

UNDER THE SURFACE

Corporate Social Responsibility in Gold Mining: The Role of Companies and the Redrafting of Land Rights in Kordofan.

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Prelude

The research and writing of this paper were completed in early 2023, before the outbreak of the Sudanese war in April 2023. Its publication was delayed due to subsequent developments. Because the topic remains highly relevant to the post-war reality, the paper was reviewed and its content condensed into a format closer to a report, as an attempt to understand the dynamics of the conflict and the positions of several groups. This does not preclude publishing the full paper at a later stage.

The report was drafted on the basis of several field visits, some of which focused on examining the experience of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Kordofan. These visits were supported by various forms of assistance from the Arab Council for the Social Sciences, as part of receiving an award to write a paper on this subject. The research attempts to center issues of resource management and land ownership as deeply intertwined with both historical and current conflicts, and require meaningful integration into public discussions in order to understand contemporary realities. Drawing on lessons from different contexts is essential, as these questions form a fundamental entry point toward achieving justice and social peace.

All photos included in this report were taken by the author at different times during fieldwork in mining sites.

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Executive Summary

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies of gold-mining production in Sudan offer an important and revealing lens through which to view the broader structural and political transformations in the country. By tracing the successive stages of the CSR experience, the contours of these structural and political shifts, especially after the December 2018 Revolution, become clear. This study demonstrates the significance of CSR policies as an expression of the state's turn toward market-oriented policies, reflecting a broader regional and global transformation that followed the era of developmental states up to the 1970s and the subsequent shifts that came after.

In Sudan, these transformations occur at a time when the country is experiencing multiple economic and political crises where CSR plays a pivotal role within neoliberal restructuring policies for local development in production areas; policies that, especially after the revolution, claim to aim at eliminating developmental disparities between the periphery and the center, which gives CSR greater theoretical and practical significance. This study aims to trace the impact of structural and political transformations in Sudan, particularly after the December 2018 Revolution, on the CSR experience of gold-mining companies in the country. The paper reviews the CSR practices of gold-mining companies in the three Kordofan states (North, South and West) during the period 2017–2022 as a case study. It draws on continuous fieldwork conducted over several years (2019–2022) across the three Kordofan states, while also situating these findings within the broader national and sectoral transformations.

In Sudan, the CSR experience began as voluntary contributions made by mining companies to local communities, in line with the commonly accepted definition of CSR in the mining sector and other sectors in Sudan. Although the government encouraged these contributions through tax exemptions, they lacked transparency. The second phase, after 2019, witnessed a significant structural shift where 4% of total gold production was allocated to communities in the form of a tax with a specific purpose and a defined level of governance. However, centralized state administrative structures continued to maintain control over CSR funds and direct them toward political purposes rather than community needs. A third phase emerged at the end of 2021, when the 4% allocated for CSR was transferred to agreed-upon local accounts, to be spent directly on development by the community. Yet this move away from centralized management was accompanied by numerous gaps that rendered the change largely superficial. These gaps included the absence of a clear definition of the “target community”—whether it referred to the site of production, the site of processing, the locality, the administrative unit, the village, or the social group—as well as unresolved questions concerning representation, how development priorities should be determined, and which authorities could be appealed to for oversight. These questions and gaps created a state of fluidity, in which actual policies were shaped by on-the-ground practices and local power balances. All of this ultimately resulted in the state failing to distribute the 4% share to production areas in any of the assessment years covered by the study. Instead, these shares were allocated on the basis of political appeasement.

This study reveals the profound and intertwined effects of the CSR experience at three levels: federal, state, and local.

- **At the federal level**, the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company represented a model of a “state within a state,” continuing patterns seen in earlier institutions such as the Dams Implementation Unit. This structure facilitated the use of gold revenues to serve political objectives aligned with the agenda of the ruling regime. CSR funds became one of the most important resources for achieving the regime’s political goals.
- **At the state level**, CSR highlighted the contradictions between the priorities of the central authority—which held decision-making power—and the states, which carried the responsibilities of service provision. These contradictions drove states such as North and South Kordofan to develop financial policies aimed at gaining more autonomy over mining revenues during the final years of the Bashir regime and after the revolution. The tensions escalated to the point that all state governors, during meetings of the Council of States, objected to the interventions of the central administration represented by the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company.
- **At the local level**, CSR lacked informed community participation. Until 2019, distribution was based on individuals aligned with authorities; after the revolution, state institutions were unable to interact effectively with the newly elected grassroots committees and replaced them with traditional administrations. This tied access to revenues to land ownership, relying on customary tenure as the basis for revenue allocation. As a result, tribal conflicts intensified at the local level, especially amid central interventions and the proliferation of competing political and military power centers. All of this led to sharp political and military divisions within communities, aligned with different centers of power.

The study points to the challenges associated with implementing social responsibility policies and their ability to achieve pro-poor development according to its determinants, which include: a comprehensive “pro-poor” developmental vision; the redistribution of resources; an administratively and financially effective state apparatus; and achieving the widest possible popular participation. The paper concludes that the first determinant is absent, namely, the absence of an overall developmental vision, and the lack of a link between local development issues and local CSR projects. There is also no harmony between projects at different levels of the state due to the absence of transparency and accountability, the spread of corruption, as well as structural and administrative challenges. In response, locally elected committees put forward a comprehensive vision for radically restructuring mining, driven by the need to address the negative impacts of mining operations. However, their efforts clashed with attempts by the central government to maintain the same structures and actors. This led the central authority to remove the elected committees and rely instead on customary administration, which in turn led to a shift and reduction in popular participation, a re-concentration of resources in the hands of customary leaders, and the fuelling of local disputes over those resources. As a result, the CSR experience of gold-mining companies did not achieve any of the elements of pro-poor development hoped by local communities. Instead, it turned into a tool for local conflicts and for expanding armed tribal alliances with military authorities and mining companies. All of this culminated in the formation of corporate “mini-states” with their own developmental and security policies, which in turn influenced the map of tribal and military alliances even after the outbreak of war on 15 April 2023.

We conclude that land and resource management policies played a decisive role in determining the allegiances of different groups during the Sudanese war. For example, in North Kordofan, groups from the Kababish aligned with the Rapid Support Forces, contrary to their local alliances and their historical proximity to the state apparatus. These positions are linked to gold mining, as the Kababish aligned with the Rapid Support Forces sought to establish alternative mining markets in their competition with the Kawahla, who controlled CSR revenues. Meanwhile, the Rapid Support Forces used the needs of Kababish groups to strengthen their military presence by constructing camps and airstrips in their areas. Similarly, most Hawazma (Dar Jama) groups in Kadugli sided with the armed forces, while in Dilling and the areas to its south, most Hawazma groups aligned with the Rapid Support Forces. The majority of the Hamar tribes also supported the Sudanese armed forces in West Kordofan, while groups such as the Misseriya were divided and fought among themselves. The same contradictions appeared in the fighting between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement over control of Kadugli, compared to the alignment of some of its members in defending Dilling. This variation cannot be understood without considering land ownership and resource management, whether oil or gold mining, where most landowning groups sided with the armed forces, while rival groups sought to use the Rapid Support Forces as a tool to shift the local balance of power. These findings challenge narratives that frame the ongoing war as a conflict involving or targeting pastoralist or Arab groups, and they confirm that it is impossible to understand or address current conflicts in the medium or long term without considering local contradictions and competition over resources.

All of this highlights the need to study and evaluate land and resource management policies as a whole. Within this context, CSR stands out as particularly important because of its role in local competition over resources. We also note the absence of similar competition over zakat budgets under social protection policies, which amount to 2.5% of revenues, for example. An assessment of this experience, and a review of the policies and structures connected to it, reveal a close relationship with the broader structural and political transformations in Sudan.

The CSR experience highlights an urgent need to reformulate overall mining policy and structures, including a clear definition of CSR and the distinction between CSR and taxation, the importance of adopting laws and regulations consistent with these definitions and policies, and identifying the target groups and locations, with priority given to local development issues by eliminating poverty and its causes through the equitable redistribution of resources. All of this requires the establishment of effective and transparent state institutions that support popular participation and allow for continuous evaluation and review, something that cannot be achieved without centering development as a responsibility of the state, which in turn requires a comprehensive review of the developmental approach and the removal of military actors from the mining sector. This entire sequence requires political will to redirect resources toward stability, local development, and the sustainable contribution of natural resources.

Development and Corporate Social Responsibility

With the significant expansion of the gold mining sector in Sudan, CSR policies for gold-mining companies were introduced as a developmental tool heavily promoted as contributing to addressing local development issues with popular participation. More significantly, after the December 2018 Revolution that overthrew the political regime in April 2019, CSR was proposed as an antidote to the policy of marginalisation and developmental inequality. Despite the widespread debate surrounding CSR policies, regarding their effectiveness in achieving local development and meaningful community participation, and their associated lack transparency and their contribution to granting moral and political legitimacy to mining activities, which are often accompanied by serious violations and allegations of corruption, corporate social responsibility has not yet received sufficient research attention. The discussion has been limited to a small number of articles that address specific cases of financial and administrative achievements or abuses, without shedding light on the issue in a comprehensive manner which addresses the nature and impact of CSR within the context of structural transformations and the resulting political role, especially during a period of rapid and complex changes.

Based on these discussions, the paper focuses on raising questions about the developmental role of the non-renewable resource of gold, comparing five consecutive years that witnessed different governments and successive political changes in a complex Sudanese context marked by long-standing armed conflicts. In light of this complexity, various governments, particularly after the December 2018 Revolution adopted CSR as a key tool for addressing important development issues. This came after a major change in the concept, transforming it from voluntary contributions by gold-mining companies to allocating 4% of total production for the development of production areas, representing a new chapter yet to be adequately studied. This experiment was promoted as an important tool for eliminating developmental disparities between the center and production areas, as a practical response to center-periphery theory popular in Sudanese discourse. This coincided with the continuing and worsening economic crisis since 2011, following the establishment of South Sudan and the loss of oil revenues, which at the time represented 90% of foreign-exchange sources.

To understand the relationship between CSR, development issues, and political developments in Sudan it is important to note the significant shift in the developmental role of the nation-state in many countries of the region after independence, a role that declined in various ways beginning in the 1970s with the retreat of the state's function in all spheres.¹ The tendency to link development and progress to the nation-state declined in many African countries, and a shift toward market policies took place in different forms as part of a global phenomenon.^{2 3} Countries that implemented these policies without taking their specific realities into account became more vulnerable to tensions and a deterioration in the living conditions of their citizens, particularly in the absence of strategic industrial policies focused on strengthening local productive capacity.⁴ All these factors contributed significantly to the worsening of economic and social conditions, the decline of the middle class, the spread of unemployment and poverty, and the creation of the conditions for popular uprisings.⁵

¹Amin, S. (2016). Egypt: Failed emergence, conniving capitalism, fall of the Muslim brothers— A possible popular alternative. *Development Challenges and Solutions After the Arab Spring*, 19–38.

²Mkandawire, T. (2001). Thinking about developmental states in Africa. *Cambridge journal of economics*, 25(3), 289–314.

³Ali, N. G. (2010). Interrogating the concept of the developmental state in southern Africa: what's power got to do with it?. In *Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association*. Montreal: Concordia University, June.

⁴Chang, H. J., & Andreoni, A. (2021). Bringing production back into development: An introduction. *The European journal of development research*, 33, 165–178.

⁵Amin, S. (2016). Egypt: Failed emergence, conniving capitalism, fall of the Muslim brothers— A possible popular alternative. *Development Challenges and Solutions After the Arab Spring*, 19–38.

This transformation is also understood as a phase of dismantling the welfare state.⁶ With the expanded role of the private sector and the erosion of the state's role, CSR concepts have expanded as a compensatory development tool and as a mechanism for legitimizing the shift toward market policies. According to this view, these policies take on greater importance as one of the fundamental tools within these political and structural transformations. With this brief introduction, we would like to discuss the applications of the Sudanese experience in the gold-mining sector as part of these transformations. This may also help in understanding the relationship between development policies and their applications in the context of political transition and ongoing conflicts, leading⁵ up to the devastating war in 15 April 2023.

Defining Corporate Social Responsibility

There are many definitions of CSR, which vary according to the nature of the activity, the location, and the theoretical framework on which the definition is based. However, the basic elements in the various definitions are limited to the commitment of companies or institutions to society, stakeholder engagement, improving the image and reputation of companies, economic development, ethical business practices, compliance with the law, voluntarism, human rights, environmental protection, transparency, and accountability.⁷

There is also a wealth of literature that sets out a general framework for CSR, such as the International Organization for Standardization's ISO 26000 standard on CSR, published in 2010. The standard outlines general principles including transparency, ethical behaviour, respect for the interests of relevant parties, respect for rules and laws, respect for international norms of behaviour, and respect for human rights. It identifies seven key subjects: governance, human rights, sound labour practices, environmental protection, fair operating practices, respect for consumer issues, and finally community involvement and development.⁸

In addition to the Bank World and the European Union,⁹ CSR has also been widely promoted within the United Nations Global Compact, which aims to promote market-oriented policy by adopting humanitarian values and principles, foremost among them CSR, announced by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in 1999.¹⁰ Many regional and international bodies widely adopted this concept, set standards for it, both regional and international, and encouraged its adoption in a manner that establishes it as one of the policies closely associated with the transition toward opening production and trade activities to private-sector enterprises, including regional and global entities. Sudan is not excluded from this trend.

In Sudan, there are multiple definitions across sectors such as oil, banking, and productive companies, but here we focus on the definition of CSR within the mining sector by overseeing institutions, foremost among them the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company (SMRC). The SMRC defines CSR as having to include basic determinants, including playing a long-term developmental role that achieves sustainable development; that projects should be identified through community participation and aligned with state plans at the state and local levels; and that they should be consistent with SMRC policies, including employing people from production areas and redistributing resources to them in order to achieve the slogan of promoting CSR and forming public opinion supportive of the mining sector.¹¹

6 Pierson, P. (1994). Dismantling the welfare state: Reagan, Thatcher and the politics of retrenchment. Cambridge University Press.

7 Hamidu, A., Haron, M., & Amran, A. (2015). Corporate social responsibility: A review on definitions, core characteristics and theoretical perspectives. Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 6(4), 83–95.

8 For more information about the standard, it can be reviewed through the following link: <https://www.iso.org/fr/standard/42546.html>

9 Additional information and an overview of some developments can be found through the following link: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/fr/731511468325284128/pdf/661030BRI0Box365730B00PUBLIC00PSO0240CSR.pdf>

10 More information can be accessed through the following link: <https://shorturl.at/j3vYj>

11 SMRC 2022, a paper presented at the First Arab–African Conference on Corporate Social Responsibility for Child Rights, Khartoum, November 2022.

The Sudanese experience differs from that of most countries in the world, as there is no form of compensation for those affected by mining activities, regardless of the scale of the harm. Despite the criticism directed at compensation policies and their shortcomings, there are examples elsewhere of collective and individual compensation in the form of land, financial assistance, and in-kind support that continues for several years, as in Burkina Faso¹², or where compensation imposed under the country's constitution and mining laws, in Ghana;¹³ and compensation for diseases resulting from mining, in South Africa. Therefore, the diversity and obligatory nature of compensation mechanisms elsewhere stands in contrast to their complete absence in Sudan, which established a non-recognition of the impacts on local populations and environments. This is reflected in CSR policy, as it is the only form that responds to local development needs, while also indirectly encompassing compensation and redress for the consequences of gold-mining impact.¹⁴

¹² Engels, B. (2018). Nothing will be as before: Shifting political opportunity structures in protests against gold mining in Burkina Faso. *The Extractive Industries and Society*, 5(2), 354–362.

¹³ Bugri, J., & Kumi, S. (2018). Dynamics of community perceptions, common resources and compensation practices in mining: the case of Newmont Ghana Gold Ltd at Ahafo. *International Journal of the Commons*, 12(1).

¹⁴ Ehrlich, R. (2012). A century of miners' compensation in South Africa. *American journal of industrial medicine*, 55(6), 560–569.

Study Methodology

The paper focuses on tracking the expansion of mining activities in conjunction with changes in CSR, against a backdrop changes in the Sudanese political system through a peaceful popular revolution that overthrew a kleptocratic regime in April 2019, one that relied on gold to maintain its rule. This was followed by the formation of a civilian transitional government whose task was to place Sudan on the path toward democracy and to achieve the revolution's slogans of freedom, peace, and justice. However, it was overthrown by a military coup on 25 October 2021, which culminated in the war which erupted on 15 April 2023 between the main military actors of the coup. CSR policies and their local implications were tracked in the three Kordofan states, characterised by differences in environmental conditions, political stability, systems of governance, the degree of influence of armed conflicts, and military intervention in issues of civil governance and resource management.¹⁵ This was done while taking into account the differing conditions of Sudan's states, which are largely reflected in these three, providing an opportunity to learn about the experience of CSR in different locations, environments, and political systems.



"May 2022, an interview with a number of workers and leaders in the Hajirat market / Kadugli / South Kordofan."

The significance of the period under review (2017–2022) stems from developments in parallel with sharp political shifts, reflected in CSR policies. Through the lens of CSR, we can also look at the changes in the mining sector (one of Sudan's largest productive sector), to understand part of the transformations taking place in Sudan during that period. This includes looking at the nature of development and its discourse under different political systems through the framework of pro-poor development,¹⁶ taking into account the ideological and structural importance of development¹⁷ and the extent to which it is able to fulfil these conditions, summarise as the ability to;

/1 serve the overall developmental vision that is "pro-poor"; /2 redistribute resources; /3 rely on an administratively and financially effective state apparatus; and /4 achieve the widest possible popular participation.

¹⁵ UNEP, "Sudan First State of Environment and Outlook Report," 2020 available at

Sudan First State of Environment and Outlook Report 2020 | UNEP – UN Environment Programme

¹⁶ Saad-Filho, A. (2016). Transcending neoliberalism through pro-poor and democratic economic development strategies. Development challenges and

¹⁷ solutions after the Arab Spring, 74–93.

Mkandawire, T. (2001). Thinking about developmental states in Africa. Cambridge journal of economics, 25(3), 289–314.

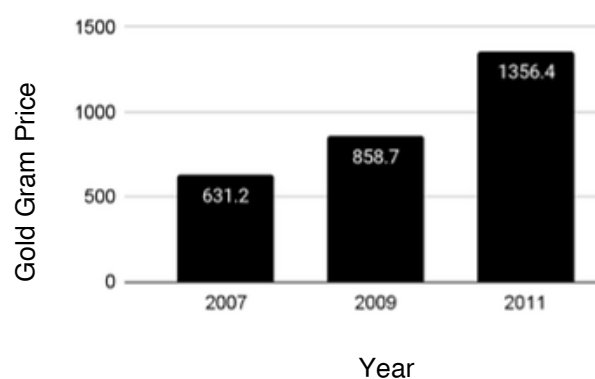
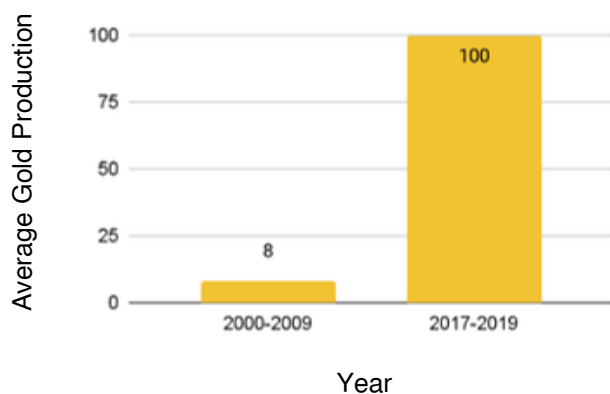
To carry out this task, field visits were conducted to North and South Kordofan States¹⁸, where interviews, focus group discussions, and visits to mining-related sites—including mining markets—were undertaken. The interviews included representatives of local communities; customary administration; state administrators affiliated with the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company; administrators from the Geological Research Authority; executive officials in state governments; state governors; the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Agriculture; the Ministry of Animal Resources; the Ministry of Minerals, state mining administrations; the Ministry of Finance; representatives of mining companies; mining workers; representatives of political, professional, and advocacy entities and alliances; resistance committees; specialists and researchers; and administrators of research centres, in addition to mining market administrations.

¹⁸ North Kordofan was visited in March for a period of one week. Afterwards, in May and June, South and North Kordofan were visited for two consecutive weeks.

Key Developments in Sudan's Gold Mining Sector

Sudan has been known for gold mining since ancient times, as evidenced by archaeological finds and the remarkable development of mining techniques, considered advanced by today's standards.¹⁹ In the 19th century, gold mining was one of the main reasons for colonial expansion into Sudan. The Northern State witnessed numerous mining activities at that time, in addition to Kordofan, Blue Nile, the Red Sea, and other states. Interestingly, there was no significant development in production under colonial rule for many reasons, and most sites ceased operations under national governments after independence. In 2011, the secession of South Sudan led to Sudan losing 75% of its share of oil, which represented 90% of its foreign exchange sources. This resulted in the urgent need to search for new budgetary resources to cover the demand for foreign currency.²⁰

This economic crisis caused by the secession of South Sudan coincided with a rise in global gold prices. The price of an ounce of gold rose from \$272.8 in January 2000 to \$631.2 in January 2007, then to \$858.7 in January 2009, and then to \$1,356.4 in January 2011.²¹ This rapid increase led to a surge in unregulated mining by citizens in various locations across the private and public sectors. The decline of several sectors due to the economic crisis and weak infrastructure also contributed to an increase in gold mining in the hope of quick returns. The state encouraged this trend to fill the foreign currency deficit without prior planning, which created a crisis as the failure to link production expansion to sustainable development plans increased the negative effects of mining. This was accompanied by a rise in production from an average of 8 tonnes in the period 2000–2009 to an average of about 100 tonnes between 2017 and 2019, increasing the importance of the mining sector at all levels and reliance on the sector undertake a greater development role. This was not without challenges related to the state's ability to control gold resources and attempts by various military, traditional, and civilian actors to dominate them, alongside investors seeking to increase their profits through production, trade, and possibly smuggling. In addition to other challenges associated with mining activity related to the overall management of resources and the resulting environmental, social, and economic impacts.



19 Mohamed Salah Abdelrahman, 2018, The Price of Gold: The Environmental and Social Cost of Mining, Jazeera Al-Ward Library, Cairo.

20 Chevrillon-Guibert, R. (2016). The gold boom in Sudan. Challenges and opportunities for national players. International Development Policy 7.1. DOI 10.4000/poldev.2258.

21 World Gold Council. Retrieved 19th February 2018. Data from 1970 to 2018. In Salah, A.M. (2018). *aṭr t'dīn al-qhb 'lī al-bīrī fī ṣwārdī wālmnāṭq al-mḡāūrī*. [The environmental effect of mining in Sawarda and the surrounding areas]. Six-Party Committee for Environmental Protection and Anti-Gold Mining.

Among these challenges was local development, which is a long-standing issue. The contradiction becomes clear when considering the discrepancy between the centralised collection of revenues – including CSR and taxes – and the decentralised/local tasks of development. Here we find that CSR began in 2012, and the state established mechanisms to manage it by forming a central government body to regulate this process, as part of a set of tasks focused on centrally collecting revenues and redistributing them. This took place through the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company in 2014, after which regulations were drafted to link CSR to the state's overall policies in the mining sector in a centralised manner, creating a relationship in which priorities were set from the top of the state rather than from the base of the administrative and social hierarchy.²² Factors which exacerbated this contradiction was the developmental disparity in Sudan and the existence of areas where conflicts continue, rooted deeply in the structure of the state and society over long periods.²³ Added to the issue of governance levels is the fact that CSR policy in the mining sector was introduced to serve the expansion of mining and give it legitimacy, not for the purpose of achieving local development or even reaching an integrated participatory process. This contradiction between local responsibilities and central powers and priorities affected both development issues and mining.

As discussed above, the definition of CSR in Sudan is based on the assumption that private institutions depend on a good reputation to achieve more profit, which motivates them to improve their performance and their relationship with society. However, when looking at developments in the mining sector, we find that more than 81% of production is carried out through artisanal mining, with the remaining percentage produced by local companies—most of which operate in mining waste (producing around 11%)—in addition to some production companies, including international companies operating in Sudan despite the economic embargo due to the country's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism.²⁴ The scale of artisanal mining and the unique nature of local and international companies mean that they are not particularly concerned about their reputation, especially since they produce gold that regional and global markets compete for without sufficient scrutiny of its sources. Therefore, the assumption that increased profits encourage a good reputation does not hold in a business environment where corruption, lack of accountability, and lack of transparency are widespread, and built into the profit making mechanism.

Developments in Sudan's CSR Policies

The view of CSR policies varies among many stakeholders—especially when considering the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company as a state-owned company mandated by the state, and on the other hand local communities, mining workers, local governments, and mining companies. Given the importance of the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company as the official body responsible for formulating CSR policies and monitoring their implementation, we present its vision and assessment of CSR (see table in the appendices), as it represents the official position of the Sudanese government. The following figure illustrates the nature of CSR policies and their progression;

²² The establishment of the company at the federal level was intended to strengthen centralized control over managing resource revenues and directing them in ways that served the interests of the government at the time. It was also linked to a recommendation and endorsement within the restructuring program proposed by the IMF in 2011 and 2012. This has had negative implications for development processes, which require broad popular participation. More details can be found in the IMF report, which praised the response to the establishment of the company in 2014. The report is available at: <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2014/cr14364.pdf>

²³ Armed conflicts in Sudan have persisted for decades as a result of unbalanced development policies, centralized control over natural resources, the imposition of policies on peripheral and production regions, and the exclusion of these areas from political representation. These dynamics have fueled conflicts since 1955—before the departure of the colonial administration—and continue today in varying degrees across Darfur, Kordofan, Blue Nile, and other peripheral regions. For further details, see Suleiman (2003), Bashir and Salah (2022), and Niblock (2019).

²⁴ Abdelrahman, Mohammed Salah, How mercury is poisoning a nation, and gross mismanagement is aggravating the problem, 2022, Sudan transparency and policy tracker. <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-transparency-and-policy-trackerhow-mercury-is-poisoning-a-nation>

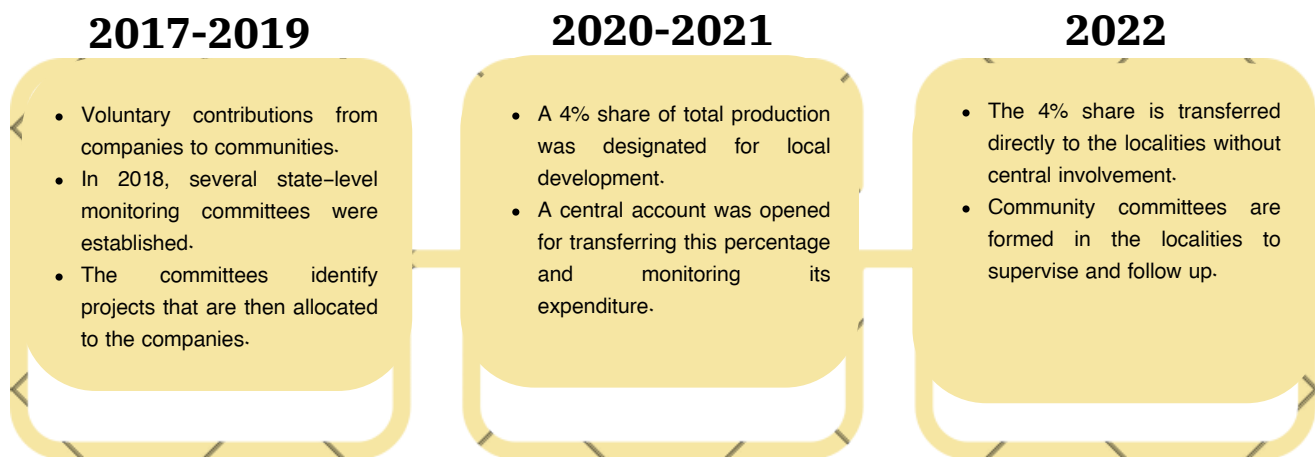


Illustration showing the evolution of corporate social responsibility policies in Sudan from 2017 to 2023.

The figure illustrates policy developments in CSR, which can be divided into two main phases: the period before 2020, when CSR consisted of voluntary contributions between companies and their stakeholders until the end of 2019;²⁵ and the period after 2020, when CSR was defined as 4% of production, calculated as part of the state's share (taxes) and imposed legally on companies. This differed from global and local definitions of CSR, as it lost its voluntary nature and became a tax directed toward local development.²⁶ This experiment did not however evolve organically as distribution was centralised through a regulation which gives the Director General of the Sudanese Mining Company the right to spend 50% of CSR without the knowledge or oversight of any authority.

The change that occurred at the end of 2021, which stipulated transferring the management of CSR from the federal government to the gold-producing localities, is seen as an attempt by the Minister of Finance to limit the Sudanese company's ability to dispose of large sums of money for the benefit of competing factions within the government. The Ministry of Minerals at the time affiliated with the Sudan Liberation Movement/Minni Minnawi, while the Ministry of Finance is affiliated with the Justice and Equality Movement; both signatories to the Juba Peace Agreement (October 2020) under the Darfur track. The relationship between the two ministries has often been marked by underlying tensions that affected the performance of state-owned companies in the mining sector, whose ownership is divided between the two ministries.

²⁵ A shift occurred in 2018 involving an attempt to organize the distribution of corporate social responsibility (CSR) by identifying projects whose implementation would be divided among the companies. Notably, this process remained largely theoretical and appeared more in government reports than in actual practice. This issue will be discussed in greater detail later in the paper.

²⁶ CSR policies were subsequently changed and converted into a 4% levy following the First Mining Conference (December 2019), through amendments to the mining contracts of all companies. This was one of the recommendations issued by the conference, which can be reviewed on the page of the Demands Coordination Bodies: <https://www.facebook.com/TAMSudan/posts/158714672318444/>

It should be noted that there is controversy over the terminology—between CSR and the local community's right to gold—especially in the post-2020 period. Official company contracts divide total production into 33% for the state and 67% for the producing company in the field of tailings. The official contracts clearly and unambiguously specify the distribution of the state's 33% share of total company production, as follows:

- 10% royalties²⁷
- 9.5% federal government share
- 7% share of the state government where the contract is located
- 4% share of the Local Community Development Committee
- 2.5% zakat

Therefore, the confusion surrounding the term “social responsibility”—between voluntary social responsibility on the part of companies prior to 2020 and the specific taxes distributed among different levels of government, and the attempt to continue calling it social responsibility even though it differs from the concept—is a misinterpretation of the percentage for communities embedded in the tax system. In other words, the mislabeling obscures the fundamental change which took place in the distribution of taxes intended to transform the community from an inactive spectator into a partner in production and a known shareholder, which allows and guarantees the right of the population to organise and participate even in financial, administrative, and environmental-safety aspects, given their new status as partners.

Renaming this relationship as “social responsibility” cast a shadow continuing the same relationships that existed before and paved the way for drafting regulations that allow the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company to control it centrally once again. The political rationale behind this was the lack of clarity surrounding the concept of the community's share of gold production, which largely led to preserving the concept of social responsibility in its current form in Sudan, thereby perpetuating the same non-participatory relationship between gold-producing companies, the population, and the state.

²⁷ A tax category dating back to the colonial period, beginning with the forestry sector. It applies to high-value resources that the state seeks to regulate in terms of their exploitation. A high percentage is allocated to the state as its share—separate from regular taxes—and it also includes revenues from imports.

Mining and Corporate Social Responsibility in Kordofan

In this section, we will review information on the scale of gold mining in the three Kordofan states, as well as information on CSR, in order to determine the extent to which the proposed policies align with practical realities. This is done by presenting detailed figures from official state sources. To begin, the following table shows information on mining–waste companies and exploration licences granted to various companies in the three states:

State	Mining Markets	Tailings Companies	Licensed Area (km ²)	Notes
North Kordofan	4	4	56,453	An area equivalent to 30.46% of North Kordofan was allocated as gold exploration blocks.
South Kordofan	26	12	15,614.80	An area equivalent to 19.58% of South Kordofan, and in reality the area is even larger—exceeding one-third of the territory under government control. Most markets also lack oversight from both state and federal authorities.
West Kordofan	6	1	4,476	Only 4.02% of West Kordofan was allocated as exploration blocks. The low percentage is likely due to the priority given to oil over gold in the state.

Table No. (1) Source (Ministry of Minerals Documents) ²⁸

The table above illustrates widespread mining operations in South Kordofan in terms of the number of companies and markets (the number increases if areas controlled by the Sudanese Popular Liberation Movement/N are included). In general, the Nuba Mountains region is historically known for its abundance of mineral resources, but in terms of area, the largest portion (30.4% of the state's land) was allocated to mining companies in North Kordofan. This may can be attributed to the limited geological surveys in North Kordofan, leaving large tracts of land formally unclassified and therefore easier for the government to allocate to mining companies. In addition, unlike South Kordofan, North Kordofan is not heavily affected by armed conflict, and its terrain is largely a desert.

The table also shows that mining has come to occupy extremely large areas of land in the Kordofan states, areas that represent some of the most heavily used and inhabited spaces in the region. Most of these allocations were made during the Bashir Government, which did not take free and informed public participation into account when making such decisions. This was done by withholding information and completing procedures centrally, without local consultation. This issue is particularly sensitive in areas where land is held under collective customary ownership, and where communities already face resource scarcity and long-standing disputes over land, whether water sources, grazing areas, or agricultural land. Mining therefore adds an entirely new layer of conflict in these settings.

²⁸ This table draws on 2020 documents from the Ministry of Minerals and a 2019 booklet titled The Vision of Gold Mining Companies for Developing the Sector and Increasing Production.

As mentioned above, the only companies operating are artisanal mining–waste companies (karta), and their production rates in previous years, along with their CSR expenditures, according to official state records (SMRC, 2022), are as follows:

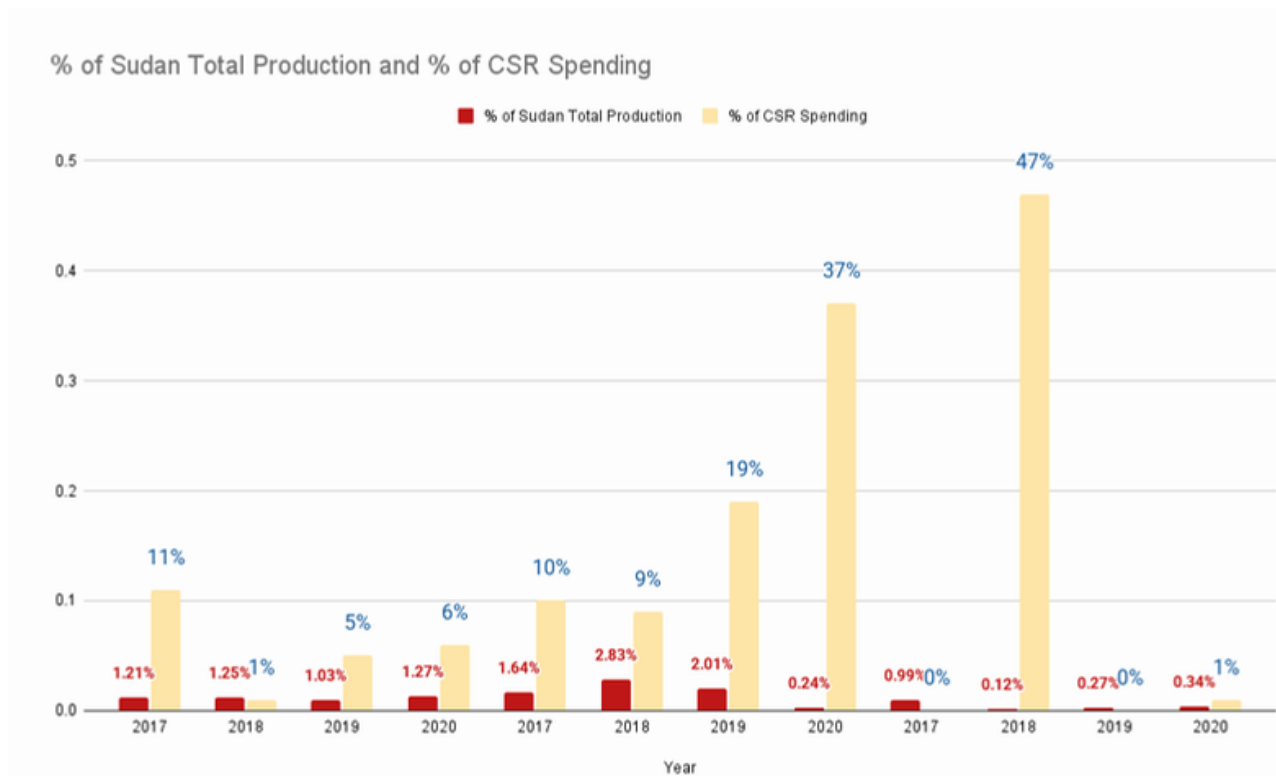


Illustration No. (4): Comparison of the ratio of total gold production to the ratio of spending on social responsibility

By examining the previous figure and comparing the companies' production shares with their CSR shares, we find, for example, that South Kordofan had its lowest production ratio in 2020, accounting for only 0.24% of the total production of mining companies in Sudan. However, it received 37% of the total CSR allocated in Sudan, the highest share of any state that year. This happened despite the fact that most mining companies in the state had been shut down since the end of 2019.²⁹ This indicates that CSR was used as a political tool to improve relations with local communities in order to facilitate the return of companies to operation. As for North Kordofan, when it produced 7.4% of Sudan's total output in 2018, it received only 1% of the total CSR allocation. It is also one of the relatively stable states in terms of private mining activity, especially before the revolution. This clearly demonstrates, based on official state-approved data, that the announced policies do not correspond to reality in any way.

The figures also show that there is no consistent pattern in CSR distribution, neither spatially nor over time. Moreover, the 4% allocation policy was not implemented; instead, CSR was largely used as a tool to improve relations with communities in order to ensure the continued operation of mining companies, rather than to achieve local development—an issue we will discuss in further detail below.

²⁹ Most companies were halted after the fall of the Ingaz regime in April 2019 due to growing popular opposition to their continued operations, driven by environmental harms and their association with the former regime and its policies.

With this brief summary, we can generalise the conclusion to Sudan: despite the different classifications of CSR stages, they were not applied according to a clear financial policy based on distributing specific percentages that reflect production rates. For example, in 2019, CSR funds were disbursed to Khartoum State (the capital and largest state) even though no mining activity exists there.³⁰ This confirms once again that the distribution of CSR budgets is not based on allocating funds to production sites according to defined ratios, but rather depends on the priorities and policies of the central government.

We also note a highly significant and influential phenomenon, namely the lack of transparency in fiscal policies. The most prominent example of this is the zakat budgets, which account for 2.5% of total production. According to the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company, this zakat is supposed to be distributed to residents of the production areas. However, the study shows that in all states it did not appear in local budgets or in the budgets of state ministries of finance, and it is unclear how it is distributed or monitored. Despite this, it did not provoke a popular reaction similar to that of CSR. CSR has attracted greater attention not only because of its large financial size, but also because of its management approach and the ways it is presented to affected communities and their expectation, factors that have played a decisive role in shaping public reactions. As noted earlier, pro-poor development provides the framework for assessing development funded through CSR budgets. After reviewing the official figures – which show that successive governments did not adhere to the stated policy – we now briefly examine how far CSR projects actually meet the conditions of pro-poor development. These conditions largely align with the state's own definitions and policy commitments.

Indeed, CSR has not been linked to any broader development strategy. South Kordofan, for example, has poverty rates reaching 67% and extremely high school dropout levels—only two out of every 100 primary school students reach the third year of secondary school. West Kordofan ranks as the weakest state nationally in primary school attendance. In North Kordofan, 67% of people marry before age 18, and 98% of women have undergone female genital mutilation. CSR has addressed none of these urgent priorities.



South Kordofan, Al-Tadamoun Locality, Al-Jaghour Market 2021

³⁰ An article in Al-Tayyar newspaper, published on 5 August 2020, provides further details and can be accessed here: <https://m.facebook.com/sudandemocratic/photos/a.1508486182619157/2034319800035790/>

Structurally, CSR remained an element external to the state apparatus. It was administered centrally and communicated directly with communities in ways that bypassed state and local governments, which in turn attempted to resist this through various measures. These included issuing state-level financial regulations that conflicted with federal mining policies – such as North Kordofan’s Ministry of Finance regulation, which contradicted the Ministry of Minerals’ rules on mining revenue management, and South Kordofan’s local fees regulation, which required workers and investors to pay the same financial charge at both federal and state levels. After CSR revenues were transferred to localities in 2022, no effort was made to integrate them into existing state structures. In Sowdari locality (North Kordofan), for example, more than 600 billion Sudanese pounds were transferred to the Umm Badr administrative unit (one of three units) after political pressure from residents. This sparked severe conflict with residents of the other units. No agreement was reached within Umm Badr on how to allocate the funds, and the money remained frozen.

In response, the state government suspended all development budgets, arguing that the locality—as a whole, not only the unit—had already received a disproportionately large share of CSR revenues, despite being one of the poorest in the state. As a result, the state effectively withdrew from development responsibilities and froze CSR budgets altogether.

Many other experiences point to structural problems that have become evident in CSR practices. One example is that even after a single development project is agreed upon locally, it must still obtain approval from the state government and from the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company (SMRC) at the state level, and then again from SMRC at the federal level. Only after these steps does the planning phase begin — a process that takes a long time. The final stage is the approval and release of the budget by the federal government with the consent of the Ministry of Finance. This lengthy process has caused major delays affecting most projects, especially with ongoing inflation and the falling value of the Sudanese pound. By the time funds were released, many projects were no longer financially viable. As a result, numerous projects ended up in court disputes between the government and the implementing companies. The most notable example is the Abu Zaima Centre project, along with the delays surrounding the controversial Sowdari water project.

Indeed, CSR has not succeeded in redistributing resources; on the contrary, it re-centralised them by placing their management at the federal level and channeling them through customary community structures inherited from the colonial period. These funds were directed toward securing the political loyalty of influential actors in both the state and society. This contributed to fuelling local conflicts over representation, in addition to the negative impacts of mining, which created divisions between those supporting mining, linked to customary administration, the state (in its various configurations), and mining companies, and other groups opposing this tripartite alliance. This dynamic shaped the nature of popular participation.

Popular participation consistently faced obstacles under CSR policies. During the Bashir regime, engagement occurred primarily with social actors loyal to the authorities, whereas after the revolution, many grassroots committees were elected. These committees proposed a comprehensive vision focused on environmental protection, transparency, and community rights. However, most of their demands were rejected because they conflicted with mining policies and existing violations. The clearest example comes from Qadir (Kalogi), where the elected committee presented a comprehensive vision that clashed with mining policies. As a result, the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company refused to give final approval for a local electricity project, despite an initial agreement and signed approval.

This refusal was intended to sideline the elected committee, leading to legal action against its members due to the high penalty clauses in the signed contract. The committee was later dissolved by the locality, which shifted to working with other actors more aligned with official mining policies.

There are many similar cases, but the core conclusion is that mining policies and their consequences have made meaningful popular participation impossible without fundamental reforms, reforms that go beyond redistributing CSR funds to include far greater transparency and structural change in the mining sector. This would require the state to adopt a productive rather than extractive role, and to place environmental safety and resource sustainability at the top of its priorities. Instead, the state has chosen to continue its existing mining approach, further distorting popular participation and exacerbating the conflicts and harms associated with mining.

Based on the explanation above, CSR has failed to achieve any of the conditions for pro-poor development as defined by state policies. The lack of transparency and free participation contributed to this failure, while some state agencies and companies were content to turn certain contributions into public-relations exercises. This was achieved by improving the relationship between the government and operating companies, which provided companies with state protection by granting media legitimacy to their work, as well as legal and security protection. Based on this, the following section discusses the most important policies and practices and their actual implications, which the research found to include: the corrupt political use of development budgets; the fuelling of disputes over land—its ownership, management, and revenue; and finally, the link between companies and the emergence of tribal and social divisions tied to divisions within the central authority. These divisions deepened and became more visible after the war of 15 April.

Development Budgets as Political Capital

The Bashir government sought to create parallel state structures in the mining sector, represented by the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company, in order to direct development budgets toward serving its political project. This approach extended from the policy proposed by Finance Minister Abdel Rahim Hamdi in 2005, which focused on building more effective parallel institutions that were not burdened by state bureaucracy when carrying out political roles.³¹ Following this vision, the Dams Implementation Unit was established, which many studies have described as a “state within a state.”³² In the mining sector, this approach was even more evident in the handling of CSR funds as political capital (through the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company). This entrenched the model as an inherited policy tied to institutional failure never reviewed after the revolution. On the contrary, the increase in CSR funds in 2020 expanded their political role through the continued use of the same parallel state apparatus created by the Bashir regime.

Under the Bashir Government in 2017, we illustrate an example which reflects the government’s federal approach. The director of the Sudanese Company was contacted by telephone to convey instructions from the then Vice President, Bakri Hassan Saleh, to finance a project in Sennar, the capital of Islamic Culture. The cheque was cashed within two days and transferred to a personal account, without even the knowledge of the CSR department within the Sudanese Company. Employees were surprised to discover that funds had been disbursed under this item at the end of the year without knowing who had done so or how.³³ This incident highlighted the existence of central institutions that direct CSR budgets to serve political objectives – even within the Sudanese Company itself – in the absence of transparency and oversight. Accordingly, the lack of oversight and transparency, in contrast to the administrative and financial barriers encountered by community projects, stems from a resource–management approach designed primarily to advance political objectives rather than genuine development.

In the late stages of the Bashir period, institutions dealing with CSR from 2017 until the end of 2019 in the states continued to rely on forming state–level CSR committees in some states. The chair of each committee was the state governor (bearing in mind that the governor was a political appointee – appointed by the president during the Bashir period or by the prime minister during the transitional period). These practices and structures continued under the transitional government.³⁴ Although CSR is promoted as a process in which local communities propose projects, in practice the governor had the authority to choose any project, including those not submitted by communities.³⁵ This transformed CSR into political roles rather than developmental ones based on coordination between state institutions and society.³⁶

³² The document established a political orientation aimed at building parallel state institutions to mitigate the political risks posed by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement to the National Congress Party’s ability to remain in power. This approach later evolved into a broader mode of state governance. The full text is available at: <https://shorturl.at/kAFY3>

³³ Abd Elkreem, T. M. (2018). *Power Relations of Development: The Case of Dam Construction in the Nubian Homeland, Sudan* (Vol. 88). LIT Verlag Münster.

³⁴ Interview with a former Director of the Environmental and Corporate Social Responsibility Department, Sudanese Mineral Resources Company (SMRC), Khartoum, 2022.

³⁵ “Governor of North Kordofan Chairs the State Mining Coordination Council Meeting,” *Sudan Today*, 2022. Available at: <https://alsudantoday.com/business/economic-news/163418>

³⁶ “Governor of West Kordofan Calls on Mining Companies to Prioritize Corporate Social Responsibility Programs,” *SUNA*, 2022. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/sMoTi>

³⁶ Interview with a former Director of the Environmental and Corporate Social Responsibility Department, SMRC.

After the revolution, not much changed, as we find many examples and experiences of this same direct political approach. Here, we can take the example of South Kordofan State. When violence broke out in 2020 near the state capital, Kadugli, a government delegation from the Sovereignty Council, the Council of Ministers, and the director of the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company was sent, and the delegation promised to provide assistance.³⁷ All steps, from dispatching the official delegation to sending the aid convoys, were carried out using CSR funds. Nevertheless, part of the convoy was presented as a gift in the name of a member of the Sudanese Sovereignty Council implying political favor. Another experience in South Kordofan took place in the locality of Al-Quoz, which lies outside the gold-producing areas. Despite this, the director of the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company met with youth from the area and asked them to form an office for the political organisation to which he belonged, in exchange for providing support to establish a youth centre. The youth refused to form a political organisation because it supported the military coup of October 2021. Their political stance was the reason the projects proposed by the company's director were never completed.³⁸

The challenges of financial and administrative corruption and lack of transparency were reflected not only in interactions with affected local communities, but also extended to companies operating in the mining sector. In an incident that was widely reported in the media and followed by many interested parties in Sudan, the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company requested several mining companies to contribute one billion Sudanese pounds as a contribution from the Sudanese Company to the celebrations welcoming the governor of Darfur, on the condition that the amount would be deducted from each company's CSR balance. Of course, it is difficult for companies to refuse the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company's requests because of the official harassment that would follow.³⁹ This move was met with widespread anger in Sudan, as it was seen as a blatant political manoeuvre to benefit the leader of an armed movement that had signed a peace agreement. Development budgets could thus be turned into direct political funds for the movement that controls the Ministry of Minerals through its chief negotiator, Mohamed Bashir Abonamo, who became Minister of Minerals in the federal government.⁴⁰ Following a media campaign rejecting this type of spending, the governor of Darfur (who is also the head of the movement that runs the Ministry of Minerals) decided to return the companies' mining funds.⁴¹

The use of CSR budgets for political purposes is an obstacle to development and to transparency and popular participation, as central control of these budgets is used to turn them into tools that serve the political goals of groups in power. This also reveals another pattern of rapid government response when political interests are involved. There is a stark contrast between the long delays that affect development projects – often stalled in state bureaucracy and slow to respond to community committees—and the speed with which political expenditures are approved according to criteria unrelated to official policy. This stands in direct contradiction to the aforementioned CSR policy, which required allocating 4% of the budget to each locality hosting mining activities.

³⁷ Interview with the Adviser to the Prime Minister on Peace Affairs, who at the same time served as a representative for the Kordofan states on the Corporate Social Responsibility Council appointed by the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company. January 2021.

³⁸ A focus group discussion that included several activists from different localities of South Kordofan State, Kadugli, May 2022.

³⁹ This statement is confirmed across many Sudanese media sites: <https://shorturl.at/acpvL> and also <https://shorturl.at/vBFLO>.

⁴⁰ Interview with an employee of a mining company, who described details of a meeting held with the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company, Khartoum, March 2022.

⁴¹ The issue was raised by journalist Suhair Abdelrahim: <https://alzrgamedia.net/6475/>

Announcement by the Governor of Darfur renouncing financial payments from mining companies; the decision can be viewed at: <https://latestevent.net/2874/>

Land as a Centre of Conflict

The issue of land lies at the centre of political, economic, and social conflict in Sudan. Land is a repository of resources, a source of economic accumulation, and a fundamental determinant of both collective and individual identity. Most areas of Kordofan are governed by customary land ownership, administered by local authorities that the state consults—at least nominally—on land use. As noted earlier, the expansion of mining has resulted in the allocation of vast tracts of land to gold companies without any individual or collective compensation for affected populations. This has pushed many actors—especially customary administration—to treat CSR as a form of compensation. As these administrations positioned themselves as the de facto custodians of land on behalf of their tribes, they sought to preserve and expand their influence over financial returns from gold and over the extensive areas that gained heightened value amid increasing resource scarcity.

Building on this, mining has come to occupy more than a quarter of Sudan's land area, with mining blocks expanding steadily over the years. The areas allocated to companies at various stages of operation now cover around 16% of Sudan's total land area, approximately 309,945.9 square kilometres.⁴² This percentage continues to rise with the licensing of more than 60 companies working in artisanal mining residues, in addition to the vast spaces taken up by artisanal mining itself, which accounts for more than 81% of Sudan's gold production.

Land ownership is a highly complex and historically rooted issue in various regions of Kordofan and Sudan more broadly. CSR policies that rely on traditional rules of eligibility have triggered disputes among different groups over land ownership. These disputes are driven by conflicting historical narratives and intricate local dynamics, and often serve to strengthen tribal and clan groups seeking to expand their influence and territorial control. As a result, the struggle led by grassroots organisations to protect the environment and natural resources up to the end of 2019 quickly transformed into a civil conflict over the 4% share. Tribes began competing with neighbouring or rival groups, reopening long-standing historical disputes. In some areas, conflicts emerged for the first time, despite these communities having previously lived in long periods of stability and social peace. The following table presents examples of these conflicts.

Importantly, the positions taken by local administrations do not represent the views of all members of the tribal group. In many cases, the majority of the population actually rejects the mining policies supported by their local administrations. When referring to a particular ethnic or tribal group in this context, we are referring specifically to the local administration that controls mining-related decisions. CSR funds have generated increasing conflict both between and within social groups because the available funds are limited compared to the scale and impact of mining operations. As a result, companies tend to channel these funds to individuals within tribal leadership structures to ensure the continuation of their activities. This has reinforced traditional hierarchical arrangements within communities, deepened conflict within and between groups, weakened genuine popular participation, and concentrated power rather than enabling a more equitable redistribution of resources.

⁴² SMRC 2022: A paper presented at the First Arab–African Conference on Corporate Social Responsibility for Child Rights, Khartoum, November 2022.

State	Locality	Benefiting Group (from CSR)	Disputing Group	Outcomes
North Kordofan	Sowdari / Umm Badr	The Kawahla — their share of CSR was assigned to them after organizing protests and pressuring the state, emphasizing their historical ownership of the mining company's site.	The Kababish, who claim historical ownership of the land and argue that the Kawahla are recent arrivals to the area. This revived a longstanding territorial dispute, raising concerns that it could escalate into violent conflict. Additionally, water supplied to companies was cut off from Al-Hamra to Umm Badr, and in other areas an agreement was reached with Al-Junaid Company (affiliated with RSF) to open milling sites and establish separate mining zones away from Umm Badr.	Mining activity declined significantly. Fine Gold Company in Umm Badr lost around 90% of its production (see Table 3). Military actors expanded their economic activities by establishing new mining markets in Kababish areas.
West Kordofan	—	—	West Kordofan previously sent raw ore to North Kordofan, but this was halted after refusal to allocate a share of CSR.	A proposal was made to establish a new processing plant in cooperation with an armed militia.

Table 2 illustrates the relationship between social responsibility and land disputes.

State	Locality	Benefiting Group (from CSR)	Disputing Group	Outcomes
South Kordofan	Kadugli	Hawazma Dar Jaama — the group that allowed the company to be established on its land.	Miri: claim ownership of the land where the plant is located. They also argue that the raw ore originates from their land and that they possess the right to manage it and collect revenues.	The supply of raw ore to the company was blocked, and operations ceased. Members of the Miri community are attempting to attract other companies to operate in their areas.
South Kordofan	Kadugli	—	Kadugli groups: claim ownership of all the land associated with the company and production sites.	The case was taken to court, formally opening a legal dispute between the groups.
South Kordofan	Abu Jubeiha	Hawazma Dar Ali — the group for whom mining revenues were allocated.	Kinana: claim ownership of the land and assert that they are entitled to the mining proceeds.	An armed conflict has persisted for approximately three years (details covered in the section on land conflict). Several gold mines have shut down.
South Kordofan	— (related to Kalogi area in the south)	—	Kawahla and Loghan: the conflict extended into Kalogi and they entered as allies of Kinana, arguing that allowing expansion onto one group's land could set a precedent that will harm them in the future.	—

Continued Table 2 illustrates the relationship between social responsibility and land disputes.

The table illustrates several examples of conflicts that reveal the dimensions of the crisis, though they are not exhaustive. The localities of Kalugi, Telodi, Liri, Al-Tadamun, Al-Abbasiya, Rashad, Al-Daling, and Al-Nahud have also experienced similar conflicts to varying degrees. In other words, there are limited localities with mining activities in the three Kordofan states which have not been affected by intense conflict over land ownership, conflicts that have been linked, to different extents, to CSR policies and to the role of the state at various levels in managing developments in these disputes. The various examples described in the table reveal conflicts over land ownership, where customary tenure has been adopted as the basis for determining rights. This has also contributed to expanding the authority of local administrations, allowing them to assume an even larger leadership role and widen their sphere of influence, particularly because the state treats them as the representatives of local communities in matters of popular participation.

Under the Bashir regime, local leaders were treated according to their relationship with the political system. After the revolution, multiple centers of political and military decision-making emerged within the federal government, most notably the army and the Rapid Support Forces, as influential military actors in the mining sector, in addition to the Forces of Freedom and Change as representatives of the civilian component. The number of military actors increased further after the Juba Peace Agreement in October 2020. In this context, the pattern of a parallel state continued, with all parties—especially the military—attempting to create their own parallel political and economic structures. This gradually generated sharp social divisions within and between local administrations, driven by competition over CSR revenues. As each group found an extension of itself within some branch of the federal government, and therefore a source of political support and legitimacy, further intensifying conflict.

The table clearly shows a shift toward tribalised mining, with groups such as the Kababish, the Midob, and communities in the northern areas of West Kordofan forming alliances with militias to protect their mining activities and to lend them legitimacy, taking advantage of the constitutional status enjoyed by various armed groups. These shifts were also reflected in tribal alliances, which contributed to the spread of conflicts and the emergence of mining operations surrounded by tribal and armed dynamics that further deepened local social fragmentation in the absence of an effective state role. Here, CSR played a pivotal role in fuelling tribal conflict over land ownership, as some groups resorted to semi-regular militias to reinforce their dominance, creating a deeper relationship between many tribes and armed groups. In contrast, other groups sided relatively with the Sudanese Armed Forces, producing an overlap between tribal alignments and competing military centres of power at the political centre. This, in turn, deepened the civil-military divide from the top of the power structure all the way down to the local level.

Through the Sowdari experience reviewed above, we see the pivotal role of gold in reshaping tribal, military, and even historical alliances as economic activities shift, even if only at the level of economic accumulation by certain group leaders. For example, the Kawahla have a historical relationship with the Mahdiyya, based on their support for it and their opposition to British colonial rule (the well-known MacMichael's Pen issue). They are a pastoral group that identifies as Arab and has a long-standing historical rivalry with the Kababish, who identify as a settled group with land ownership. The Kababish leaders sought the support of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) to establish gold markets within their territory in order to control the revenues. After the war of 15 April, areas such as Jabrat Al-Shaikh, Hamra, and others were targeted as investment zones for the RSF for military purposes, including airstrips used by the forces. It is important to note that gold has played a role – at least in part – in reshaping alliances among groups whose positions do not fit the common assumption that the RSF is simply an alliance of Arab or pastoral groups, groups with disputed land claims, or a revival of Mahdist-era alliances.

It is worth noting that the nature of central authority since the colonial period has often been described as similar to a solar-system model: a weakening centre surrounded by sectoral groups that increasingly turn inward.⁴³ Under the Bashir regime, central authority weakened even further for several reasons, including its attempts to impose itself on sectoral groups, particularly local administrations, which resulted in multiple loyalties and multiple centres of power within the same group. After the revolution, and with the proliferation of competing political and military power centres, this structure transformed into multiple central “suns”, each orbiting its own conflicting interests and none aspiring to an integrated framework for resource management. This was reinforced by the Juba Peace Agreement, which formalised a model of imposing local legal representation from the centre and relying on military force for implementation. These dynamics increased militarisation and deepened social divisions, ultimately crystallising into competing centres of authority that culminated in the widespread war of April 2023.

In Kadugli, the capital of South Kordofan State, many tribes rejected the establishment of a mining factory under the National Congress Party and during the violent conflict between the Sudanese government and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement. A mining factory was eventually built on land belonging to, or adjacent to, the Hawazma (Dar Jama) group. As a result, the CSR funds were directed to them and did not reach the broader communities. This represents a crisis, as distribution under the Bashir Government often included other leaders depending on their degree of loyalty to the regime. In parallel with these developments, the Hajirat mining area (near Kadugli) witnessed a dispute over land ownership between the Kadugli and Miri Barah groups. The conflict was not linked to the companies and was resolved through traditional mechanisms. The dispute emerged because local taxes were tied to the interests of the local community, represented by the local administration that owned the land and delegated committees to carry out this role.

The conflict was settled by forming a local committee with equal representation from both groups.⁴⁴ Tax revenues from the Hajirat (B) mine were divided equally between the two groups, while revenues from the Hajirat (A) mine went to the Miri group.⁴⁵ This arrangement remained in place until the revolution. Afterward, under the transitional government, no percentage was handed over to the local administration.⁴⁶ In fact, following the revolution, operations in various mines declined, and no mechanism was established to determine the local administration’s share after the committees were dissolved and no agreement was reached to form new committees between the administration, the former committees, and the wider community.⁴⁷

Traditional mechanisms for resolving complex land-ownership disputes, which historically played a significant role in managing and distributing resources, began to lose their influence with the introduction of centralised CSR and its rigid policies. By linking access to development budgets to land ownership, these policies deprived local communities and local governments of one of their most important mechanisms of dispute resolution. As a result, tensions increased, and actors began turning either to legal avenues or to the formation of tribal, political, and military alliances in order to control land and, by extension, resources. The dynamic increasingly shifted into a zero-sum equation of victory or defeat, gradually becoming a matter of survival or extinction.

⁴³ A description included within *The Expansion of Authority and the Contestation of Loyalty in Sudan* by Jaafar Mohamed Ali Bakhit, summarized and discussed by Ahmed Ibrahim Abu Shouk. For more details, see: <https://shorturl.at/XadfM>

⁴⁴ The revenue from the sale of karta (tailings) is also divided as follows: 40% to the state Ministry of Finance, 40% to the locality, and 20% to the Native Administration.

⁴⁵ Interview with Mr. Hussein Al-Zaki, Mak of the Miri Barra group, Kadugli, May 2022.

⁴⁶ Interview with Mr. Mohamed Rahal, Mak of the Kadugli group, Kadugli, May 2022.

⁴⁷ Focus group discussion with a number of miners at the Hajirat mine, May 2022.

The crisis was further complicated by the intervention of the state. In the Kadugli case in mid-2022, the governor appointed a CSR council and selected the Amir of Dar Jama and the Amir of Miri Barah as members, while excluding the Amir of Kadugli. By doing so, the state effectively sided with the groups it considered entitled to receive CSR funds and excluded the others. This meant that the state had taken a position on land ownership, even though the issue of land rights was still before the courts and traditional dispute-resolution processes were under way. This intervention deepened the crisis and caused the state to lose its neutrality toward the disputing parties. The only remaining option became enforcing decisions through the law and security forces, in a context where all parties involved were heavily armed. Given the multiplicity of political centres in the state and the many competing actors, CSR policies expanded the scale of conflicts and weakened the ability of local mechanisms to resolve them. Development budgets and poverty-alleviation measures were turned into tools for concentrating wealth and reproducing conflict dynamics.



From Development Tools to Engines of Armed Conflict: The Rise of Corporate Mini-States

With the spread of mining companies during the Bashir period, the government used various methods to tighten its control over mining and its revenues by empowering those connected to political power in each region. Mining companies were approved for investors directly or indirectly linked to the political system, and they were provided with different forms of support, including security protection from official units. The distribution of CSR was tied to pro-government community leaders in order to strengthen them economically. More specifically, all levels of government, mining companies, and security and military units worked in close coordination to directly or indirectly support the National Congress political project. Thus integrating the private sector further into the regime apparatus. Thus, private-sector companies can effectively be described as state companies, given the absence of any real separation between government and state, and consequently no separation between state and companies.⁴⁸ This explains why, on the day the army announced it had taken power and removed Omar al-Bashir on 11 April 2019, many people in mining communities immediately headed to the mining companies and demanded their immediate closure. For them, political authority was embodied in these mining companies, and the fall of the regime implicitly meant that these companies should be shut down. This occurred in Abu Jubeiha,⁴⁹ Al-Tartar,⁵⁰ and several other areas in Sudan.⁵¹

After the fall of the regime, there was a major upheaval in political and social relations due to the length of its rule and the complexity of the political, economic, and social networks it had built. Although post-regime relations are still taking shape – making it difficult to fully analyse these emerging dynamics – some core features can be identified. Companies lost the interconnected networks that linked them to the former political system, and began searching for new ways to survive politically. They were shocked by the changes that dismantled the political and economic alliances they once relied on, stripping them of the legal and moral legitimacy previously granted by the authorities. In the eyes of many, they became viewed as tools of the former regime (for example, the cabinet's decision to suspend mining companies in South Kordofan following widespread public pressure).⁵² They also lost their varying-degree alliances with military actors, which had provided them with security, an issue tied, to some extent, to legal and moral legitimacy. Moreover, companies lost their historical social bases, as they had previously depended on supporting leaders and communities linked to the authorities against other groups. This changed significantly after the revolution, as public pressure and broad popular support forced the state to consider those who had been excluded in the past (such as civil society committees and the groups supporting them) as rightful stakeholders. By contrast, groups that supported mining and the former authority found themselves in the opposite position during a specific historical moment: the period immediately following the political transition. This shift was also driven by certain actors within the state who were influenced by the widespread popular pressure, though not all components of the state supported this shift, and some actors sought to gradually reverse it.

⁴⁸ Abd Elkreem, T. M. (2018). Power relations of development: The case of dam construction in the Nubian homeland, Sudan (Vol. 88). LIT Verlag Münster.

⁴⁹ Interview with an expert and member of the Environmental and Resistance Committee in Abu Jubeiha Locality, conducted in Abu Jubeiha, December 2020.

⁵⁰ Interview with Abu Jandal, a member of the National Committee for Environmental Advocacy, conducted in the town of Tartour, February 2021.

⁵¹ For example, the Turkish company in Northern State was shut down on 11 April 2019. Interview with members of the Resistance Committees and the Services and Change Committees in Delgo Locality, December 2019.

⁵² In September 2019, the acting Governor of South Kordofan issued a decision to halt the operations of mining companies, directing local security committees to guard their work sites, open legal cases against anyone violating the order, and pursue offenders. For more details: <https://shorturl.at/Llvyd>

To understand this shift, we refer to events in Kalogi, in the locality of Qadir in South Kordofan State, which announced an open sit-in on 4 September 2019 against the mining company. The situation escalated into civil disobedience, with the closure of markets and government buildings, accompanied by popular marches and public addresses. This pressure led the leader of the local civil administration to issue a statement rejecting the company's presence on the grounds that it was causing harm and was rejected by the local population. As a result, the company lost its popular legitimacy and the support of the authorities. The head of military intelligence in the region responded to this large-scale movement by implementing the protesters' demands – confiscating the company's machinery and closing its facilities – before the official decision to suspend the work of mining companies was issued by the Governor of the state.⁵³ This intervention helped calm the situation and prevented it from escalating into violence, as has happened in the nearby town of Telodi a few days later. Nevertheless, the military intelligence commander was suspended and immediately transferred from his post, illustrating the existence of multiple layers and forms of response: some aiming to preserve the old state structure and hierarchy, and others responding to popular demands in different locations.⁵⁴

It is a highly complex and intertwined phenomenon, as the environment that once supported these companies has almost completely disappeared. As a result, efforts have been made to create a new situation that would allow them to continue operating. To understand the effects of this on the local community, we turn to the local experience of Abu Jibeha (located just north of Qadir/Kalogi), where one company and a local mining market are still active. In this case the waste-processing company is sourcing waste from the Al-Hameed artisanal mining market, which lies in the border areas between Kalogi and Abu Jibeha in the eastern mountains of South Kordofan State.

The issue began with a rapid shift by the waste-management company's CSR – moving its support from the Al-Kinana group to the Al-Hawazma (Dar Ali) group. This immediately generated tension between communities with a long history of disputes. It is important to note that the company's support gave the Dar Ali group greater legitimacy in the area. The company's interactions with them were also driven by its desire to secure protection following growing public pressure and the military's increasing restrictions on the use of weapons. As a result, the company outsourced its security needs to the tribe, appointing around 60 of its members as security personnel, training them, and providing them with various types of weapons. In response, through this arrangement, the tribe gained trained fighters and a continuous funding stream through CSR. A significant portion of these funds was used to purchase additional weapons, further consolidating the tribe's power.⁵⁵

⁵³ Suspension of artisanal mining companies in South Kordofan and the initiation of legal procedures against them," Sawt al-Hamish, 2019. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/0G2p7>

⁵⁴ Interviews with several activists and local leaders in Gedir Locality, Kalogi area, September 2019.

⁵⁵ This incident was verified through several sources, including a member of the Abu Jubeiha sit-in committee in Abu Jubeiha (December 2020), and a member of the investigation committee formed by the Council of Ministers at the onset of the events, who confirmed that weapons provided by the company had been used in the communal conflict. This testimony was delivered at a forum on peace and justice issues in South Kordofan State, January 2021. The accounts were consistent with a focus group discussion with members of the Abu Jubeiha Resistance Committees, as well as an individual interview with a member of the Environmental Committee in December 2022.

For further corroboration, an informal interview was conducted with an official from the company in question, who stated: "We are not concerned with how the money is used. The government told us to pay them, so we paid them, and the rest is not our responsibility." Khartoum, 2021.

With these changes, the Services and Change Committee in Qadir/Kalogi attempted to dig a well near the Al-Hameed mining market, in a border area between Kalogi and Abu Jibeha. This area lies at the intersection of the Al-Kinana and Al-Hawazma groups, both of which are in dispute over corporate social responsibility. The location holds particular importance because it is a source of the mining tailing (karta) on which the company depends for production. The attempt to dig the well triggered a dispute. The Al-Kinana group refused to allow the well to be built near Hawazma villages without first knowing their share of the development benefits, fearing that development would consolidate settlement and strengthen one group over the other.⁵⁶ The dispute escalated, leading to the suspension of drilling and the withdrawal of machinery. Although compensation was paid to the owner of the land on where the well was to be dug – who belonged to the opposing group – the conflict intensified. The landowner was killed that same evening by a bullet from an unknown source, which triggered violent clashes which have continued without interruption since early 2020.⁵⁷ This case involved a shift in the balance of power related to CSR revenues, and the dispute also extended to proposed mining fees.⁵⁸

The conflict continued for years, leaving tens of thousands displaced and many villages burned and lives lost between the localities of Kalogi/Qadir and Abu Jibeha. Various government interventions only intensified the crisis.⁵⁹ What concerns us in this paper is the relationship between this conflict and mining, CSR, and the alliances that formed around them, and how this dynamic became a tool for dismantling local communities. Companies shifted from being instruments of the former ruling regime into entities attempting to create their own “corporate states,” with their own development and security policies to ensure the continuation of production, effectively replacing the role of the state with corporate power.

This phenomenon reflected a reciprocal relationship between tribal alliances and companies on the one hand, and centres of political – particularly military – power on the other. This relationship generated political leverage and legal legitimacy that enabled mining operations to continue amid widespread social fragmentation and conflict at every level over control of resources and political representation. What is striking is that the mining company in Abu Jibeha had an undeclared relationship with the Rapid Support Forces, whose leadership – particularly the RSF commander in South Kordofan – comes largely from the Hawazma group. As the company’s competitiveness declined in an economy increasingly dominated by military actors, most of its assets were transferred to Al-Junaid, a company run by the RSF’s deputy commander.

A committee was formed by the Council of Ministers, led by Dr. Hamid al-Bashir, which temporarily suspended the dispute. Afterward, he was appointed governor, and an official and civil committee was established to settle the land ownership dispute. Although the procedures were completed and clear findings were reached, the governor froze the process, which worsened the situation. Some argued that the suspension was due to the governor’s affiliation with one of the groups involved in the dispute, while others questioned his neutrality because of alleged involvement in mining operations in Abu Jibeha – an allegation the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company denied in an official statement. Despite the disputing parties appealing to the Sovereign Council – and delegations traveling to Khartoum – a decision was issued to return the case to the governor. However, he was unable to resolve it due to having lost the trust of all parties.

⁵⁶ There are ongoing disputes among the Kawahla, Kanana, and Hawazma groups over farming, grazing, and gum arabic production, exacerbated by the absence of land-use planning and land allocation, with reliance instead placed on customary norms.

⁵⁷ The conflict continued to rise and fall without resolution up until the outbreak of the war on 15 April.

⁵⁸ In Kalogi Locality, it was agreed that mining tailings (karta) belong to the local community, and a large portion of the proceeds was sold to implement development projects with the participation of the community through the Services and Change Committees. This was confirmed through an interview with the head of the Services and Change Committee for Kalogi Locality, conducted in Abu Jibeha, December 2020.

⁵⁹ A committee from the Council of Ministers, led by Dr. Hamid El-Bashir, temporarily halted the conflict. He was later appointed governor of the state. A joint official and community committee was formed to resolve the land ownership dispute. Although the committee reached clear conclusions after completing both formal and customary procedures, the governor suspended its work. This aggravated the situation, and some argued that the suspension was due to the governor’s affiliation with one of the disputing groups. Others questioned his neutrality, alleging that he was involved in mining activities in Abu Jibeha, an accusation denied by the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company in an official statement.

Despite calls by the disputing parties for intervention by the Federal Sovereignty Council—and delegations travelling to Khartoum—the final decision returned the matter to the governor. He was unable to make any breakthrough, having lost the trust of all sides.

In general, these disputes had a direct impact on mining operations. Mining companies stopped operating in several localities – Tadamun, Abu Jibeha, Kalogi, Telodi, Kadugli, and Rashad – and significantly reduced their activities in Sowdri and An-Nahud. Meanwhile, companies previously linked to the former regime and associated with pollution shifted to unregistered (illegal) mining inside towns and remote areas, using mixers, thiourea, and cyanide in open basins far from public and governmental oversight. These basins are abandoned without treatment, creating severe and widespread environmental hazards and contributing to the proliferation of weapons in the absence of state security.

In the localities of Tartir, as well as in El Obeid – the capital of North Kordofan State – and other areas where raw materials are sold directly to citizens who then process them anywhere they choose, a catastrophic pattern of pollution has spread.⁶⁰⁶¹⁶² This has also contributed to the erosion of state authority and the rise of tribal and military groups that expand and form alliances on the ruins of the state. These groups have become parasitic formations that feed on, and grow within, the collapsing body of the state, affecting all its social, environmental, economic, and political components.

⁶⁰ In 2022, several sites were discovered where gold was being extracted using cyanide and thiourea inside urban areas in an unregulated and unsafe manner, posing risks that could lead to serious disasters. This was documented in multiple reports, including:
<https://alharakalseyasi.com/21010/>

⁶¹ Further details can be reviewed at:
<https://www.sudanakhbar.com/1298887>

⁶² Additional information is available here:
<https://www.suna-sd.net/read?id=760635>

Conclusion

Political loyalty has overshadowed any developmental role the gold-mining sector could have played in the Kordofan states. Competing power centres have exploited the sector in their struggle to expand political and economic influence. This has fuelled intense competition among tribal groups over the 4% share, which represents significant financial resources capable of strengthening the authority of local leaders aligned with those power centres. As a result, conflicts between tribes over land ownership have escalated, since land is the key gateway to accessing CSR funds. The proliferation of political and military centres of power has produced further tribal fragmentation among rival groups tied to different military actors. Over time, this has deepened tribal divisions and weakened long-standing traditional mechanisms for resolving disputes – especially in the absence of a civil political authority capable of promoting the construction of a democratic, civilian state, despite its nominal control over the central government during the transitional period.

The study highlighted the absence of the developmental role that corporate social responsibility policies are supposed to play, and the challenges associated with macro policies and institutional structures that hinder the fulfilment of this role, thereby undermining their ability to redistribute resources and accommodate popular participation as an important factor in creating development. Given the absence of similar studies, it is important to fill the theoretical gap regarding the nature of corporate social responsibility policies and their implications for other productive sectors such as oil production. This would enable an understanding of the characteristics associated with corporate social responsibility as a mechanism, as well as its applications to different resources and the impact of the nature of the resource and location on policies. This would deepen the discussion on development issues and extractive activities in a way that helps to summarise lessons learned and build more effective development policies.

Appendix

Phase	Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Arrangement	Locality-Level Mechanism
Phase One (2015–2017)	Voluntary contributions from companies to local communities, also referred to as “stakeholders.”	No clear mechanism for follow-up; companies may simply notify the relevant official authorities.
Phase Two (2018–2019)	A 1% share of company production was designated as CSR.	The Sudanese Mineral Resources Company followed up through state-level mining committees, which identified community needs annually and distributed them among companies.
Phase Three (2020 – October 2021)	A special CSR account was opened in the name of the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company at the federal level; funds were disbursed after the company approved the projects.	The percentage increased to 4% of the total production of tailings-processing companies.
Phase Four (2021 –)	The 4% remained, but the method of collection and transfer changed.	The share of the localities is deposited into a dedicated development account, and spending is determined through local development committees in coordination with the local administrative apparatus.

Table (3): Information compiled from publications of the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company, with a focus on (SMRC, 2022).

State	Production Volume (g)	2017	2018	2019	2020
North Kordofan	Production (g) ⁶³	1,301,330	1,175,400	572,620.43	453,569.84
	Share of Sudan's Total Production	1.21%	1.25%	1.03%	1.27%
South Kordofan	Production (g)	256.03	448.44	342.529	35.618
	Share of Sudan's Total Production	1.64%	2.83%	2.01%	0.24%
West Kordofan	Production (g)	184.8	18.8	45.567	50.992
	Share of Sudan's Total Production	0.99%	0.12%	0.27%	0.34%

Table (4): Source — Reports of the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company and gold mining companies.⁶⁴

⁶³ The large variation in production volumes is primarily due to fluctuations in the output of Fine Gold Company. In addition, production figures in official documents are inconsistent, with discrepancies between some documents exceeding double the reported amounts.

⁶⁴ The data were compiled from reports of the Sudanese Mineral Resources Company that were reviewed, in addition to a 2019 booklet titled The Vision of Companies Operating in the Gold Mining Sector for Developing the Sector and Increasing Production.

State	Category	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
North Kordofan	CSR Spending	8.849.540	2.774.000	6.350.000	625.765.131	—
	Share of total CSR Spending	0.11	0.01	0.05	%6	0.13
South Kordofan	CSR Spending	7.970.425	28.940.348	23.000.000	163.735.296	—
	Share of total CSR Spending	0.1	0.09	0.19	0.37	0.01
West Kordofan	CSR Spending	75	145.200.000	—	4.683.005	—
	Share of total CSR Spending	0	0.47	—	0.01	0.03

Table (5) shows the volume of spending on corporate social responsibility in Kordofan states and its percentage share of total spending in Sudan.

Center for Enviromental and Social Studies

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