

Good Governance, Ecological Footprint and the Fight against *Galamsey* in Ghana: A Human Security Perspective

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Abstract

A National Consultative Dialogue on Small Scale Mining held in April 2021 under the auspices of the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources of the Government of Ghana, concluded by consensus, that, “dealing with galamsey is a national emergency which requires urgent and concerted effort.” Such an alarming declaration after more than three decades ‘war’ on galamsey is an eloquent testimony of the failure of successive governments to put a stop to it and its devastating effects on the environment and Ghana’s water bodies. This paper attempted to do two things; appraise government’s effort so far in the fight against galamsey, and explore the human security dimension of the ‘battle’ against galamsey on the assumption that, such an approach would present a better outcome in dealing with the menace. Using desk reviews as the method of investigation, the paper finds that, the inherent militaristic approach of government to ending galamsey has produced disappointing outcomes. The paper also finds that, the human security approach to ending galamsey is neither employed by government nor has it received attention in public and policy discourse on the matter, in spite of its tremendous opportunities for remedying the galamsey menace. Consequently, this paper among other recommendations calls on government to mainstream human security in its approach in order to deal with the root causes of galamsey; enhance effectiveness, focus on prevention, and reverse the eroding public confidence in government’s ability to fight galamsey.

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Introduction

The end of the Cold War marked the beginning of the new dawn of democratic development that swept across Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia (Huntington, 1991; Diamond, 2015). Democratic values appeared triumphant with appropriately 153 new countries accepting democracy and its principles and these numbers have held steady to these principles over the past three decades (Diamond, 2015:1). This dynamic began to waver as the number of countries hitherto recognized as electoral democracies reduced from 120 to 116 in 2009, with no net improvement in the number of countries that practise democracy (Diamond, 2015: p.142). This observation triggers the alarm bell and the near consensus that there was a creeping period of democratic recession in the world. At this same time, Kurlantzick (2011) also suggested that, global freedom had plummeted and that, we might in fact be seeing the beginning of the end of democracy. These arguments were leading the debate of democratic roll back in the world. There is a little bit of caution in reaching such a conclusion, the decline in the number of countries practising democracy as well as the instability and stagnation within democratic states undoubtedly remained evident in the last three decades. However, Diamond (2011) admits to a darkening moment since 2005. According to him, three-fifths of the thirty democratic reversals that have occurred during the 35 years of the third wave have occurred in the last decade or so, and eight democracies broke down just in the recent three-year period spanning 2007 through 2009. Further, the Freedom House Index reports on levels of freedom around the world supported the suspicion of a global democratic roll back. It shows that in the last decade the number of countries declining in freedoms (press freedom, freedom of speech inter alia) exceeded the number of countries gaining. This trend of democratic recession signalled poor performance of new democracies and decline in good governance and rule of law. There are broad dimensions to the debate on global democratic recession.

Nonetheless, what appears paramount in the discussion is that there are empirical records indicating that, the numbers of democracies all over the world have either declined or remained levelled.

In the wake of this democratic recession, Ghana seems to be moving strongly against the tide. It has nearly perfected the art of holding relatively peaceful and fair elections, has built relatively strong democratic institutions over time and has made strides in the frontiers of effective democratic governance (Ayee, 2001; Dahl, 2005; Gyimah-Boadi, 2009). Democratic government is linked to good governance where there is constitutionalism and respect for the rights and choice of the people (Huntington, 1991; Bratton & Van de Walle, 1997). Good governance allows for the exercise of effective government in the resolution of state problems in a consensual manner that takes into consideration the rights and dignity of the citizens. Presently, one of the most pressing policy and political challenges in Ghana hovers around the question of how to end *galamsey* and halt its disastrous effects on the environment and the country's water bodies (Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, 2021). Gold mining in Ghana can be categorised primarily into the Large-Scale Mining (LSM) and the Small Scale or Artisanal Small-Scale Mining (SSM/ASM) (Nyarko, Mantey & Owusu-Nimo, 2017). The problem is with the ASM where over 80% of miners operate illegally without permits and thus unregulated (Ibrahim, 2018; Nwokolo, 2019). The term *galamsey* is thus used as the vernacular for illegal ASM (Alhassan, 2014).

Operating on the blind side of regulatory institutions, Ghana's hitherto virgin and green vegetation is being cleared to make way for *galamsey* activities while some of the finest water bodies have turned clayey and contaminated with harmful chemicals such as cyanide. The alarming rate at which the country's water bodies are being polluted by *galamsey* operators, compelled the Ghana Water Company to issue a public warning in 2017 stating that, the country may have to import water for domestic consumption by 2020 if nothing is done to pushback at *galamsey* (University of Ghana Business School, 2017).

Following the rising public awareness of the harmful effects of *galamsey* on the environment, water bodies, human health and the country's

economy, the campaign against galamsey in Ghana gained traction from a legion of anti-galamsey crusaders comprising the Media coalitions, CSOs, Chiefs, Opinion leaders, the general public among others. These campaigns prompted actions from successive governments through a number of institutions including the Presidency, the Legislature, The Judiciary, The Ministry of lands and Natural resources and several other MDAs. However, starting from the 1980s through operation “flush-out” in 2006 to operation “vanguard” in 2017, the results of the efforts by successive governments at ending galamsey has been nothing more than disappointing (Citinewsroom, 2020).

The available analyses have attributed the persistence of galamsey to technical, legal and political factors such as the cumbersome nature of the formalization of the ASM, lapses in law enforcements and political interference (Alhassan, 2014). Whereas the factors noted above may be useful in explaining the persistence of galamsey, they are muted on the root causes of galamsey and consequently unable to inform any effective solution to the menace. To account for the root causes of galamsey and to tackle the menace at birth calls for the adoption of a human security approach, which is people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented (UN, 2008). Conspicuously missing in the discourse, however, is the human security dimension of the fight against galamsey despite the opportunities such an approach may offer governments in bringing an end to galamsey.

Given this backdrop, this article attempts to address the following three key questions in the ensuing discussion: Why do people engage in galamsey in the first place? Why does the overly military approach by successive governments to curb the activities of galamsey operators produce disappointing outcomes? In what ways would a human security approach differ from the military approach? It will proceed by discussing the concept of good governance and its relationship to Ghana’s ecological footprint; followed by the historical antecedents to the fight against galamsey in Ghana and then interrogate the militaristic approach to the fight and then advocate for a human security approach. It will then conclude with a brief policy recommendation.

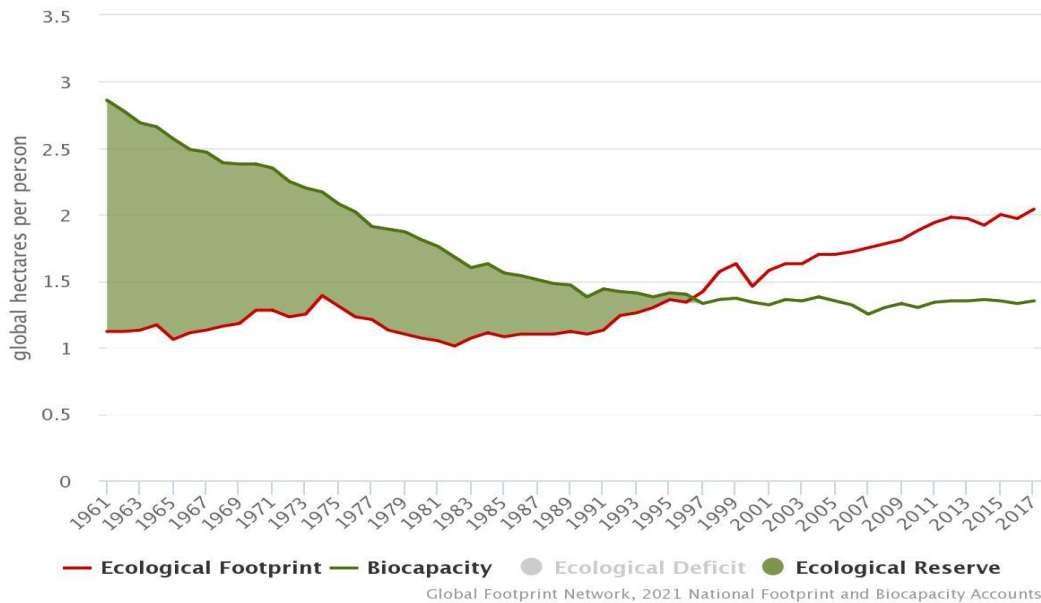
Good Governance and Ghana's Ecological Footprint

The World Governance Index explains governance as consisting of the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; the capacity of governments to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them. The WGI identifies six dimensions of governance, including voice and accountability which captures perceptions of the extent to which a country's citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, freely express themselves, have the freedom to associate and a free media; political stability and the absence of violence which measures the perceptions of the likelihood of political instability and/or politically motivated violence, including terrorism in a country; governance effectiveness which examines perceptions regarding the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies; regulatory quality which measures the perceptions of the ability of the government to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations that permit and promote private sector development; the rule of law which indicates the perceptions of the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rules of society, the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, and the courts and the likelihood of crime and violence; the control of corruption which captures perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption and the "capture" of the state by elites and private interests.

The presence and effectiveness of these variables have a corresponding relationship to the ability of the state to fight climate change and improve upon a country's ecological footprint. Historically, the trend between Ghana's ecological footprint and biocapacity, since the 1960s, has been low while the ecological reserves have been high based on the global standardized hectares. Ghana's dependency on energy and

material resources as well as the level of resource consumption were relatively low due to the population density and the relative quality of governance. Figure 1 below indicates an inverse relationship between ecological footprint and the biocapacity of the country.

Figure 1: Ecological footprint and biocapacity of Ghana

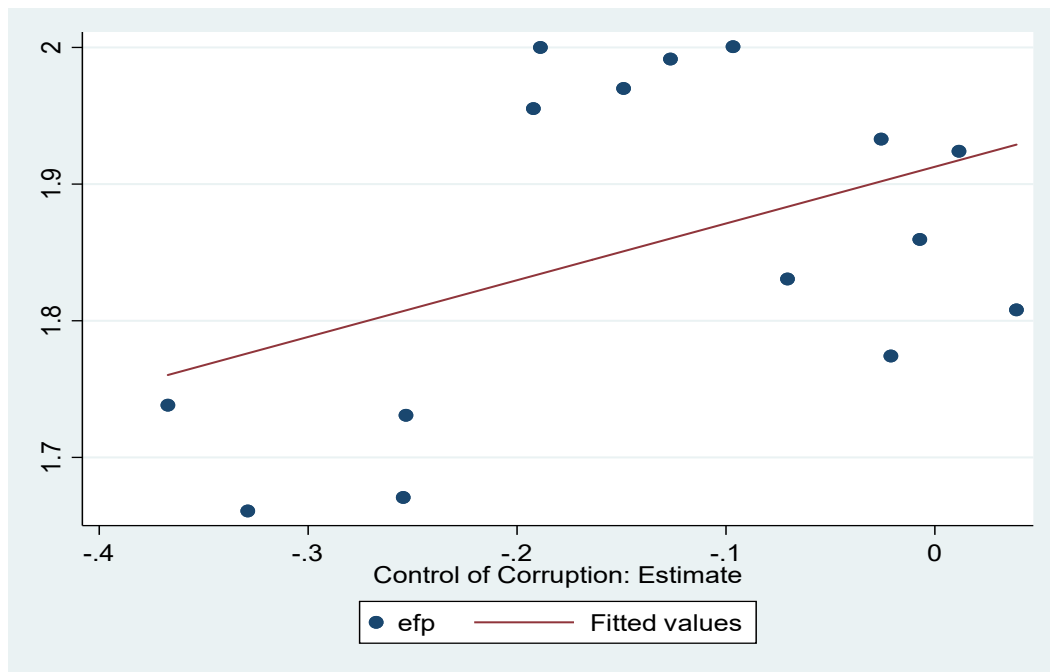


Source: Data from WGI

However, increase in the Ghanaian population led to an increase in resource consumption, motorizations, electricity consumption, oil usage, water consumption and estate development thereby decreasing biocapacity. Notwithstanding this development, Ghana's ecological footprint relative to the WGI index still remains stable. For example, there is a positive correlation between ecological footprint and control of corruption in Ghana between 2002-2016. Corruption is one of the major obstacles to development since it leads to high investment cost and low profits for government and foreign investors. Control of corruption is therefore crucial for economic growth. Thus, if there is strong control of corruption it will serve as one of the stems that will push the growth of the economy, increasing developmental activities such as road constructions, estate development, motorizations, among others, which promotes the consumption of the ecological reserves

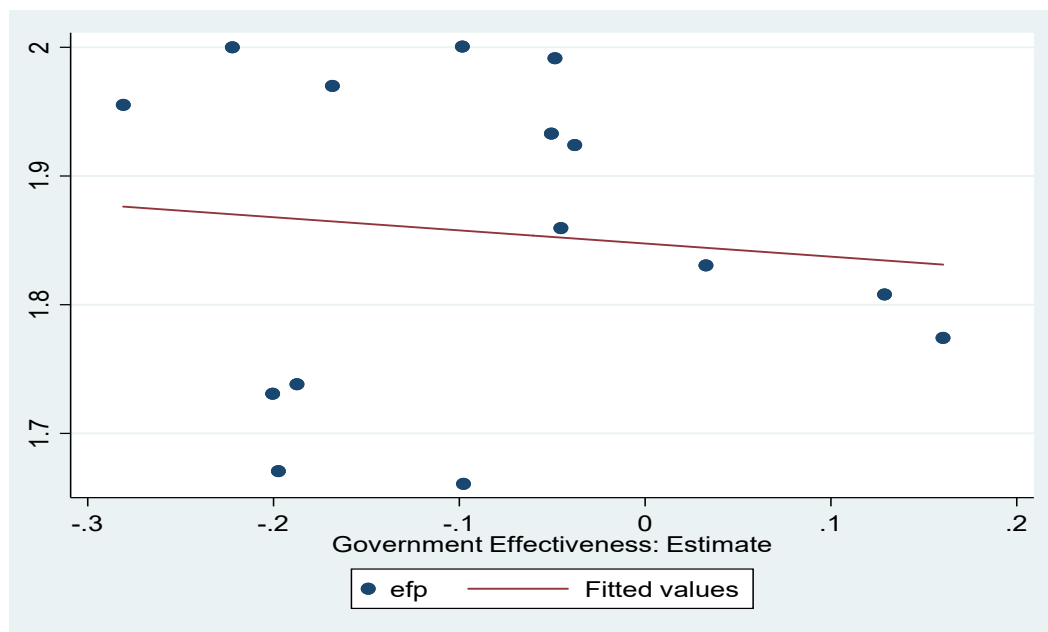
and hence increasing the country’s ecological footprint system. Figure Two below illustrates this explanation.

Figure 2: Ecological footprint and control of corruption in Ghana



Source: Data from WGI

Also, there is a negative correlation between ecological footprint and government effectiveness in Ghana between 2002-2016 (Figure 3, below). Effective governance enhances environmental sustainability and initiates alternative strategies of promoting development and the use of a country’s biocapacities. The type of governance structure and institutional framework that exists in a country has the propensity to determine the depth of environmental quality or degradation that a country can experience (Adekunle et al. 2020; Hsieh and Shannon 2005). Hence, an effective structure can lead to a low level of ecological footprint since the essence of governance is to protect its citizens and to preserve the environment and attendant resources from ecological footprints and hazardous wastes.

Figure 3: Ecological footprint and government effectiveness in Ghana

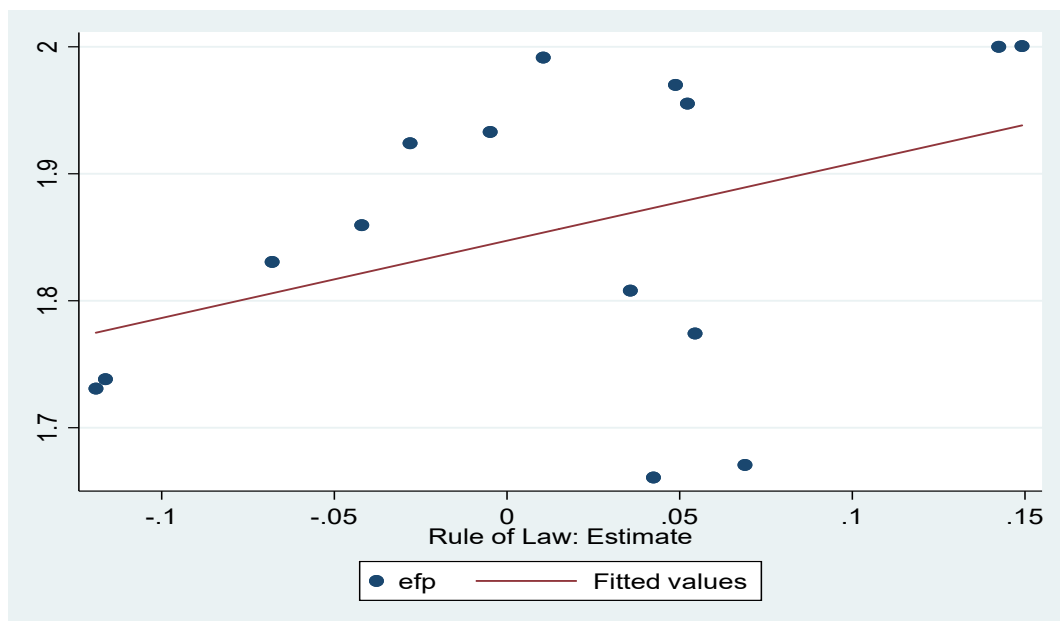
Source: *Data from WGI*

Further, there is a weak positive correlation between ecological footprint and political stability and absence of violence/terrorism in Ghana between 2002-2016. Political instability has negative effects on ecological demand even though its effect is lower than that of biocapacity. However, the study shows that an increase in political stability would not have a strong influence on ecological footprint index, particularly because of historical and natural heritage in Ghana. This is because there are trivial tendencies that a higher political stability/absence of violence will definitely lead to higher resources consumption and thus ecological footprint. There is also a positive correlation between ecological footprint and regulatory quality in Ghana between 2002-2016. The role of regulatory quality by strong institutions in ensuring environmental quality extends to the public sector growth in terms of basic amenities including housing, efficient road networks, functional healthcare facilities, and more (Easterly and Levine, 1997; Mbhalati, 2014). The quality of regulatory structure and institutional framework in a nation, in turn, becomes the most pervasive factor that determines the depth of ecological footprint that a country

can experience (Adekunle et al., 2020). Natural resource management options, interactions of states with social actors, quality of laws, and enforcement strategies put in place to safeguard the environment are essential elements of institutions and governance for the realisation of desirable environmental sustainability objectives (McConnell 1997). Hence, there is a tandem relationship between ecological footprint and regulatory quality. An enhanced regulatory quality will result in an enhanced ecological footprint.

Again, there is a positive correlation between ecological footprint and rule of law in Ghana between 2002-2016 (Figure 4, below). The findings suggest a positive relationship between the rule of law and transformation to ecological footprint largely through governmental interventions, including enacting and enforcing laws to protect natural resources consumption and usage. Therefore, an increase in ecological footprint will result in an increase in the inception of rule of law regime that discourages the plundering of natural resources and responsible lifestyles, particularly on disposing waste, recycling materials, reducing travel, and turning off lights when not in use.

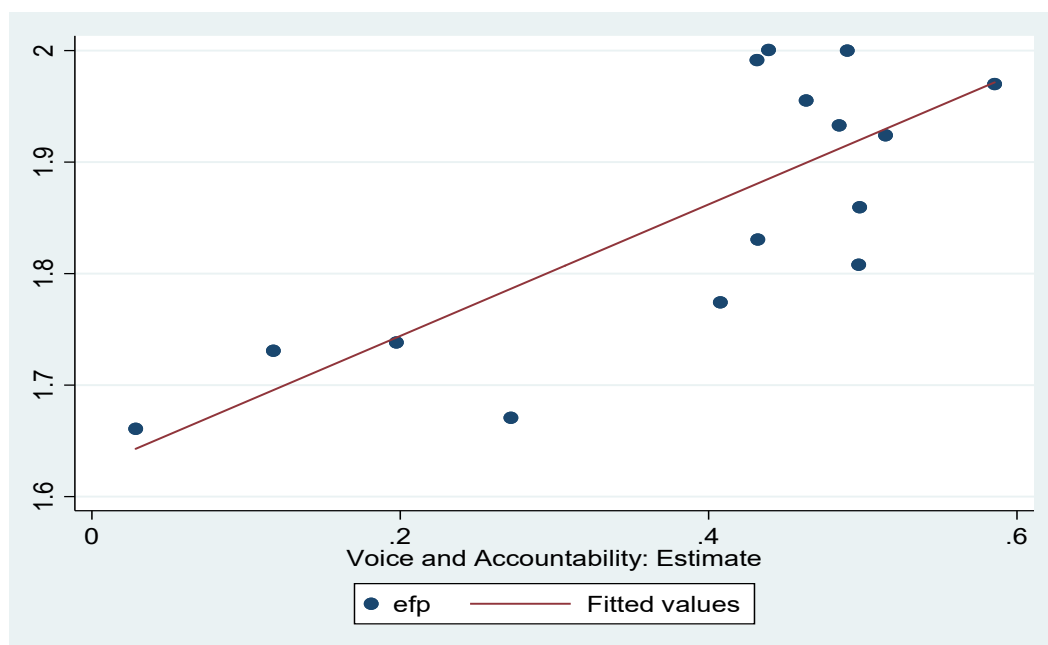
Figure 4: Ecological footprint and rule of law in Ghana



Source: Data from WGI

Finally, there is a positive correlation between ecological footprint and voice and accountability in Ghana between 2002-2016. Voice and accountability in democratic governance relates to the state's ability to allow citizens' participation in the everyday decision-making process, in freely expressing themselves and ventilating their grievances without fear and to freely associate with legally registered and constituted bodies and organizations. Also, voice and accountability include the freedom of the media to operate without censorship, threats and ill-feelings. There is a tandem relationship between ecological footprint and voice and accountability where an increase in ecological footprint results in an increase in the voice and accountability of the citizens. Thus, voice and accountability are essential variables in achieving sustainable targets in a country's ecological footprint. Identifying and monitoring ecological footprint provides valuable information on the environmental impact of the country.

Figure 5: Ecological footprint and voice and accountability



Source: *Data from WGI*

The historical antecedent of the fight against *galamsey*

In theory, Ghana's approach to curbing *galamsey* is holistic, taking into account the political, development, socioeconomic and governance drivers of *galamsey* (Alhassan, 2014). In reality however, government's approach has been overtly and overly militaristic. This is evidenced in the consistent launch of series of military operations and military-styled task forces to combat *galamsey* in the country. The first recorded military operation was launched in the 1980s following the passage of the Small-Scale Mining Law, PNDCL 218 (1989) (Republic of Ghana, 1989). This was succeeded in 2006 by what became known as "*Operation Flush Out*".

In spite of the high hopes this latter operation floated in flushing out *galamsey*, the menace festered on until 2013 when a joint taskforce comprising the military, immigration and the police service was launched under the banner of "*Inter-Ministerial Taskforce*" to respond to the renewed public outcry over the deleterious effects of *galamsey* on the environment and government's revenue. The inauguration of a new government in 2017 saw a change in the approach and the replacement of the "*Inter-Ministerial Taskforce*" with what was considered the mother of all anti-*galamsey* operations, the "*Operation Vanguard*". Compared with the previous attempts, "*operation vanguard*" enjoyed the most goodwill and support through the media coalition against *galamsey*, CSOs, Chiefs, NGOs and the general public (Frimpong, 2019). Operation Vanguard was a joint taskforce of 400 personnel comprising 200 military personnel and 200 police personnel. The operation targeted primarily, three of the country's most *galamsey*-prone regions – Ashanti region, Western region and Eastern region. The areas in each region where *galamsey* is rife are Tarkwa in the Western, Obuasi in the Ashanti and Osino in the Eastern Regions (Ministry of Defence, 2017). Four years into '*operation vanguard*', which was originally planned to last for just six months, government has now declared *galamsey* as a national emergency.

Accounting for the outcomes: Has the military approach succeeded?

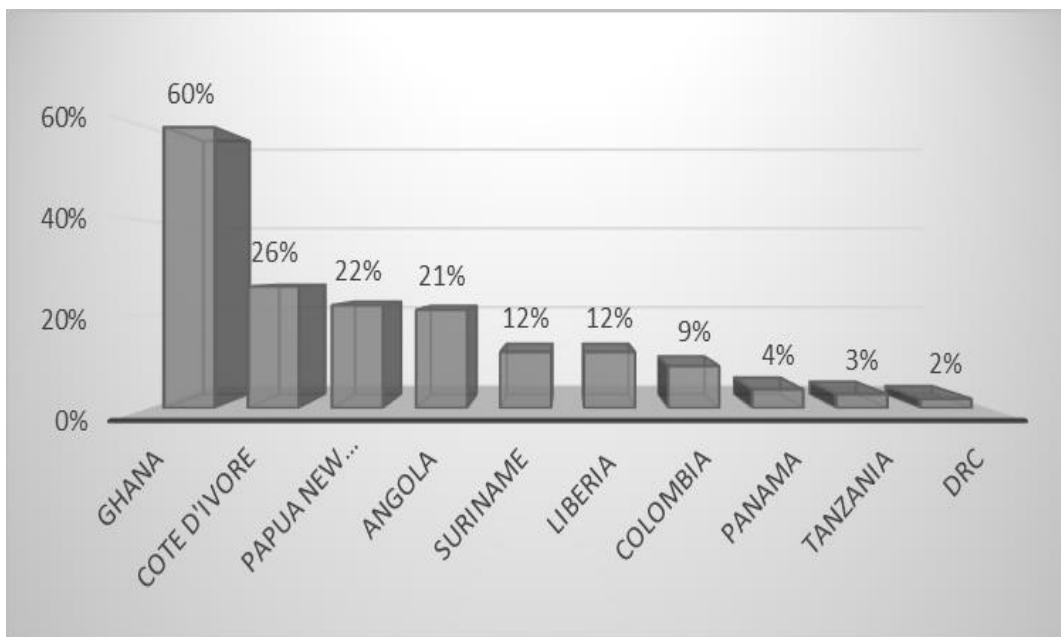
Whereas present and past governments have claimed moderate successes for their anti-galamsey military operations, the evidence suggests otherwise. The overall outcomes of the military operations to end galamsey leave much to be desired. For instance, Snapir, Simms, and Waine (2017) used remote sensing technology to estimate that galamsey activities in Ghana's cocoa-growing areas more than tripled between 2011 and 2015, resulting in the encroachment of 603 protected forest reserves (Snapir, Simms & Waine, 2017). There are now more people including thousands of Chinese, drawn to the illegal ASM than there were before many of these operations came to light. Some sources estimate that over 200,000 people directly engage in galamsey while nearly 3 million people are connected indirectly (Burrows & Bird, 2017). The latter, compared with the 2014 estimates of 500,000 to one million shows an alarming rise in the number of beneficiaries of galamsey (Alhassan, 2014).

Other associated crimes such as the rise in weaponry, the trafficking and use of drugs have all gone up as a result of the rise in galamsey over the years (Burrows & Bird, 2017). For instance, Alhassan (2014) noted that, large quantities of assorted weapons believed to have been handed over by deported Chinese illegal ASM miners are in circulation in the mining towns in the Ashanti, Eastern, and Western regions, which poses a serious threat to national security (Alhassan, 2014). The weapon proliferation exemplifies a weakness in the militaristic approach to end galamsey and its associated criminal activities. Similarly, studies have shown that, the use and trade of narcotics is on the rise in galamsey sites (Alhassan, 2014). Nwokolo (2019) in particular has noted that, a large proportion of the cocaine and methamphetamine trafficked through Ghana is often destined for the galamsey sites in the country for transit and use by illegal miners (Nwokolo, 2019).

Perhaps, the most devastating and visible challenge over the three decades of military and military-styled 'war' against galamsey is the loss of Ghana's highly priced rain forest (Nwokolo, 2019). Ghana is losing its rain forest at an alarming rate, primarily due to galamsey in

the country's forest areas. Between 2017 and 2018, Ghana lost 60% of its tropical primary rainforest and as shown in Figure 6, became the number one of the top 10 countries that lost the most tropical primary rainforest in 2018 (Weisse & Goldman, 2019).

Figure 6: Top 10 countries that lost the most tropical primary rainforest in 2018



Source: Authors' own design using data from the World Resources Institute

A Human Security approach to the galamsey problem in Ghana

Whereas a cocktail of factors including bushfires, variability in rainfall and agricultural activities are cited as some of the causes, galamsey is one of the major causes leading to the loss of the tropical primary rain forest (Satelligence, 2019).

In the wake of the obvious challenges facing an entirely militaristic approach to the fight against galamsey, there is the need to re-examine the strategy and approach to the fight. Consultations, stakeholder-based participation and consensus building are great hallmarks of

democracy; and starting the new wave of fight along these democratic principles, where the needs of the *galamseyers* are considered, may lead to a different outcome. Such an approach calls into practice a human security-driven approach to the fight against the *galamsey* menace in the country.

From the ashes of the cold war arose the concept of human security which sought to replace the realist state-centric paradigm of security that subordinates individual concerns to the primacy of territorial integrity (Johns, 2014). Even though no precise definition exists for the concept of human security, its very first formal usage appeared in the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) 1994 *Human Development Report titled the 'New Dimensions of Human Security'* (UNDP, 1994). In that report, the UNDP broadened the conceptualization of security and defined human security to include "safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression" and "protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life" (UNDP, 1994: p.22).

Perhaps the most concrete representation of human security which makes it the most suitable approach for addressing the *galamsey* menace in Ghana is captured in the 2012 UN General Assembly Resolution 66/290. The Resolution notes;

human security is an approach to assist Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people. Based on this, a common understanding on the notion of human security includes the following: (a) The right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair. All individuals, in particular vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential. (UN, 2012: p.1).

It also adds that, Human security calls for people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people and all communities; Human security recognizes the interlinkages between peace, development and human rights, and equally considers civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights (UN Resolution 66/290).

A human security approach by its extreme consideration for root causes and prevention, will afford government the opportunity to identify the individual motivations as well as the collective drivers for engaging in galamsey. Majority of those engaged in the galamsey activity is the youth. Unemployment and its attendant poverty and economic hardships are the most frequently cited factors that drive a lot of the youth into galamsey (University of Ghana Business School, 2017). The youth who engage in the illegal ASM are very much aware of the health hazards and the environmental and climatic implication. Yet they engage in this activity largely for survival. As once noted by Henry Kissinger, *"There are some situations in which the more survival is threatened, the narrower the margin of choice becomes unless you say you would rather have a society (in this case yourself) destroyed than to pursue marginal means."* (AntiGroupThink, 2009). The drive to survive tends to override all other considerations including the threats from the series of military and military-styled taskforces. A human security approach will ensure that, as a starting point towards the battle against galamsey, the fundamental drivers such as unemployment, poverty, feelings of alienation are addressed, and an alternative livelihood provided in dignity. Otherwise, as experience has shown, the illegal ASM will persist even under the most risky and prohibitive condition.

Additionally, a human security approach will ensure that governments' responses to galamsey are people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented. A people-centred and context-specific approach will encourage local participation and ownership of the battle against galamsey while a comprehensive and prevention-oriented approach will ensure that government addresses the drivers

that push the youth into galamsey. The small-scale mining law, PNDCL 218 (1989) provides for the registration of small-scale mining at the district centre at the local level. This means that, the local level authorities who are better placed to identify the local forces pushing the youth into the illegal ASM have a role to play in preventing it (Republic of Ghana, 1989). However, it is not clear the role these local authorities play in the actual battle against galamsey – from planning through to execution. The military operations, usually working in a top-down fashion appear to side-step the local authorities, losing out on the opportunities offered by the nuances peculiar to the specific contexts within which the ‘war’ is waged.

To answer the remaining two key questions set out in the beginning; why do people engage in galamsey in the first place? People, especially the youth engage in illegal ASM as a form of employment in order to overcome poverty, economic hardship and to guarantee for themselves their human dignity. Therefore, for any anti-galamsey approach by governments to be successful, these drivers must first and foremost be addressed contextually.

And then, why do the measures put in place by governments to curb the activities of galamsey operators produce disappointing outcomes? The military approach which for the past three decades has been the mainstay of successive governments’ response to illegal ASM is largely reactionary and attends only to the manifestations of galamsey rather than the fundamental drivers or pull and push factors. The military approach by its own excesses erodes public trust and confidence most needed for the success of any government intervention. The common excesses characteristic of all the different military operations include but not limited to abuse of office, corruption and human rights violations (Citinewsroom, 2020). In relation to human rights violations resulting from military crackdowns, the United Nations in a report titled “The United Nations System for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights”, notes;

In many cases it is private security personnel of mining companies that take the lead. Security contractors of mining companies assisted by armed police and

soldiers often conduct “operations” ostensibly to arrest illegal small-scale mining operators (galamsey) in the concessions of large-scale mining companies. ... these “operations” tend to be violent and bloody invasions of communities resulting in gross human rights violations. (UN, 2008: p.48).

Due to the media reports of the widespread corruption and human rights abuses that have often engulfed some of the military operations, the public confidence in the fight wanes and trust in the architect of the fight is lost. The goodwill and public support then evaporate leaving more room for miners to continue with their illegal activities. The media and other CSOs rather than focusing on the galamsey fight then turn their attention to the conduct of the government and government officials responsible for the fight against galamsey.

Conclusion and recommendation

The overall evidence points to the fact that the approach adopted by governments in dealing with galamsey is inherently militaristic, characterised by violent military crackdowns, destruction of mining equipment and facilities and sometimes gross human rights violations. Efforts by successive governments to address the problem have also been informed by technical, legal and cultural factors such as the cumbersome nature of the formalization of the ASM, lapses in law enforcements and claims over land ownership and use by indigenes (Alhassan, 2014). Whereas these measures are important in accounting for and attempting to halt the persistence of illegal ASM, the effectiveness of the fight will be enhanced if combined with a human security approach. In particular, the human security approach is prized for being people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented (UN Resolution 66/290). When used alongside existing measures, government will have the opportunity to address the root causes of the problem while avoiding the fallouts from the excessive military and military styled crackdowns. In order to mainstream human security into the fight against galamsey, the following recommendations are made for the purpose of informing policy and government’s actions.

As a starting point government needs to replace the sporadic and reactionary method with one that is proactive and is informed by research and strategy. Government must as a matter of necessity invest in local level and context specific research. This way, government's approach will be tailored to the specific context within which the 'war' on galamsey is waged. Second, on the issue of unemployment, there is the need for government to formulate and implement inclusive multi-level, multi-agency, and sustainable employment creation strategies. Within the short to medium term, government must urgently work to reduce the number of youths currently unemployed while targeting communities where galamsey is endemic. Government's policy of One-District One-Factory (1D1F) should be at the centre of all government priorities to help create jobs and reduce unemployment. Third, another success factor for any approach government employs is community buy-in at all stages of formulation and implementation and execution. Government must acknowledge that, local, context-specific, and community owned solutions are more efficacious than the usual top-down approach. Therefore, the norm where decisions are made in the capital city and imposed on communities must give way for local participation and community-led strategy. Fourth, government must also, as a matter of urgency work to reverse the eroding public trust and confidence in the galamsey fight by ensuring that the actions of its agents are consistent with the rule of law. As expressed in the words of the UN, the "*violent and bloody invasions of communities resulting in gross human rights violations.*" UN (2008: p.48) denies government the much-needed support and cooperation from the indigenes while spreading widespread public discontent against government and those involved in the fight.

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