Thus, the Federal Government should establish a clear legal framework for the NMRS through either subsidiary legislation under the NMRS Bill or a dedicated regulation. Such a framework would clearly define the Service's mandate, powers, and mechanisms for coordination with other security agencies. Such legal clarity would prevent constitutional conflicts regarding security control, especially since policing remains a federal matter under the Exclusive Legislative List of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended). Moreover, a statutory basis would delineate the NMRS's operational boundaries to avoid encroachment on state security initiatives and promote cooperative federalism in natural resource governance.

4.2. Promoting Inter-Agency Coordination in the NMRS

The NMRS should be developed as a multi-agency initiative under the supervision of the Ministry of Solid Minerals Development, with formal liaison frameworks in place with the Nigeria Police Force, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), and state mineral resources task forces. This would mitigate functional duplication and ensure unified command structures during operations. Drawing lessons from South Africa's Operation Vala Umgod and the DRC's Mining Police, inter-agency coordination is crucial to avoid overlapping enforcement powers, internal rivalry, and inconsistent enforcement standards.

4.3. Capacity Building and Sustainable Financing for the NMRS

Sustained capacity-building and financing are essential to the NMRS's success. Officers should undergo specialised training in mine safety, environmental management, and conflict de-escalation, areas where both the South African and DRC initiatives have faced limitations. The dedicated Nigerian Mines Security Fund, as provided for under the Bill, could consider additional financing through mining royalties, corporate social responsibility contributions, and development partner grants to support logistics, intelligence gathering, and operational sustainability.

4.4. Integrating Environmental and Human Rights Standards in NMRS Operations

The NMRS's operations must be integrated with environmental and human rights standards. Its enforcement actions should align with the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Act,¹⁹ ensuring that interventions against illegal mining also promote environmental remediation and community welfare. Similarly, aligning NMRS protocols with international frameworks, such as OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas (2025),²⁰ would enhance Nigeria's compliance with global best practices in resource governance.

4.5. Ensuring Transparency and Accountability

Periodic independent oversight and intergovernmental review mechanisms should be instituted to assess the NMRS's performance, procedural legality, and community impact. This could take the form of a joint committee comprising the National Assembly, the Ministry of Solid Minerals, environmental agencies, and representatives from civil society organisations. Such oversight would promote transparency, minimise abuse, and ensure that the NMRS evolves into a model for coordinated mineral resource security and sustainable development in Nigeria and beyond.

¹⁹ Environmental Impact Assessment Act, 1992.

²⁰ OECD, OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Supply Chains of Minerals from Conflict-Affected and High-Risk Areas (OECD Publishing, April 2016) https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2016/04/oecd-due-diligence-guidance-for-responsible-supply-chains-of-minerals-from-conflict-affected-and-high-risk-areas_g1g65996.html accessed November 21, 2025.

5. Conclusion

The NMRS Bill represents a necessary and timely security reform to safeguard Nigeria's mineral wealth from the growing menace of illegal mining and to promote sustainable resource management. However, the success of this initiative will not depend solely on the deployment of the force, but rather on the clarity of its legal framework, institutional accountability, and effective coordination among the various agencies involved in mineral resource management and governance. By embedding the NMRS within a coherent legal and policy framework that harmonises the roles of the Ministry of Solid Minerals, the NSCDC, and the Police, Nigeria can avoid bureaucratic overlap while ensuring operational efficiency.

Ultimately, a well-structured NMRS, rooted in transparency, environmental responsibility, and inter-agency cooperation, has the potential to reinforce national security, stimulate economic growth, and advance a model of responsible mining governance that reflects Nigeria's commitment to sustainable development and the rule of law.

CONTRIBUTORS



Emeka Opara
Maritime Practice



Qudus Adeoye
Maritime Practice



Chimeremeze Nwachukwu
Maritime Practice



Oludayo Olufowobi
Maritime Practice



Contact

LAGOS

KENNA Place
8, Ogunyemi Road, Palace Way, Oniru
PO Box 73002, Victoria Island, Lagos

ABUJA

1st Floor, Novare Central
Plot 502 Dalaba Street,
Wuse Zone 5, FCT 900285, Abuja

ENUGU

3 Emmanuel Ngwu Street,
Thinkers' Corner,
Enugu, 400001

+234 811 395 1052, +234 811 395 1053
counsel@kennalp.com

