**Beyond the Resource Curse: A Peripheral Perspective on Africa’s Sustainable Future**

**Matai Muon**

**PhD Student**

**University of Oxford**

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# Abstract

Africa’s resource wealth has long coexisted with economic underdevelopment, political instability, and social inequality, reinforcing the resource curse thesis. This paper challenges the dominant national-level focus of resource governance debates by arguing that subnational entities hold the key to mitigating resource dependence’s adverse effects. Through a comparative analysis of South Sudan, and Ghana, the study examines how decentralization can foster inclusive and sustainable development in resource-rich regions. Employing the subnational resource curse thesis as its analytical framework, the paper extends its theoretical scope to interrogate the role of local governance structures in shaping resource outcomes. Unlike conventional perspectives that attribute governance failures to national institutions, this approach highlights how weak subnational institutions, elite capture, and fragmented political economies entrench localized underdevelopment. The study critically engages with fiscal federalism, political contestation, and revenue-sharing mechanisms to assess their impact on resource governance and development trajectories. Methodologically, the study adopts a mixed-method approach, integrating large-scale survey data with a qualitative desk review of policy documents, national and subnational legislation, and existing empirical research. The survey data provide quantitative insights into public perceptions of resource governance and institutional trust at the subnational level, while the desk review contextualizes these findings within historical and political frameworks. This enables a nuanced analysis of governance dynamics across diverse resource-producing regions. Preliminary findings indicate that while subnational autonomy can facilitate localized economic transformation, weak institutional frameworks and elite control often exacerbate inequality and conflict. Where decentralization lacks transparency and robust governance mechanisms, resource wealth reinforces rather than alleviates localized political and economic marginalization. The paper argues that bridging this governance gap requires strengthening local institutional capacity, enforcing transparent revenue-sharing models, and integrating community-driven approaches into resource management strategies. By extending the subnational resource curse thesis, this study contributes to debates on resource federalism, political economy, and sustainable development in Africa. It posits that equitable resource governance must go beyond national frameworks to address structural imbalances in peripheral political economies, positioning subnational governance as central to Africa’s development trajectory.

**Key words:** Oil, Resource curse, Peripheral perspective, South Sudan, Ghana, Sustainable development

# Introduction

Africa is a rich continent, endowed with vast natural resources, yet it is also the poorest. Resource abundance coexists with widespread underdevelopment, occasioned by poverty, political instability, hunger, and unsustainable debt (United Nations, 2024). This development paradox is captured under the phenomenon of a resource curse, which challenges the conventional wisdom that resource wealth automatically creates national prosperity (Rostow, 1961). Traditionally, the resource curse phenomenon has been approached through the lens of national institutions' (political and economic) role in resource governance, stressing the macro-level policy shortcomings as evidenced by entrenched, state-led corruption (Karl, 1997). Yet, this focus renders the analysis problematic - i.e., it overlooks the critical task played by subnational entities - states, provinces or regions in shaping resource outcomes.

This study shifts the needle from national to subnational levels, contending that decentralisation and local governance structures are fundamental in mitigating resource dependence’s most adverse effects. It achieves this by examining cases from two resource-rich African nations: South Sudan and Ghana.

The study seeks to understand how regional and local institutions influence resource management, economic inclusion and sustainable development. The study’s overarching objective is to widen the empirical scope of the evolving subnational curse thesis (Cust and Viale, 2016; Manzano and Gutierrez, 2019). It posits that effective resource governance must be anchored within a localised and institutional terrain.

The significance of the study lies in its potential to inform policy reforms aimed at decentralising resource management, strengthening local institutional capacities, while fostering sustainable growth and development. By so doing, it aspires to reframe existing explanatory paradigms which often neglect the heterogeneity across resource-rich regions within African countries, urging for a granular policy orientation that minimises structural inequalities and political fragmentation at the subnational level.

The paper is structured as follows. Section I discusses the literature underpinning the study. Section II presents the methodology. Section III discusses the key results and findings; Section IV interprets the findings and discusses their implication. Section V concludes.

# Literature Review

This section discusses the resource curse thesis in line with the study objectives. It does so by exploring existing debates as well as pointing out gaps in current research to set the stage for a comparative outlook, emphasizing a subnational focus.

The natural resource curse thesis has been a prominent framework for understanding the paradoxical relationship between resource wealth and economic underdevelopment (Auty, 2001; Sachs and Warner, 1995). The thesis argues that countries rich in natural resources, such as oil and gas, often experience slower economic growth, weaker governance, and higher levels of conflict compared to resource-scarce nations (Collier and Hoeffler, 2005). This phenomenon has also been captured by the Economist as a Dutch Disease - an economic incident where an increase in revenues from natural resources leads to a decline in other sectors of the economy, particularly manufacturing and agriculture (The Economist, 1977). Put differently, as the country exports more of the natural resources, the demand for other commodities within an economy declines leading to what economists call the crowding out effect. This occurs because the imports become cheaper, little incentive remains to invest in local production as first observed by the economist John Elliot Cairns during the Australian goldrush in the 50s (Davis, 1995).

The resource curse thesis emerged as a counterpoint to earlier optimistic views, particularly those of scholars like Walt Rostow, and Norton Ginsburg. According to these views, natural resources are understood as critical by-products necessary for industrialisation as their material values can be re-invested into other productive sectors. As argued by Norton Ginsburg, the national ownership of natural resources should facilitate a rapid social and economic transformation of societies required for sustainable development (Ginsburg, 1957). Similarly, development theorist, Walt Rostow once observed that the presence of natural resources should assist the emerging economies’ transition from underdevelopment to industrialisation, building on the experiences of the industrialised countries (Rostow, 1961).

However, by the 1990s, empirical evidence challenged this optimistic view. Scholars like Auty (2001) and Sachs and Warner (1995) demonstrated that resource-rich countries often underperform economically, attributing this to institutional weaknesses and rent-seeking behavior. The theory suggests that the quality of institutions is the critical determinant of whether resource wealth (particularly oil and gas) leads to positive or negative outcomes.

As time progressed, the curse thesis extended to how natural resources mediate and are enmeshed in poor governance, corruption, environmental decay, violent conflicts etc (Walt, 2009; 2010). This governance discourse received blessings from the New Institutional Economics (NIE) scholars who support this view. They argue that "good" or inclusive institutions—those that protect property rights, enforce contracts, and promote accountability—can leverage resource wealth for sustainable development. On the other hand, "exclusive" institutions, which concentrate power and resources in the hands of a narrow elite, exacerbate inequality and stifle growth (North, 1990; Acemoglu et al., 2001). This institutional focus has been central to resource curse literature, which posits that natural resource abundance, especially oil and gas, fundamentally shapes how economies operate, influencing state functions. This is particularly true because extractive resource revenues from oil and gas are viewed as a key source of development (Chang, 2007).

However, the literature also argues that this abundance can lead to economic instability, creating opportunities for rent-seeking by political elites (Karl, 1997). As Karl (1997: 44) asserts, natural resources "affect not only the actual policy environment of goal formation but also the type of public institutions adopted, the prospects of building other extractive capabilities, and the locus of authority."

Since its emergence in the 1990s, the resource curse thesis has been empirically validated in cases such as Nigeria. Despite being Africa’s largest oil producer and the sixth-largest exporter globally, much of Nigeria’s population lives in poverty (Idemudia, 2012; Usman, 2023). Its oil-rich Niger Delta region has experienced decades of violent unrest (Watts, 2010). Similarly, Angola’s resource wealth has not translated into broader economic development; instead, the country remains mired in corruption, as highlighted by political economist Ricardo Soares de Oliveira (de Oliveira, 2007). Angola’s national oil institutions, de Oliveira discloses, become the cash cow of the state with far-reaching consequences for a broad-based economic development.

Despite empirical support, the resource curse thesis has faced significant criticisms, particularly since the early 21st century. Critics have raised concerns about the thesis's statist and institutionalist foundations (Rosser, 2006; Poteete, William & Le Billon, 2017). Some argue that its focus on the national level and the assumption that national actors are primarily motivated by rational utility-maximization overlooks the roles of subnational entities and other motivations e.g. social pressures (Asante, 2016; Orihuela, 2018).

Rosser (2006) suggests that focusing on national elites as autonomous, rational-utility-maximising actors neglects the influence of social forces. For instance, in Saudi Arabia, despite the prevalence of rent-seeking, social pressures continue to shape policy choices (Rosser, 2006). Moreover, the rational-actor assumption downplays the influence of social structures, such as class and ethnicity, on individual behaviour. Bet-Shlimon (2012) echoes this critique, arguing that long-standing social dynamics predate institutions and influence resource governance before a resource boom.

Obeng-Odoong (2015), critiquing the resource curse thesis through the lens of women in Ghana’s oil industry, argues that the thesis oversimplifies the relationship between resource wealth and development. He claims that focusing solely on macroeconomic factors, such as currency stability, obscures the broader impacts of oil extraction, including labor exploitation, ecological degradation, and the marginalization of women. The conventional blessing-curse dichotomy misdirects inquiry, he argues, and a more nuanced approach is needed to examine the intersection of these dynamics with institutions and societal aspirations.

The deterministic nature of the resource curse thesis has also been criticized. The thesis suggests that all resource-rich countries are susceptible to rent-seeking, civil unrest, and underdevelopment. By generalizing this pattern, it overlooks the reasons some countries have escaped the curse, such as Botswana, the United Arab Emirates, Canada, and Norway (Frederick, 2010). Poteete (2009), for example, reinterprets Botswana’s success story with diamonds, arguing that institutional endowments alone cannot explain positive outcomes. Instead, Poteete suggests that Botswana’s participatory politics, established long before the discovery of diamonds, played a crucial role in its development.

Further critiques target the resource curse thesis’s national focus. Scholars like Cust and Viale (2016) and Manzano and Gutierrez (2019) argue that the emphasis on national actors neglects subnational effects and entities. Manzano and Gutierrez (2019) suggest that the curse thesis should incorporate a subnational unit of analysis to better understand the processes and effects of natural resource extraction on local economies, politics, and environments.

Some scholars propose that expanding the resource curse thesis to include local-level dynamics is important but insufficient. Orihuela (2018) calls for moving beyond the binary of blessings and curses to incorporate how extractive industries and national actors are shaped by contextual and spatial disparities. A "context matters" approach, emphasising the conditions under which the oil resource curse manifests, is essential for understanding development outcomes in resource-rich countries (Orihuela, 2018: 162).

This critical review of the resource curse thesis, in both its conventional and contemporary forms, offers several insights for this study. First, the thesis's focus on institutional quality highlights the importance of institutional governance in resource-based development. Second, the emerging focus on subnational aspects of the resource curse emphasizes the need to consider how subnational factors influence national institutions, a theme not sufficiently explored in the existing literature. Third, scholars advocating for a more granular approach to the curse thesis align with this study's agenda of moving beyond the binary framework of blessings and curses to explore the overlooked role of subnational actors in the oil industry.

## **Theoretical framework**

This section critically engages with evolving subnational resource curse with the aim to unpack its relevance in driving sustainable development discourse in Africa’s resource-rich domains. It discusses this alongside other concepts such as decentralisation and fiscal federalism to point out varying elements of resource governance in Africa.

### The Subnational resource curse

As already stated, the mainstream discourses on resource governance -i.e. the natural resource curse miss out on the local variant of the curse/blessing dichotomy. This growing body of evidence highlights the urgency to examine the curse’s manifestations from the below. First raised by Latin American resource-based scholars, the subnational resource curse raises the importance of approaching resources governance from a regional and local-level podium (Cust and Viale, 2016; Manzano and Gutierrez, 2019). At the forefront of this debate lies the contention that the frame of analysis in the current discourse is too narrow. Proponents of the subnational curse argue for expanding the unit of analysis to include subnational entities. These entities might be broadly categorised on geographical basis (e.g. district levels), extractive sites (e.g. oil and mine fields) and/or their political levels (e.g. municipal and provincial governments).

As distilled by Cust and Viale (2016, p. 1), the subnational resource curse denotes the “overall net negative economic impact in resource producing regions.” While expanding the scope, Manzano and Gutierrez (2019) contend that the subnational curse extends beyond just economic realms but also include other aspects. Therefore, they define it as the ‘overall negative effects of natural resource wealth in the economy, politics, polity or environment of a subnational area’ (p. 1). In their view, this conceptualisation is inescapable primarily for two reasons: (i) the spillover effects often associated with extractive sector - e.g. the economic activities and political processes directly connected to oil and mining endeavors should also be prioritised, and (ii) the decentralisation of oil and mineral revenues and their subsequent allocation and distribution across the local sectors.

All these processes, they argue, necessitate a broader conceptual casting than Cust and Viale (2016) contends. This follows the critique that current debates on natural resource curse tend to focus on national-level variables - including the emphasis on macroeconomic channels (e.g. fiscal channels and rents-seeking concerns). Yet, as these scholars argue, the natural resource domain also greatly impacts regional economies and local constituencies differently. As a case, the sector depends on goods and services from other sectors of the economies which may directly or indirectly affect the economic performances of those sectors at the subnational levels (Rodriguez, 2015; Cust and Viale, 2016).

Furthermore, business interactions within the extractive industries are not necessarily reduced to national or federal level. On the contrary, subnational entities - both regional, provincial and local level arguably undertake the business of permits issuance, enforcement of relevant regulatory oversights as well as investing a substantial amount of resource revenues (Manzano, 2014). Additionally, communities living within and across the extractive sites (e.g. oil and mine fields) often come into contact with the local governments almost on daily basis. Such a proximity deserves a closer scrutiny into how extraction impacts on the socioeconomic and political lives of the locals (Espinosa and Rodriguez, 2017).

Yet, despite the existence of the above evidence, much remains to be known about the manifestation of the subnational resource curse. Unlike the most established body of evidence found in the macro-level analysis, research into the existence and the channel of mechanisms of the subnational resource curse remain murky with less conclusive results. As concluded by Cust and Viale (2016) in a seminal publication, scholarships that analyse the impacts of resource extraction, regional spillovers and revenue expenditure across and within-regional settings is less conclusive with inconsistent results. Nonetheless, scholars also agree that despite the absence of conclusive evidence, there exist rigorous studies that identify the positive, negative and mixed effects associated with resource wealth at the subnational levels.

A growing body of knowledge begins to coalesce, an indication of the existence of this variant of the curse. As shown by Aragón et al ([2015](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214790X19300656?casa_token=weu_FcqPcysAAAAA:5nYCVy5Kl3DeXuMYQGUecHI_Ie0q4wEVDUTvuyBB-rgoBwpInavvlUnpf7s3fkssAU5XBSeWKw#bib0015)), four main strands already constitutes the appearance of the resource curse at the subnational level - they comprise: (i) ‘the effects of the specialization in primary sectors (an outcome of Dutch Disease); (ii) the increase in demand of local goods (backward linkages with extractive sector); (iii) the negative externalities generated by extractive industries (such as environmental and health-related effects); and, (iv) the impact of a fiscal revenue windfall on economic welfare’ (Manzano and Gutierrez, 2019, p. 3).

Empirical cases persist in Africa where the curse manifests and is reproduced subnationally. A briefing is necessary before devolving into the discussion on gaping holes through which this paper penetrates the inquiry. As found at the national-level analyses, subnational governments in Africa and elsewhere in the wider Global South contend with similar shortfalls and risks while managing abundant fuel and non-fuel mineral revenues. These may consist, as Manzano and Gutierrez (2019, p. 1) reveal, of: ‘rent-seeking incentives for public and private actors; pressures to spend without sufficient planning; increased corruption and non-programmatic distributive politics; fiscal “laziness” (neglecting local taxation); increased localized violence; and the appropriation of resource revenues by non-state armed groups.’

As demonstrated in the work of Christian S. Otchia analysing the effects of commodity shocks on the DRC’s urban and rural households, there are marked variations across the urban and the rural DRC wherein both urban and rural, poor households within the district level suffer the most from a decline in commodity prices (Otchia, 2018). Additionally, the findings reveal that an increase in government revenues did not create better household welfare. Thus, government efficiency in government expenditure is crucial for the resource sector to induce positive externalities on the local community.

In addition to government policy, an account of how local actors interact with one another is also imperative. According to a study conducted by Neuman et al (2017) into Uganda’s nascent petroleum sector, local capabilities are an important ingredient in assessing the robustness of the resource-rich private sector. In their analysis, they revealed that despite the existence of procurement opportunities within the country’s petroleum value chain, limited local capabilities obstruct communities from harvesting gains in the sector. Accordingly, a policy imperative that develop these capabilities would be key for sustainable growth.

Beyond the economic and social concerns, some scholars also unpack the impact of extraction on governance and armed violent conflicts. As demonstrated by Andreas et al (2015) in examining the impact of mining on local corruption in Africa, mineral extraction has an adverse role on political institutions in Africa. In a large-scale study that mapped 90,000 survey respondents in four Afrobarometer survey waves to spatial data on about 500 industrial mines, the study finds that mining increases bribe payments following the resumption of mining activity. Hence, mineral production, concluded the study, is indeed a curse to local institutions.

Several other studies explore how natural resources, particularly mining and hydrocarbons, are connected to various types of social conflicts. Orihuela et al (2018) revisit the relationship between mineral windfalls and social unrest in Peru, defining "mining-related conflicts" as forms of active opposition by local communities, including protests, riots, sabotage, and violence. These conflicts often stem from environmental issues or dissatisfaction over how resource revenues are distributed or utilised. Meanwhile, Gutiérrez Rodríguez investigates the link between oil wealth and internal armed conflict in Colombia, focusing on a specific municipality as a case study (Rodríguez, [2018](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214790X18300935)). Gutiérrez Rodríguez carried out research in a municipality of Colombia, San Vicente de Chucurí, that has been associated with oil extraction for almost 100 years. The paper argues that oil wealth and the spill-over effects from neighbouring oil-producing regions help to explain the onset and intensity of the armed conflict in San Vicente.

Another critical area for analysis lies in the resource ownership - i.e. the relationship that exists between the central and local governments while interacting on the resource domain. In understanding the role played by natural resources in effecting local development, an analysis of the relationship between the national and subnational governments is key, as Anderson (2012) demonstrates in-depth. According to Jophace Poncian, Tanzania’s model of national ownership grants the central government exclusive control over extractive resources, often undermining subnational community rights (Poncian, 2019). The author does not take a definitive stance for or against national ownership but highlights that centralised management has not fully prevented local communities in some African and Latin American countries from benefiting directly from resource extraction. The paper emphasises the need for further research to understand how institutional frameworks can be improved to enable local communities to participate more effectively in managing extractive industries to foster more equitable resource sharing and governance.

The empirical cases above provide an entry point for the discussion that follows, which extends beyond the subnational curse.

### Extension of the Subnational Resource Curse: A Relational Approach

Building on this understanding, this paper explores the manifestations of subnational curse using the cases of South Sudan and Ghana with the view to examine (i) how the two resource economies compare especially in line with resource governance - i.e fiscal and institutional decentralisation and (ii) assess the pathways through which sustainable practices might be had. In so doing, it is guided by the view that current economic and national-level analyses are unsustainable in the debate of resource governance in Africa. It therefore moves the needle beyond this reductive dichotomy of curses and blessings to incorporate ways in which the extractive domains interact with the surrounding polities, governments and the local economic and environmental ecosystem (Orihuela, [2018](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214790X19300656?casa_token=weu_FcqPcysAAAAA:5nYCVy5Kl3DeXuMYQGUecHI_Ie0q4wEVDUTvuyBB-rgoBwpInavvlUnpf7s3fkssAU5XBSeWKw#bib0275)).

As such, this paper adopts and builds upon Andrews and Siakwah's (2021) relational perspective approach to the resource curse, which contends that the curse manifests and reproduces through locally and socially embedded systems, a phenomenon they dubbed as an ‘oil assemblage’ (Andrews and Siakwah, 2021, p. 137). While their work highlights the criticality of approaching the extractive zones from a multi-lensed angle, an important observation, this paper enriches the framework by drawing from comparative cases of South Sudan and Ghana to explore how different resource-based economies operate and interact within the oil assemblage. Fewer studies exist to determine this complex mix. Perry et al ([2009](https://www.repository.fedesarrollo.org.co/bitstream/handle/11445/366/Oil%20and%20institutions%20Tale%20of%20two%20cities%20Nigeria_Colombia_Oil_Institutions_May_Versionmolivera%20-%202010.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)) presented a robust comparative case for Nigeria and Colombia, yet the study suffers from the obvious econometric biases without regard to social, political and environmental considerations.

And as argued by Andrews and Siakwah (2012, p. 90), such technocratic and macroeconomic representations of the resource outcomes defeat the very logic of an otherwise socio-political space.

# Methodology

This paper employs a mixed-methods research design, involving qualitative and quantitative comparative research designs. It utilizes both the primary and secondary data sources to explore South Sudan and Ghana’s complex hydrocarbon economies. The secondary data reviewed comprised a wealth of data sources, including the extant literature and basic statistics. Primary data for this research were obtained using a mixed bag of sources consisting of semi-structured interviews with community members and elites, ethnographic insights and focused interviews (Integrate the finding from Gopalakrishnan & Miller, 2024).

Purposive and snowballing sampling were deployed to identify and target individuals knowledgeable on the subject matter who were invited to share their lived perspectives and intellectual/professional expertise (Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015).

With respondents’ consent, interviews and discussions were recorded, analysed and subsequently transcribed. The data were then coded and later analysed using themes relevant to the multiple issues, including a mix of actors, networks and power configurations which animate the countries’ intricate oil interfaces.

The primary data for this research were collected between June 2023 and April 2025, a period which allows for comparison across the two countries. Quantitative data sources, which comprise the surveys (public perceptions, institutional trust, government reports, as well as industry documents), were seamlessly integrated with the qualitative data (i.e. interviews, focused discussions and field observations) for depth and breadth. The qualitative component involved thematic analysis of policy documents and contextual data to identify governance gaps and promising practices.

The case selection rationale of South Sudan and Ghana was deliberate. Both countries stand at opposite spectrums of the curse thesis, allowing for comparative analysis. South Sudan is an emerging case for the curse thesis, evidenced by an ongoing conflict and resource-driven independence, and a near absence of subnational governance. This reality offers insights into post-conflict resource governance. Ghana is often presented as a reform-oriented oil economy with a fairly democratic stature, occasioned by largely peaceful transitions. Unlike its counterpart, it is not often seen as a fragile and post-conflict state, which allows for some limited measures of resource transparency and accountability. Such offers a contrasting case of governance reform in the oil sector.

## Case Studies / Comparative Analysis

This section presents the two cases of South Sudan and Ghana. As already stated, both countries represent the diverse resource contexts in Africa owing to different historical evolutions and governance. To compare and assess the two resource governance dynamics in the two economies, this paper adopts Bebbington (2013)’s eight channels of inclusion as a comparative framework. According to Bebbington (2013), there are eight channels of inclusion in a typical natural resource economy - which comprise: (1) employment, (2) effective supply chain management to provide opportunities for local and regional populations, (3) corporate social responsibility and transparency, (4) corporate/state ownership, (5) public ownership, (6) planning and consultation, (7) taxation and social expenditure on development programmes, and (8) the effective governance of the environment. In Bebbington’s view, an understanding of these channels and how they intersect with broader political settlements and processes underscores the complex interface between resource extraction and inclusive development. To do this, we will first introduce each case.

### South Sudan

Oil is deeply enmeshed in the South Sudanese body politic, with the oil revenues accounting for more than 90% of the country’s exports (World Bank, 2022). Due to the long history of war evidenced by deep institutional incapacities and underdevelopment, oil stands as the only economic mainstay for this nascent republic (Shankleman, 2011; Johnson, 2012; Patey, 2014). South Sudan is governed through a centralised, presidential system with national institutions and resources, notably oil, kept under the tight control of a largely negotiated rather than elected presidency (Crisis Group, 2021). Its ten states plus three Administrative Areas are governed by weak local institutions that have limited oversight regarding oil revenue governance and management (Ajawin, 2024).

The oil-producing areas exist largely as enclaves of the President. Indeed, one of the Administrative Areas, the Ruweng Administrative Area (RAA), Unity State’s immediate neighbour, was reportedly carved out directly by the President in 2020 to establish his control over the oil resources (Small Arms Survey, 2021), though some observers have also held that

the carving out of Ruweng from Unity State reflected a longstanding separatist tendency dating back to 1905 (Longar, 2020). South Sudan is a typical case of the resource curse in the sense that much of its oil resources and incomes evade the state’s coffers (De Waal, 2014; Crisis Group, 2021).

Reportedly, oil revenues have constantly disappeared into thin air since South Sudanese independence in 2011. In most instances, accusations have been made against the institution of the presidency (De Waal, 2014), along with some hands-greasing at subnational levels, notably through the nominated state representatives, titled ‘chairmen’, at these levels (Muon, 2024). These figures are appointed by the central government ostensibly to ensure the equitable distribution of oil revenues in oil-producing areas. However, they are often seen by members of oil-producing communities as part of the state machinery designed to loot oil wealth on behalf of national leaders (Muon, 2024). For more than a decade, the country has faced a tumultuous path in leveraging its oil wealth for economic and social development. Instead of becoming a pillar of prosperity, the oil sector has been entangled in the country’s political conflicts, contributing to protracted instability and displacement (James, 2015; Ruei, 2018).

The country’s fragile state and institutional deficits have had an adverse effect on its oil resource governance. Its resource governance remains fragile, with conflict over oil revenues fueling unrest. Decentralisation efforts face challenges from a weak institutional framework, leading to elite domination and local conflicts. Despite some local initiatives, resource revenues have often perpetuated deep socioeconomic and political inequalities rather than fostering development, illustrating the risks of weak local governance structures. This development occurs in the face of burgeoning institutional and regulatory frameworks, including the Petroleum Act (2012), Petroleum Revenue Management Act (2013), and the most recent local content regulation Act of 2019, among others.

### Ghana

Ghana is a recent entrant in the hydrocarbon industry in comparison with South Sudan. The country only discovered petroleum in commercial quantities in June 2007 (BBC, [2007](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6766527.stm); Fosu, [2017](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Sw7xDQAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA137&dq=%27Ghana%27s+oil+profile%27&ots=fJgay31jlT&sig=eEp2YOBMzZ2bpr30B2fWGaMZ1Xg)) amidst national euphoria and expectations. The country’s President at the time, President John Kufuor, told the BBC that "Even without oil, we are doing so well…..But ‘With oil as a shot in the arm, we're going to fly." Equally impressed by the oil find, the IMF estimated that Ghana would harvest at least US$1 billion a year from its 10% stake in the sector, coupled with royalties and taxes (World Bank, 2009). Ghana had waited for too long to finally get its hands on oil, with the evidence of an oil search dating back to the 19th century based on the official records from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, Ghana’s environmental watchdog (EPA, 2011). In the 1970s, premature politically motivated announcements were made by Ghana’s then leaders - both Presidents Busia and Acheampong, an indication of long-established expectations tied to the hydrocarbon (Laryea, 2014). Three years following the successful discovery, Ghana first began its oil production in December 2010, a development that quickly accelerated the GDP growth from 7.9% in 2010 to 14.0% in 2011, an increase of 5.6% (IMF, 2011).

However, this impressive GDP addition would not be sustained in the succeeding years despite a sustained increase in the petroleum share as a percentage of overall revenues. As observed by Kwasi Fosu, it appears that the jubilation was rather premature given that Ghana’s fiscal problems got even worse (Fosu, 2017), a slap on President Kufuor’s face. Despite the country’s significant harvest from the oil revenues since 2011, it has not met the IMF’s projected US$1 billion per year estimates. Instead, Ghana has earned US$ $444.2 billion in 2011 and US$ $ 978.8 billion in 2014 (MOFEP, 2012; 2015), figures that demonstrate the volatility of the global oil prices and subsequent impacts on government revenues and resultant spending (Andrews and Siakwah, 2019, p. 22). Be that as it may, oil revenues are not the only way through which the resource-development nexus might be assessed.





As already stated, the focus of this paper is to examine the impact of oil resources on the broader national and local economy - i.e. how it ‘shapes the national political economy through its transformation of employment, energy, industry, environment, and social systems’ (Andrews and Siakwah, 2019, P. 22). To help assess this nexus, ISODEC (2014) conducted a study into the impact of oil on Ghana. It found that the key tangible impact of the petroleum resource on Ghana’s political economy is government oil revenues and the few employment opportunities that the sector provides (ISODEC, 2014). It is important to add that Ghana, like South Sudan, does not refine its crude oil domestically, and so employment opportunities tend to be limited.

To proactively respond to the resource curse, Ghana has commissioned a number of initiatives and institutions since 2011 - and they include (Nantogmah, 2014): (i) The Petroleum Revenue Management Act, Petroleum Commission Act, Local Content and Local Participation in Petroleum Activities Policy Framework, Petroleum Regulatory Authority, among others. On the policy space, Ghana deploys the Local Content framework with some reported strides. As reported by Andrews and Siakwah (2019, p. 22), there have been policy monitoring shortfalls.

‘Apart from the FPSO, which is a ship-shaped crude oil export facility, the petroleum midstream sector outlined in the local content policy (involving the storage, processing, and transportation of oil) is still at an early stage of development.’

Yet Ghana’s resource management matrix remains optimal in comparative terms. It is reportedly more transparent and inclusive in terms of revenue management frameworks, as shown in the petroleum revenue allocation chart below.



Additionally, Ghana has implemented policies promoting transparency and community participation, such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and the Petroleum Interest Accountability Committee (PIAC). The latter ensures that accountability and transparency measures are enhanced and complied with in line with the Petroleum Revenue Act of 2011 (see Fosu, 2017, p. 146). Decentralization reforms have empowered local governments, resulting in more inclusive resource management and reduced conflict (Andrews and Siakwah, 2019). However, capacity gaps still exist, emphasizing that strong local institutions are essential for good resource governance. As an example, the country’s competitive clientelist elections have ensured that politicians pursue short-run political aims, often channeling oil revenues into consumption to enhance electoral fortunes. This sits against the logic of targeting sectors that can transform the national economy. Such a zero-sum political bickering and electioneering is captured under the concept of the democratic curse, where electoral pressures do not create long-term investments (see Siakwah, 2016).

# Comparative Analyses

Before we delve into the specifics of the resource governance in the two countries, a presentation of the general characteristics of the two resource economies is ripe.

**Table 1: South Sudan and Ghana: General Characteristics**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **South Sudan** | **Ghana** | **SSA[[1]](#footnote-1)** |
| Area (km²) | 610,952 | 227,540 | - |
| Median Age | 18.7 | 21.3 | - |
| Urban Population % (2025) | 27.7 | 56.6 | - |
| Population (2011) | 10,288.11 | 26,095.09 | - |
| GDP growth - Annual % (Average): 2010-2015 | -39.5 | 7.25 | 2.8 (2023) |
| GDP per capita PPP 1/ (2015) | $1,080.1 | $1,721.7 | - |
| Linguistic fragmentation Index | 0.125 | 0.241 | - |
| Poverty line under $2.15US/daily (2017) | 67.3% | 25.2% | 36.7 (2019) |
| Gini index (2016) | 44.1 | 43.5 | - |
| Corruption Perception Index (2014-2024) | 12.27/100 | 43.1/100 | 32/100 |
| Political Stability & Absence of Violence/Terrorism/ (2023) | -2 | -0 | - |
| Fragility Index[[2]](#footnote-2) | 112.90/120 | 108th/120 | - |
| Governance Index (2023) | 19.0/100 | 62.2/100 | 49.3/100 |

1. $2.15/ US Dollars in 2016 constant prices
2. GDP per capita PPP 1/ (2015)
3. Ranking of 180 countries. Source: Transparency International
4. Fragility Index is drawn from the Fragile State Index.
5. Ranking of 54 African states. Source: MO Ibrahim Governance Index
6. – Represents unavailable data points for the SSA region
7. Resource Governance Index ranks countries on three key metrics: value realisation, revenue management and enabling environment. Source: Natural Resource Governance Institute

A cursory examination of the two resource economies’ general characteristics reveals some important points. From the macroeconomic perspectives, Ghana has sustained a higher GDP growth, averaging 7.25% between 2010 and 2015, while South Sudan’s economy depreciated to a -39.5. Meanwhile, poverty lines are higher in South Sudan (67.3%) than in Ghana (25.2%). On corruption, Ghana ranks comparatively higher (43%) than South Sudan (27%). On fragility, South Sudan is 4.9% more fragile than Ghana. On governance, Ghana ranks higher (62.2%) than South Sudan (19%) on the MO Ibrahim governance indices, which assess countries’ governance state on four key metrics: security and rule of law, participation, rights and inclusion, foundations for economic opportunity and human development.

**Table 2: South Sudan and Ghana: Oil Abundance-Dependence**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Country** | **South Sudan** | **Ghana** |
| Crude Oil production (Thousand barrels per day, average 2015-2024) | 150.6 | 158.9 |
| Proved Reserves (Billion Barrels) 2021 | 3750 | 660 |
| Net hydrocarbons exports (Million dollars 2025) (2023) | 576 | 5.13B |
| Number of exploratory oilwells (Average 1998-2008) | - | - |
| Net oil exports/Total exports (average 2015-2024) | 88% | (est.)15.5% |
| Oil revenues/Total revenues (average 2014-2015) | 98% | 1% (2015) |
| Non-oil exports/GDP (Ten last years available average) | Minimal | Significant |

As shown in Table 2 above, there are marked differences across the two economies. Despite having more proven reserves estimated at 3.7 billion barrels in 2021, South Sudan lags Ghana in terms of actual production, primarily due to an active conflict situation coupled with limited technical capacity to fully exploit its extractive sector. This can be seen in comparatively smaller net oil exports in 2023. Additionally, South Sudan has a higher net oil export as a percentage of total exports (88%) than Ghana (15%), an indication of a hydrocarbon dependency in the young nation. Such a picture is also true when it comes to its oil revenues as a percentage of total government revenues, which stands at 98%, while its counterpart, Ghana, stands at just 1% during the same period. Furthermore, South Sudan’s oil dependence is clear-cut when assessed from the non-oil exports to GDP ratio. Although data is unavailable across the two countries during the period, non-oil exports are indeed lower in South Sudan than they are in Ghana. These macro-level differentials have bearings on the subnational resource governance as we shall see below.

## Share with Sub-nationals and Public Finance

In both countries, the logic of revenue redistribution and allocation to subnational and public finances is expressed in the petroleum-related laws. South Sudan’s Petroleum Revenue Management Act (2013) requires theoretically that at least 5% to be allocated to the oil-producing regions – 3% for the oil-producing community while 2% to the oil-producing state. Similarly, Ghana’s petroleum laws and policies especially the Petroleum Revenue Management Act (PRMA, 2011) stipulates the need to prioritise accountable and equitable petroleum-related regional development.

### Legal Framework for Petroleum Revenue Management: Ghana vs. South Sudan

In Ghana, all oil receipts are disbursed into the Petroleum Holding Fund (PHF) at the Bank of Ghana as stipulated under the PRMA. Oil revenues consist of royalties, taxes, and proceeds from carried and participating interests under the national oil company, the Ghana National Petroleum Company, GNPC (Asante, [2016](https://pure.manchester.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/54586136/FULL_TEXT.PDF), p. 203). Once lodged, revenues are then paid to the consolidated funds (the national account) through the Annual Budget Funding Amount (ABFA) from which redistribution to other revenue channels occurs. ABFA is made up of 70% of all estimated oil revenue accruals for the year, after deductions for the operations of the GNPC. The remaining 30% is redistributed at a 70%-30% ratio, respectively, to two sovereign wealth funds – the Ghana Stabilization, which lays down rules safeguarding revenue shortfalls and the Ghana Heritage Fund, an endowment for the future once oil depletes (Asante, 2016, p. 204). This policy development creates a ripple effect where oil revenues are channelled into other sectors of the Ghanian economy which minimises the incidence of a curse as the table below demonstrates.

Table 3: Allocation of ABFA to priority areas (Millions of cedis): 2011-13



An analysis of the total 2011-2013 ABFA allocations for roads and other infrastructure (amounting to GHC832.12 million, as shown in Table 2) indicates that 35.3% (GHC293.56 million, as shown in Table 3) was allocated to other infrastructure projects such as energy, security, works and housing, education, water, health, railway, and water transport. Nearly two-thirds (64.7%, or GHC538.56 million) of the funds were directed towards road-related activities, including construction, rehabilitation, upgrading, and resurfacing (Armah-Attoh, 2015, p. 7).

Table 4: Allocation of ABFA to infrastructure project (millions of cedis): 2011-13



A closer look at the GHC293.56 million allocated to other infrastructure development shows that education, water, and health—three key social service areas identified as priorities by surveyed Ghanaians—received only about 5% of this total (as shown in Table 3). In 2011, all the funds allocated to roads and other infrastructure were actually spent solely on road projects. This indicates that, although the government has followed proper procedures and guidelines for using the ABFA, the focus has primarily been on oil and gas infrastructure, roads, and energy, leaving minimal funds for social sectors that are considered most important by the public (Armoh-Attoh, 2015).

In South Sudan, similar legal procedures and expectations exist. For example, the Petroleum Revenue Management Act (2013) foregrounds the importance of establishing what it calls the Petroleum Revenue Account through which oil revenues should theoretically be paid (PRMA, 2013, p. 4). Following this, the revenues are then disbursed to the Consolidated Funds through the National Budget Funding Account (NBFA). It equally speaks of the Revenue stabilization Fund as well as the Future Generation Fund. Furthermore, the Petroleum Revenue Management Act of 2013 establishes the framework for creating Community Development Committees (CDC) and a coordinating body called the Community Development Committees’ Coordination Forum (CDCCF).

The CDC operates at the county level, where it plans and manages the community funds, while the CDCCF oversees and provides guidance at the state level. County Legislative Councils, set up according to the 2009 Local Government Act, are responsible for forming the CDC and approving its projects and programs after they are presented by the CDC. The Act also authorizes county commissioners to nominate members to the CDC and submit these nominations to the County Legislative Councils for approval. The Act states that the members of the CDC should include representatives from farmers’ unions, trade chambers, civil society organizations, traditional authorities, religious groups, and groups representing women and youth. Yet in practice, none of this has been operationalised. As revealed by Atem ([2024](https://carijournals.org/journals/index.php/IJECOP/article/view/2426/2852)), Muon (2024) and Tiitmamer (2021), the management of South Sudan’s oil revenues is riddled with corrupt practices at the highest echelon. The sector is muddled in opaqueness and there is no accountability and transparency in terms of how much revenues have been collected and or how it has been used and for what purposes (Chol, [2016](https://www.jstor.org/stable/45341720?read-now=1)).

### Resource Governance

The figures below compare the two countries on the Resource Governance Index using 2017 as the base year.

#### South Sudan

Figure 1: South Sudan’s RGI and Component Scores (2017)

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Source: Natural Resource Governance Institute – NRGI (2017)

South Sudan’s petroleum sector scored 32/100 points in the 2017 RGI index, below the belt average. Such performance is attributed to a failing enabling environment occasioned by active conflicts and abuses primarily driven by contestations over the control of oil resources (NRGI, 2017). The Petroleum Act of 2012 set a satisfactory baseline for oil sector governance. However, active conflicts coupled with a declining monitoring safeguard have rendered the sector unenforceable. Consequently, performance in revenue management is reportedly weak. Additionally, performance in subnational revenue resource sharing, as assessed by rules set in the peace agreement (2015) and the transitional constitution (2011), is somewhat higher (54%). Furthermore, the national budgeting is reportedly poor despite disclosures in expenditure and resource revenues due to a failing fiscal rule implementation. Meanwhile, the disbursement of the Petroleum Funds set forth in the Petroleum Revenue Management Act (2013) is yet to be operationalised and was missing in the RGI metrics.

#### Ghana

Figure 2: Ghana’s RGI and Component Scores (2017)



Source: Natural Resource Governance Institute – NRGI (2017)

On the other hand, Ghana scored a satisfactory 67/100 in the 2017 RGI, making it the best performer in Sub-Saharan Africa. This performance was attributed to an enabling environment and better revenue management policy. The country’s sovereign wealth funds performed second best among the 34 funds assessed in the index. Additionally, Ghana’s Petroleum Revenue Management Act was reportedly transparent in allocating oil revenues between the national budget, national oil company and the two funds. However, has accumulated large budget deficits and borrowed hugely against future oil revenues, even though oil revenues presently comprised only 4% of total government revenues. This practice made Ghana’s petroleum revenue management rules foreign to those governing broader public finances.

Figure 3: South Sudan and Ghana's RGI scores (2017)

****

**Table 5: Governance/Institutional Trajectories and Prospects**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **South Sudan** | **Ghana** |
| Political settlements | Exclusive; militarised SPLM-dominated elite pact | Inclusive; stable electoral democracy |
| Institutional framework | Transitional Constitution (2011); Peace Agreements (2015; 2018), Petroleum laws, Local content framework | PIAC, PRMA (2011), Fiscal Responsibility Act (2018) |
| Revenue Transparency | Low; limited public access, politicised audit mechanisms | High; civil society access to oil revenue data |
| Community impact | High; displacement, insecurity and socioeconomic and social alienation in Upper Nile and Unity State | Mixed; coastal communities affected by offshore oil |
| Sustainability pathways | Low; few initiatives, nascent agricultural and civic initiatives | Medium; renewable energy investments, youth startups |
| Key challenges | Building institutions amid conflict and economic collapse | Maintaining oversight and diversification momentum |

**Table 6: Channels of Inclusion in Resource Governance: Ghana vs. South Sudan**

**(Bebbington et al, 2013)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Channel of Inclusion | Ghana | South Sudan |
| 1. Employment
 | Local content policies promote hiring of Ghanaians at both national and subnational levels; Increasing but limited high-skill employment. | Oil jobs are few; most high-skilled positions held by foreign workers. - Local employment is politicized and minimal. |
| 1. Effective Supply Chain
 | Local Content Act encourages Ghanaian-owned firms in supply chains; SME participation improving. | Procurement processes opaque. - Supply chains dominated by politically connected firms or foreign contractors. |
| 1. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
 | Tullow, ENI, others fund community development projects; CSR subject to monitoring by civil society. | CSR projects exist by the JOCs (e.g. Chinese and other Asian firms) but are sporadic and poorly documented; Often used to pacify elites rather than engage communities. |
| 1. Ownership (private)
 | Domestic firms allowed equity participation; Some Ghanaians hold stakes in oil blocks. | Oil sector dominated by joint ventures with foreign companies; South Sudanese ownership nearly absent with local elites taking lion’s share |
| 1. Public Ownership (state participation)
 | GNPC holds equity in oil blocks and manages national interests; Strong parliamentary oversight. | Nilepet is the national oil company but is poorly managed, lacks autonomy, and is used for elite rent-seeking. |
| 1. Planning and Consultation
 | Consultative processes through Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and stakeholder forums; Community hearings conducted before exploration. | Planning is top-down and militarized; Communities in oil areas (e.g., Unity) rarely consulted before oil activities. |
| 1. Taxation and Social Expenditure
 | Petroleum revenue invested in education, health, and infrastructure via PRMA; PIAC reports publicly track spending. | Oil revenue used primarily for recurrent and military spending (Jason, 2014); Lack of transparency and tracking of oil-funded expenditures. |
| 1. Environmental Governance
 | EPA monitors oil-related pollution though environmental curse seemingly thrives; Offshore drilling reduces environmental conflict with land users. | Widespread environmental degradation in oil areas; No strong environmental regulation or remediation mechanisms. |

# Findings and Presentation

The analysis reveals that decentralization can foster economic transformation but only when local institutions are robust, transparent, and accountable. Weak governance and elite capture at the national level often exacerbate inequalities and conflicts at the subnational level, regardless of resource abundance. Successful cases tend to share strong institutional capacity, community engagement, and clear revenue-sharing mechanisms.

As highlighted by Bebbington et al.’s (2013) eight channels of inclusion, resource-led development relies on a broader aspect of sustainable development. These channels contribute to—or undermine—social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

## 1. Employment

In Ghana, local content policies, including the Petroleum Commission’s mandates, have led to modest employment of local Ghanaians, especially in technical and support services (Andrews and Siakwah, 2019). Though high-skill jobs remain limited, the pathway to employment fosters human capital development, a key pillar of sustainable growth. In South Sudan, the oil industry provides very few jobs to local citizens, especially in oil-pumping regions. The available high-skill roles are dominated by foreign technicians, while local hiring is informal and often politicised (Muon, 2024). This excludes the population from benefits, reinforcing dependency and grievance, and undercuts long-term socio-economic sustainability.

## 2**.** Effective Supply Chains

In Ghana, the Local Content Act (2013) actively encourages and supports Ghanaian SMEs to integrate into oil supply chains (Ablo and Otchere-Darko, [2022](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-83051-9_10#citeas)). Though such remains to be fully utilised, it stimulates domestic entrepreneurship, strengthens forward/backwards linkages, and fosters a broader industrial base. In South Sudan, local businesses are largely excluded from supply chains, which are dominated by foreign or politically connected elites. The result is weak domestic industrial growth and minimal economic spillover, particularly at the subnational level.

## 3. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

In Ghana, oil companies implement CSR projects in health, education, and infrastructure, particularly in the Western Region. These are monitored by a stronger parliamentary oversight and a competent civil society, giving CSR a measure of public legitimacy (Andrews and Siakwah, 2019). In South Sudan, CSR is sporadic and often used as elite pacification or military appeasement in areas with stronger military leadership. Communities receive few tangible benefits, and there is little transparency or consultation at the subnational level. Moreover, existing CSR activities are poorly structured and lack sustainability due to limited oversight.

## 4. Ownership (Private Participation)

In Ghana, Ghanaians and local firms are allowed to own shares in oil blocks, though capital limitations remain a barrier. Nevertheless, this opens space for economic empowerment and domestic investment. Although this extends to South Sudan at least in theory, oil concessions are dominated by foreign firms, mainly from China and Malaysia. South Sudanese citizens or firms have no ownership stake, and the public is unaware of contract terms.

## 5. Public Ownership

In Ghana, the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC) holds state equity in petroleum projects and operates with some public oversight. Though not free from politicization, it is relatively professionalized. In South Sudan, the operation of Nilepet, the state oil company, is opaque, militarised, and used for rent extraction by elites. It lacks the financial or technical capacity to act as a developmental agent (Muon, 2024; Gibb, [2018](https://policycommons.net/artifacts/1443776/the-nexus-between-oil-and-conflict-in-south-sudan/2075509/)).

## 6. Planning and Consultation

Environmental and social impact assessments (ESIAs) in Ghana are mandated before oil projects begin. Communities are consulted, and parliamentary debates precede major resource decisions. In South Sudan, oil operations often begin without community consent or environmental safeguards. Even if they do, such promises are never upheld by the oil companies due to limited state oversight. Planning is top-down, tied to military interests, and excludes affected populations who live in the vicinity of oilfields.

## 7. Taxation and Social Expenditure

Through the Petroleum Revenue Management Act (2011), oil revenues fund health, education, and infrastructure at Ghana’s subnational level. The Public Interest and Accountability Committee (PIAC) tracks expenditures and reports annually. At the same time, the Fiscal Responsibility Act (2018), a legal framework set up to overcome fiscal challenges during electoral cycles, ensures that the overall fiscal balance does not exceed a 5% cap of the gross GDP for that year (World Bank, [2019](https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/africacan/will-procyclicality-override-ghanas-new-fiscal-responsibility-law)). In South Sudan, oil revenue constitutes over 90% of the national budget but is spent mainly on security, military salaries, and elite rent-seeking (Jason, 2014). There is little to no public expenditure tracking or developmental budgeting.

## 8. Environmental Governance

In Ghana, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) monitors offshore drilling impacts. Though enforcement gaps exist, institutional oversight exists, and environmental incidents are subject to public scrutiny. In South Sudan, oil operations have caused severe environmental degradation in Unity and Upper Nile States, including water pollution and soil toxicity (Majok, [2013](https://repository.up.ac.za/items/f65e70e4-a935-4610-b69f-712082b6412a); Rong, 2023; Saturlino, [2023](https://cadmus.eui.eu/entities/publication/edf61c3a-f503-5d74-b0b6-3ddfad6568ce)). There is no credible regulatory enforcement or environmental justice mechanism.

# **Discussion**

The oil sector serves as a critical lens through which to examine the divergent development trajectories of Ghana and South Sudan, illustrating how governance, inclusion, and economic strategy shape outcomes in resource-rich yet fragile contexts.

1. Ghana’s relatively inclusive approach to oil sector management has contributed to stability and gradual diversification, while South Sudan’s extractive and elite-dominated model has exacerbated fragility and inequality.

2. Ghana has leveraged its oil sector to create jobs and build local capacity, particularly through local content policies that encourage skills transfer and supplier linkages. This has supported broader structural transformation, even if progress remains slow. In contrast, South Sudan’s oil industry remains enclave-based, offering few employment opportunities for locals and reinforcing an exclusionary economy that fuels instability.

3. In Ghana, CSR initiatives in the oil sector—such as investments in education, health, and infrastructure—complement state efforts, mitigating some of the negative externalities of extraction. South Sudan’s oil-dependent economy, however, sees CSR as largely performative, with minimal developmental impact. This neglect breeds resentment in oil-producing regions, where environmental damage and displacement go unaddressed.

4. Ghana’s use of public ownership (e.g., through the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation) ensures that oil revenues are partially reinvested in public goods, fostering intergenerational equity. South Sudan’s oil wealth, however, is captured by a narrow elite, with little trickle-down effect. This elite consolidation deepens dependency on external actors and undermines long-term wealth creation.

5. Ghana’s relatively transparent oil revenue management, including mechanisms like the Petroleum Revenue Management Act and stakeholder consultations, helps build public trust and reduce grievances. South Sudan’s opaque and centralized control over oil resources fuels communal conflicts, particularly in oil-rich regions like Unity and Upper Nile, where marginalized communities see little benefit from extraction.

6. Ghana’s oil taxation system, though imperfect, contributes to national revenue and funds development priorities, enhancing state legitimacy. South Sudan’s oil revenues, however, are poorly managed, often diverted for elite patronage rather than public services, exacerbating inequality and undermining social cohesion.

7. Ghana’s offshore oil production reduces land-use conflicts, though risks remain. Environmental safeguards and compensation mechanisms help mitigate harm to coastal communities. In South Sudan, rampant pollution, flaring, and land degradation—particularly in the oil-rich wetlands—have devastated livelihoods, displacing farmers and pastoralists and eroding social resilience.

# **Conclusion**

The comparative analysis of Ghana and South Sudan's oil sectors demonstrates how governance structures determine whether resource wealth drives sustainable development or exacerbates fragility. While Ghana's inclusive approach to local content, revenue transparency and participatory governance has mitigated the resource curse's worst effects, South Sudan's extractive elite model has entrenched inequality and conflict. These findings contribute to resource federalism debates by showing how decentralized, participatory systems enhance equity compared to centralized control that breeds instability. The study also advances sustainable development discourse by proving that environmental and social safeguards - like Ghana's offshore regulations and CSR-linked investments - are fundamental to stability rather than secondary concerns.

This study's conclusions, while insightful, face limitations including data gaps on South Sudan's opaque oil finances and informal elite networks.

# **Policy Recommendations**

Moving forward, policymakers should prioritize four key interventions:

* First, strengthening local content and employment policies to broaden economic opportunities from oil wealth.
* Second, enforcing transparent revenue management systems modeled after Ghana's Petroleum Revenue Management Act to build public trust.
* Third, integrating CSR initiatives with national development planning to ensure corporate investments address real community needs.
* Fourth, implementing robust environmental regulations to prevent the ecological damage and displacement seen in South Sudan's oil regions.

## **Future Research Direction**

Future research should examine international actors' influence on domestic resource governance, conduct comparative studies of other oil-dependent African states, and assess renewable energy transitions' impact on petro-states like South Sudan. Ghana's model, while relatively successful, also warrants deeper scrutiny of its local content implementation challenges and environmental oversight shortcomings. Ultimately, these cases prove that natural resources are neither inherently cursed nor blessed - their developmental impact depends entirely on the governance frameworks managing them. Breaking the fragility cycle requires prioritizing inclusive institutions, equitable redistribution and environmental stewardship to transform oil wealth into sustainable progress.

# **Acknowledgement**

This research has been made possible through funding from my department. I acknowledge their financial support to enable me to produce and present this work.

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1. SSA means the Sub-Saharan African Countries [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [Fragile States Index](https://fragilestatesindex.org/global-data/) measures the degree of a country’s fragility on a 12-point indicators -comprising of security apparatus, human rights, economic health etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)