

Addressing the Galamsey Menace: Opportunity and Challenges

Alisa Hotel
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1. Background

This report summarises the proceedings of the IGC Public Forum on *Addressing the Galamsey Menace: Opportunity and Challenges* held on 21st February 2017. The public forum was organised to share IGC sponsored research findings with the various stakeholders. The aim was to inform the ongoing debate on the issue, and the new government's policy options and reclamation strategies.

The uncontrolled activities of illegal mining (galamsey) are adversely affecting water bodies, vegetation, wild animals, human health and safety. Various stakeholders are calling for the abolishment or regularisation of galamsey as well as the restoration of abandoned sites across the country. Indeed, in the past, several policy initiatives have been taken to stop illegal mining, but these efforts appear ineffective as galamsey operations are on the rise.

A major challenge is that the operational disposition of galamsey is poorly understood. There is limited information on the operational types, attributes, and their relative environmental effects, which are necessary for an effective policy response to the galamsey menace. A related challenge is the limited information on the cost of decommissioning and restoring the degraded sites.

It is against this background that the public forum seeks to engage stakeholders in a well-informed discussion to shape policy (re)formulation on the issue of galamsey. The forum drew participants from the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, Ministry of Finance, the Minerals Commission, the Forestry Commission, the Environmental Protection Agency, Cocoa Marketing Board, Chamber of Mines, CSIR-Water Research Institute, researchers from various academic institutions, and media houses. The list of participants and a summary of their feedback are presented in Appendix A and B respectively below.

The MC for the public forum was Mr. Abdul Moomen of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC). He is an award winning journalist who has done several stories on galamsey, particularly in the Northern part of Ghana.

2. Welcome Address and the Introduction of the Chairman

Dr. Nii Sowa, the IGC-Ghana Country Director, welcomed the participants to the public forum. He informed the participants that IGC is a policy relevant research network, organised and run by the London School of Economics in collaboration with the University of Oxford. The aim, he said, is to promote sustainable growth in developing countries through policy advice underpinned by frontier research. He pointed out that the public forum is an example of IGC's mode of engaging various stakeholders in informed discussions on how to address pertinent issues such as illegal mining and its detrimental effects.

He then handed over the podium to the MC who in turn introduced the Chairman.

The Chairman for the public forum was Osaberima Asiedu Boafo II, a traditional leader with keen interest in galamsey and the challenges it presents to his traditional area and Ghana. In fact, it was his article, [*Galamsey: A Scary Sight in Atiwa*](#), which first attracted the attention of IGC-Ghana to him. He has been a

Chief of Sunkubaase in the Akyem-Abuakwa traditional area since 1989. After taking the participants through the Chairman's educational background and previous work life, the MC invited the participants to welcome Osaberima Asiedu Boafo II to Chair the public forum.

3. Chairman's Remarks

In his response, the Chairman stated that he felt a great honour and privilege to be asked to Chair the public forum on an issue dear to his heart as the galamsey menace. He thanked the IGC for the opportunity.

He observed that galamsey, which started as a nuisance is now a national emergency, and must be treated as such. He outlined the environmental, economic and social challenges the galamsey poses to Ghanaians. In particular, he noted that the sources of drinking water across the country are polluted with cyanide, mercury and other harmful chemicals. He warned that if galamsey is not arrested, Ghana will have no option but to import drinking water. He also warned of the threats to food production as arable lands are being taken over by illegal miners.

Further, he touched on the social, cultural and the psychological costs of galamsey to the nation. He recounted the stories of children, women and old people falling to their death in uncovered, sludge filled pits left by illegal miners, the increasing number of chieftaincy and boundary disputes, violent armed robberies and general breakdown of family life and social cohesion in and around the illegal mining areas.

"The dangers associated with galamsey are real and pervasive", he emphasised. He expressed the view that with a new government in place, the IGC Public Forum could not have come at a more auspicious and strategic moment. Drawing inspiration from Bob Marley, he rallied the stakeholders and the general public to get up, stand up and combat galamsey as a national emergency.

4. Keynote Address

The Minister's keynote address was delivered by Mr. Simon Atebrya, the Technical Director of Mines at the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources.

Prior to the public forum, IGC-Ghana had met the Minister to brief him on the theme and purpose of the event. He had agreed to give the keynote address, indicating that the issue of illegal mining is one of his top priorities. However, on a follow up visit, the IGC was informed the Minister had been called to an urgent national assignment, and therefore would be represented by Mr. Simon Atebrya.

Mr Atebrya apologised for the absence of the Minister. He said, the Minister was particularly keen on attending the forum because the Minister wanted to incorporate the discussion at the public forum into his plans.

In his speech, the Minister observed that galamsey is having deleterious impact on the environment and the socio-economic lives of the entire country and that the menace poses a threat to national security and therefore requires a multi-stakeholder engagement to identify the various challenges and opportunities for overcoming them. He announced that the government is committed to tackling galamsey through "a three prong approach namely; law, technology and enforcement. These interventions will however require first identifying the challenges and the available opportunities, he noted. This public forum on addressing the galamsey menace: challenges and opportunities, he continued, "is therefore appropriate and commendable".

5. The Presentation

Jones Mantey began by thanking the IGC for the research grant and the opportunity to share the findings with stakeholders.

By way of background, Jones observed that following reforms in the mining sector in the 1980s, small scale mining saw a rapid expansion in the late 1980s. With this emerged galamsey, the illegal aspect of small scale mining.

He suggested that a major reason why previous attempt to address the galamsey menace seemed to have failed is the lack of detailed understanding of the various types of galamsey, their geographical distributions, the relative environmental damage and a sense of how much it would cost to reclaim the abandoned galamsey sites.

After outlining the objectives of the study, he proceeded to take the participants through why the study focused on 11 out of the 22 Districts of the Western Region, and how the analyses were carried out.

On the findings, he identified 5 broad categories and 11 forms of galamsey. He showed a number of pictures of each form, describing the gold deposit type, resources used, origin of technology and the processing style as well as their local names. His core message was that galamsey operations differ, and that the same level of intervention cannot be prescribe for each type of galamsey.

He then went on to show the spatial distribution of the various types of galamsey, land-take, their abundance, and scope across the 11 districts. In all, a total of 868 galamsey sightings in 269 different towns and villages was reported. He flagged Tarkwa Nsuaem, Amenfi East and Preatea Huni-Valley Districts as the hot spots of galamsey with 276, 223 and 153 sightings respectively.

The most prevalent galamsey types are the alluvial washing board, mill-house and chamfi. Incidentally, these three types of galamsey were also shown to be the most harmful to the environment. For example, it was reported that the mill-house galamsey recorded the highest level of mercury (149.51-215.25mg/L), followed by chamfi (76.5-88.9 mg/L) and then the alluvial washing board (39.8-55.4 mg/L). He called on stakeholders to focus attention and resources on addressing these types of galamsey.

Finally, Jones' analysis showed that it will cost approximately \$250 million to reclaim lands and water bodies destroyed by galamsey in the 11 Districts studied. This includes the cost for driving away galamsey operators and restricting access to the general public; long-term drainage management; demolition, dismantling and removal of the galamsey infrastructures; filling of open pits and holes; housekeeping and general clean-up of sites; and salvaging of abandoned heavy duty equipment.

In concluding his presentation, Jones urged responsible institutions to invest more into research to understand the challenge. He was of the view that extending the present study to cover the rest of the country will provide a nationwide map of the galamsey menace.

On the way forward, he tasked the government to stop galamsey in sensitive areas “at all cost”. He also urge policymakers to partner land-owners to tackle galamsey. As he put it, “the solution to galamsey lies with land-owners”. Finally, he implored NGOs to venture into the restoration of affected and abandoned lands across the country.

6. Discussants

Dr. Daniel Twerefou

Dr. Daniel Twerefou, a lecturer at the University of Ghana and one of the PIs of the IGC project #33107: *Attitudes of Local People to Mining Policies and Interventions* focussed his discussion on conflicts in mining communities and the factors hindering formalisation of small scale mining (SSM). In his view, formalising small scale mining is an important aspect of addressing the galamsey menace.

He suggested that SSM activities tend to compete with traditional land use. He showed, for example, that conflict is more prevalent in mining communities with predominantly primary occupations. This is further corroborated by his finding that predominantly rural mining communities reported higher incidence of conflict than urban mining communities. He also revealed that conflict tend to increase with youth unemployment in these communities.

Drawing on his extensive survey, he cited non-availability of economically-viable lands, high costs of registration, cumbersome registration processes, and the attitude of the Minerals Commission officials and other authorities as some of the factors hindering formalisation of SSM. The other factors he mentioned are the harassment of legal SSM by security personnel, influx of Chinese nationals, and allocation of land for illegal mining activities by some traditional authorities.

He urged the Minerals Commission to simplify the procedure for registering SSM. He also touched on the need to spread the registration fee over time. On non-availability of high grade lands, he tasked policymakers to encourage large scale mining companies to seed off part of their concessions to SSM. This in his view will minimise the likelihood of illegal mining in very sensitive areas.

Pauline Vande-Pallen, Third World Network

Ms Pauline Vande-Pallen started by thanking the IGC for the invitation and the commitment to research to inform policy. In her view, many policy interventions failed partly because of inadequate understanding of the phenomenon and a meticulous assessment of the various policy options.

On the presentation, she commended Jones Mantey for an insightful presentation. She pointed out that her main take away was the need for multifaceted, rather than a one-size-fit-all approach to addressing the galamsey menace.

However, she thought a more detailed discussion on gender and children's involvement in galamsey would provide further insights into tackling galamsey. She observed that galamsey is drawing kids out of classrooms and thus condemning them to poverty.

While she agreed that galamsey is a national emergency, she observed that galamsey is also a livelihood issue. In her view, the strategy to addressing galamsey must necessarily involve finding alternative employment opportunities. Otherwise, she feared, "you may drive them away but they will creep back".

Ms Vande-Pallen also questioned the commitment of the government to stamp out galamsey. She argued that galamsey had been allowed to fester mainly because of the lack of political will to stop it.

Dr. Toni Aubynn, Chief Executive Officer, Minerals Commission

Dr. Aubynn informed the participants that he had worked very closely with the PIs in the course of the study.

He touched on the need to redefined SSM to be consistent with the current realities. He observed that the current laws of Ghana define SSM in artisanal terms and prohibits the involvement of foreign nationals. However, as clearly shown in the presentation, heavy machineries are being used and foreign nationals are deeply involved.

He also pointed out that according to the current laws, there is either small scale mining, which is reserved for Ghanaians, or large scale mining, which is opened to foreign entities. There is nothing like a medium scale mining. He revealed that one of the proposals the Minerals Commission is considering is to allow for medium scale mining where both foreigners and Ghanaians could form partnerships. In his view, this approach will dissuade foreigners from engaging in galamsey.

He concluded by picking on a point Dr. Twerefou made, which suggests that traditional authorities need to do more to curb the galamsey. While Dr Aubynn acknowledged that traditional authorities are key stakeholders in addressing the galamsey menace, he drew attention to the constraints that the traditional authorities face. He gave an example of a traditional ruler who was threatened with dis-enstoolment because of his opposition to galamsey.

Ebenezer Appah-Sampong, Deputy Executive Director, EPA

Mr. Ebenezer Appah-Sampong welcomed the research findings, saying it will inform the EPA's strategy in managing the galamsey menace. In his view, the phenomenon of galamsey is not simply an illegal mining problem. It is a complex and evolving phenomenon that needs to be broken down into "small bits" so that we can understand it better, he added.

He indicated that he was glad the research has added to what the EPA already knows. He was particularly impressed about the estimated cost of reclaiming abandoned sites. He was of the view that it will help in assessing the costs of degradation and the EPA's demand for deposits for future reclamation from small scale miners.

Reacting to earlier concerns about the lack of political will and the commitment of various stakeholders in addressing the galamsey menace, he conceded that there is the need for improved regulatory capacity of the EPA, Minerals Commission and the Police.

He concluded by calling for a study to also look into the performance of various regulatory authorities in Ghana. He argued that such a study will provide an independent assessment of the areas "we are doing well and areas that we need to improve, and perhaps suggesting how we could be better regulators".

7. General Discussion

Most of the contribution from the participants focused on the threat of galamsey to the environment and the livelihood of most Ghanaians. There were also the views that vested interests and lack of political will are undermining effective action against galamsey.

Dr. Gabriel Botchwey, one of the PIs for the IGC project #33110: *The Impact of Chinese Involvement in Small-scale Gold Mining in Ghana* welcomed the Minerals Commission's announcement that it was considering to allow foreign involvement in the medium scale mining in partnership with Ghanaians. He pointed out that when they presented their work, one of the recommendations was to allow foreign involvement in small scale mining but, at the time, it was met with scepticism. He argued that it is much better to regularise the involvement of foreigners and monitor their involvement than the current situation where they operate under the radar.

8. Closing

The Chairman thanked the participants for their insightful contributions and asked for a renewed effort to tackle the galamsey menace. He warned that failure to do so has dire consequences for the environment as well as the socio-economic wellbeing of Ghanaians.

He thanked the Minerals Commission's CEO, Dr. Toni Aubynn for his personal involvement in the study and asked him to ensure that the recommendations therein are adequately reflected in the Commission's efforts to regularising small scale mining in Ghana.

The public forum, which ended around 1:30pm was followed by lunch and networking.

9. Media Coverage

Proceedings of the Public Forum was covered by a number of media houses in Ghana. The Daily Graphic ran two separate stories on it. The [first](#), which was also reported by online outlets, focussed on the cost of reclaiming lands and water bodies destroyed by galamsey. The [second](#) story was on the government's announced three-prong approach to ending galamsey.

Joy TV and Atinka TV reported on the public forum during the evening news. In addition Atinka Radio ran four separate interviews with Dr. Henry Telli, Nana Osaberima Boafo II, Mr. Simon Atebrya of Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources and Dr Jones Aubynn of Minerals Commission.