

Review

The outbreak of artisanal and small-scale gold mining (*galamsey*) operations in Ghana: Institutions, politics, winners and losers

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Abstract

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This paper focuses on the outbreak of illegal mining (*galamsey*) operations in Ghana in recent times claiming that the outbreak is accompanied by massive environmental destruction including pollution of water bodies, degradation of farmlands and forest landscapes. Despite the efforts of governmental, non-governmental and civil society organisations to streamline the artisanal and small-scale (ASM) sector since 2017, illegal mining activities remain a livelihood strategy for several Ghanaians. Institutions, politics and local manoeuvrings have rejuvenated and shaped by illegal mining activities. This study employs the narrative review approach to theorize and analyse the pertinent issues influencing the outbreak of ASM activities in Ghana. We draw on the extant theoretical and empirical perspectives to argue that illegal mining activities persist in Ghana today because every stakeholder wants to be a winner—the state institutions are weakened by politics for political triumphs. The local authorities collaborate and embrace illegal mining activities for economic gains while the local communities perceived illegal mining as a last resort to circumventing dispossession by state institutions and foreign mining conglomerates of their share of the mineral wealth. We posited that until the local communities' share of mineral wealth is duly served them including desirable compensation regimes, illegal mining activities would continue to flourish in Ghana. It is therefore, suggested that mineral resource decisions in the country must identify and incorporate the needs of the local communities. Further research into the needs of local communities, expectations and challenges regarding mineral resources extraction within their range is pertinent.

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Introduction

Artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM), low-tech, low output, low capital investment and low formalization have become prevalent in developing

countries including Ghana. However, the associated contributions of the ASM sector are mixed and do not provide a clear portrait of ASM's true positive reflection in the sub-Saharan African (SSA) landscape

(Amponsah-Tawiah and Kwasi Dartey-Baah, 2011; Osumanu, 2020; Mabe et al., 2021). It is imperative to state that ASM is one of the oldest indigenous livelihood activities that have existed in Ghana for many centuries—it has been in force as of the 4th century (Ofosu-Mensah, 2010). In Ghana, the ASM sector has gone through several transformations. The sector is a significant contributor to about 40% of all gold produced in the country in recent years (Owusu et al., 2019). In addition, the sector also employs close to 60% of the labour force that is into the extraction of precious minerals in the country (Hilson and Osei, 2014).

Despite the previously mentioned contributions of the ASM sector in Ghana, the current mode of operations of the miners appears to have projected the economic gains of the sector above the environmental and social consequences. Although scholars such as Akabzaa and Darimani (2001), Hilson (2001) and Ofosu-Mensah (2011) have shown that illegal mining operations had earlier been quashed after the promulgation of the Small-Scale Mining Law (PNDC 218) in 1989, about 85% of the indigenous miners in Ghana remain at the unregistered sector called *galamsey* as posited by Ofosu-Mensah (2010). The term *galamsey*, translates as “gather or get them and sell” in the local parlance (Aryee et al., 2003: 139). However, legal small-scale mining is conferred on the citizens aimed at improving the socio-economic statuses of mining communities’ dwellers by the constitution of Ghana (Akabzaa and Darimani, 2001; Ofosu-Mensah, 2011).

In the light of the aforementioned, *galamsey* activities peaked in Ghana from 2008 upwards (Hilson et al., 2014; Botchwey and Crawford, 2018; Bofo et al., 2019; Hausermann et al., 2020). The increasing trend in illegal mining activities, according to scholars (e.g. Hilson et al., 2014; Botchwey and Crawford, 2018; Bofo et al., 2019; Antwi-Boateng and Akudugu, 2020; Hausermann et al., 2020), among others, is caused by the involvement of foreigners. Around the early 2000s, the rising global market gold price led several foreigners, the Chinese in particular numbering about 50,000 troops into Ghana to mine gold (Crawford et al., 2016; Bofo et al., 2019). Though foreigners are outlawed from engaging in artisanal and small-scale mining, the Chinese dominated the illegal mining landscape of Ghana because of the following: (1) they have the technical know-how; (2) both national and local institutions are ready to compromise and take their share; (3) the responsible institutions are weak and lack the capacity to sanction this illegality and finally, (4) the political economy and politicisation of the *galamsey* sector to capture political power by the two major political parties—the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) (University of Ghana Business School [UGBS], 2017). In this study, we show, contrary to this claim, that the outbreak of illegal mining in Ghana is attributable to varied factors. Notwithstanding the increase in illegal mining, the

Government of Ghana has recently intensified efforts towards fighting illegal mining. One of the famous efforts in fighting *galamsey* daubed, “war against *galamsey*” (Hilson, 2017), cannot be overlooked, though the aspect of instructing the military to shoot and kill illegal miners, burning of excavators, arresting and incarcerating of the illegal miners have been condemned and flawed in the extant scholarship as an unsustainable approach (see Hilson, 2017; Zolnikov, 2020). According to research findings, illegal mining (*galamsey*) has major economic traction more than the overhyped large-scale foreign-dominated mining corporations (Guenther, 2018; Bazillier and Girard, 2019; Pokorny et al., 2019; Yankson and Gough, 2019). Yet, the Government of Ghana, acting on the recommendations of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Illegal Mining (IMCIM) banned all ASM operations (both legal and illegal) and followed that with massive repatriation of several Chinese *galamseers* between 2017 and 2019 (see Bofo et al., 2019).

However, in spite of the fact that the *galamsey* ban has contributed to ecological gains in recent times (Eduful et al., 2020), illegal mining operations are again gaining strong ground across local communities during and after the 2020 presidential elections in Ghana. It is common knowledge that several attempts to streamline *galamsey* operations in Ghana over the past decades have not been successful. This failure is because the local people do not embrace the formalization agenda (Twerefou et al., 2015). Some studies cited the lack of involvement of the local people in mineral resource decision-making, including poor compensation regimes perpetuated by the large-scale mining companies as the cause of the growing illegality in the small-scale mining sector of Ghana (Ayitey et al., 2010; Kidido et al., 2015; Osei-Kojo and Andrews, 2016).

In addition, other studies have indicated that the government’s efforts to halt *galamsey* may be mere rhetoric if the local community context is not duly served (UGBS, 2017). However, away from the current debates, there remains a dearth of literature within both the theoretical and empirical perspectives on the reason(s) why *galamsey* activities continue to resurface despite the several attempts to clamp-down on the activity. In this study, we argue that a compendium of factors—from the national to the local level account for the unceasing illegal mining activities in Ghana. We, therefore, seek to find solutions to this illegality by evaluating the myriad of factors responsible for the outbreak of *galamsey* operations in Ghana from employing both theoretical and empirical lenses. The study was based on a narrative review of the dynamics of artisanal and small-scale mining operations in Ghana.

The study thus draws on both theoretical and empirical studies, constitutional and legislative frameworks, media reports, and other related discourses to examine the plethora of factors that shaped the outbreak of illegal mining activities in

Ghana. We demonstrate that the growing illegality in the ASM sector is deeply-rooted in both theoretical and empirical discourses. Therefore, addressing the *galamsey* menace in Ghana requires a Janus-faced approach in which all relevant actors must be responsible for the gains (wins) and losses in the sector. The study is pertinent as it contributes to the existing literature on the reasons responsible for the unceasing illegal mining activities in Ghana. The study will provide guidelines for policymakers on the theoretical and practical measures to employ in addressing the illegal mining menace in Ghana. The remaining sections of the study are organised as follows: the theoretical perspective is explored to understand how theory has shaped illegal mining activities in Ghana, followed by an overview of the existing legal reforms' implications in the ASM sector of Ghana. In addition, we explored the implication of foreigners' involvement in Ghana's ASM sector and draws on the political settlements debates to understand the influence of politics in Ghana's ASM sector. The last section concludes and offers key policy and recommendations for addressing the illegal mining menace in Ghana.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Accumulation by dispossession

We explored the accumulation by dispossession thesis to understand why the illegal artisanal mining sector is growing in numbers across local communities in Ghana despite being outlawed. The theory has gained traction in recent scholarly works seeking to unpack the rationale behind the increasing illegality in the extractive sectors (Arrighi et al., 2010; Andrews, 2018; Baddianaah et al., 2021). Harvey (2003) adds more insight to Marx (1976) capitalists' theory of primitive accumulation (Cáceres, 2015; Fenton, 2019). Accumulation by dispossession is aligned to the capitalists' philosophy of wealth (assets) maximization. It suggests that profits obtained from capital or labour be reinvested to expand and gain more assets—a constant reinvestment cycle is emphasised.

The cyclical reinvestment of the surplus leads to the 'capitalists' crisis'—described by Marxist's scholars as the 'overaccumulation of capital crisis' (Bhattacharya and Seda-Irizarry, 2014) in which the reinvested capital fails to generate more profit than the principal. Thus, more capital dominates the market and—devaluation sets in (Clarke, 1990). Because of this, there is the need to explore space for the surplus capital and in so doing, developed economies look up to the developing world who are hubs of surplus land and labour for reinvestment of this surplus capital (Harvey, 2004). Regrettably, these foreign capital investments end up dispossessing indigenous industries of their profitability. Reference in this regard is made to the liquidity crisis that resulted from the investment of hedge funds and the consequential collapse of many indigenous industries in Southeast

Asia in 1997 (see Harvey, 2003). Accumulation by dispossession occurs in various forms and across spaces. It encompasses Harvey's description of the capitalist economic implications. Accumulation by dispossession gave rise to a multifaceted array of struggles that display some new characteristics (Harvey, 2003). In extractive societies, the problem at hand is that indigenous people have limited rights and power to own and control the resource extraction or even decide their share in terms of royalties after the privatisation of such lands (Arrighi et al., 2010). Arrighi et al. (2010) posited that the worst scenario manifests in the unlawful exploitation, short-changed indigenous property rights, as well as suppression of the alternative livelihood strategies in local communities. Of more pulsating is the impact of the World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) on the economies of developing nations (Hilson and Potter, 2003; Hilson and Potter, 2005; Hilson and Yakovleva, 2007).

Countries that were badly hit by the 1980s economic crisis in the Global South—including Ghana were persuaded to embrace programmes to enable them to avoid economic failure (Akabzaa and Darimani, 2001). Thus, these countries were influenced by the World Bank to open up their economies and adopt policy adjustments such as the creation of tax heavens to attract greater foreign investment (Kinuthia, 2013) but with emphasis on their mineral wealth. Bush et al. (2011) opined that the World Bank and other western aid institutions at the time of the global economic crisis were fixated on the private tenure of land and its resources. In this sense, the majority of the alternatives suggested for countries in the Global South were skewed towards privatisation of state properties, including lands under traditional areas. In the end, indigenous lands were allocated to foreign corporations, dispossessed them and the benefits go the way of the expatriate firms and state institutions with minimal effect on the local communities' development outlook. Popular mining towns in Ghana such as Obuasi, Prestea, Tarkwa, Nsuta, Awaso and Konogo are major reference points (Akabzaa and Darimani, 2001; Hilson and Yakovleva, 2007; Darimani et al., 2013; Yankson and Gough, 2019).

Mining in Ghana was an indigenous livelihood strategy for centuries. Moreover, the scramble for Africa and colonial rule short-changed and created obnoxious laws to dispossess local miners from freely prospecting for precious minerals such as gold, diamond, bauxite and manganese (Ofosu-Mensah, 2011). The extant literature enunciated that the decision to regulate local mining activities was to enable the British to accumulate more minerals (raw materials) to support their home industries (Hilson and Potter, 2003; Hilson and Potter, 2005; Ofosu-Mensah, 2011). According to Tsikata (1997), before Ghana's independence, the colonial masters' main attention on the gold mining sector was influenced by the colonial office in London and its representatives in the Gold

Coast territory and shaped the formulation and implementation of the mineral policy in the colony.

Akabzaa and Darimani (2001) and Hilson (2001) bemoaned that the main driver of the mining sector policy at in the colonial era was aimed at establishing a legal and administrative framework that would empower large-scale mining corporations and promotes the benefits of the British Empire—and marked the starting point of accumulation by dispossession in the mining sector of Ghana. Observably, the scramble and partitioning of the Global South by countries in the Global North demonstrated marked characteristics of accumulation by dispossession (Bush et al., 2011; Perreault, 2012). For instance, indigenous miners in Ghana were barred from prospecting for gold within communal lands they had customary tenure to appropriate unless a permit is sanctioned by the head of the British Crown (Ofosu-Mensah, 2010).

The interventionist regime under the World Bank and its related institutions like the International Monetary Fund cannot be left out of the accumulation by dispossession thesis in the mining sector of Ghana. Under the economic recovery programmes (ERPs), the government was advised to adopt a neo-liberal stance of which the forces of demand and supply (market forces) allocate economic resources, giving the private sector a positive role to play in the management of the economy (Akabzaa and Darimani, 2001; Darimani et al., 2013). Thus, the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) influenced the opening up of the Ghanaian economy including the extractive sector around the 1980s to foreign investors. This period witnessed the licensing of about 156 large-scale mining companies to operate in the country (Hausermann and Ferring, 2018; Yakovleva and Vazquez-Brust, 2018; Yankson and Gough, 2019).

Undoubtedly, a large proportion of the assets accumulated from these large-scale mining concessions are taken outside Ghana while the local communities suffer the environmental and social ramifications (Darimani et al., 2013; Okyere et al., 2021). Besides, hasty labour retrenchment and underpayment of indigenous workers by large-scale mining corporations remain a major topical issue (Yankson and Gough, 2019). Emphatically, massive acts of plundering, pillaging, displacement and conning are tactically advanced, denying the peasant landlords of their share of mining proceeds (Hilson and Yakovleva, 2007). Even in situations where displaced residents are due to be compensated, these compensation regimes are mostly complicated with deceit, leading to inimical compensation arrangements and dispossession of the rightful owner of the land (Kidido et al., 2015). These indicators signalled local communities to widen their scope of engagement in mining activities since the signs are clear that large-scale mining companies cannot solely be relied upon to salvage their economic woes (Yankson and Gough, 2019).

In present-day Ghana, indigenous settlers—the customary landlords are still excluded and dispossessed of the benefits of mining on legal, economic and/or political grounds (Fold et al., 2013; Osei-Kojo and Andrews, 2016; Hausermann and Ferring, 2018; Yankson and Gough, 2019). These indicators appear to have a greater influence on the rationale behind communities massively engaging in illegal mining operations.

This current paper argues that the dominance of accumulation by dispossession characteristics in the developing world has generated a surplus population that needs to explore the informal sector for their livelihood sustenance. Therefore, a Janus-faced integrated assessment (Samson, 2015) of the dynamics of the ASM sector in Ghana is pertinent in addressing the negative consequences across local communities.

Reforms in Ghana's ASM Sector

From the colonial period to date, there have been several attempts to reform the artisanal and small-scale mining sector culminating in the promulgation and the enactment of a plethora of laws and regulations (see Table 1). The colonial rule has its untoward footprints in the small-scale mining sector of Ghana. As already mentioned, colonialism led to the first ban on indigenous miners through the enactment of the Mercury Law including other related enactments (Akabzaa and Darimani, 2001; Bebbington et al., 2018). This, according to Tsikata (1997), was to pave the way for British mining companies to dominate the mining sector of Ghana. Tsikata argued that the Mercury Ordinance (1932) was brought into force to subdue local mining companies from competing with the British companies.

In the light of the aforementioned, ASM activities in Ghana have been largely understood as illegal compared to large-scale mining activities. The problem of giving undue advantage to large-scale mining companies appears to be a general problem across Africa as similar dynamics have been reported by Kinyondo and Huggins (2019) in Tanzania. Conversely, in this study, the focus is not on the colonial regime and its impact on the small-scale mining sector, but the post-colonial and most recent reforms' implications on the activities of local miners. Nevertheless, it is significant to state that the colonial footprints on reforming the artisanal and small-scale mining sector still have a greater influence on the post-colonial mining reforms. It would be recalled that the first point of recognizing and regularizing ASM operations emerged strongly in 1989 under the influence of the World Bank's Economic Recovery Programme (Akabzaa and Darimani, 2001). Thus, the British position of banning local miners was reoriented, leading to the promulgation of the Small-Mining Law (PNDCL 218) in 1989. Indeed, the small-scale mining sector has received a large majority of the laws and regulations (see Table 1).

Table 1. Colonial and Post-colonial Mining Reforms in Ghana.

General Mining Laws

Diamonds Decree, 1972 (NRCD 32)
 Environmental Protection Council Decree, 1974 (NRCD 239)
 Additional Profit Tax Law, 1985
 Minerals and Mining Law, 1986 (PNDCL 153)
 Diamonds (Amendment) Law, 1986 (PNDCL 217)
 Small-Scale Gold Mining Law, 1989 (PNDCL 218)
 Precious Minerals Marketing Corporation Law, 1989 (PNDCL 219)
 Minerals Commission Act, 1993 (Act 450)
 The Minerals and Mining Act, 2006 (Act, 703)

General Regulations

Mining Regulations, 1970 (LI 665)
 Explosives Regulations, 1970
 Minerals (Royalties) Regulations, 1987
 The Minerals and Mining Act, 2006 (Act 703) section 110

Small-Scale Mining Enactments

Diamond Mining Industry Protection Regulations, 1927
 Concessions Ordinance, 1939 (c.136, Laws of G.C. 1951 Revision), s.38
 Gold Mining Products Protection Ordinance (Amendment) Act, 2001 (Act 608)
 Laws of the Gold Coast, 1951(Revision)
 Mining Health Areas Ordinance (c.150, Laws of the Gold Coast 1951 Revision)
 Mining Health Areas Regulations, 1935 (Vol. VIII, 1954 Laws of the Gold Coast)
 Prospecting and Digging License Regulations, 1950 (Vol. VIII, 1954 Laws of the Goal Coast)
 Minerals Regulations, 1962 (L.I. 231), especially Regulation 1 and Form 5
 Minerals Regulations, 1963 (L.I. 253)
 Mining Regulations, 1970 (L.I.665), especially Regulations 4,6,10 and 194–250
 Explosive Regulations, 1970 (L.I. 666)
 Diamonds Decree, 1972 (NRCD 32) (as amended by the PNDCL 216)
 Minerals and Mining Law, 1986 (PNDCL 153)
 Mercury Law, 1989 (PNDCL 217)
 Small-Scale Mining Law, 1989 (PNDCL 218)
 Precious Minerals Marketing Corporation Law, 1989 (PNDCL 219)
 The Constitution, 1992
 Minerals Commission Act, 1993 (Act 450)
 Environmental Protection Agency Act, 1996 (Act 490)
 Water Resources Commission Act, 1996 (Act 522)
 Minerals and Mining Act, 2006 (Act 703) Sections 82–99

Source: Akabzaa and Darimani (2001) and Opoku-Antwi et al. (2012)

Yet, the sector remains the most destructive and criminalised in the Ghanaian extractive industry. The motive and significance of Ghana's Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) has been viewed from diverse angles by scholars. At the macro level, it has significantly stimulated economic growth by providing tax holidays, which consequently attracted many larger companies to invest in the mining sector (Ayee et al., 2011; Twerefou et al., 2015). Earlier, Aryee et al. (2003) opined that the formalization of ASM operations has subdued the illicit trade of gold by artisanal miners with neighbouring countries like Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, and Togo. These countries, according to these scholars were getting richer in the illicit and crook transactions of Ghana's mineral wealth at the expense of Ghana. To buttress this point, Awumbila and Tsikata (2004) argued that the SAP worked to the advantage of Ghana by closing all loopholes and rejuvenating the mining industry. These authors argued that the ERP and SAP have

tremendously transformed the small-scale mining industry of Ghana.

However, other scholars such as Hilson and Potter (2005) and (Yankson and Gough (2019) shared diverse opinions on the contributions of ERP and SAP to the small-scale mining industry. To them, specifically at the micro-level, the ASM sector cannot boast of any significant achievement obtained from the SAP except alienating the local dwellers from mining gold. A similar opinion has been shared by Akabzaa and Darimani (2001) in their effort to holistically review the Ghanaian mining sector. In the work of Hilson and Potter (2005), the SAP has been condemned with the justification that it acted as a catalyst to worsening poverty in local communities. Their argument emanates from the fact that the SAP brought in several obnoxious and bureaucratic policies aimed at projecting and protecting large-scale mining companies. Indeed, these regulations appear not to have any significant difference from what transpired in

the colonial era. Objectively, one may disagree with these authors' positions on the formalization of the ASM sector as encouraged by the SAP, but for the fact that the ASM sector remains the most problematic livelihood strategy across local communities in Ghana (Boadi et al., 2016; Botchwey and Crawford, 2018) affirmed that the majority of the legal provisions in line with the ASM sector (refer to Table 1) have not been able to mitigate and holistically address the fundamental challenges facing the sector.

One significant pronouncement under the small-scale mining law (PNDL 218) was the requirement for local miners to register with the Minerals Commission. The Minerals Commission is the mother of all institutions tasked with the mandate of registering and certifying mining activities in Ghana. Thus, due registration and certification are required before a mining concession can be granted (Darimani et al., 2013; Mcquilken and Hilson, 2016). As far as the narratives across literature are concerned, one would be right to suggest that the authority of the traditional rulers in granting mining concessions has been shifted to the Minerals Commission although some local elements are still considered. Taking the argument of Wilson et al. (2015) that the proper legalization of ASM activities would promote economic development at the macro and micro levels if all promising actors are brought into the chain as a cogent call, it is paramount to state that ASM's legalization processes should be inclusive and follow a multi-stakeholder participatory configuration. This will allow for the needs of local dwellers to be incorporated and addressed.

The Small-Scale Mining Law was given a further boost through the Minerals and Mining Act, 2006 (Act 703). Thus, the Small-Scale Mining Law (PNDCL218) of 1989 was integrated into the Minerals and Mining Act, 2006 (Act 703). Under the new Act, the right to engage in small-scale mining was clearly defined (see Adu-Baffour et al., 2021). The law gives the natives the exclusive right to prospect for gold on an artisanal basis. According to Akabzaa and Darimani (2001), the decision to legalize ASM operations was arrived at to create jobs and livelihood sustenance in gold-rich communities. Importantly, indigenes are allocated a mining concession of not more than 25 acres to mine in groups or on an individual basis. A related study by Opoku-Antwi et al. (2012) revealed that the number of registered small-scale miners is increasing, but this needs to be accompanied by strict monitoring to ensure miners operate under the guidelines of the licenses given them. While these observations are embraceable, recent scholars have indicated that the majority of the ASM operations (about 75–85%) in Ghana are carried out on illegal grounds (Boadi et al., 2016; Mcquilken and Hilson, 2016; Bansah et al., 2018; Owusu et al., 2019). This suggests that a licensed small-scale miner still has the greatest proclivity of engaging in illegal mining if the relevant institutions such as the Minerals Commission and the Environmental Protection Agency do not enforce monitoring.

The literature has presented a consistent argument for the failure of the regulatory institutions to sanitize the ASM sector of Ghana, which culminated in massive degradation of land and water resources in recent times (Boadi et al., 2016; Owusu et al., 2019). Recently, the government of Ghana was called into action to help address the negative effects of ASM operations in the country, leading to the banning of all forms of ASM activities for a period of almost two years (Owusu et al., 2019; Hilson and Maconachie, 2020a). The government claimed to have sanitized the ASM sector by outlining and incorporating reforms into the ASM framework. However, the formalization strategies embarked upon by the government have been observed to demonstrate very little impact on attaining sustainable ASM operations across local communities. The decisions on streamlining the ASM sector of Ghana were carried out at the national level with a little touch on the local communities' dynamics and perspectives for addressing the ASM conundrums (Owusu et al., 2019).

It must be acknowledged that local community participation is a core aspect of identifying and finding solutions to community-based problems of which ASM problems are not precluded (Que et al., 2018). Earlier on, Fold et al. (2013) indicated that the formalization of ASM activities in Ghana is centred on two main thematic areas: (i) improving the practices and conditions of artisanal miners and the environment and (ii) making available, mineralized concessions to artisanal miners. Conversely, this notion still follows the usual bureaucratic principles and high cost of obtaining a small-scale mining certificate in Ghana. For instance, Yankson and Gough (2019:123) confirmed from the Minerals Commission that an amount of GHC 19,169, equivalence of US\$ 4,564 (at the time when the exchange rate was 1= GHC 4.2) is charged for issuing a small-scale mining license as of May 31 2017. This and many more challenges have prevented many artisanal miners from registering their operations, resulting in the large numbers of illegal miners being recorded in Ghana (Mcquilken and Hilson, 2016).

Significantly, proposals are advanced to address a majority of the challenges facing the ASM sector. These include the setting-up of the district offices of the Minerals Commission and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to ensure easy access for artisanal and small-scale miners to process and pay registration fees, and also, to fast-track the processing of environmental permits (Yankson and Gough, 2019). Also, the government has launched the "Multilateral Mining Integrated Project (MMIP) purposely to bring artisanal and small-scale miners under a common umbrella with certified designated concession (Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research [ISSER], 2017). Despite these proposals, the issue of attaining sustainable ASM operations in Ghana is still a far cry. Almost five years down the lane, Ghanaians are yet to witness these proposals being

operationalized particularly that aspect of supporting local miners to mine under cooperatives.

Foreigners in Ghana's ASM Sector

The mining sector, though of great importance to local economic development (Yankson and Gough, 2019), has come under serious debate in recent times (Okyere et al., 2021). This is mostly attributed to the mammoth environmental destruction associated with the activities of artisanal miners (Boadi et al., 2016; Botchwey and Crawford, 2018; Owusu et al., 2019). The literature reported a paradigm shift in the tools and technologies used in ASM activities (Hilson, 2017). Crawford and Botchwey (2017b) observed that the artisanal and small-scale mining sector of Ghana has recorded a significant technological revolution—there has been a major change in the hitherto pans, buckets, and wheelbarrows, shovels, and pickaxes kind of extracting minerals, particularly gold to a more robust mechanized technology involving the use of heavy machinery.

The main architects behind the revolutionization of the ASM industry in Ghana are the Chinese (Hilson et al., 2014; Botchwey and Crawford, 2018; Hausermann et al., 2020). The participation of the Chinese in the ASM sector has been approached by scholars from two major perspectives involving (1) the positive and (2) the negative implications (e.g. Hilson et al., 2014; Crawford and Botchwey, 2017a; Botchwey and Crawford, 2018). Crawford and Botchwey (2017b) evaluated the impact of the Chinese involvement in the ASM sector of Ghana and submitted that they should be acknowledged for the modernization and mechanization of the sector. To these scholars, the engagement of the Chinese in the ASM sector positively impacted the economy of Ghana, increasing the total quantity of gold produced in the sector sevenfold between 2005 and 2013, an equivalence of 11-36 percent. They went further to argue that other factors also contributed to the rise in the quantity of gold produced by the sector.

Alternatively, the Chinese dominance of the ASM sector of Ghana has been cited as the major driver of the adverse environmental destructions currently ongoing in the country (Hilson, 2017; Hausermann and Ferring, 2018). According to Botchwey and Crawford (2018), the introduction of excavators and other machinery like the “Chan fan” into the ASM sector by illegal Chinese miners is accompanied by massive destruction of arable lands and water bodies. Therefore, the mechanization of the ASM sector in Ghana has a trickle-down adverse effect on environmental quality. However, the discussion on the Chinese impact on the ASM sector may appear incomplete without touching on the factors that promote their participation in the ASM sector despite the fact that Ghana's Constitution only gives room for indigenes to engage in legal small-scale mining (Hilson et al., 2014; Adu-Baffour et al., 2021). The reasons behind Chinese involvement in the ASM

sector of Ghana are multifaceted. Crawford and Botchwey (2017a) exclusively reported on the compelling factors that influence the participation of the Chinese in Ghana's small-scale mining sector. These authors are of the conviction that the Chinese fully trooped to Ghana because of the increase in global market prices for precious metals, particularly gold. The participation of Chinese in the ASM sector of Ghana was first noticed around the early 2008s and assumed a major height around 2012-2013 (Crawford and Botchwey, 2017a). Similarly, Crawford and Botchwey (2017b) and Bofo et al. (2019) pointed out that the success of the Chinese in the illegal mining sector was due to their ability to establish strong ties with crook local miners who were on the ground, including officials of state institutions such as the Minerals Commission, Environmental Protection Agency, traditional rulers and landlords as well as the national security apparatus (e.g. Police, military, and immigration officers).

The Chinese succeeded in the illicit ASM activity because all the responsible stakeholders want to be ‘winners’. It also reflects Harvey's theoretical tenets of accumulation by dispossession. But in this context, the losers (local communities) ganged up with the Chinese to perpetuate the illegality to obtain their share of the mineral wealth. Hence, these groups of influential individuals were able to trade-off Ghana's mineral wealth for their separate gains (Botchwey and Crawford, 2018). Establishing the nexus between formal and informal institutions in shaping the ASM sector of Ghana, a recent study by Bofo et al. (2019) pointed out that the dearth of coordination between the formal institutions (e.g. Minerals Commission, Environmental Protection Agency among others) and the informal institutions (chiefs and landlords) have accounted for the proliferation of the Chinese illegal mining activity in Ghana. Thus, strong coordination and collaboration between the formal and informal institutions are encouraged to help settle the illegal mining menace in the country.

Political Settlements and Contestations in Ghana's ASM

Political settlements according to Department for International Development (DFID) is “the forging of a common understanding, usually between political elites, that their best interests or beliefs are served through acquiescence to a framework for administering political power” (Di John and Putzel, 2009:4). According to Frederiksen (2019), political settlements explained a wide range of integrated but complex ways of understanding the impact of politics, power, and institutional arrangements, when exposed to an alternative political dynamism and motivations, these same institutional arrangements will automatically yield varied economic and developmental consequences. Laws and Leftwich (2014:1) noted that political settlements' constructs deal with “the formal and informal processes,

agreements, and practices that help consolidate politics, rather than violence, as a means for dealing with disagreements about interests, ideas, and the distribution and use of power”.

Laws (2012) indicated that political settlements analysis cut across all sectors of society—the intra-elite and elite-non-elite relationships are clearly outlined. The political settlement approach is deep-seated in the conviction that because development-oriented policy impacts and focuses on who gets what, when and how they form alliances either in opposition or in support of them (Laws and Leftwich, 2014). In this study, political settlement structures stand to explain how politics influence societal outlook along the path of economic growth and development, basically through the spread and control of power. The political portent of a country has a greater influence on all aspects of the economy, including minerals resource allocation and extraction (Abdulai and Hickey, 2014). Natural resource discovery and exploitation in any country are bedevilled with a host of sometimes, not too simple to predict characteristics and challenges—the resource curse, accumulation by dispossession and clientelist orchestrations (Abdulai, 2017).

Available studies (e.g. Abdulai, 2017; Ntewusu, 2018a) posited that the ruling government greatly exerts greater influence with respect to the governance of natural resource—deciding as to whose interests and how the resources should be allocated and extracted. Therefore, political and institutional structures act as mediators between natural resource exploitation and inclusion, thereby shaping and directing the contribution of natural resources along major development trajectories (Abdulai and Hickey, 2014; Abdulai, 2017). Notably, this study is focused on exploring the impact of politics on mineral resource governance and extraction with specific reference to the artisanal and small-scale mining sector of Ghana.

The influence of politics on the mining sector of Ghana has been widely discussed by recent scholars (e.g. Hilson, 2017; Hilson et al., 2017; Luning and Pijpers, 2017; Ntewusu, 2018; Botchwey and Crawford, 2018; Boafo et al., 2019; Hilson and Maconachie, 2020b). From the local community level, Ntewusu (2018a) claimed that the early power and authority exhibited by traditional rulers (chiefs and landowners) regarding mineral resource extraction in Ghana still impacted massively on their involvement in ASM activities in recent times. Luning and Pijpers (2017) opined that a long-lasting relationship existed between local miners and traditional rulers, which until today still characterize the ASM sector of Ghana. Thus, these traditional leaders, though they do not have full control of the minerals found within their territories, rather formed cabals and collaborated with illegal miners to engage in *galamsey* (Crawford and Botchwey, 2017a). However, other scholars (e.g. Ntewusu, 2018b; Boafo et al., 2019), though acknowledged the illegality between traditional authorities and the local miners, highlighted myriad of factors that cause collaborative illegality in the sector.

For instance, Ntewusu (2018b) in his quest to unpack why chiefs are closely aligned to *galamsey* drew the following conclusions (i) that the over empowerment of foreign mining companies in the name of promoting large-scale mining is gradually weakening the position of chiefs leading to continuous fear and tension. (ii) the proportion of royalties likely to be accumulated by these traditional chiefs from large-scale mining companies have not been clearly defined, thereby, raising fears that they may not benefit (‘losers’) from large-scale mining operations compared to ASM activities. These dynamics have not changed since the Constitution of Ghana gives more power to the president in mineral resource allocation to the extent that mining concessions are sometimes allocated without the consent of the chiefs within whose frontier the mining is to take place (Osei-Kojo and Andrews, 2016).

A related study by Boafo et al. (2019) alluded to the fact that there exists wide disparities between formal institutions at the national level and traditional authorities in governing the ASM sector of Ghana. To these scholars, this gap has resulted in the traditional authorities considering themselves to be closer to local miners by collaborating with them to mine. Similarly, the nefarious engagement of traditional rulers in facilitating ASM activities is highlighted by Botchwey and Crawford (2018). Moreover, a large body of scholarship has come to a point of convergence that the illegal mining activities are spreading in Ghana because of political interference (Crawford and Botchwey, 2017a; Hilson, 2017; UGBS, 2017; Botchwey and Crawford, 2018; Boafo et al., 2019) as opposed to weak institutional framework mostly reported by scholars (Debrah et al., 2014; Bansah et al., 2016; Boadi et al., 2016).

Politics is deep-rooted in the ASM sector of Ghana to the extent that the UGBS (2017) in their Policy Brief No 5:1 argued that “any anti-*galamsey* crusade that fails to tackle the political drivers of the problem is unlikely to succeed”. And in line with the impact of politics on ASM activities in Ghana, the recent adverse ramifications caused by the Chinese miners are traced to the NDC’s regime, spanning from 2008 to 2016, which coincided with the period a significant rise in the global price of gold. The government failed to guard the country’s borders, leading to the intrusion of foreigners, largely the Chinese into the country to mine gold (Botchwey and Crawford, 2018; Hausermann and Ferring, 2018). The literature indicates that the illegal mining activities by the Chinese flourished because the political regime—the NDC, led by its leader and President of the Republic of Ghana at the time, His Excellency John Dramani Mahama has failed to sanitize the sector (Crawford and Botchwey, 2017a). However, the Mahama administration is credited for deporting about 5,000 Chinese illegal miners in 2013.

Furthermore, the literature on the role of successive governments in sanitizing the ASM sector in Ghana has categorically indicated that the sector

always attracts the ruling governments' attention to the formalization during periods that are distant from national elections in order not to mar their political prospects. According to the UGBS (2017:1), "as electoral competition has become more intense, the *galamsey* discourse has taken an increasingly partisan character in which opposition parties often bolster the position of illegal miners to make those in power unpopular and gain partisan political advantage". Thus, at the beginning of every government's first tenure of office, the zeal towards putting a stop to illegal mining is always high but when elections are approaching, all the standards are relaxed to convince the illegal miners to vote in favour of the government in power (Crawford and Botchwey, 2017a; Ntewusu, 2018a; Bofo et al., 2019).

Per the above observation, Ntewusu (2018b) asserted that the average illegal miner in Ghana has come to understand the behaviour of politicians towards ASM activities in Ghana. These illegal miners understand that the government of the day is always ready to relax the rules and regulations to win political power. Consequently, wealthy miners can influence the government of the day to yield to their demands. This explains why the adverse activities of illegal miners were intensive around 2016, which was an election year (UGBS, 2017). As reported by UGBS, a noticeable negative effect of the ASM sector of Ghana around the 2016 general election was the pollution of water bodies in which the Ghana Water Company Limited threatened to shut down its water desalination plants and subsequently, made it public of the tendency of Ghana to import portable water from other neighbouring countries if the activities of illegal miners go on unabated in the country.

Following these struggles between the Government of Ghana and illegal miners in the build-up to the 2016 elections, the loss of political power by the NDC to the NPP comes with its associated changes in the ASM sector of Ghana (Yankson and Gough, 2019). The NPP government under the leadership of His Excellency President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo made a manifesto promise to put a stop to illegal mining activities in Ghana when voted into office. With the mandate given to him to rule Ghana, his manifesto promise was given full attention resulting in significant reforms and transformation of ASM activities in the country. Thus, the ban on ASM was enforced, new reforms were outlined, and the mandate was given to small-scale miners to submit new applications for registration to engage in sustainable mining (Bansah et al., 2018). However, the canker of lowering the standards as national elections come close resurfaced after the 2020 elections. In addition, Ghana has over the years attempted several options aimed at curbing the *galamsey* menace, including military and police joint crackdowns (Hilson, 2017; Owusu et al., 2019; Hilson and Maconachie, 2020b; Zolnikov, 2020). Yet, political interference remains a major setback as ASM activities continue to increase with their associated adverse ramifications.

Conclusion

In contributing to the literature on the outbreak of illegal mining activities in Ghana, this study identified a host of factors responsible for the phenomenon and posited that the growing illegality in the ASM sector is deeply-rooted in both theoretical and empirical discourses. The colonial and post-colonial regimes including the economic policy reforms have directly and indirectly projected large-scale mining operations at the expense of local mining activities. However, large-scale mining activities have a little positive impact on the local economy but are associated with worsening environmental consequences, frequent labour retrenchment and poor compensation arrangements for the local communities whose farmlands are used for the mining activities. Therefore, the aforementioned indicators triggered the local communities to widen their scope of engagement in artisanal mining (*galamsey*) activities. In addition, the weakness and/or poor quality of institutions that have long existed in this era of increased investment in the extractive sector mostly attributed to deep-seated political orchestrations are highlighted.

Weighing into the intricacies of the *galamsey* sector in Ghana, we claimed that illegal mining activities persist in Ghana today because every stakeholder wants to be a winner—the state institutions are weakened by politics for political triumphs. The local authorities collaborate and embrace illegal mining activities for economic gains while the local communities perceive illegal mining as a last resort to circumventing dispossession by the state institutions and foreign mining companies of their share of the mineral wealth. We conclude that until the local communities' share of mineral wealth is duly served them, including desirable compensation regimes, illegal mining activities will continue to flourish in Ghana. It is, therefore, suggested that mineral resource decisions must identify and incorporate the needs of the local communities. Further research into local communities' needs and expectations regarding mineral resources within their range is pertinent.

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