

Mr. President Save Ghana From Gather Them and Sell

Dr. David Ackah, PhD.

President of Institute of Project Management Professionals

Email: president@ipmp-edu.org

Abstract

Small-scale mining was once a respected traditional vocation. When the government officially legalised the practice in the late 1980s, it brought to the fore some challenges, including the mechanism by which the government granted mining concessions to peasants. The process was cumbersome and slow and therefore forced many people to mine illicitly. Today, illegal mining, popularly known as ‘galamsey,’ has become a major source of livelihood for persons living around legal mining communities, mainly due to the continuous rise of the price of the commodity on the world market. The activities of illegal small-scale mining operators have been identified as the major source of water pollution in mining communities, especially in the Western Region.

At Nkroful in the Ellembele District and Wassa Amenfi East District, both in the Western Region, activities of small-scale miners are a major problem, threatening the health of the people living in those communities who depend on the polluted water-bodies for their domestic use. However, the district agencies whose duty it is to monitor and enforce the laws do not have adequate capacity to enforce the laws, and have therefore failed in the execution of their monitoring and supervision roles.

Indeed, the environmental effects and other demerits of small-scale mining operations prima facie look overwhelming. But a holistic and dispassionate look at the real issue might tempt one to side with the sentiments of the small-scale miners. It is important however to distinguish between the licenced small-scale miners, who have been licenced under the small scale Gold Mining Law (PNDCL 218) now replaced by sections 81 to 99 of the new Minerals and Mining Act, 2006 (Act 703) and the illegal operators, popularly referred to as galamsey operators. The small-scale miners have no mining equipment that will prevent water-bodies from getting polluted, yet the Minerals Commission continues to issue operating licences to them. Mining experts describe small-scale mining as being similar to illegal mining due to the method both miners use to extract their gold. Experts further state that galamseyers are people who do gold mining independently for mining companies using crude methods such as digging pits, tunnels and sluices with their hands.

Keywords: *Galamsey, Gather & Sell, Illegal Mining*

A. “Gather Them and Sell”

It is said that the word galamsey is derived from the phrase “gather them and sell”, which is what these artisanal miners do to survive. In practice, a small-scale mining operation in Ghana is based on a land plot measuring less than 25 acres. There are however other indicators like work output and equipment used, which the Minerals Commission refuses to inspect before it makes recommendations to the ministry of lands and natural resource. In Ghana the small-scale mining industry is reputed to be well over 2,000 years old and is still being treated as an informal industrial sector, even though the sector employs thousands of people who use largely rudimentary, unmonitored and uncontrolled practices which are not monitored by the environmental protection agency. Small-scale mining activities in Ghana remained unregulated, and therefore the government does not receive any revenue from their operations

B. Negative Effective of “Gather Them and Sell”

Generally, many social commentators and environmentalist have advocated for a stricter regime to flush out the activities of illegal miners.

- **Destructive floods** in parts of the country recently were blamed largely on the activities of illegal miners. It is also feared that illegal mining activities could have serious repercussions for the safety of the formal mines and the environment as a whole. Illegal mining for example, affects the geological balance of other mines. “Illegal miners have shifted their activities to the Adansi Shaft Pillar, a rock that serves as a support system to keep the shaft on its feet,” noted John Owusu, AngloGold Ashanti (AGA) Corporate Affairs Manager has

stated. In Ghana, many sociologists extend the scope of damage that mining can produce to include potentially adverse impacts on society and cultural heritage and the health and safety of mine workers.

- **Great risks to the miner's life:** There are regular incidents of a pit may caving in and burying miners alive. Siaw summarised, "It is not an easy job, sometimes people go down there and do not return. At other instances we do not get anything and that is why there is a lot of theft in this area." Yet, these deadly trends are not ones that deter people from descending into the earth's deep shafts in search of ore bearing rocks. Their motivation is attached to a desperate need for income. Anytime lives are lost in the mines, those who survive are able to potentially secure more minerals for themselves. The mine operators are rather spurred on to engage in their illegal activities by such accidents.

The Obuasi mine of AngloGold Ashanti, according to management, is under threat by the activities and operations of illegal miners. The activities of these illegal miners have heightened the insecurity in the area for their employees as the illegal miners have resorted to the use of sophisticated weapons to protect their operations. "It is worrying the manner in which the illegal miners competed with company workers underground, using offensive weapons like cutlasses, clubs and guns to put fear in the legitimate miners. There have been several occasions where AGA workers resisted going to work, because of the risky environment created by these illegal miners", said Mr. Owusu. The government in collaboration with multinational mining companies has on several occasions expressed worry about the trend of galamsey operations in the country and has tried alternative ways to wean practitioners off their dangerous trade by introducing alternative livelihood schemes in all mining communities.

However, this approach seems to do little to discourage adventures into the pits especially when gold prices have resumed their surge. Alternatively, there have been calls on the government and mining companies to release concessions to the illegal operators since these adventurous miners are now impacting formal concession arrangements without the mining company reaping any benefit. Illegal mining is creeping dangerously close to the mining company's areas. Whatever solution is adopted, it is clear that the root of the problem is a mix of social and economic considerations. Low income, lack of regulatory enforcement, perverse incentives to avoid obtaining official land concessions for mining, as well as a lack of education on environmental issues has morphed into a very hazardous practice in Ghana's mining sector. The government and civil society must put their hands to the wheel to fight it otherwise legitimate private sector operators may be deterred from investing in the sector which is one of the chief foreign exchange earners in the economy.

- **Devastating effect of illegal mining:** Initially one may only think that it is the surface soil which is being destroyed but there is more to it like pollution of water bodies. Institutions, charged with the protection of the environment such as the Minerals Commission, Environmental Protection Agency and Forestry Commission seem to be overwhelmed by the strength and threat of illegal miners. It is therefore alarming to hear reports that cocoa and cashew farms in some parts of the country are allegedly being sold out for illegal mining activities. This situation will obviously affect the production of cocoa, one of Ghana's major economic crops. River bodies are not being spared by illegal miners. For instance, the Tano River which is the main source of water for more than 60 percent of the population of Brong Ahafo region is bearing the brunt of illegal miners. Communities like Dormaa Akwamu, Kenyase, Nkaseim are also under similar threats.

C. Conclusion

One thing Ghanaians should bear in mind is that the continuous operations of illegal miners in the country will have more destructive effects on the entire nation than an ordinary mind can fathom. One health hazard is the effect of dangerous chemicals used by illegal miners. We should know that the life of one Ghanaian is precious than hundreds of ounces of gold. It must be made clear that galamsey operations come with some moral and social problems. These are open prostitution by girls between 10 and 15, abuse of alcohol, illicit use of marijuana and other hard drugs like cocaine and heroin. Incidence of armed robberies, falling educational standards in the affected communities and blatant disregard to laws, order and customs are exhibited at the highest levels. It should be noted that when galamsey

is not checked, land is degraded and food production decreases. The effect of illegal mining on economic crops which gives the nation a sustained means of foreign exchange cannot be quantified. Our Security Agencies, Environmental Agencies, Chiefs, Political Leaders and all well-meaning persons should rise up and stop any attempt to destroy the nation in the name of gold.

References

1. Abdelhamid, T.S., and Everett, J.G. (2000). Identifying Root Causes of Construction Accident. *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management* 126, 52-60.
2. Austin, J., Kessler, M.L., Riccobono, J.E., and Bailey, J.S. (1996), Using feedback and reinforcement to improve the performance and safety of a roofing crew. *Journal Organizational Behavior Management* 16 (2), 49-75.
3. Brunette, M.J. (2004). Construction safety research in the United States: targeting the Hispanic workforce. *Injury Prevention* 10 (4), 244-248.
4. Cheyne, A., Cox, S., Oliver, A., and Tomas, J. M. (1998). Modeling safety climate in the prediction of levels of safety activity. *Work and Stress* 12 (3), 255-271.
5. Dejoy, D. M., Schaffer, B.S., Wilson, M. G., Vandenberg, R. J., and Butts, M. M. (2004). Creating Safer Workplace: assessing the determinants and role of safety climate. *Journal of Safety Research* 35 (1), 81-90.
6. Dong, W., Vaughan, P., Sullivan, K., Fletcher, T. (1995). Mortality study of construction workers in the UK. *International Journal of Epidemiology* 24 (4), 750-757.
7. Edberg, M. (2007). *Essentials of Health Behavior: Social and Behavioral Theory in Public Health*. Jones and Bartlett Publisher. Sudbury. Hal 51-58.
8. Edelson, J., et al. (2009). Predictors of hearing protection use in construction workers. *Annals Occupational Hygiene* 53 (6), 605-615.
9. Fang, D., Zhao, C., and Zhang, M. (2016). A Cognitive model of construction workers' unsafe behaviors. *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management*. 10.1061/(ASCE)CO.1943-7862.0001118.
10. Feldman, R. S. (2003) *Essentials of Understanding Psychology*. 5th edition. McGraw-Hill Co. Inc. New York.
11. Ferdinand, A. (2002) "*Structural Equation Modelling in Management Research*, 2nd Edition". Diponegoro University Press. Semarang.
12. Geller, E.S. (2000) *The Psychology of Safety Handbook*. Lewis Publishers. New York. Hal 53 – 86, 166 – 170.
13. Goldberg, A. I., Dar-El, E. M., and Rubin, A. H. E. (1991) Threat perception and the readiness to participate in safety programs. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 12 (2), Hal. 109-122.
14. Griffin, Mark, A and Neal, Andrew. (2000) Perceptions of Safety at Work : A Framework for Linking Safety Climate to Safety Performance, Knowledge and Motivation. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Volume 5 No. 3, Hal. 347-358.
15. Haslam, R.A., Hide, S.A., Gibb, A.G.F., Gyi, D.E., Pavitt, T., Atkinson, S., and Duff, A.R. (2005) Contributing Factors in Construction Accidents. *Applied Ergonomics*, 36, Hal. 401-415.
16. Heinrich, H.W. (1980). *Industrial Accident Prevention*. Mc. Graw-Hill Book Company. New York.
17. Huang, X., and Hinze, J. (2003) Analysis of Construction Worker Fall Accidents. *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management*, 129, Hal. 262-271.
18. Huang, Y.P., Wang, X.Q., Ding, R.X., and Xia, N.N. (2016). Risk perception, risk propensity, and unsafe behavior: an empirical study of workers in Chinese construction industry. *Proceedings of the 2016 IEEE IEEM*, 978-1-5090-3665-3/16.
19. Khosravi, Y., Asilian-Mahabadi, H., Hajizadeh, E., Hassanzaden-Rangi, N., Bastani, H., and Behzadan, A.H. (2014) Factors Influencing Unsafe Behaviors and Accident on Construction Sites: A Review. *International Journal of Occupational Safety and Ergonomics*. 20:1, Hal. 111-125.
20. Kim, H., Lee, H.S., Park, M., and Choi, B., 2013. Automated information retrieval for hazard identification in construction sites. *Journal Computing in Civil Engineering*, 897-904.
21. Kouabenan, D.R. (2009) Role of Beliefs in Accident and Risk Analysis and Prevention. *Safety Science*, 47, Hal. 767-776.
22. Lombardi, D.A., Verma, S.K., Brennan, M.J., and Perry, M.J. (2009). Factors influencing worker use of personal protective eyewear. *Accident Analysis Prevention*, 41 (4), 755-762.
23. Mullen, J. (2004) Investigating Factors that Influence Individual Safety Behavior at Work. *Journal of Safety Research*, 35, Hal. 275-285.

24. Oliver, A., Cheyne, A., Tomas, J.M., Cox, S. (2002) The Effects of Organizational and Individual Factors on Occupational Accidents. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 75, Hal. 473-488.
25. Postlethwaite, B., Robbins, S., Rickerson, J., and McKinniss, T. (2009) The moderation of conscientiousness by cognitive ability when predicting workplace safety behavior. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 47, Hal. 711-716.
26. Rundmo, T. (1992) Risk Perception and Safety on Offshore Petroleum Platforms-Part ii: Perceived Risk, Job Stress and Accidents. *Safety Science*, 15, Hal. 53-68.
27. Sacks, R., Rozenfeld, O., Rosenfeld, Y., 2009. Spatial and Temporal Exposure to Safety Hazards in Construction. *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management* 135 (8), 726-736.
28. Seo, Dong-Chul. (2005) An Explicative Model of Unsafe Work Behavior. *Safety Science*, 43, Hal. 187-221.
29. Shin, M., Lee, H.S., Park, M., Moon, M., and Han, S. (2013) A System Dynamic Approach for Modeling Construction Workers' Safety Attitudes and Behaviors. *Accident Analysis and Prevention*. 68 hal. 95-105.
30. Suraji, A., Duff, A.R., and Peckitt, S.J. (2001) Development of Causal Model of Construction Accident Causation. *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management*, 127, Hal. 337-344.
31. Waehrer, G.M., Dong, X.S., Miller, T., Halie, E., Men, Y., 2007. Cost of Occupational injuries in construction in the United States. *Accident Analysis and Prevention* 39 (6), 1258-1266.