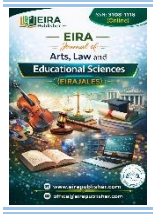

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Why Development Tarry in Africa: An Essay on Resource Un-utilisation, Under-utilisation, and Mis-utilisation

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Abstract **Original Research Article**

Despite possessing a disproportionate share of the world's natural, human, and financial capital, the African continent remains a profound ontological paradox: a "geological titan" tethered to the periphery of global prosperity. This paper contends that Africa's developmental lag—or "tarrying"—is not a consequence of resource scarcity or purely external exploitation, but is rather driven by a systemic crisis of internal stewardship. Drawing upon political economy and institutionalist frameworks, the study classifies these failures into a "Trilogy of Institutional Pathologies": unutilisation (the failure to activate "dormant capital" such as fallow arable land and flared natural gas), underutilisation (the "efficiency gap" characterized by the export of raw materials without value-addition), and misutilisation (the corrosive diversion of wealth through rent-seeking, illicit financial flows, and regulatory capture). By analyzing the mechanics of these pathologies—from the "extraction trap" in the cocoa and mineral sectors to the "brain drain" of human capital—this paper identifies the primary bottleneck to progress as a legacy of extractive institutions that reward wealth capture over wealth creation. The analysis concludes that overcoming this inertia requires a radical institutional re-engineering focused on domestic beneficiation, digital accountability in revenue collection, and the strategic transition from a resource-dependent economy to one rooted in value-added industrialisation.

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1.0 Introduction

Africa's development narrative is a classic paradox: a continent rich in resources but poor in outcomes. Statistics consistently highlight the contradiction: Africa holds approximately 30% of the world's mineral reserves, vast arable land, and a rapidly growing, youthful population [1]. Yet, it struggles with high rates of poverty, limited infrastructure, and weak industrial bases. The question of "Why development tarry in Africa?" is not new, but the answer often returns to the core challenge of resource management [2].

The development narrative of Africa is defined by a staggering ontological paradox: the continent is a geological titan and a demographic juggernaut, yet it remains tethered to the periphery of global prosperity. While Africa anchors approximately 30% of the world's mineral reserves and the lion's share of its uncultivated arable land, the translation of this "natural capital" into "human flourishing" remains fitful and fragmented [3-6]. The persistent inquiry into why development "tarries" on the continent has historically been diverted toward the ghosts of colonial extraction or the fluctuations of global commodity markets; however, such externalist critiques often obscure the internal institutional mechanics that govern resource outcomes [8-10]. This essay contends that Africa's developmental inertia is not a consequence of scarcity, but rather a crisis of stewardship—a systemic failure categorized by a trilogy of institutional pathologies: unutilisation, underutilisation, and misutilisation. By examining how resources remain dormant, how they are extracted without value-addition, and how their revenues are diverted through rent-seeking and capital flight, we can

move beyond the "resource curse" trope to identify the precise governance deficits that prevent Africa's endowments from fueling a modern industrial revolution. This essay moves beyond simple scarcity or external factors to focus on the internal, institutional failures of how Africa uses its endowments, classifying these failures into a trilogy: unutilisation, underutilisation, and misutilisation.

2.0 Literature Review

The persistence of underdevelopment is best understood through the lens of Institutional Economics and Political Economy [11]. The core argument is that resources themselves do not guarantee development; rather, the institutions governing their extraction, allocation, and distribution determine economic outcomes [12].

Following recent literature, many African states inherited or solidified extractive institutions—political and economic structures designed to concentrate power and wealth in the hands of a small elite [13-16]. These institutions create incentives for the powerful to maintain control over resource rents rather than fostering broad-based, inclusive economic growth. Development tarries because the ruling elite profit more from the *control* of unutilized or misutilised resources than from their *efficient utilisation* for national development.

The Resource Curse theory as put forward by R.M Auty in 1993 is central to misutilisation. Abundant resource rents, particularly from minerals and oil, detach the state from the populace, eliminating the need to tax citizens and, consequently, the need for accountability [17-19]. This environment fosters endemic rent-seeking behaviour, where political actors divert national wealth for personal gain [7]. Misutilisation, therefore, is an institutional choice, not an accident.

Rent-seeking is a crucial concept in understanding the economic and political dynamics of natural resource utilization. It describes the practice of spending resources to secure or maintain an economic rent (a payment to an owner or factor of production in excess of the amount needed to keep that factor in its current use) through political processes, rather than by creating new wealth. In the context of natural resources, the rent is often generated by the scarcity and high market value of the resources themselves, leading to intense competition to capture this value [17-20].

The utilization of natural resources such as oil, gas, minerals, timber, and water—often generates substantial rents due to the fixed supply and demand dynamics. For instance, the price of crude oil far exceeds the marginal cost of extraction in many established fields. This surplus, the resource rent, becomes a target for various actors, including private corporations, government officials, and interest groups.

The rent-seeking framework analyzes how this resource rent is distributed. Instead of being allocated efficiently through a competitive market, portions of the rent are often dissipated through non-productive activities aimed at influencing policy and regulation [18].

The pervasive nature of rent-seeking in natural resource utilization has profound negative consequences, often linked to the "resource curse" phenomenon. Rent-seeking diverts resources- capital, labor, and entrepreneurial talent away from productive, wealth-creating activities and toward unproductive political competition. If a company spends million on lobbying instead of investing it in new, more efficient extraction technology, the overall economic efficiency of the sector suffers. The pursuit of rents can lead to over-extraction or misallocation of resources as decisions are driven by political connections rather than economic rationale.

In resource-rich nations, the existence of large, easily appropriable resource rents provides a powerful incentive for political elites to focus on capturing and maintaining control over the resource sector rather than establishing strong, transparent institutions. This is the core of the "resource curse" argument [19]. Rent-seeking can exacerbate corruption, undermine the rule of law, and lead to an authoritarian or non-democratic political system, as incumbents use resource revenues to finance patronage networks and suppress dissent [20].

The drive to secure resource rents often prioritizes short-term gain over long-term social and environmental sustainability. Companies that successfully lobby for lax environmental rules can externalize the costs of pollution onto the public. Furthermore, the competition for resource control can fuel social conflict and even civil war, especially in regions where the distribution of resource rents is perceived as highly unequal or ethnically biased.

The rent-seeking framework offers a powerful lens through which to analyze the persistent challenges in natural resource management. It highlights how the potential for large economic rents distorts economic decision-making, corrodes governance, and often prevents resource wealth from translating into broad-based development. Ultimately, the transition from a resource-dependent economy plagued by rent-seeking to a productive, well-governed economy hinges on creating institutions that reward wealth creation over wealth capture.

2.1 Mechanisms of Rent-Seeking

Rent-seeking in the natural resource sector represents a diversion of economic energy away from actual

production and toward the capture of existing wealth. In resource-rich developing nations, these mechanisms often become entrenched, turning "potential wealth" into "actual poverty" for the general population. Rent-seeking manifests in several ways within the natural resource sector:

i. Lobbying and Campaign Financing

This mechanism involves using financial capital to secure legal advantages. In the extractive sector, this often looks like "legalized" influence where corporations fund political campaigns to ensure that the incoming administration maintains low royalty rates or grants exclusive land rights. In Australia, the mining industry launched an aggressive $22 million (AUD) advertising and lobbying campaign in 2010 against the proposed "Resource Super Profits Tax" (RSPT). The intense pressure contributed to a change in Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd to Julia Gillard) and resulted in the tax being significantly watered down into the Mineral Resource Rent Tax (MRRT), which ultimately generated far less revenue for the public than originally projected [21].

ii. Corruption and Bribery

Unlike lobbying, bribery operates outside the legal framework, relying on secret payments to bypass due process. This is most common during the "licensing" phase, where the right to explore an area is sold to the highest "under-the-table" bidder rather than the most competent firm. The OML 245 deal in Nigeria is one of the most cited examples of this mechanism. In 2011, Shell and Eni paid $1.1 billion to the Nigerian government for an offshore oil block. However, it was alleged that much of this money was diverted to a shell company (Malabu Oil and Gas) controlled by the then-Petroleum Minister, Dan Etete, to be used as kickbacks for various officials, rather than entering the national treasury [22].

iii. Regulatory Capture

Regulatory capture creates a "fox guarding the henhouse" scenario. When the agencies meant to oversee mining or drilling operations are staffed or influenced by the industry itself, public safety and environmental health are traded for corporate profit. The Deepwater Horizon oil spill (2010) in the Gulf of Mexico highlighted severe regulatory capture within the U.S. Minerals Management Service (MMS). Investigations revealed that the agency was too "cozy" with the industry it regulated, often allowing oil companies to fill out their own inspection reports. This lack of rigorous, independent oversight was a direct precursor to the catastrophic blowout [23].

iv. Policy Manipulation

Governments may intentionally design "bureaucratic mazes" to extract rents. By making the process of obtaining a permit intentionally slow, opaque, or complex, officials create "gatekeeping" opportunities where they can demand payments to speed up the process or provide "clarification." In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the mining sector has historically been plagued by "opaque" contracting [24]. Between 2010 and 2012, reports (such as the *Africa Progress Report*) found that the state-owned mining company, Gécamines, sold off stakes in high-value copper and cobalt mines to offshore shell companies in "secret deals" at prices far below market value. These shell companies then flipped the assets for massive profits, effectively siphoning billions of dollars away from the state through intentional policy opacity.

2.2 The Trilogy of Resource Management Failure

2.2.1. Resource Unutilisation: The Dormant Potential

Un-utilisation refers to the failure to harness and deploy available resources, leaving significant developmental capital dormant. This is often most evident in two major areas:

1. Natural Resources

Resource unutilisation in the physical sense is not merely about the absence of activity, but the presence of a "productivity gap"—the distance between what the lands can provide and what is actually harvested. While Africa holds approximately 60% of the world's remaining uncultivated arable land, the continent spends billions annually on food imports. This un-utilisation is often rooted in antiquated land tenure systems and a lack of rural infrastructure. Let's consider the Gezira Scheme, Sudan, which was once the largest irrigation project under single management in the world, the Gezira Scheme was designed to be the "breadbasket" of the region [25]. However, decades of under-investment, siltation of canals, and poor management have left hundreds of thousands of hectares fallow. The potential for cotton and food crop exports remains dormant while the nation struggles with food insecurity, illustrating how a lack of maintenance turns a strategic asset into a stagnant one.

Within the Limpopo Basin, Mozambique, despite vast fertile plains and proximity to water, only a small fraction of Mozambique's arable land is commercially cultivated. The "unutilisation" here is a result of the "infrastructure deficit"—without roads to transport perishable goods to Maputo or international ports, the land remains a subsistence tool rather than a developmental engine.

B. The "Critical Mineral" Stalemate

The global race for "green" minerals like lithium, rare earth elements (REEs), and copper has turned global eyes toward Africa. However, many deposits remain "dormant" because the capital required for extraction is held back by high-risk perceptions or a lack of domestic energy to power mines.

For instance, Zimbabwe and Namibia possesses some of the world's largest hard-rock lithium deposits (e.g., the Bikita and Arcadia mines). For decades, these were under-utilised or exported as low-value ores. While recent Chinese investment has begun to wake this sector, the lack of a stable national power grid means that high-value "beneficiation" (refining the ore into battery-grade chemicals) remains largely unutilised domestically [26].

In addition to this, around the Afar Depression in Ethiopia, massive potash deposits, essential for global fertilizer production are laid un-utilised. Despite its proven quantity, the resource remained unutilised for years due to the extreme environmental conditions and the absence of a rail link to the coast. It represents "dormant capital" that could have revolutionized African agriculture but remained buried due to logistical hurdles [26].

2. Human Capital

Human capital is the only resource capable of directing all others. When it is unutilised, the entire economic engine stalls. This manifests through the physical exit of talent (Brain Drain) and the internal failure to align skills with needs (Brain Waste).

Brain drain is a form of involuntary foreign aid where developing nations pay for the early healthcare and education of citizens, only for wealthier nations to reap the productive tax-paying years of those professionals. Studies have shown that the Nigerian Healthcare is heavily drained. Nigeria currently has one of the highest rates of medical migration in the world. With over 10,000 Nigerian-trained doctors practicing in the UK alone, the Nigerian state is effectively subsidizing the British National Health Service (NHS). The "unutilisation" here is tragic: millions of Nigerians lack access to basic care while the country's most expensive "human exports" provide care in London and Manchester because of poor domestic pay and dilapidated hospital infrastructure [29]. A new form of brain drain is emerging where highly skilled software engineers in Accra work exclusively for Silicon Valley firms via remote contracts. While they remain physically present, their intellectual output is entirely unutilised for domestic industrial problems—such as digitizing local supply chains—because the local economy cannot compete with US-dollar-denominated salaries.

Domestic unutilisation occurs when the education system operates in a vacuum, producing degrees for which there is no market demand. This creates a "lost generation" of over-educated but under-employed youth. Currently, South Africa faces a structural mismatch where the unemployment rate for youth (ages 15–24) often exceeds 60%. Despite having a robust university system, there is a massive shortage of artisans, specialized technicians, and "green" engineers [26]. The unutilisation of this youthful energy is not due to a lack of will, but a "skills gap" where the curriculum is tailored to 20th-century bureaucracy rather than 21st-century technology and manufacturing [27]. Similarly, for decades, the Egyptian education system was geared toward producing graduates for guaranteed government jobs. When the state could no longer afford to hire them, millions of graduates found themselves with degrees in law or humanities that the private sector did not value [28-30]. This resulted in a massive "dormant" pool of talent working in informal transport or retail, representing a profound waste of the state's educational investment.

Table 1: Key Unutilised/Under-exploited Resource and Estimated Proven Quantity

Country	Key Unutilised/Under-exploited Resource	Estimated Proven Quantity (Reserve)	Notes on Significance
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	**Cobalt**	~6 million metric tons (MT)	World's largest reserves; critical for electric vehicle batteries.
	Copper	Significant reserves	Key mineral for green energy transition; substantial untapped potential.
Nigeria	**Natural Gas**	~209–210 trillion standard cubic feet (Tscf)	Largest gas reserves in Africa, with much being undeveloped or completely flared.
Libya	**Crude Oil**	~48 billion barrels	Largest oil reserves in Africa; subject to geopolitical instability.

Country	Key Unutilised/Under-exploited Resource	Estimated Proven Quantity (Reserve)	Notes on Significance
Mozambique	**Natural Gas**	~100 Trillion Cubic Feet (Tcf)	Vast offshore discoveries, positioning it as a major future global gas supplier.
South Africa	**Platinum-Group Metals (PGMs)**	Dominant world reserves (e.g., 90% of global **Chromium** and **Platinum** reserves are in Africa, heavily concentrated in South Africa)	Essential for automotive, chemical, and green hydrogen industries.
Guinea	**Bauxite**	World's largest reserves	Primary ore for aluminium; currently exported largely as raw bauxite.
Uganda	**Crude Oil**	~2.5 billion barrels	Recent, large discoveries (e.g., Albertine Graben) awaiting full production/export infrastructure (e.g., EACOP).
Namibia	**Uranium**	Significant reserves (46% of Africa's stash)	Key for nuclear energy; exploration and development are ongoing.
Angola	**Natural Gas**	~366 billion cubic meters (bcm)	Much of the gas is currently associated with oil production and often flared or re-injected.

UNCTAD (19); African Development Bank (AfDB) (1)

Table 2: Natural Resource Proceeds (Rents) in Select African Countries

Country	Principal Resource	Total Natural Resource Rents (% of GDP) – 2010	Total Natural Resource Rents (% of GDP) - 2021
Libya	Oil & Gas	59.4%	**61.0%**
Angola	Oil & Gas, Diamonds	33.6%	30.0%
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	Copper, Cobalt, Gold, Diamonds	16.9%	38.8%
Equatorial Guinea	Oil & Gas	32.7%	35.3%
Algeria	Oil & Gas	20.9%	22.6%
Nigeria	Oil & Gas	15.1%	13.4%
Zambia	Copper, Cobalt	10.9%	14.9%
Gabon	Oil, Manganese	11.9%	11.5%
South Africa	Platinum, Gold, Coal	7.6%	7.3%

UNCTAD (19); African Development Bank (AfDB) (1)

Information from Table 1 indicates a massive wealth of strategic resources across Africa that remains largely untapped, positioning the continent as a central pillar for the global green energy transition. Countries like the DRC, South Africa, and Guinea hold world-leading reserves of cobalt, platinum-group metals, and bauxite, all of which are indispensable for manufacturing electric vehicle batteries and renewable energy infrastructure. Meanwhile, nations like Nigeria, Mozambique, and Namibia possess vast energy potential in natural gas and uranium, which could redefine global power markets if the current barriers—such as gas flaring, geopolitical instability, and a lack of export infrastructure—are successfully addressed. The data underscores a significant economic

gap where high-value resources are currently exported as raw materials or left undeveloped, representing a major opportunity for industrial growth and domestic value addition

From Table 2, the highest resource rent percentages consistently belong to countries heavily dependent on oil and gas (e.g., Libya, Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Algeria), illustrating the massive revenue generated by these commodities, especially during periods of high prices.

The DRC shows a dramatic increase in resource rents between 2010 and 2021, reflecting a surge in global demand and extraction of critical minerals like copper and cobalt, essential for the green energy transition.

On average, resource extraction accounts for around 30% of government revenues in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, this high revenue does not always translate into broad-based prosperity, a concept often referred to as the "resource curse", where wealth from resources fails to diversify the economy or reduce poverty.

For context, in 2019, the continent produced nearly 1 billion tonnes of minerals worth an estimated $406 billion in total. This total production value gives a sense of the large-scale wealth generated, though the direct revenue (rent/tax) to individual governments is a fraction of this amount.

2.2.2 Resource Underutilisation: The Efficiency Gap

Resource underutilisation represents an "efficiency gap"—a state where resources are being extracted or used, but in a way that captures only a fraction of their potential value [5]. Unlike unutilisation (where resources stay dormant), underutilisation involves active but sub-optimal engagement that results in "value leakage" to foreign economies. Under-utilisation occurs in various pathways as shown this;

1. The Energy under-utilisation

Energy under-utilisation occurs when a nation possesses the raw inputs for power but lacks the infrastructure to convert them into industrial kinetic energy. A classical example is the recurrent flared gas wasted in Nigeria and Angola which could have solve the problem of power outage and related cases. These nations hold some of the world's largest natural gas reserves. However, due to a lack of gas-gathering infrastructure, billions of cubic feet are "flared" (burned off) annually as a byproduct of oil extraction [18]. This is a double under-utilisation: a valuable energy resource is wasted, and the environment is degraded.

Secondly, South African energy sector suffers serious deficit. Despite having a massive installed coal-fired capacity, South Africa's grid operates at roughly 50–60% Energy Availability Factor (EAF) due to poor maintenance and corruption [9]. This inefficiency creates an "energy poverty" that forces manufacturers to scale back production, costing the economy billions in potential GDP.

2. Industrial Under-utilisation

This is the failure to build "forward linkages" (processing raw goods) and "backward linkages" (manufacturing the equipment used for extraction). Guinea holds the world's largest bauxite reserves. However, the majority is exported as raw ore to China and Europe. By failing to refine bauxite into alumina or smelt it into aluminum domestically—tasks that require massive, consistent power—Guinea "exports" the high-paying industrial jobs and technological spillover that come with smelting [14].

Agricultural sector in Africa is not exempted in the issue of under-utilisation. The Cocoa Value Chain (Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire) had dropped significantly. These two nations produce the majority of the world's cocoa but capture less than 6% of the global chocolate industry's value. The under-utilisation lies in the "mid-stream" processing; the value-added steps of grinding and chocolate manufacturing happen in the Global North [23].

In a different case, the under-utilisation of Africa's botanical wealth—specifically its aromatic plants and ornamental flowers—represents a poignant example of the "Value-Addition Gap." While the continent possesses the ideal biodiversity and climate to be the world's perfume and cosmetic laboratory, it currently functions primarily as a raw material nursery for luxury brands in Europe and North America.

Africa is considered home to some of the world's most potent aromatic species, from the Geraniums of Egypt and the Ylang-Ylang of the Comoros to the Cape Snowbush of South Africa and the Frankincense of Somalia. Despite this, the essential oil industry within Africa remains largely artisanal or focused on the export of raw, dried plant matter. The Comoros is one of the world's largest producers of Ylang-Ylang, a flower essential to high-end perfumes like *Chanel No. 5*. However, the local industry is often limited to primary distillation using rudimentary, wood-fired stills. The "essential oil" is then shipped to Grasse, France, where it is refined, stabilized, and bottled into perfumes. A bottle of perfume that retails for **$150** in Paris (and is sold back to elites in Moroni or Lagos at that price) often contains raw material for which the local farmer was paid only a few cents.

In many African urban centers, highly scented plants like Jasmine, Lavender, and Roses are treated strictly as "ornamentals" to beautify gardens or hotel lobbies. There is a psychological and industrial barrier where these plants are seen as aesthetics rather than "green gold."

Kenya is a global giant in the cut-flower industry, supplying roughly 35% of all flowers sold in the European Union. However, this industry is almost entirely focused on the "visual" market—selling flowers that will die in a vase within a week. The under-utilisation lies in the failure to pivot toward the "aromatic" market. Instead of discarding "imperfect" blooms, a sophisticated economy would utilize them for essential oil extraction, rose water, and absolute oils used in cosmetics. By selling only the "stem," Kenya exports the lowest value-added version of the plant.

The most visible sign of this efficiency gap is found on the shelves of African pharmacies and beauty boutiques. African consumers often buy "Shea Butter Creams" or "Aromatic Oils" produced by French or American brands. African countries lose the "Technological Spillover" of cosmetic chemistry and the high-paying jobs of branding and marketing, while simultaneously suffering a hit to their foreign exchange reserves to buy back their own plants.

Why aren't African gardens being used as the base for domestic "Essential Oil Hubs"?. The answers are too numerous. However, Madagascar has made strides in the Vanilla and Clove sectors by moving beyond raw export and establishing domestic extraction facilities. By doing so, they keep the "aroma" of the profit within the country [7]. If Nigeria, South Africa, or Kenya were to integrate aromatic plant cultivation with cosmetic science, they could supply the burgeoning "Afro-centric" beauty market (which is currently worth billions) using 100% local supply chains.

3. Technological Under-utilisation

Technological under-utilisation occurs when a country fails to adopt or adapt modern tools that could multiply productivity in traditional sectors. While Ethiopia has a massive agricultural workforce, the use of GPS-guided planting, soil sensors, and automated irrigation remains negligible. The "resource" (the soil and workforce) is under-utilised because it is bound to 19th-century tools [16]. Many African governments suffer from inefficient revenue collection because they under-utilise digital e-government platforms. In countries like the DRC, tax revenue as a percentage of GDP remains low not because wealth isn't being generated, but because the "technological infrastructure" for transparent collection is missing, allowing for leakages and "rent-seeking."

4. Solid Minerals and the "Beneficiation" Deficit

Unlike oil, solid minerals require complex processing to move up the value chain. Most African solid minerals are mined, shipped, and refined elsewhere. Zimbabwe possesses world-class lithium deposits essential for the EV revolution [8]. For years, these were under-utilised as "raw rock" exports. The government recently banned raw lithium exports to force "beneficiation"—the domestic processing into concentrates. Botswana provides a rare counter-example. For years, it under-utilised its diamonds by exporting them as rough stones. By negotiating "Diamond Trading Company Botswana" (DTCB), they forced the sorting, valuing, and even some cutting and polishing to happen in Gaborone, capturing significantly more value than its neighbors [7].

5. The "Blue Economy" (Maritime and Aquatic Neglect)

The Blue Economy refers to the sustainable use of ocean resources. Many African coastal nations under-utilise their "Exclusive Economic Zones" (EEZ) by focusing only on small-scale fishing while ignoring deep-sea potential. Additionally, illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) Fishing in West Africa cost a huge lost to the economy [18]. Countries like Senegal and Sierra Leone lose billions in potential revenue because they lack the naval capacity to monitor their waters. Foreign industrial trawlers "strip-mine" the ocean, meaning the domestic economy under-utilises its own protein sources and export potential. Nevertheless, Seychelles has pioneered the use of "Blue Bonds" to fund the protection and sustainable expansion of its maritime economy. This serves as a contrast to nations that treat their coastline merely as a place for traditional ports rather than a hub for biotechnology, offshore renewable energy, and sustainable mariculture.

6. Financial Capital Under-utilisation (Capital Flight and IFFs)

Domestic savings and profits are under-utilised when they are moved out of the country through Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs) rather than being reinvested. For instance, large mining firms often undervalue the copper they export to reduce their tax burden in Zambia, moving the "financial resource" to offshore tax havens. This means the profits from Zambian soil are not utilised to build Zambian schools or hospitals [15]. Likewise in many African nations, pension funds hold billions of dollars but are restricted by law to only invest in government bonds. This is an under-utilisation of domestic capital; these funds could be used to finance critical infrastructure projects (rail, power, ports) that would generate a higher social and economic return than simple debt interest.

2.2. 3. Resource Misutilisation: The Corruption Drain

Misutilisation represents the most destructive tier of the "Efficiency Gap," where resources are not merely idle or inefficiently used, but are intentionally diverted away from the public good. In this phase, the state functions as a vehicle for private accumulation rather than a facilitator of development.

There are many dimensions of mis-utilisation, first Governments often divert limited public funds into high-visibility, capital-intensive "prestige projects" that offer little to no economic return. These projects are frequently chosen because they allow for large-scale "rent-seeking" through construction contracts and provide a facade of modernization. The Ajaokuta Steel Mill, Nigeria: Intended to be the bedrock of Nigerian industrialization, this project has consumed over $8 billion since the late 1970s [5]. Despite being "90% complete" for decades, it has never produced a single sheet of commercial steel. The misutilisation lies in the continued budgetary allocations for salaries and maintenance of a non-functional facility, diverting funds that could have revitalized the nation's entire power grid or healthcare system.

1. Inefficiency in Public funded Firms

A premier example of resource misutilisation is the Aluminium Smelter Company of Nigeria (ALSCON) located in Ikot Abasi, Akwa Ibom State. Originally conceived to position Nigeria as a leader in the global aluminium market by leveraging the country's vast natural gas reserves to power the energy-intensive smelting process, it has instead become a symbol of wasted industrial potential [6,17]. Despite an initial investment of over $2.5 billion of public funds, the plant has remained largely moribund for decades. The misutilisation manifested through a series of controversial ownership transfers, including a heavily criticized sale to a Russian firm (UC RUSAL) for a fraction of its setup cost—reportedly around $250 million, of which only a portion was paid upfront. Instead of providing thousands of jobs for the youth of Akwa Ibom and producing aluminium for domestic use and export, the facility sits as a "rusting giant." Massive gas-to-power infrastructure was built specifically for ALSCON, but because the plant is non-functional, that energy resource remains misdirected or wasted, while Nigeria continues to import aluminium at high foreign exchange costs

2. Debt Mismanagement

Loans are often secured under the guise of "national development" but are mismanaged so profoundly that the debt remains while the intended infrastructure fails to generate the revenue needed to pay it back. In the mid-2010s, Zambia took on massive Eurobond and Chinese debt for infrastructure. However, opaque contracting and mismanagement led to projects being overpriced or left incomplete [30]. By 2020, Zambia became the first African nation to default on its debt during the pandemic. The misutilisation was twofold: the capital was not converted into productive capacity, and the subsequent interest payments now swallow the majority of the national budget, starving the education and health sectors. Secondly, Mozambique secretively borrowed roughly $2 billion for a state-of-the-art tuna fishing fleet and maritime security. Much of the money was allegedly diverted into bribes and kickbacks [30]. Today, the "tuna fleet" sits rusting in Maputo's harbor, while the sovereign debt remains a crushing burden on the Mozambican taxpayer—a classic case of misutilised financial capital.

3. Military Spending

In many African nations, misutilisation takes the form of "security-heavy" budgeting. Funds that should be directed toward Research & Development (R&D) or technical vocational training are instead funneled into military hardware, often to protect the regime rather than the borders. Following this, despite having significant oil wealth, South Sudan remains one of the least developed nations on Earth [15]. A vast majority of oil proceeds have been misutilised to fund internal conflict and military hardware. In this scenario, the "natural resource" (oil) is directly converted into "destruction" rather than "construction," representing a total misutilisation of the nation's economic potential.

4. Overpricing and "Contract Padding"

Misutilisation is also found in the micro-details of public procurement, where the cost of a simple road or school is inflated by 300% to 500% to accommodate "kickbacks" for government officials. For instance, Kenya's government reportedly lost billions of shillings in payments made for the construction of two dams that never started. The misutilisation here is "ghost infrastructure"—where the financial resource vanishes into private bank accounts through sophisticated paperwork, leaving the rural population without the water and power they were promised [29]. Comparisons across East Africa have shown massive discrepancies in the cost-per-kilometer of railway construction. When a project is overpriced due to corruption, it represents a misutilisation of capital because the same "loan" could have built twice the length of track or included necessary "backward linkages" like local repair hubs.

In Nigeria, the misutilisation of resources through procurement fraud is the greatest in Africa.

Perhaps the most egregious example of financial misutilisation in Nigeria's history is the Mambilla Hydropower Project in Taraba State. Conceived over 40 years ago to be the largest power plant in Africa (3,050 MW), it has become a "black hole" for public funds [27]. Meanwhile billions of Naira had been being allocated for studies, land acquisition, and preliminary work, the project remains at 0% physical completion. In 2024 and 2025, judicial proceedings against former Ministers of Power (such as Saleh Mamman and Olu Agunloye) revealed

allegations of a $6 billion fraudulent contract award and the "indirect conversion" of over N33 billion through money laundering. The result is a nation still crippled by power outages while billions meant for a solution sit in private accounts.

Among the most questionable agencies in Nigeria is the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). The NDDC was established to develop the oil-rich but ecologically devastated Niger Delta. However, a 2021 forensic audit ordered by the Presidency uncovered a staggering level of "ghost infrastructure." The audit reviewed 19,421 projects awarded between 2001 and 2019. It discovered that over 13,000 projects were abandoned or undocumented—meaning they were paid for but either never started or were left halfway [6-8]. The audit highlighted that roughly N6 trillion ($14 billion at the time) had been funneled through the commission with almost no tangible infrastructure to show for it. This is a classic "efficiency gap" where resources were misutilised to satisfy political patronage rather than regional development.

Nigeria is often cited as having one of the highest road construction costs per kilometer in the world, frequently 3 to 4 times higher than global averages for similar terrain. Experts have noted that while the average cost for a kilometer of road globally is approximately $1.5 million, some Nigerian federal road contracts have been awarded at costs exceeding $4 million to $5 million per kilometer. The "inflation gap" (the difference between market price and contract price) is used to facilitate kickbacks for officials [7]. A 2024 report by BudgIT tracked nearly 3,000 government projects and found that 92 were "fraudulently delivered," meaning the government paid full price for substandard work or projects that were relocated to undisclosed sites to hide the fact that they weren't actually built.

At the micro-level, misutilisation affects the most vulnerable rural populations through the "ghost borehole" or "ghost classroom" projects commonly found in the budgets of many Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs). Contracts are awarded for the sinking of solar-powered boreholes in rural villages. On paper, the project is "100% completed and commissioned." In reality, the contractor might only paint a signpost or sink a dry well that never functions. Because monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are paper-based and easily compromised, officials sign off on "completion certificates" in exchange for a percentage of the contract value. This leaves communities to continue drinking from contaminated streams while the state "utilises" its budget for non-existent services.

Table 3: Estimated Losses from Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs) in African Natural Resources

Country	Principal Resource and Type of Loss	Estimated Amount and Timeframe	Source of Estimate
Nigeria	**Oil Theft and Under-invoicing** (Crude oil, gas)	**$69.8 billion** in revenue lost due to under-invoicing of oil exports to the US alone.	UNCTAD (1996-2014)
		$5 billion+ lost to illegal gold smuggling.	Nigerian Authorities (2012-2018)
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	**Illegal Exploitation and Trade** (Gold, Copper, Cobalt, Timber)	**98%** of net profits from illegal natural resource exploitation goes to criminal networks.	International Organizations (Various Years)
		Illicit trade in gold, charcoal, and timber is cannibalizing resources.	African Development Bank (AfDB)
Ghana	**Trade Misinvoicing** (Gold)	**$14.39 billion** in cumulative illicit flows from trade misinvoicing.	Global Financial Integrity (2002-2011)

UNCTAD (19); African Development Bank (AfDB) (1)

From Table 3, the total annual loss from IFFs for the entire continent is frequently cited as over $88 billion per year, with a significant portion stemming from the oil, gas, and mining sectors.

3.0 Materials and Methods

The study is structured around a qualitative, literature-based approach utilizing descriptive analysis rather than original empirical data collection. The primary objective is to define and categorize the institutional failures—unutilisation, underutilisation, and misutilisation—that explain why African development is delayed. This methodology is fundamentally a theoretical exposition, aiming to synthesize existing knowledge from the fields of Institutional Economics and Political Economy to build a cohesive conceptual framework. The research design is

non-empirical, focusing on the critical review and organization of established scholarly arguments and secondary statistics.

The Data Sources and Scope rely exclusively on secondary literature. Core theoretical underpinnings, such as the Resource Curse, rent-seeking, and the concepts of extractive versus inclusive institutions, were drawn from academic journals and foundational books in political economy and development studies. To provide concrete support and illustrate the scale of the problem, institutional reports and statistics were selectively integrated. These quantitative data points—concerning mineral reserves, resource rents, Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs), and sectoral inefficiencies (e.g., energy, agriculture)—were sourced from reputable international and continental bodies like the World Bank, UNECA, and the AfDB, ensuring the arguments are grounded in verifiable economic contexts. The analysis maintains a broad focus on Sub-Saharan African countries reliant on extractive industries.

The Analytical Procedure employed was Thematic Analysis. First, the collected literature was reviewed and coded to isolate recurring concepts related to resource governance failures and the persistence of underdevelopment. Second, this coded evidence was then organized into the three-part framework: Unutilisation (failure to harness dormant potential), Underutilisation (inefficient and sub-optimal deployment), and Misutilisation (intentional, corruption-driven diversion). Finally, the analysis involved a synthesis and interpretation phase, where the theoretical concepts (e.g., rent-seeking mechanisms like regulatory capture and corruption) were analytically mapped onto the practical consequences (the three categories of resource failure). This allowed the study to provide a structured, qualitative explanation that links institutional incentives to economic outcomes, thereby addressing the central question of the study.

4.0 Results and Discussion

Thematic analysis method was employed in this study and the outcome was given thus:

1. "Why Development Tarry in Africa"

This thematic analysis evaluates the conceptual strength and argumentative clarity of the essay, "Why Development Tarry in Africa: An Essay on Resource Un-utilisation, Under-utilisation, and Mis-utilisation." The study's primary achievement is its successful pivot of the African development narrative from one of external constraints or scarcity to one of internal institutional failure in resource governance. Its central strength lies in the creation and rigorous application of the "Trilogy of Resource Management Failure," offering a precise framework for diagnosing persistent underdevelopment.

The essay's central theme establishes a clear and forceful answer to the paradox posed in its introduction: Africa's development delay is not a consequence of having insufficient resources, but rather an institutional choice that intentionally favors rent-capture over productive deployment of wealth. This thesis is exceptionally strong because it provides a precise, actionable framework (the Trilogy) grounded in high-level theory, effectively moving beyond the generalized, often vague concept of "corruption." Instead, the essay introduces three analytically distinct categories of failure, providing a significantly more nuanced diagnostic tool. Ultimately, this core theme functions as a powerful conceptual bridge, linking the vast, abstract problem of underdevelopment to specific, observable phenomena, such as the practice of exporting raw logs or the construction of non-viable "white elephant" prestige projects.

2. Institutional and Political Economy

The entire argumentative structure of this work is anchored firmly in the theoretical frameworks of Institutional Economics and the Resource Curse, which together provide a robust, non-deterministic causal explanation for the continent's struggles. The immediate introduction of the theme of Extractive Institutions is crucial, as it sets the necessary political context. This framework argues that ruling elites do not mismanage resources by accident; they *intentionally* design political and economic systems to concentrate wealth and power in the hands of a small few, thus incentivizing and institutionalizing resource mismanagement. This thematic choice successfully legitimizes the study's focus on internal political dynamics as the primary obstacle, rather than simply blaming external market forces or colonial legacies.

The detailed discussion of Rent-Seeking then serves as the vital connecting thematic mechanism between the high-level theory and the observed on-the-ground failures. By defining rent-seeking as the practice of spending resources to *capture* existing wealth (resource rents) rather than to *create* new wealth, the article establishes the perverse incentive structure that underlies the entire "trilogy" framework. The mechanisms identified in the text—Lobbying, Regulatory Capture, and direct Corruption—correctly demonstrate how this incentive to extract unearned income is operationalized within the natural resource sector, leading directly to the three categories of institutional failure.

3. The Trilogy of Failure

The "Trilogy of Failure"—comprising unutilisation, underutilisation, and misutilisation—is the essay's most

effective and original thematic organization device. The three categories are conceptually distinct, yet mutually comprehensive in their description of how resources are poorly managed. Unutilisation is characterized as a Passive Failure, referring to the failure to harness dormant potential due to lack of capacity, infrastructure, or clear incentives. Examples include vast fallow arable land, untapped critical mineral deposits, and the "brain drain" of skilled human capital. Next, Underutilisation defines an Efficiency Gap, where resources are used inefficiently, operating far below their optimal potential, causing value to be lost through poor policy. Key examples here include the failure to establish forward and backward linkages (e.g., exporting crude oil instead of refining it) and the massive drain of capital via Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs). Finally, Misutilisation represents Active Corruption and rent-seeking in its most direct form—the intentional diversion and squandering of public funds, exemplified by expensive "white elephant" prestige projects and the misuse of development debt and loans. This thematic coherence is powerfully grounded in real-world economic realities, supported by the essay's inclusion of statistical context, such as the high average resource rent percentages and the fact that IFFs often exceed foreign aid received by the continent.

The article conclusion is structurally and thematically consistent, flowing directly from the theoretical foundation and the diagnostic trilogy. The concluding theme emphasizes the necessity of institutional transformation. The argument posits that development will only "cease to tarry" when African leaders fundamentally transform the incentive structure from one that rewards "control" and rent-seeking to one that rewards "productive utilisation" and wealth creation. Furthermore, the suggested policy remedies—Strengthening Governance, Industrialisation through Linkages, and Investing in Productive Human Capital—are explicitly and logically aligned with the three thematic failures. *Strengthening Governance* directly counters Misutilisation; *Industrialisation through Linkages* addresses Underutilisation; and *Investing in Human Capital* targets the "brain drain" aspect of Unutilisation. In its entirety, the article offers a perfectly structured thematic analysis, using a strong theoretical base to justify its internal focus, developing an effective and original taxonomy (the Trilogy), and presenting policy recommendations that are logically derived from its own analytical framework.

5.0 Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The prolonged delay in African development is not a fate sealed by geography or natural endowments, but a consequence of institutional failures manifesting as the unutilisation, underutilisation, and misutilisation of the continent's wealth. The resources are present; the will to deploy them productively has often been absent. Development will cease to tarry when African leaders fundamentally transform the incentive structure from one that rewards *control* to one that rewards productive utilisation of the people's resources. To shift the narrative, African nations must:

1. **Strengthen Governance and Accountability:** Implement robust anti-corruption institutions and transparency in resource contracts. A move from extractive to inclusive institutions is paramount to shift incentives from rent-seeking to wealth creation.
2. **Industrialise through Linkages:** Policy must deliberately force resource-backed industrialisation. This means banning the export of raw materials (e.g., crude oil, iron ore) and investing heavily in domestic processing capacity to capture value-added wealth.
3. **Invest in Productive Human Capital:** Reform education systems to align with industrial needs and create an economic environment—including competitive wages and research funding—to reverse the brain drain and effectively utilise the vast youth population.
4. **Local Investment:** Encourage local investors through financial instrument such as loan for natural resource extraction and processing
5. **Development-driven projects:** Channel Resource Proceed into development-driven projects can boost economic growth and household income.
6. **Policy Reform:** There is need to re-strategize and reframe policy on natural resource extraction and value-chain investment for efficiency. These ranges from setting rules on extraction, post management, illegal extraction and trading, mining sites conservation, miners' welfare protection etc.

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