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The Environmental Politics of Small-Scale Mining and its Implication for Sustainable Development in Ghana: A Political Ecology Perspective

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Abstract

The surge in small-scale illegal mining poses significant environmental concerns for both present and future generations in Ghana. This study explores the effects of illegal mining activities on Ghana's progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Using case studies of two districts, the political settlement theory was applied to examine how power relations influence environmental outcomes. Data was collected through interviews and focus group discussions, revealing an inextricable link between actors at the local, national, and international levels and ongoing environmental degradation. Illegal mining has negatively affected several SDGs, including clean water, health, environment, food security, education, poverty, and hunger. The study urges swift policy action to prevent further deterioration.

Introduction

The mining sector holds a significant and integral position within Ghana's economy, making substantial contributions to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Gold mining has been the cornerstone of Ghana's economy since pre-colonial era and contributes significantly to revenue mobilization and provision of employment to several people (Asori et al., 2022). Gold mining accounted for 48.4% of gross merchandise export in 2020 (Ghana Chamber of Mines, 2020). Just like other industries, mining has both benefits and risks for the people living in communities where minerals are found. The environmental and health impacts of mining can either worsen or improve the lives of nearby community inhabitants and beyond.

The proliferation of illegal mining in Ghana, coupled with its negative impact on the environment, such as pollution of major and minor water bodies, degradation of forest

resources, depletion of soil nutrients, destruction of wildlife habitat can all work to militate against the country's sustainable development agenda. Ghana's progress toward sustainable development—such as cutting poverty, hunger, and improving health—is being undermined by widespread illegal gold mining. Despite efforts like an inter-ministerial task force with police and military involvement, these initiatives have not succeeded. Hence, the current study examines the power relationships of various stakeholders directly and indirectly involved in illegal mining and how the activities of illegal mining affect the sustainable development goals of Ghana from the political ecology point of view.

Background

Gold mining in Ghana according to Wireko-Gyebi et al. (2020) can be categorized into two divisions namely: large-scale multi-national and small-scale mining sectors. The small-scale mining can further be divided into two classes-legal and illegal according to its approval and operational protocols (Boateng et al., 2014). The small-scale mining sector alone accounts for 35% of total gold output in Ghana, an estimated 4.5 million Ghanaians livelihoods, and 60% of the labor force (Kumah, 2021). The Small-scale Mining Act (PNDCL 218) was enacted in 1989 and later incorporated into the present Mining Act 703 (2006) which provides a blueprint for its formalization. The Act also reserves small-scale mining solely for Ghanaian citizens. According to the Act, prospective local miners must apply for a license to mine up to twenty-five acres of land in designated areas. However, the enforcement of the small-scale mining Act by successive governments has not been successful. Despite the Act granting only Ghanaian citizens the right to undertake small-scale mining, foreigners especially Chinese citizens have taken over the business with associated widespread environmental catastrophes.

The environmental impact of small-scale mining sector, especially destruction of forests, croplands, biodiversity, and water bodies is unsurmountable (Emmanuel *et al*., 2018). Artisanal small-scale mining (ASM) is increasingly associated with the use of heavy earth moving equipment and chemicals such as mercury and cyanide for ore extraction can lead to land degradation and contamination of water bodies (Adu-Baffour *et al*., 2021). According to Mensah and Tuokuu (2023) illegal mining activities coupled with both artisanal and industrial mining play a major role in polluting water bodies in Ghana.

Small-scale mining has been found globally as one of the chief causes of mercury pollution, which is a potential neurotoxin that can cause serious health problems in human beings and wildlife (Taux et al., 2022). The United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) reported that artisanal small-scale mining handles about 37% of global mercury emissions, with 2,000 tons of mercury emitted annually (UNEP, 2023). Illegal gold mining activities have not only affected unacceptable levels of environmental damage but attendant social impacts such as child labor, human trafficking, health e.g. HIV infection, conflicts over resources control, teenage pregnancy, and school dropouts in communities (Boadi et al., 2016; Duncan, 2020; Fold et al., 2017; Owusu & Dwomoh,

2012; Gatsinzi and Hilson, 2022; Adonteng-Kissi and Adonteng-Kissi, 2017). While the country tries to meet the sustainable development goals (SDG) of ending all forms of poverty; ending hunger and achieving food security; ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing; ensure availability and sustainable management of water resources; and protection of biodiversity amongst others, this has however remained elusive due to the threat posed by illegal gold mining popularly known as "*galamsey*" which is being orchestrated by political interest groups.

The pattern of power relationship amongst various stakeholders who are directly and indirectly engaged in small-scale gold mining activities in the country are to blame for this menace (Asori et al., 2022). Successfully ending illegal mining activities by various governments over the years has been the biggest conundrum due to the complex interplay of the actors involved in the "galamsey" business which mostly shields the main perpetrators (Crawford & Botchwey, 2016). This study contends that the deep linkage between the various power actors in the small-scale mining sector such as chiefs/kings, politicians, foreigners, citizens, and other public officers are the driving forces for illegal mining and its negative effects on sustainable development. While numerous studies have described how illegal mining impacts Ghana, no research has explored the environmental politics involved from a political ecology standpoint or considered its consequences for sustainable development. Hence, this study examines how political power relations influence environmental change due to illegal mining and its implication for sustainable development.

Theoretical Framework

The Political Settlement Theory/Framework

Article 257 (6) of the 1992 Constitution of the republic of Ghana stipulates that every mineral in its natural state in, under or upon any land in Ghana, rivers, streams, water courses throughout Ghana, the exclusive economic zone and any area covered by the territorial sea or continental shelf is the property of the Republic of Ghana and is vested in the president on behalf of and in trust for the people of Ghana (The Constitution of Ghana, 1992).

Hence, the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources (MLNR) proved under Section 11 of the Civil Service Law, 1993 (PNDCL 327), is mandated to ensure the sustainable management and use of the nation's lands, forests, and wildlife, as well as mineral resources for the people of Ghana. However, the fact that the president appoints the minister for lands and natural resources including analogous ministries such as environment and science, food and agriculture make politicians abuse the law leading to the wanton destruction of Ghana's natural resources.

Political and traditional leaders control natural resources management in Ghana. Hence, the discovery of natural resources has important implications on how and whose interests those resources are administered (Asori et al., 2022). To this end, in analyzing the role of actors in the political economy of natural resources, it is significant to understand the political settlement of the country vis-à-vis the management of these

natural resources, the implication for economic growth, and sustainable development of the country. According to Asori et al., (2022), political settlement shows how the balance of power among social groups outlines the type of social institution that appears and its overall effect on society itself. The basis of the political settlement framework is that societal institutions exist in relationship with power establishments in society (Bebbington, 2015).

Khan, (2010) and Di John & Putzel, (2009) in expanding the framework show that the political settlement occurs where the distribution of natural resources benefits supported by institutions is consistent with the distribution of power in society which is sustainable over time. In elaborating the framework further, Gray (2019) defined it as a combination of power and institutions that are mutually compatible and sustainable in terms of economic and political viability. The framework is thus consistent with how small-scale mining concessions are distributed by political and traditional authorities to their preferred cronies against the general good of Ghanaian society.

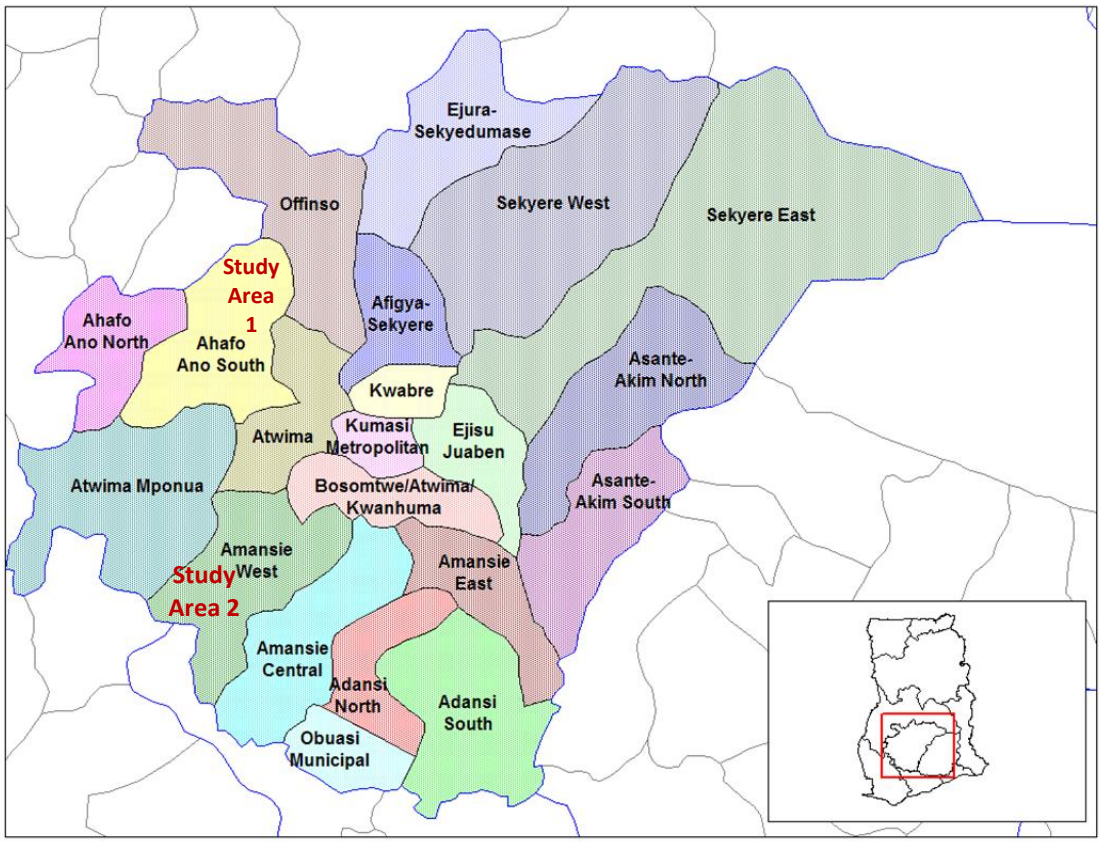
In Ghana, political parties in power usually give mining concessions especially to their members at the expense of the society (Crawford et al., 2015). The framework is thus a strong mechanism that clarifies the resource curse of most African countries especially Ghana (Asori et al., 2022), where small-scale illegal mining activities of power relations conspire to affect Ghana's sustainable development agenda.
A significant contribution of this framework is the awareness it creates about such informal institutions which allows a deeper understanding of governance and development outcomes in developing countries where political clientelism is widely accepted (Asori *et al*, 2022). The concept of political clientelism involves an asymmetric relationship of political actors where an organized minority or interest group benefits from goods such as jobs, contracts, and other private goodies, in this case natural resources at the expense of the public. Hence, clientelism is regarded as the most prevalent form of politics where the formal economy is not developed enough to allow proper and formal allocation of resources which can help the citizenry (Behuria et al., 2017). It is therefore imperative to understand the dynamics of small-scale mining concessions allocation and management in Ghana vis-à-vis political settlement framework and examines how power relations influence environmental change due to illegal mining and its implication for sustainable development from the political ecology perspective.

Methodology

Study Area

The study was conducted in two case study districts namely (see Figure 1): *Amansie* West with its capital at *Manso Nkwanta* and *Ahafo Ano* South district with *Mankranso* as the district capital, both in the Ashanti region of Ghana. The region was selected for this study due to the high level of illegal mining (*galamsey*) going on in the region.

Figure1
Map of Ashanti Region Showing the Case Study Districts



Source: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ashanti_districts.png

Data Collection Method

A case study approach was used to purposely select two districts namely: *Amansie* West and Ahafo Ano South for this study. A case study was chosen due to its ability to provide in-depth, rich qualitative data from a specific case in a real-life situation (Yin, 2014).
They provide rich qualitative data like interview transcripts, observations, and documents, which are ideal for finding themes that capture the nuances of a particular situation. Relevant legal documents and specialized reports were analyzed to understand the legal framework of both the commercial and artisanal small-scale mining sectors in Ghana. Content analysis, a qualitative data analytical tool was also used to inductively analyze in-depth interviews, most of which were recorded. Each participant was made to read and sign an informed consent form saying the purpose of the study and assured them of confidentiality before interviews were conducted.

These two districts were selected based on their history as major illegal mining hubs in the region. Three communities from each district (see table 1) were further purposely

selected for interview. These six communities were selected due to the intensity of illegal small-scale mining and the considerable environmental damage going on in these areas.

The study employed four qualitative methodologies - open-ended interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), documents review, and observation. These four methods were used to get unbiased and a better understanding of the degree of damage caused by small-scale mining activities in these areas. Data was collected from March 2024 to July 2024 in which a total of forty-eight respondents were purposely selected and interviewed. Two focus group discussions (FGDs) forming an average of twenty-four people per group were conducted in each district.

Those interviewed at the local communities' level included: unlicensed small-scale miners, licensed small-scale miners, traditional authorities, and farmers/landowners. Government officials interviewed included Ghana Education Service (GES), Ghana Health Service, the Mineral Commission, Forestry Commission, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Ghana Water Company, and NGOs. The aim of interviewing these major stakeholders, especially the public officials, was to gain a deeper understanding of the activities of illegal-mining and find the institutional and power dynamics in the small-scale mining industry and how these conspire to affect the sustainable development goals of the country.

Table 1
Sex distribution of respondents interviewed in each district.

Ahafo Ano South District				Amansie West District			
No. Respond	Mankraso	Kunsu	Domeabra	No. Respond.	Manso Nkwanta	Antoakrom	Manso Atwere
Men	8	7	6	Men	7	6	6
Women	2	1	2	Women	2	1	0
Total	10	8	8	Total	9	7	6

Table 2
The different Stakeholders interviewed in each district.

Actor/Institution	Number interviewed	
	Ahafo Ano South Dist.	Amansie West Dist.
Farmers/Landowners	7	5
Unlicensed small-scale miners	5	6
Licensed small-scale miners	2	2
Traditional Authorities	3	2
Forestry Commission	1	1
Mineral commission	1	1

Ghana Health Service	1	1
Ghana Water Company	1	1
Environmental Protection Agency	1	1
Ghana Education Service	1	1
Ministry of Agric/COCOBOD	1	1
NGOs	1	1
Total	**25**	**23**

Data Analysis

Both content and thematic analysis were used to inductively analyze data recorded from interviews. Content analysis was employed in finding key concepts, words, and frequencies in the data. While thematic analysis was used to find recurring themes and patterns from the interviews recorded. The use of content analysis was particularly significant because content analysis is considered useful for explorative studies where the respondents are also stakeholders (Berg, 2001). Also, reports and some documents were analyzed to better understand the legal framework of getting commercial and artisanal mining licenses in Ghana. Seven themes were generated from the data analysis: mode of buying mining licenses, pollution and destruction of water bodies, destruction of forests and farmlands, reduction of farm crops yield, health and disease problems, small-scale mining affects children's education, and cost of living.

Results

Mode of Acquiring Mining Licenses in Ghana

Mining Legislation

The minerals and mining Act, 2006 (Act 703) as amended in 2015 (Act 900) and 2019 (Act 995) respectively (Government of Ghana, 2006) governs the operationalization of the mining sector in Ghana. Backing the minerals and mining Act is the minerals commission Act, 1993 (Act 450) which gives the mineral commission the legal authority to regulate and manage the use of mineral resources in the country. These Acts serve as the principal enactments, spelling out the guidelines for the country’s mining laws. These two documents clearly show the state’s ownership of minerals in their natural state, and the role of relevant regulating institutions within the mining sector. For example, sections 82-99 of Act 703 solely cover artisanal small-scale mining addressing areas such as licensing, composition, and functions of the district mining officers, obligations of the miner and mercury use and distribution (Government of Ghana, 2006). There are other relevant laws that address environmental legislation in forests and water protection and use.

Types of Mining Land Acquisition

Although the government of Ghana owns all raw mineral/natural resources in trust of its citizens, the lands on which these resources are found could belong to different ownership. Hence, the prospective miner may get mining land from any of the following five different categories:

1. State lands: these are lands bought by the government under State Lands Act, 1962 (Government of Ghana, 1962b)
2. Vested lands: These are stool lands vested in the state under the Administration Lands Act, 1962 (Government of Ghana, 1962a). The state in such cases functions as trustees for the right stool
3. Stool lands: These are lands vested in a suitable stool or clan authority, represented by the chief or traditional leader, on behalf of
4. Family lands: These are lands vested in a family represented by the head of the family.
5. Private lands: These are freehold interest lands that have been bought by individuals or groups. Irrespective of which of the above categories of land a prospective miner may get, no mining activity can start without buying the necessary documentation.

Mining License Acquisition

License acquisition requires the prospective miner to get an authorization in the form of license or permit from the right institution prior to the commencement of operations to make the operations legal. There are different types of licenses prospective miners can buy which include the following:

a. The rights for mineral reconnaissance, exploration, and mining which is the legal authorization to search, explore, prospect, or mine for minerals (Adu-Baffour *et al*. 2021)
b. Environmental permit: According to the Government of Ghana (1999), the environmental assessment regulations LI 1652 prohibits anyone from undertaking mineral extraction activities which have possible adverse environmental and public health impacts without obtaining an environmental permit from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).
c. Operating permit: The operating permit allows a person to practically exploit land for minerals (Government of Ghana, 2012a). This permit entreats the prospective miner to abide by all mining regulations such as transportation, management, storage, and use of explosives in the mines (Government of Ghana 2012b).
d. Mine closure obligations of a licensed holder: license holders must adhere to the practice of concurrent reclamation during mining and adopt an effective abandoned plan, which will allow productive reuse of mined

> areas post mining. In view of this, a holder of small-scale mining license is required by law to reclaim and revegetate land that is no longer used for mining within one month of completing all mining activities on the land (Government of Ghana 2012c).

Case studies findings from the two districts showed that most small-scale mining licenses are not legally bought through authorized government departments, but illegally through traditional authorities and individual farmlands owners. The results revealed that most of the licenses holders are political activists who buy their mining rights because of their affiliation to the government of the day. The other group of illegal miners are the youth who buy their land from traditional authorities and farmland owners. Most of them have no mining equipment on their own hence resort to traditional method of mining or collaborate with foreigners especially Chinese nationals to mine. Such complicity often involves corrupt and illegal practices by government officials and traditional authorities. These findings are consistent with that of Crawford et al (2015) that small-scale mining activities are dominated by collusion between traditional authorities and government officials in helping illegal mining activities. As one traditional head put it: “we usually sit here and people bring us letters from Accra saying they have been awarded a contract to mine in our area, and sometimes with security protecting them, we have no power.”

Contrary to the claim by one traditional leader that the government sends people from Accra to their areas to mine, an interviewee showed that “these traditional authorities are the ones who facilitate illegal mining activities and destroy our farmlands and cocoa farms.” The results from Focus group discussions (FGDs) corroborated the ones generated from interviews. FGDs indicated that both government and traditional authorities are to blame for the wanton destruction of the environment and its attendant environmental problems. One participant posited “our chiefs and the politicians are responsible for the destruction of our land and water bodies and should bow their heads in shame.” This corroborates initial findings that small-scale mining is influenced by people in authority, especially politicians, government officials, and traditional leaders who are engaged in bribery and corruption to influence small-scale mining activities (Addai and Baiden, 2014; Eshun, 2005). On following laid down mining regulations, it was clear from the finding from this study that most mining laws are not adhered to. These include unregulated use of mercury and other heavy metals, reclamation of mining pits as all pits are left uncovered, and destruction of water bodies, among others. As one respondent said: “our backyards are full of open- mined pits which do not only destroy our farmlands but serve as breeding grounds for mosquitos.” Findings from interviews with local government officials corroborated the claims from focus group discussions. These unregulated mining activities led to several environmental problems as discussed below:

Pollution and Destruction of Water Bodies

Water is a necessity of life. In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a historical resolution that recognizes the right to safe and clean drinking water as

essential for full enjoyment of life and all human rights. The results from the two case study districts show that all water bodies previously serving as primary sources of drinking water for rural communities have been contaminated or degraded due to illegal mining activities. This was corroborated by other participants during focus group discussions where all the participants expressed gross concern about the spate of water pollution which makes life unbearable for them. Buttressing the point, one respondent from Domeanbra in the Amansie west district said, “all the rivers in this area have changed to yellow color and we have to boil water to settle before we can get clean water to drink.” Similarly, a respondent at Kunso in the Ahafo Ano South district showed that “water will soon become a scarce commodity in this area, looking at the rate water is being polluted.”

Interviews with officials of the Ghana water company in the two districts highlighted the extent to which water pollution resulting from illegal mining activities is affecting their treatment plants. As one official in the Ahafo Ano South district said, “the cost of treating water for consumption has quadrupled in the last 6 to 7 years due to the presence of heavy metals and the dirty nature of the water caused by illegal mining activities”. The results from this case study corroborates earlier warning issued by the Ghana Water Company national headquarters that very soon the country might import drinking water as the company’s machines cannot treat water due to the level of damage heavy metals (cyanide, mercury) are causing to water quality (Modernghana.com). According to the company, water turbidity levels have reached a record high of 14,000 NTU, which is far above 2,000 NTU needed for adequate treatment.

Destruction of Forests and Farmlands

The forestry sector is an important source of revenue for the country through the exportation of timber products which contribute 6% to the country’s GDP. Similarly, the timber industry provides employment for the citizens through downstream processing of wood products. Significantly, over 2.5 million rural Ghanaians depend on the forest for food, clothing, shelter, medicine, and other necessities of live. The surge in the activities of illegal mining is threatening these useful forest products and sustainability of forests and wildlife in general. Similarly, over 65 percent of Ghanaians are farmers who depend entirely on rainfed agriculture. The activities of illegal mining do not only destroy the available arable land for agriculture but affect the rainfall pattern due to forests destruction which makes life unbearable for these peasant farmers.

The case study results showed that forest lands including some forest reserves have been encroached by illegal mining activities. Respondents at focal group discussions lamented how illegal mining is threatening their livelihoods. As one respondent at Kunso stated “I used to be a chainsaw operator making money from wood but now all the timber trees are destroyed by these “galamsey” people.” Similarly, another participant said, “it is now even hard to get common grasscutter from the forest because the “glamsey’ people have poisoned all to death.”

“The size of land for agriculture is shrinking day by day while the number of uncovered pits increases day by day in this community.” These were the words of lamentation by a farmer at Antoakrom.

Reduction of Farm Crops Yield

Small-scale illegal mining has over the years affected agriculture productivity, especially cocoa. A major negative effect of mining on land use is the switch from farming to mining with its associated loss of land for subsistence agriculture and cash crops like cocoa. Results from the case studies revealed that land for subsistence agriculture and cocoa farming is gradually becoming a scarce commodity because of the preference for the use of land to prospect for gold at the expense of farming. During an FGD at Manso, one cocoa farmer said, “I used to get about 70 bags of cocoa in the past but the same cannot be said now because all the cocoa trees are dying”. In a similar vein, a farmer in Mankraso mentioned that “I was sick for about two months and could not go to my farm, the first day I went to farm, all my land was turned into “galamsey” pits.”

The study revealed that illegal mining has recently caused significant declines in both food and cash crop yields. This reduction is mainly due to farmland being turned into mining pits and crops or trees being contaminated by toxic chemicals from these activities. The results support claims that, in 2023, Ghana's cocoa board imported $1.2 million worth of cocoa from Nigeria (Donkor, 2024). This calls for an immediate action to stop “galamsey” as it could spell doom for the country’s number one export crop for centuries.

Health and Diseases Problems

Illegal mining activities pose health hazards to mining communities and the country at large. The pollution of water bodies with heavy metals such as mercury and cyanides is a significant health risk to the populations. Results from the two case study districts showed that mining communities are experiencing a surge in diseases which they said were either not common or have never been experienced in their areas for decades. As one respondent showed “the strange diseases and deaths we have been recording here are all due to this small-scale illegal mining.”

Interviews with officials of Ghana health services corroborated the words of respondents. Records from the two district health directorates showed that there is an increase in birth defects, cancer, and kidney diseases in recent times which were never experienced until “galamsey” began in these areas. These findings were supported by reports from myjoynews.com that babies are born with several defects in mining communities which are linked to contamination and consumption of water holding heavy metals such as mercury, cyanide, and arsenic. Some of these defects include extra limbs, malformed heads, and the absence of genitalia, which unfortunately lead to the premature death of most of the babies. Another major health hazard of concern is the increase in HIV infection cases in these mining areas due to the influx of sex workers. Malaria cases and related deaths have also worsened and continue to surge due to the

high number of uncovered abandoned pits. As one Ghana Health official said, “just take a look at this chart, and you will see that these cases keep increasing year in year out.”

Small-scale Mining and Children Education

The activities of illegal mining are having adverse effects on children’s education in communities where illegal mining is predominant. Chronic absenteeism and low enrollment have become major challenges school authorities are confronted with. School children in these areas now prefer to make money from “*galamsey*” activities at the expense of going to school. Findings from both case study districts showed similar situations experienced by school authorities, which have culminated in poor performances in Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) results. Interviews with officials of the Ghana Education Service showed that some parents prefer sending their children to mining sites to school. Such decisions have led to behavioral problems in schools, as school children show a lack of respect for teachers because they earn enough income from small-scale mining. In confirming this, a respondent said: “my children help me at the mining pit to make money for the family after all it is because of money we go to school.” The study further revealed that there is a high rate of teenage pregnancy amongst schoolgirls because of cash income spent to lure them by boys who get money from their mining activities. This results in schoolgirls dropping out of school at very tender ages.

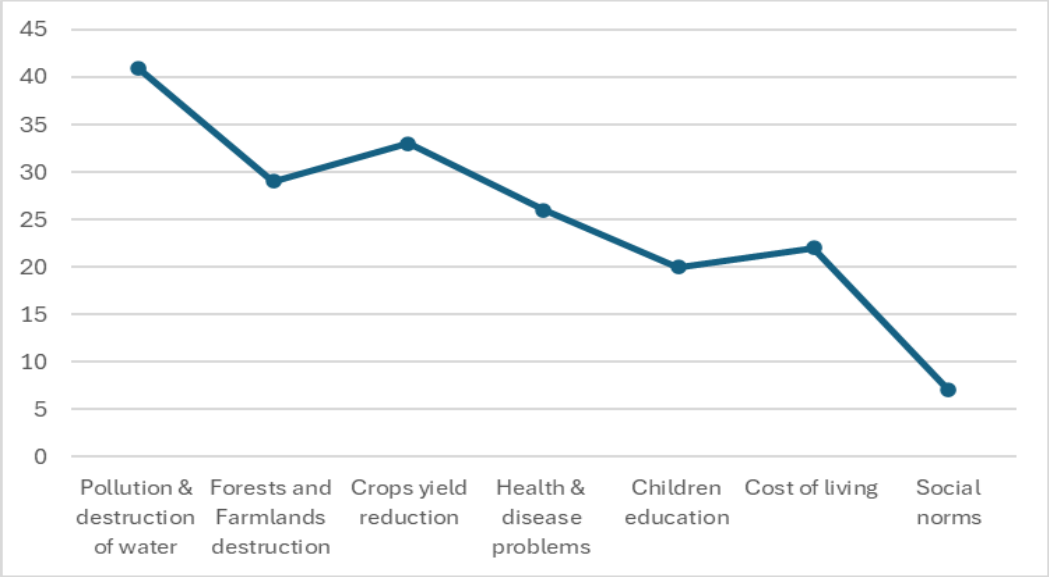
The Economy and Cost of Living

The economic impact of illegal gold mining has both positive and negative dimensions. One positive impact of illegal mining is the increase for gold produced and exported with its associated increase in tax revenue to the government. The study results from both case study districts revealed that the positive impact of “galamsey” activities in mining communities include boosting local economies through the provision of employment for the youth, purchase of food, fuel for mining equipment, increased in income from houses rent, high income from the sale of cocoa farms to miners, and as well as some local people making more money from illegal small-scale mining activities known as “local gainers”.

Illegal mining operations present numerous adverse consequences, such as fatalities caused by pit collapses. As noted by an illegal miner (“_galamseyer_”): “Individuals in our community lose their lives in the pits almost daily, yet cessation is difficult due to post-graduation unemployment.” Another negative impact of illegal mining is the high cost of living, which includes rent, foodstuffs, and unavailability of certain foodstuffs because people have stopped growing such crops. Importantly, the lack of clean drinking water has increased the cost of buying sachet water. During FGD at Manso, one participant said, “we now buy common pure water from Kumasi every day and it is now expensive because we don’t have clean water here anymore.”

Figure **2**

Rating of the Effects of Illegal Mining



Conclusion

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED], 1987, p. 43).). The three core principles of sustainable development are enshrined in environmental sustainability, social sustainability, and economic sustainability. Compromising environmental sustainability directly affects social and economic sustainability. However, political decisions of awarding mining concessions to political members who do not have the proper equipment, technical knowledge in mine closure obligations and reclamation plan, as well as lack of employment for the youth has become the bane of Ghana's environmental challenges today. Though the sustainable development concept means different things to various interest groups, the consensus highlights fairness to future generations.

Significantly, the concept propagated and advocated the need to protect the interest of future generations at the expense of potential short-term benefits (OECD, 2016). However, the current situation in Ghana depicts a gloomy future for its future generation because the future of Ghana lies in a balance since political leadership have traded off the future of the nation's youth for their parochial short-term gains. The present situation suggests that the country is far from achieving the most prominent components of sustainable development such as zero hunger, no poverty, clean water, good health, quality education, protection of biodiversity and fight climate change, which are gradually becoming a mirage.

Unfortunately, Ghana was one of the eighteen countries to sign the Minamata Convention on Mercury at the UN General Assembly in 2014, with the intention of minimizing mercury exposure to the population. On the contrary, the authorities have since not regulated the use of mercury as illegal mining continues unabated. This exposes children directly to hazards of Mercury at "*galamsey*" sites as well as through polluted drinking water. Aside the harmful effects on human, mercury can also kill several plant populations including the most precious cocoa trees which is currently being experienced per the results of this study. For centuries, rural communities in Ghana have been depending on their farmlands and forests for their livelihoods, but the activities of *galamsey* have threatened the sustainability of these resources which opens the doors for contemplation by policy makers. It is dangerous to play politics with policymakers should not wait until the situation reaches a tipping point before they act.

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