

Responsibility to Protect Ghana's Absolute Territorial Sovereignty in the Light of "Galamsey": Why the Military Matters.

Prize F. Y. McApreko*

Abstract

Historically, "galamsey" has been part of Ghana's pre-and post-colonial era but has assumed large-scale level notably since the 2000s for many reasons including rising gold prices. The persistence of "galamsey" activities constitutes a major driver of ecological degradation in Ghana. To combat the crisis, Governments over the decades have initiated several interventions which have been unsuccessful. This paper contributes to extant literature on how to deal effectively with "galamsey." It makes copious references to incidences of "galamsey", in media discussions. It engages discourse analysis as methodology, and employs interdisciplinary perspectives involving human security and state sovereignty among other relevant areas of interest. It argues that (i) a state's natural mineral deposits, and other natural resources constitute strategic parts of its territorial integrity; (ii) their illegal extraction compromises human security, and threatens state sovereignty, raising concerns over the involvement of foreigners in this state-wrecking crime. The paper contends that since the places where "galamsey" happens are part of Ghana's territorial integrity, the military, as part of its duty to protect the state's absolute territorial sovereignty, has significant role to play in combating "galamsey" more effectively. It concludes that although military intervention may not offer a complete solution to the menace, the military wields substantial capacity to suppress the practice more effectively. The paper calls for a state of emergency in illegal mining sites as an urgent 'first aid' while the state explores durable multi-actor solutions. It also provides recommendations on how the military could be engaged strategically for enhanced results-oriented interventions.

Keywords: Galamsey, absolute territorial sovereignty, territorial integrity, human security, state of emergency.

**pfymcapreko@uesd.edu.gh*

1.0 Introduction

Originally named Gold Coast after its vast deposits of Gold, the Republic of Ghana is a sovereign state located at latitude 7.9465 degrees and longitude 1.023 degrees on the western coast of Africa. Literally sitting atop the equator, and covering a total area of about 92,497 square miles, Ghana shares boundaries to the north with Burkina Faso; to the west by Côte d'Ivoire and to the east by Togo. Its entire southern coast is generally swashed by the Atlantic Ocean and partly by the Gulf of Guinea. Ghana boasts of strategic reserves including forests, lakes and long snaking rivers that enhance biodiversity and economic activities. Under its verdant mountains and sinuous valleys lie large deposits of natural mineral resources, notably, gold: a blessing that is gradually becoming its Achilles' heel. Ghana's natural mineral resource wealth has engendered pronounced anthropogenic challenges, prominent among them being the phenomenon of "galamsey". It is now a disquieting situation that evokes the resource curse phenomenon and the view of natural mineral resources as a double-edged sword (Cai et al., 2024).

This paper is underpinned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s 1994 Human Development Report which introduced the human security framework as a people-centred approach with focus on threats to individual well-being and security. This framework comes as a set of interconnected components that are applicable to the "galamsey" menace and its significant consequences on human security, the environment and human rights. The people-centred approach allows human security to be defined by the well-being of individuals rather than focusing exclusively on state security. This way, human security plays a complementary role to state security.

Its comprehensive character allows it to consider a range of threats including poverty, food insecurity, health risks, violence and environmental degradation. The human security framework recognizes that because different regions and their populations are susceptible to unique or context-specific threats, they require tailor-made interventions or solutions. One unique characteristic of the human security framework

lies in its prevention-oriented nature which aims not only at reacting to crisis but aims at addressing the root causes and building resilience. Human security is interconnected because it aims at addressing the complex relationship between different security threats.

This paper uses Absolute Territorial Sovereignty in its meaning of a state having absolute sovereignty over the territory and resources within its borders. Throughout this paper, the use of “responsibility to protect” does not refer to the doctrine of “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) at the World Summit in 2005. It is therefore to be understood in its ordinary sense as Ghana’s military duty to protect the state.

2.0 Literature Review

This paper is essentially based on media analysis on the subject under study, and therefore employs media document review. It also throws searchlight on existing gaps as well as areas for further study. The paper notes that though “galamsey” is not new in Ghana, in the country has assumed unprecedented levels, notably in the run-up to the 2024 presidential elections and its aftermath. As of 19th March 2025, the Government of the day had revoked all post-December 7, mining licences as one of its major interventions aimed at dealing with the “galamsey” crisis.¹ At a press briefing, the sector minister noted that one of their anti-“galamsey”, “operations led to the confiscation of at least 60 excavators,” through a joint security task force comprising the military, police, and the Forestry Commission’s rapid response team.

However, the sector Minister’s emphasis on the seizure of 60 excavators prompts this paper to argue that, (i) though this move is very important, it should be appreciated that it is not necessarily the acquisition or non-acquisition of licences that matter most. Instead, it is the (irresponsible) manner in which mining is done that matters. (ii) Seizures and confiscation

¹ ‘Government Revokes Small Scale Licenses Granted after December, 7 – Lands Minister’

Available at: <https://mlnr.gov.gh/govt-revokes-small-scale-mining-licenses-granted-after-dec-7-lands-minister/> Accessed: 19th March, 2025.

of excavators are not new among the counter measures, nor have they resolved the problem at any point in its history. Consequently, beyond the seizures, more efforts should be directed at regulating mining practices for both licence holders and non-liscence holders alike. (iii) Seizures of excavators without prosecution of their owners, operators and allied persons of interest significantly undermine anti-galamsey interventions, and therefore deserve greater attention. Though the devastation which the practice imposes on environmental integrity, social stability and economic prospects has become very visible, “galamsey” continues to attain threatening limits in the face of several high-level counter-measures.

As Col. Festus Aboagye [Rtd] (2024) documents, Operation Fight Galamsey (2006) was one of the earliest military interventions to curb illegal mining activities. Operation Flash Out (2013) was focused on removing illegal miners from artisanal small-scale mining (ASM) sites. Operation Vanguard, launched in 2017, was a joint military-police task force deployed to enforce mining laws and shut down illegal mining operations. He draws attention that though not a law, this operation was a significant government initiative involving a military-police task force to provide immediate action against “galamsey” operations which has been instrumental in arresting illegal miners and seizing equipment. Operation Halt (2021) targeted illegal mining activities in water bodies and forest reserves, aiming to protect critical environmental resources from the impacts of “galamsey”.

Regrettably, almost all these operations boasted of seizures of mining equipment. In some cases, the pieces of equipment were burnt, yet “galamsey” persists today. In fact, highlights from a study conducted by Bansah et al. (2022) indicate that across the globe, over 20,000 informal miners have been arrested in military crackdowns. But supporters of military action in Artisanal Small-Scale Mining have deplored the shooting of miners and the burning of excavators. The study notes that brutalities, human rights abuses and loss of properties associated with military involvement have failed to deter informal mining, while highlighting

unsustainability of the military approach. These observations are indicative that engaging the military for countering “galamsey” is neither new nor peculiar to Ghana alone. That the military alone has not been successful in this fight is also not in doubt. These highlights therefore point to the need for improved governance and legislation, stakeholder engagement and job creation as interventions that could help mitigate informal mining.

These thoughts lie at the heart of this paper because they resonate with this paper’s consideration that, military intervention is not necessarily an absolute panacea. However, it wields substantial capacity to tame the practice with more effect and sustainability which is why this paper proposes a declaration of a state of emergency on all illegal mining sites as an urgent ‘first aid’ intervention while the state considers durable solutions for short-, medium- and long-term multi-actor collaborative interventions. Indeed, this paper’s call for a state of emergency is not an isolated view. In a high-level meeting with the President as recently as 25th May, 2025 at the presidency, the Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference called on His Excellency, the President to do so, urging the Government “to temporarily suspend all mining activities in the worst-affected zones, deploy military engineering units to reclaim degraded lands, and restore lawful governance structures to the affected districts.”²

The added value of a state of emergency would ensure that “galamsey” perpetrators would be warded off the potential crime scenes. It would also ensure that the associated pollution of water resources, forest and environmental degradation would be drastically reduced because ordinarily, no one would like to dare the military or defy their orders by venturing into military demarcated zones. Those who may be aware that they do so at their own risk. Declaring a state of emergency therefore

² ‘Catholic Bishops Call on Mahama to Declare state of emergency Over Galamsey Menace’

Available at: <https://www.peacefmonline.com/article/391781-catholic-bishops-call-on-mahama-to-declare-state-of-emergency-over-galamsey-menace>
Accessed: 2th May, 2025.

comes to enhance military capacity to engage more effectively than in past military interventions.

In a statement to Parliament on 9th February 2025, the Minister of Lands and Natural Resources noted that more than nine (9) out of Ghana's forty-four (44) forest reserves had been completely taken over by illegal miners with impunity, preventing the Forestry Commission from accessing these reserves³. This paper notes that by 19th March 2025, the Minister of Lands and Natural Resources had communicated that seven (7) of these reserves had been reclaimed by the Government⁴. Prior to these developments in October, 2024, organized labour unions in the country had threatened a nation-wide strike scheduled for 10th October, 2024 in protest against the persistence of “galamsey” and what was perceived to be the Government’s ineffective and lackadaisical posture in combating “galamsey”⁵. Though the strike failed to materialize (not because the government of the day did the needful), labour unions’ resolve remains a patent tribute to the unprecedented heights of “galamsey”. It also provides justification for the need to design an entirely enhanced and robust mechanism for dealing with the challenge.

On 12th March 2025, in the towns of Tano Anwia, Tano Nimri, and Boin Tano Forest Reserves (Western Region), which were reported to have come under siege by armed groups engaging in “galamsey”, eight (8)

³ “Illegal miners block Forestry Commission’s Access after Hijacking 9 Forest Reserves”. Available at:

<https://www.myjoyonline.com/illegal-miners-block-forestry-commissions-access-after-hijacking-9-reserves/>

Accessed: 20th February, 2025.

⁴ “Government reclaims seven out of nine forest reserves from illegal miners” Available at: <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/government-reclaims-seven-out-of-nine-forest-reserves-from-illegal-miners.html>

Accessed: 19th March, 2025.

⁵ “Ghana labour union calls for nation-wide strike on October 10 over government inaction on illegal mining.”

Available at: <https://www.intellinews.com/ghana-labour-union-calls-for-nationwide-strike-on-october-10-over-government-inaction-on-illegal-mining-346306/>

Accessed: 15th March, 2025.

Ghanaians, together with three (3) foreign miners operating excavators were arrested and handed over to the police. The group had evaded a recent military and Rapid Response raid on “galamsey” camps in the forest reserve to perpetuate their heinous crime⁶. Swift judgment on, and deterrent prosecution of this matter are desirable to ensure that the Government is seen to be doing the needful, while ensuring that severe and deterrent punishment will discourage the practice. On 5th March 2025, Erastus Asare Donkor, a leading environmental journalist reported how a Government advisory team on a fact-finding mission to assess the impact of “galamsey”, was confronted with resistance by “galamseyers” in parts of the Western and Central Regions as the team immobilized and seized illegal mining equipment. In fact, the journalist himself, while in the line of duty, had been attacked and molested by “galamseyers” earlier in October 2024⁷, forcing him to flee into a self-imposed exile⁸. The team was reportedly confronted by angry illegal miners and some officials of the governing NDC. For this paper, the alleged involvement of high-level political figures associated with sitting Governments in “galamsey” is rather problematic as it thwarts effective engagement, while suggesting complacency on the part of various Governments. It gives the impression that Governments are almost always neck-deep in the illicit practice, depriving them of any moral high ground to take decisive stands towards punishing offenders, some of whom might be their own kith and kin. If that

⁶ ‘Forestry Commission arrests illegal miners in Tano Anwia Forest’ Accessed: <https://www.myjoyonline.com/forestry-commission-arrests-illegal-miners-in-tano-anwia-forest/>

⁷ ‘MGL condemns attack on Erastus Asare Donkor and 3 other employees’ Available T: <https://www.myjoyonline.com/mgl-condemns-attack-on-erastus-asare-donkor-and-3-other-employees/> Accessed: 15th March, 2025.

⁸ ‘Threats from illegal miners forced me into exile: Ghanaian environmental journalist narrates ordeal’ Available at: <https://mfwa.org/issues-in-focus/threats-from-illegal-miners-forced-me-into-exile-ghanaian-environmental-journalist-narrates-ordeal/> Accessed: 10th February, 2025.

becomes the reality, then the supposed fight against “galamsey” is moribund even before it starts.

At “galamsey” sites in Anwia (near Nkroful), Prestea, and Dunkwa, the team seized pumping machines, generators, and excavators and also destroyed *Changfan* machines which were being used for “galamsey”. As argued earlier, mere seizures and burning of illicit mining equipment are nowhere near addressing the “galamsey” problem. Instead, persons and personalities behind the deployment and use of these pieces of equipment ought to be apprehended with alacrity, arrested and prosecuted to make the practice unattractive. This paper believes that the “galamsey” fight will yield better results if it is given a “perpetrator-centred” approach rather than the current ineffective ‘equipment destruction-centred’ approach.

Fact is that, most of these pieces of equipment are imported into the country. This being the case, the state should be able to trace and track owners of these pieces of equipment in order to hold the appropriate persons of interest accountable and be punished appropriately should their equipment be used for “galamsey”. In the same vein, movement of these pieces of equipment could be monitored from their arrival at the ports to determine their movements, locations and those behind their movements at any given point in time for effective actions to be taken.

In Dunkwa, it was noted that tensions escalated as miners, reportedly led by the NDC Constituency Chairman, backed by angry miners, had mobilized to confront the team, with the NDC Chairman arguing that he had not been consulted before the raid was executed. Here, it is important to highlight that, this singular act of a leading politically-linked figure is most unfortunate because, once again, it suggests possible Government complacency in this state-wrecking enterprise. The protesters, many of whom were reported to be directly involved in illegal mining activities along the Offin River, blocked roads and threatened a direct standoff with the heavily armed security personnel accompanying the team.

This act of ‘party-flavoured’ lawlessness is becoming an unacceptable albatross around the necks of successive Governments because it tells the story of communities becoming involved, benefiting from the crime, and being prepared to fight openly, by any means necessary, in defence of “galamsey” because they appear to benefit from it. They also do envisage being apprehended possibly because they might have some protection from the corridors of power. The worrying trend is that, some members of both leading political parties appear to have “soiled” their hands in this sordid affair, and if this does not change, then even changes of Government would not inure to this otherwise noble fight. In fact, during the erstwhile New Patriotic Party (NPP) administration, comparable concerns were raised over alleged deep involvement of political party hierarchy in illegal mining.

The Media Coalition Against “galamsey” cited the then Ashanti Regional Chairman of the NPP for his alleged involvement in illegal mining⁹. In a closely related but slightly different context, Dr. Ashigbey of the Coalition of Anti-Galamsey Executives notes that the fight against illegal mining has been undermined by the involvement of high-profile politicians: “Unless these influential figures are brought to justice, the fight against “galamsey” will remain an uphill battle”¹⁰. It is both important and fair to note that the persistent trading of counter-accusations between the dominant political parties introduces scepticism about the extent to which government officials are truly committed to combating “galamsey” with the urgency and rigour it requires. This may explain the resurging character of “galamsey”. Otherwise, one wonders why we are yet to see deterrent

⁹ ‘Media Coalition Against Galamsey Wants ‘Chairman Wontumi’ Arrested for alleged illegal mining’

Available at: <https://www.myjoyonline.com/media-coalition-against-galamsey-wants-chairman-wontumi-arrested-for-alleged-illegal-mining/>

¹⁰ ‘Coalition of Anti-Galamsey Executives urges action on galamsey, demands probe into politically linked miners’.

Available at: <https://www.myjoyonline.com/coalition-of-anti-galamsey-executives-urges-action-on-galamsey-demands-probe-into-politically-linked-miners/>

Accessed: 16th March, 2025.

prosecution of “galamsey” practitioners. In fact, Governments ought to be seen to be implementing the letter and spirit of interventions they often claim to be undertaking. This will assure the public that Government really has the political will to dismantle the “galamsey” system.

Meanwhile, in Anwia, illegal miners were reported to have severely damaged roads and nearly collapsed concrete storm drains. The advisory team reacted by dismantling equipment and setting the mining camps ablaze. In Baduwa No.2, Upper Denkyira East District, “galamsey” along the Offin River was identified as a major environmental hazard, causing frequent floods and destroying farmlands. The team discovered colossal illegal excavation dangerously close to the town’s main bridge. As the situation was being assessed, an angry mob beseeched the location, challenged the security forces and demanded their immediate departure. The confrontation intensified, with a crowd gathering near the bridge, openly challenging the security forces¹¹. This paper views such attitudes reprehensible as they tell the extent to which ordinary people who are supposed to be beneficiaries of an effective clamp down on “galamsey” are rather demonstrating for the perpetration of the crime. The expectation is that such ordinary people would have rather collaborated with state actors and state agencies by offering information that could lead to the arrest and prosecution of perpetrators.

From the analysis so far, a visible gap on the fight against “galamsey” appears to be that, substantial attention has been focused on destruction of “galamsey” equipment without appropriate corresponding sanctioning regime for perpetrators. It also appears as though some level of politicization has often characterized the “galamsey” fight, and this is quite manifest in what this paper considers a lack of political will to prosecute

¹¹ : ‘NDC officials resist seizure of galamsey equipment as government team faces hostile reactions’

Available at: <https://www.myjoyonline.com/ndc-officials-resist-seizure-of-galamsey-equipment-as-government-team-faces-hostile-reactions/>

Accessed: 13th March, 2025.

“galamseyers” linked with political parties in authority. It further expresses concerns that foreign nationals involved in “galamsey” are not given deterrent punishment.

It is against such worrying trends that this paper tackles the multi-dimensional implications of Ghana’s contemporary “galamsey” regime, and how it compromises other people’s source(s) of livelihoods and their human security. In particular, it highlights how some foreign nationals are gradually but steadily getting deeply involved in the “galamsey” enterprise, and in some cases, almost taking the lead, while some Ghanaians work for them and sabotage their own country.

In the following discussion, this paper examines potential implications for national sovereignty, and makes the case for why and how the military matters in bringing new dimensions towards an effective closure to the menace.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

Two theories are examined here: the theories of political economy and rational choice theory serve as theoretical framework for this paper. This is essentially because this paper contends that the complex nature of “galamsey” does not make the use of a single theory sufficient enough to address the phenomenon of “galamsey” in Ghana. Thus, political economy brings to the fore, the complex interplay that inform economic factors, political structures and social relations that operate within the framework of “galamsey”.

This also invokes sentiments on the role of state actors and agencies as well as how corruption and to some extent, how economic insecurity expresses in joblessness can influence “galamsey”. The rational choice theory, on the other hand, helps to explain how individuals make decisions and choices informed by cost-benefit analysis. In the context of “galamsey”, in Ghana, “galamseyers” may settle for illegal mining by considering the potential economic benefits associated with “galamsey” overrides dangers of being apprehended and handed down punitive sanctions. The

absence of such punishment emboldens perpetrators to practice “galamsey” without fear.

4.0 Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research design, drawing primarily on discourse analysis. Engaging the Ghanaian media as its principal data source, it analyses media documents to explore how the “galamsey” phenomenon is reported, debated, and contested in the public sphere. The media, understood as the Fourth Estate of the Realm, is examined for its role in investigating illegal mining activities, raising public awareness, shaping public opinion, and holding stakeholders accountable¹². The use of media document analysis helps in appreciating more rapid reported “galamsey” scenarios coming from a broad cross-section of the general public involving individuals, Non-governmental Organizations, Civil Society Organizations, perspectives and concerns from various professionals, politicians among others. Given the on-going and topical nature of “galamsey”, it continues to attract important and new dimensions from a broad spectrum of the Ghanaian society.

Such media interventions provide regular updates on actions and inactions from Government, reportage and discussions involving Government officials, experts and the general public. The consulted media discussions were done at random, based on how they reported on the “galamsey” menace as a topical issue. In order to scale up analysis obtained from the media, the paper features reflections from related researched and published papers in order to enrich its arguments with the benefits of academic literature and research rigour.

¹² An Extended Policy Brief: ‘Gold Rush Chaos and Golden Curse: How Ghana’s Political Elite Are Selling out the Nation’s Posterity for Personal Gain’ Available at: <https://imaniafrica.org/2024/09/an-extended-policy-brief-gold-rush-chaos-and-golden-curse-how-ghanas-political-elite-are-selling-out-the-nations-posterity-for-personal-gain/>

P. 16.

Accessed: 26th May, 2025.

5.0 Discussion

This discussion is anchored on the conviction that, Ghana's natural mineral resources, forest reserves and water resources are inalienable parts of Ghana's territorial integrity, and therefore needs to be protected and guarded jealously, especially because of their strategic importance to the country and its people. It upholds the concept of absolute territorial sovereignty, and makes reference to the multiple international-actor involvement in the "galamsey" circles, while highlighting the shared tragedy of both internal and external conflict implications of the multi-national actor involvement. It notes that, because "galamsey" is often practised by persons without authorized licences, they operate under unregulated settings mostly outside the scope of state supervision.

The discussion shares perspectives on some "galamsey" implications on the environment within the larger framework of "galamsey" as a tragedy of the commons due to the common environment which perpetrators and non-perpetrators share. It draws attention to how some state actors have fallen victim to the sheer bravery of "galamsey" practitioners and how civil society organizations have reacted and shared their frustrations at the continuum of "galamsey".

5.1 "Galamsey" as a Tragedy of the Commons

The **Tragedy of the Commons**, Harding (1968), succinctly captures the situation in which an often privileged few individuals or groups with access to a public (common) good or resources, act in pursuit of their parochial interest such that they eventually deplete the common good. It highlights the tendency of how such persons, informed by their greed, will totally disregard the immediate, mid and or long-term implications which their actions may impose on the general public or the environment. In the end, the desire of a privileged few becomes a burden to be carried by the common majority¹³.

¹³ "Tragedy of the commons: What it is & 5 examples"

Available at: <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/tragedy-of-the-commons-impact-on-sustainability-issues>

Accessed: 27th December, 2024

This is a travesty of environmental justice, and when left in the hands of interested individuals or groups, public goods might be usurped by only a privileged few to the perpetual detriment of an unfortunate majority. In the end, social justice might never prevail. Instead, it might lead populations back to the abyss of lawlessness. This paper opines that, against such disorders, *inter-alia*, and as part of efforts to guard against environmental degradation and injustice, states have onerous responsibility to protect their populations from environmental harm, through effective resource governance including the processes, structures, and policies put in place to determine and regulate management of natural resources.

This should be facilitated by the enforcement of appropriate law and order. This paper is quick to admit that the issue of “galamsey” is a rather complex one, and not just an issue of law and order. In fact, it is driven by multi-dimensional issues rooted in poverty, unemployment, absence of alternative livelihoods, lack of training for responsible artisanal mining, among others. There is also the issue of ever soaring gold prices which makes “galamsey” attractive in a country where there are hardly any reliable youth employment policies. These gaps have often ensured that “galamsey”, in spite of all its associated risk and challenges to its practitioners, is continuously seen by many as low hanging fruits to be plucked. These have triggered natural resource conflicts, bordering on the desire to have access to management of, control over and or denying others of key natural resources, notably land, water, forests, vegetation etc. Ghana’s “galamsey” narrative fits excellently into this scenario in the sense that the impact of a few “galamsey” activities is endangering entire prominent natural resources and the livelihoods of all who depend on these resources. The consequences are simply dire.

5.2 Impact of “Galamsey” on Environment and Water Resources

The Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) pointed out in March 2025 that the extent of water pollution caused by “galamsey” required 300 million dollars to restore the quality of polluted water resources to render

them safe for drinking and agricultural purposes¹⁴. Already, the Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) has raised urgent concerns about its inability to filter heavy metals from treated water due to “galamsey”¹⁵. The GWCL also indicates that having recorded water turbidity levels of 14 000 NTUs (Nephelometric Turbidity Units), far above the 2000 NTU required for adequate treatment,¹⁶ in some areas, the country could face severe water scarcity if “galamsey” is not curtailed. Besides, Enoch Randy Aikings, a researcher of African Futures and Innovations at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) suggests that water pollution from “galamsey” has direct health repercussions. He notes that water pollution is causing chronic diseases such as kidney failure, birth defects and cancer, as seen in many of Ghana’s mining communities, and concludes that Ghana could be importing water by 2030!¹⁷

Several diseases and ailments, including birth defects in pregnant women, have been linked to the release of toxic substances into the environment as a result of “galamsey”. Studies conducted by Abewomon *et al.*, (2024) reveal high concentration levels of various pollutants and their negative

¹⁴ ‘Galamsey Has Contaminated Our Water:, S300m Needed for Restoration – EPA’ Available at: <https://www.peacefmonline.com/article/389551-galamsey-has-contaminated-our-water-300m-needed-for-restoration-epa>
Accessed: 14th February, 2025.

¹⁵ “Illegal mining: GWCL’s inability to filter heavy metals from drinking water is of grave concern – Engineer” Available at: <https://www.myjoyonline.com/illegal-mining-gwcls-inability-to-filter-heavy-metals-from-drinking-water-is-of-grave-concern-engineer/>
accessed: 23rd December, 2024.

¹⁶ “Ghana must stop galamsey before it sinks the country” Available at: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/ghana-must-stop-galamsey-before-it-sinks-the-country>
Accessed: 18th November, 2024.

¹⁷ “Ghana must stop galamsey before it sinks the country” Available at: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/ghana-must-stop-galamsey-before-it-sinks-the-country>
Accessed: 18th November, 2024.

impacts in “galamsey”-prone areas of Ghana. Their studies on River Tanor, Tarkwa Nsuaem, Amenfi East and Prestea Huni Valley reveal the stark reality of mercury concentrations in fish species and “galamsey” waste. The consumption of such contaminated fish with these heavy metals has been associated with damage to the nervous system and the occurrence of birth-related disorders. In the estuaries of River Pra, high concentrations of lead were also detected in water. Since these levels significantly exceed recommended health limits, it implies potential health threats to aquatic life as well as the local populations which could lead to mercury and lead poisoning. In Kenyasi (Ashanti Region), cyanide levels of 43.47 mg/l found in yams was far in excess of the 10 mg/kg recommended level. Such health implications associated with “galamsey” are too gross to be ignored.

The seeming failure of successive Governments to exercise effective resource governance regarding access, management and control of the country’s natural mineral resources eventually suggests that, a privileged few may have usurped and dominated the mineral resource mining space, exploiting them beyond sustainable margins with impunity while the majority of others remain exposed to these health hazards discussed above. Indeed, in the event that, critical implications of “galamsey” begin to descend heavily on Ghanaians, it is certainly the ordinary masses who will bear the brunt most because they are the underprivileged ones with comparatively less economic means to navigate through successfully. Natural mineral resources tend to be located in specific geographical territories, yet the actions and or inactions taken on their extraction have multiple ripple effects over everyone everywhere. This is symptomatic of the butterfly effect rooted in the chaos theory in which over a period of time, a tiny change in the initial stages of a system results in huge non-linear consequences elsewhere. It is therefore imperative that the country takes advantage of the location specific nature of natural mineral resource deposits to contain the “galamsey” impact by strategically engaging traditional leaders.

5.3 Leveraging the Location-Specific Character of Natural Mineral Resources: The Role of Traditional Authorities

Since almost every stool land in Ghana lies within the jurisdiction of an identified and recognized traditional authority, it is suggestive that such traditional authorities, especially our chiefs have key and direct roles to play in prohibiting “galamsey” at least within their jurisdictions. This is first and foremost because they are custodians of the lands on which “galamsey” is practised. Yet, the state seems not to involve them effectively in the regulatory exercise. This practice creates an environmental protection gap in which chiefs of some locations where “galamsey” is practised often turn a blind eye to these happenings. Some of such chiefs and local authorities could be complacent or remotely involved in the illicit practice.

This paper holds the view that there is hardly any way in which any responsible traditional leader can claim ignorance over “galamsey” happening within his or her jurisdiction. Such claims could be an indictment on the said traditional leader. Ways in which chiefs and traditional authorities can help save the situation includes collaboration with local assemblies and Government agencies to strengthen enforcement and compliance initiatives. Chiefs can ensure that sub-chiefs who engage directly or indirectly in “galamsey” are de-stooled or punished. The Asantehene has already led this charge a number of times¹⁸. Chiefs could decide not to collaborate with illegal miners by prohibiting their activities or refusing to grant them access to lands in their territories. Chiefs can legislate and ensure compliance with measures that safeguard the environment and also proscribing “galamsey” in their jurisdictions.

Justification for the above is inherent in the view that though natural mineral resources tend to be unevenly embedded beneath the earth in specific geographical locations, their poor extraction through human-environment interactions, unleash far-reaching challenges whose negative

¹⁸ ‘Asantehene destools Ohwim Chief over galamsey, oath desecration’

Available at: <https://citnewsroom.com/2025/02/asantehene-destools-ohwim-chief-over-galamsey-oath-desecration/>

Accessed : 25th May, 2025.

ramifications including environmental degradation, deforestation, air and water pollution affect everyone even in distant locations. “Galamsey” identifies with this character, and therefore makes its practice a looming catastrophe. Its gravity is further appreciated in the case that, by October 2024, it was estimated that over one million “galamsey” operators were active in Ghana and these were supporting the livelihoods of over 4.5 million people¹⁹. Available literature identifies gold as one of Ghana’s highest revenue sources. In fact, Ghana is the highest producer of gold²⁰. This source documents further that:

Artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) is vital for Ghana's gold exports, making up about 36% and generating \$1.7 billion in revenue by mid-2024. It is suggested further that ASM exports could exceed \$3 billion for the whole year. For now, ASM and industrial gold production and export data are unavailable. Neither are forecasts for 2025. However, some indicators suggest that the figures will keep rising.

This is very important: First, ASM where “galamsey” belongs was responsible for as much as about 36% and generating \$1.7 billion in revenue by mid-2024. This suggests the sheer number of “galamsey” operators in the country, and by extrapolation, the employment offered in the “galamsey” enterprise. Seen from the perspective of environmental degradation, it also exposes the extent of damage caused by the high

¹⁹ ‘Mining and Extractives / Illegal mining digs up multiple problems in Ghana’ Available at: <https://enactafrica.org/enact-observer/illegal-mining-digs-up-multiple-problems-in-ghana#:~:text=There%20are%20over%20a%20million,of%20over%204.5%20million%20people.>

Accessed: 13th March, 2025.

²⁰ ‘Ghana: Gold Exports Stood at \$11 billion in 2024’ Available at: <https://www.ecofinagency.com/mining/2801-46375-ghana-gold-exports-stood-at-11-billion-in-2024-up-53-yoy#:~:text=Ghana%20earned%20%2411.6%20billion%20from,total%20export%20revenue%20in%202024.>

Accessed: 19th March, 2025.

informal miners involved. In effect, though “galamsey” is illegal, it provides a source of livelihood and employment to its practitioners, usually the youth. “Galamsey” in this context is providing the much-needed employment which Government is unable to provide. It also contributes to national income.

This fact is important for the purpose of this paper because it provides a critical nexus between unemployment and “galamsey” which ought to be factored into the sustainable interventions as we fight against the menace by whatever means. The figures quoted above may have increased by now. The Centre for Extractives and Development notes that, as of 25th February 2025, ‘over 3 million people were actively working in illegal mining, going into the forests or “galamsey” areas every day’²¹ These figures could still be conservative because illegal miners are technically undocumented, and most of them work on the blind side of governments. What is evident is that, while the numbers keep rising, the sheer impact on the environment is equally increasingly deteriorating. At the same time, the sheer revenue from the gold industry makes the latter, a point of strategic interest for state revenue that may be falling into wrong hands.

Where it is legal, small-scale mining is regulated by permits, and is exclusively reserved for Ghanaians 18 years and above under special registration. Unfortunately, it has now become a debilitating case that Ghana’s unprotected natural mineral deposits are now illegally extracted by an increasing number of foreign nationals, some of whom facilitate the acquisition and use of heavy earth-moving equipment, including bulldozers, *chanfang* motors (though some are manufactured locally) and excavators. This is a violation of Ghana’s laws by foreigners and could gradually undermine Ghana’s sovereignty. If this is not well-managed, it could cascade into an alarming butterfly effect syndrome that could compromise the human security of millions of our citizens over time. Already, “galamsey” apart from its negative impact on the environment,

²¹ ‘Over 3 million people are involved in illegal mining in Ghana’

Available at: <https://www.myjoyonline.com/over-3-million-people-are-involved-in-illegal-mining-in-ghana-samuel-bekoe/> Accessed: 25th February, 2025.

provokes gun-related violence since “galamseyers” will go every length to protect their mining equipment, their facilities and their source of livelihood. This phenomenon goes a long way to explain standoffs and faceoffs associated with “galamsayers” and state actors. This paper is concerned that, with ‘galamseyers’ including foreign operators wielding sophisticated arms, attacks on them could harm Ghana’s international relations while compromising state security.

In the wake of all these, and notwithstanding the far-reaching consequences at both local and international levels, many have risen to the defence of “galamseyers” through sympathy, arguing that it is the last resort for them to earn livelihoods. Proponents of this sympathetic stance argue that in the wake of high unemployment, “galamsey” provides an opportunity for its practitioners to earn a living and to provide livelihoods that cater for their families. This paper agrees to an extent, especially in the context of rising unemployment. However, it is quick to contemplate that unemployment must not be used as a justification for violating state laws, especially when it leads to such life-threatening effects which eventually destroy a public good while compromising human security of others. The brakes must be applied at a point in time because uncurtailed freedoms are dangerous to every human society, and cannot be accommodated.

5.4 The Employment and Income Dilemma

Admittedly, one of the greatest challenges in Ghana today is the youth bulge worsened by unemployment. In all fairness, however, it should be mentioned that unemployment is a global challenge and therefore not peculiar to Ghana alone. With approximately 57% of Ghana’s population below age 25, the 2021 Population and Housing Census documents that 19.7% of Ghana’s youth is unemployed. A focus on the unemployment rate for youth between 15 and 24 by Ghana Statistical Service (2021) estimates the youth unemployment rate at an even more debilitating 32.8%,²²

²² ‘Demographic profile’: Available at:

https://www.google.com/search?q=how+many+of+ghana%27s+population+are+youth&oq=how+many+of+ghana%27s+population+are+youth&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAE

This helps in appreciating the mass drift into “galamsey” as a means of self-employment in spite of its associated risks. While it is admissible that “galamsey” serves as a source of income and livelihood to a teaming number of unemployed youth, it is also argued in some circles that the practice shores up national income from the extractive industry. This notwithstanding, “galamsey” remains proscribed and therefore illegal. “Galamsey” deprives communities of their right to clean water, farmlands and livelihoods, among others. Some cocoa farmlands are even being given out for “galamsey”. All said and done, “galamsey” is inimical to the human security of a significant number of people in and around its operational purview.

5.5 Multidimensional Impact of “Galamsey” on Human Security

The notion of human security came into prominence in 1994 because of the Human Development Report (1994), and is universal in that it applies to all people. It is also people-centred, interdependent, and prevention-oriented as Golo et al. (2023:45-49) document.

Together, these characteristics underscore a holistic approach to security – one that addresses threats from all forms of insecurity, including health and environmental risks: all of which “galamsey” threatens. Human security shares close coordinates with human rights, human development and livelihoods. A close study of “galamsey” reveals the extent to which it is antithetical to human security essentially because it serves the interest of a few at the expense of the majority. Another intricate line of connectivity between “galamsey” and human security is that, because “galamseyers” will do everything to defend their equipment and mining sites, natural mineral resources and their illegal exploitation tend to have close correlations with the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, which eventually trigger gun-related violence in addition to existing resource conflicts. This situation is reminiscent of Liberia’s civil war in which the

[EUYOTIHCAEQIRigAdIBCTEzNDA5ajBqN6gCCLACAfEFcLSmZ3_VszA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=EUYOTIHCAEQIRigAdIBCTEzNDA5ajBqN6gCCLACAfEFcLSmZ3_VszA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

Accessed: 24th May, 2025.

illegal exploitation of diamonds in Sierra Leone and use of the profits from illicit diamond sales to procure small arms and light weapons and thus sustain the bloody conflict across the border.

Generally, the paradox of “galamsey” is that, today’s youth, arguably for whose future the idea of sustainable development was born, are the very ones who, through “galamsey”, are compromising the present environment. In this respect, “galamsey” stands directly at variance with the idea of sustainable development generally conceived as “development which meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Our Common Future, 1987).

5.6 Applying the doctrine of absolute territorial sovereignty

Named after Judson Harmon, the Harmon doctrine of absolute territorial sovereignty holds that a country has absolute sovereignty over the territory and resources that lie within its jurisdiction. Since it falls traditionally and conventionally within the scope of the military to protect the sovereignty of Ghana, this paper is convinced that engaging the military in fighting against “galamsey” is not out of place. Consequently, the engagement of the military in this direction falls within its responsibility to protect Ghana’s strategic interest, state sovereignty and human security.

For this paper, “galamsey” falls excellently within the purview of ecocide, as conceived by the Independent Expert Panel for the Legal Definition of Ecocide as the ‘unlawful or wanton acts committed with the knowledge that there is substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to environment being caused by those acts’. Because such unlawful acts impact directly on the public goods of Ghana, the use of the military to combat the same is justified. Besides, it remains the duty of the military to protect Ghana’s territorial integrity, and this justifies their engagement. For emphasis, as captured earlier, this paper uses responsibility to protect in its ordinary sense and does not imply the doctrine of “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P).

5.7 Engaging the Military as a Strategic Partner

Protecting Ghana's territorial integrity effectively positions the military as key stakeholder in safeguarding Ghana's absolute territorial sovereignty. This paper believes that Ghana's military is a disciplined institution and tactically resourceful enough to contain the "galamsey" threat. At this critical crisis level, therefore, the military should no longer be side-stepped in matters relating to environmental threats that have the magnitude of "galamsey". In some previous circumstances, when the military was deployed to confront "galamsey", some concerns were raised. Notably, it has been alleged, for instance, that engaging the military to fight "galamsey" in the past resulted in gross human rights abuses and violations of "galamsey" perpetrators' rights. Proponents of this view have commonly referenced almost all previous military anti-"galamsey" operations, and their allied interventions. They have, therefore, expressed strong reservations regarding the use of the military in the anti-"galamsey" onslaught.

Others have suggested that military deployment in fighting "galamsey" is often a failure. Again, copious references have been made to various operations including all the 'operations' discussed earlier in this paper, to back their claims. This paper takes cognizance of these concerns. However, it is important to appreciate that Ghana's military is simply too well-organized to fail in such an assignment. The military enjoys high public trust and confidence, which bear testimony to its professionalism and high discipline. Ghana's military has been successful in more sophisticated local, regional and international assignments. These include joint exercises with the Ghana Police Service. Ghana's military and police forces have regularly conducted joint exercises aimed at sharpening their interoperability skills and ensuring appropriate responses to various security challenges. These include peacekeeping operations, counter-terrorism, and maintaining public order. Specific examples include "African Lion" with the U.S. Army and joint training for "Operation Calm Life" and "Peace Trail".

What the military needs to excel, in the opinion of this paper, is an enhanced Terms of Reference that goes beyond seizures and burning of illegal mining equipment. The call on the part of this paper is to see the military engagement as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. By implication, the military engagement ought to be carved within the framework of a larger strategy involving other strategic partners. The military needs advanced and sufficient equipment, logistics and appropriate accoutrements to facilitate needed surveillance, backed by a good application of Artificial Intelligence. There is also the need for coordination with the three arms of the Ghana Armed Forces: the Ghana Army; the Ghana Navy and the Ghana Air Force to ensure that land manoeuvring, Marine and aerial intelligence are well-coordinated to take full control of the “galamsey” fight.

Col. Festus Aboagye, a prominent security analyst, speaks to this issue from a more strategic and well-organized context which this paper sees worthy of consideration. He argues for instance that, the sheer numbers of seizures and burning of a given number of mining equipment, fail to make good meaning in the absence of a plan which is inspired by a baseline and a benchmark against which these figures could be measured²³. On the allegations of human rights abuses, this paper does not support human rights infractions. However, it contends that perpetrators of “galamsey” are the first to know that, by their activities, they themselves are trespassing the brinks and limits of their human rights responsibilities, and that, by embarking on a collision course with the arms of the law, they are tacitly mortgaging their human rights for potential suppression.

²³ ‘Military action against galamsey is a 'lazy strategy' – Security analyst warns of political delay tactics

Available at: <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Military-action-against-galamsey-is-a-lazy-strategy-Security-analyst-warns-of-political-delay-tactics-1955094>
Accessed: 24th May, 2025.

Therefore, the controversial and more important question should be: “Between suppressing the human rights of “galamsey” perpetrators, and that of the greater public, whose human rights should be prioritized? This paper stands for the latter. Besides, “galamsey” in itself leads to the denial of the rights and human security of a law-abiding majority. This is more so because, perpetrators of “galamsey”, by polluting water resources, compromising our forest reserves and degrading the environment, are invariably violating the rights of even generations yet unborn.

This paper therefore, wonders the extent to which the human rights arguments hold water. Important approaches to getting the military on board is for the president, who is also the Commander in Chief of the Ghana Armed Forces, to consider demarcating “galamsey” sites as security zones, and go a notch higher to proclaim a state of emergency for all the jurisdictions under discussion, including reserved forests, water resources etc. By such proclamation, all unauthorized persons and their activities would be automatically proscribed, and questions of unlawful entry, human rights violations and related concerns would have no room to prevail. This would offer an appropriate ambience for the military to take charge until the situation is reasonably brought under control, and make way for subsequent lasting interventions until reasonable control is regained over these endangered sites.

5.8 Theory of change

Because a people cannot continue to do the same things and yet expect different results, there is always the need for a Theory of Change to drive the desired change based on earlier circumstances. A theory of change, in its simplest rendition, refers to a method that explains how a given intervention is expected to engineer specific or required changes. In the context of “galamsey” and specifically with the use of the military, this paper observes that, military deployment to halt “galamsey” under varied nomenclature has been underpinned by Terms of References that have not differed significantly. It has often been centred on seizure and destruction of “galamsey” equipment. This paper has already suggested that such seizures and destruction do not stop the crime. Besides, it gives the

erroneous impression that the military is ‘incapable’ of addressing “galamsey”.

This paper therefore proposes, as its Theory of Change, the deployment of the military in a different way: first, a pre-declaration of “galamsey” sites as security or restricted zones. Such declarations should be made and sufficiently disseminated ahead to the general public, and followed by possible declaration of a state of emergency that should equally be sufficiently disseminated ahead of the military deployment.

Equally important is the provision of adequate financial and related resources and collaboration with other agencies to ensure that all arrested criminals are handed over to the appropriate state agencies for swift deterrent prosecution which should also be made known to the general public. In this context, military interventions should be part of a broader system in which the arrest of culprits is only a phase that does not end there but culminates in effective prosecution and punishment.

6. Limitations

This paper is not immune to limitations. Among them, the paper is cognizant that, not all critical discussions on the subject may have found their way into the media, and therefore such discussions do not feature in this paper. This deficiency has the capacity of altering the balance of discuss. Besides, some factors such as some level of biased reportage in the media, political influence and sensationalism could impact on media reportage, and therefore undermine media analysis. The paper admits further that between the time of writing the paper and the time when it is eventually published, some significant media developments, Government interventions and related events might have emerged that could not be captured here. This paper considers such among its limitations. However, it is anticipated that these identified limitations would not be of the magnitude which would deprive the paper of its essential arguments, contribution, focus and line of debate on the issue.

8. Conclusion

This paper has investigated some causes responsible for the allure of people into the “galamsey” industry. It has equally made some assessment of the negative impact of “galamsey”. It has also discussed some previous interventions, especially involving the military. The paper concludes that, since all the sites referenced throughout this discussion fall within the jurisdiction of Ghana’s territorial integrity, it is apt and fair that the state takes initiatives to protect the country’s total territorial integrity. This effectively implies upholding the commitment to protect Ghana’s absolute territorial sovereignty. Doing so justifies the engagement of the military to provide this as a responsibility.

The “galamsey” challenge has risen to one of a “galamsey” crisis, especially with the involvement of some foreigners, and the government must be seen as proactive and responsive, rather than reactive. Over all, human security, in all its perspectives, is under siege by the “galamsey” crisis. Water resources and forest reserves are the principal victims of “galamsey”, but humanity is the final victim. Given the appropriate resources, Ghana’s military is capable of delivering effectively on their mandate to quash “galamsey”. Sustainable end to “galamsey” involves collective responsibility driven by sensitization of the citizenry, collaboration between state and non-state actors.

One important contribution of this paper to the “galamsey” discourse is that, contrary to general opinion regarding the military and human rights infractions in previous exercises, this paper makes the case for the military as a strategic partner in the context of protecting Ghana’s absolute territorial sovereignty in the “galamsey” challenge. In doing so, the paper upholds human rights as well as responsibilities for balance. Based on the above, this paper considers for further research, how the military has been engaged to successfully contain illegal mining elsewhere, especially in Africa. Equally important is how other African countries have successfully managed mining without compromising the environment the way “galamsey” does.

9.0 Recommendations

To address the deepening crisis of illegal mining “galamsey” in Ghana, this paper proposes a set of urgent, multi-dimensional policy recommendations aimed at restoring environmental integrity, strengthening institutional response, and ensuring inclusive, sustainable governance of natural resources.

- The commander in- chief of the Ghana Armed Forces is encouraged to consider declaring, an urgent state-of-emergency on all “galamsey” sites including affected water resources and forest reserves. This will effectively ensure deployment of the full force of the military to confront local or foreign invasion of such places.
- The military should be adequately resourced and properly re-tooled enough for combating the sophisticated weaponry of the criminals they are pursuing.
- A multi-level natural mineral resource governance regime should be put in place to ensure that there are strands of governance over our natural mineral resource extraction. This must include traditional authorities, notably chiefs because they are the primary custodians of our lands, and they wield substantial influence over how the lands are used:
- There must be a conscious effort on the part of the Government to ensure policy interventions that promote sustainable environmental practices in place of those that compromise the environment.
- Since “galamsey”, to a reasonable extent, is poverty-driven, policy interventions should be carved, cognizant that, if there are no alternative livelihoods towards dealing effectively with unemployment and poverty challenges, “galamsey” might never stop.
- All efforts should be made to keep politics and personal interests away from the fight against “galamsey”.
- Perpetrator-centred” approaches should give way to the current ineffective equipment destruction-centred’ approach.

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