Media Foundation for West Africa

Illegal Mining and Implications on Peace, Community Resilience and National Security in Ghana

Professor Kwesi Aning and Mustapha Abdallah

FA678, Aar-Bakor Street, Ogbojo, Accra, Ghana
Telephone: +233 302 555327
Website: www.mfwa.org
Email: info[@]mfwa.org

Publisher
Media Foundation for West Africa

Editor
Kojo Impraim, Ph.D.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Illegal artisanal small-scale gold mining (ASGM) in Ghana, widely known as *galamsey*, has long been an important source of employment, especially for rural populations (McQuilken & Hilson, 2016). Increasingly, however, *galamsay* has expanded and is now not only an environmental and economic issue; but, also a national security concern (Tuffuor & Takora, 2024) posing an existential threat to Ghana. It is now a profound challenge to national security, social cohesion, and economic survival. Underpinning g*alamsey* are an interlocking set of activities that undermines legitimate governance, exacerbates community vulnerability, encourages illicit financial flows, organised criminal activities (OC), (Ayambire, et al. 2024; Crawford and Botchway, 2017), and now ready to challenge the authority and presence of the state (https://gapnews.media, 2024). Despite successive government interventions, illegal mining persists, reflecting deeper political, economic, and institutional gridlocks. The unregulated and often-illegal aspect of this sector—*galamsey* has grown increasingly destructive over the last two decades. The sector has become an avenue not only for economic survival; but, also for illicit enrichment by political actors, foreign nationals, and transnational organised criminal (TOC) groups (Bokpe and Boateng, 2024).

The scale of devastation caused by illegal mining is extensive: According to the Forestry Commission (FC), at the *State of the Nation's Forests* briefing, "... The scale of galamsey destruction of Ghana's forests is alarming, with 34 major forest reserves significantly affected. This has resulted in the destruction of over 4,726 hectares of forest land, which are crucial for regulating the climate, preventing soil erosion, and providing habitats for diverse species" (Arthur-Mensah. 2023). Forests are decimated, water bodies contaminated with mercury and other toxins, and arable land rendered infertile. These environmental consequences are inseparable from the social toll on affected communities, including the displacement of livelihoods, leading to President John Mahama declaring the multidimensional impact of galamsey as "... a national emergency" (GNA, 2025). Closely related to the economic and environmental threats, is the rise of armed vigilante and criminal groups, and increased youth vulnerability to exploitation (Mensah & Tuokuu, 2023). Additionally, the issue of *galamsey* has become highly politicised. Political parties have been accused of either shielding or weaponising the menace for electoral and economic gain (Yeboah, 2023; Frimpong-Boateng, 2021). State institutions such as the Ghana Police Service (GPS), Ghana Armed Forces (GAF), and regulatory bodies have, in some instances, been complicit in perpetuating the problem due to corruption, collusion, or weak enforcement capacity (ibid).

It is against this backdrop, that this report aims to contextualise illegal ASGM within Ghana's broader socio-political and security framework. In doing so, it seeks to

provide an analysis of the threats posed by *galamsey*, its connections to organised crime, and the multidimensional power dynamics that sustain it. Ultimately, the goal is to propose actionable, consensus-driven policy options that address the evolving challenge of illegal mining while fostering peace, community resilience, and national security. The report adopts a qualitative research approach to data collection and analysis. It focuses on desk review of academic literature, policy briefs, and media and other investigative reports.

The Report is structured into six sections. Section 1 reviews existing literature with the view to highlighting existing gaps. This is an important approach to lay the foundations for the subsequent arguments. Subsequently, the succeeding sections are discussed along themes emerging from the literature review and the gaps identified. To this end, the second section examines and discusses threats and insecurities created by this activity and within illegal mining sites, while the third section focuses on organised criminal networks and their related illicit activities. In section four, the Report highlights what it perceives as the emerging secretive power dynamics and regulatory capture; a state of affairs that Kwadwo Appiagyei-Atua (2024) characterises as the development of a 'galamstate', while section five examines the implications on peace, resilience and national security, reflecting on Galtung's theoretical perspectives of positive and negative peace. The final section offers practical steps for coordinated national response and concluding remarks.

2. Literature Review: Illegal Mining, Criminal Networks, and National Security in Ghana

Illegal mining, particularly ASGM, has evolved into a critical governance and security challenge in Ghana. Scholars and policy practitioners have highlighted the environmental, social, and economic implications of *galamsey*, but fewer studies systematically link it to organised crime, elite capture, and state fragility—gaps this review seeks to address. The review focuses on issues on environmental destruction and displacement of livelihoods, political economy of *galamsey* and state complicity, organised criminal networks and illicit financial flows, weak regulation, information control and institutional fragmentation. It also reviews issues of polarisation and policy paralysis, and concludes by highlighting the gaps.

Legal frameworks exist to regulate the operation of the ASGM in Ghana including the Small-Scale Gold Mining Law (PNDC Law 218) of 1989, which was subsequently incorporated into the Minerals and Mining Act of 2006 (Act 703). In 2020, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) government introduced a community mining scheme followed in 2021 with Small-scale Community Mining and Operational Manual. The aim of the laws and community mining guidelines were to ensure that small-scale miners who are self-employed, also operated in an environmentally friendly and sustainable manner. Despite these frameworks, the sector has continuously faced the challenge of non-compliance, resulting in what Crawford and Botchwey describe as "incalculable environmental damage to both land and water bodies" (Crawford & Botchwey, 2017). Rivers such as the Pra, Offin, Birim and Ankobra have been polluted with mercury, leading to adverse health and livelihood effects in affected communities (Armah, et. al., 2013).

McQuilken and Hilson note that ASGM accounts for a major portion of Ghana's gold output, but largely occurs outside formal regulatory systems, exacerbating environmental damage and institutional inertia (McQuilken and Hilson,2016). Scholars such as Mensah and Tuokuu observe that government interventions, including *Operation Vanguard*, *Operation Galamstop* and *Operation Halt (1&2)*, and the ban on small-scale mining have not yielded sustainable results, as miners return to abandoned sites due to a lack of alternative livelihoods (Mensah & Tuokuu, 2023). While this points to a weak adaptive capacity among communities and the absence of resilient, sustainable development frameworks, it also shows the complicity of state actors within the wider context of political economy discourse.

Scholars have argued that *galamsey* has become both an economic enterprise and a political tool. For instance, Abdulai (2017) and Frimpong-Boateng (2021) stress that the menace is a **more of a political problem, requiring political solutions (**Abdulai, 2017; Frimpong-Boateng, 2021). The works of Crawford and Botchwey (2017) reveal how political elites, including Members of Parliament and local government actors, have provided covert support to illegal miners, especially during election seasons (Crawford and Botchway, 2017).

As a result, some have argued that the expressed commitment to fight the menace is at best a mere media rhetoric, and at worse, a grand collusion between political elites, security forces, some traditional leaders and the local communities (https://www.myjoyonline.com/chiefs-politicians-others-cited-in-bni-report-on-galamsey/, 2017). Such collusion, they argue, have undermined the fight through various layers of bribery and corruption (Crawford and Botchway, 2017). Professor Frimpong Boateng's Report, concurs with this assertion and contends that:

"many party officials from the national to the unit committee levels had their friends, personal assistants, agents, relatives, financiers [...] engaged in the illegal mining" (https://www.modernghana.com/news/1226663/report-on-the-work-of-the-imcim-so-far-and-the.html) posing significant challenges to the fight. Not only political elites, similar reports by media outlets have uncovered how **national security operatives are directly involved in or protect illegal mining operations** (thefourthestategh.com/2024/09/17543/). These dynamics reveal a troubling convergence of abuse of state power and its complex collusion with criminal enterprises.

Illegal mining is no longer confined to poor and unemployed youth. It is increasingly linked to transnational organised criminal (TOC) networks. In Ghana, these linkages manifest in several ways. The CDD-Ghana (2022) points out that **dirty money from *galamsey* finances political campaigns**, further compromising state integrity.[i] A study by Eduful, *et al.*, (2020) indicate the prevalence of **trafficking in women and minors for sexual exploitation**, as unregulated mining camps become hotspots for gender-based violence and informal economies.

The use of armed guards, some of whom are retired military personnel, shows the sophistication and militarisation of *galamsey* operations. This evolution from informal mining to militarised criminal syndicates has elevated *galamsey* to a national security threat (Yeboah, 2023). Consequently, a number of interventions including deployment of security forces and drones for surveillance have become key features of fighting the menace.[ii] Despite these interventions, institutional fragmentation and opaque governance hinder the attainment of the expected outcomes. Government efforts to deploy drones for surveillance, for instance, have been criticised for lacking transparency. The Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources has withheld critical information on drone operations under the guise of national security (https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/I-m-yet-to-see-the-drones-NPP-bought-to-fight-galamsey-Lands-minister-1978889). This lack of accountability continues to create a parallel governance structure, where impunity flourishes. Additionally, while the security forces themselves are accused of corruption and complicity in the crime, multiple agencies—the Minerals Commission, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Water Resources Commission (WRC) and Forestry Commission (FC) operate with little coordination, creating overlaps and enforcement gaps (Teschner, 2012).

There is consensus among key stakeholders: the government, academics, the media and civil society organisations (CSOs) that galamsey remains a national security threat. Nevertheless, the operations of the security agencies and the response of policy makers has not translated into systemic reform. Instead, it has offered legal cover for the central government to bypass scrutiny while weaponising security forces against poor miners, often excluding elite perpetrators from accountability.

Thus, between the two alternating political parties that form governments— the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP), polarisation-induced policy paralysis remains a defining barrier to addressing illegal mining. As Yeboah notes, government responses since 1989 have failed due to "lack of proper planning of programmes" (2023). But more important is the fact that there is political manipulation of the various interventions, often after each election cycle. The reluctance to hold politically connected individuals accountable, coupled with a fragmented policy environment, results in a stalemate that sustains the *galamsey* economy.

Frimpong-Boateng's report also indicates how the dissolution of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Illegal Mining (IMCIM) and selective prosecution of offenders have deepened public disillusionment with state institutions. This erodes trust and weakens collective community resilience, especially when victims of environmental degradation see perpetrators walk free.

While the reviewed literature offers significant insight into the environmental, economic, and political aspects of illegal mining in Ghana, several gaps persist. Few studies have systematically analysed *galamsey* through a national security lens. Most research stops at environmental and regulatory concerns without

interrogating its links to organised crime and arms trafficking. From the analysis, the role of women in mining zones both as victims of trafficking and actors in informal economies is under-researched. The intersection of *galamsey* with sexual exploitation and gender-based violence remains anecdotal. While few media reports and particularly the famous Frimpomg Boateng's report highlight political involvement, there is inadequate analysis of how illegal mining finances political campaigns and fuels elite capture. Moreover, most of the documents reviewed focus on macro-level policy responses, with limited exploration of how communities are or can be empowered to build resilience and resist exploitation. Although media reports have highlighted the infiltration of national security operatives into illegal mining networks as an alarming trend, it is understudied and requires further exploration. The sum total of the state's failed interventions, according to Appiagyei-Atua, is the development of a galam-state that, where:

> … state capture is evident. This is a setting in which the ruling elite, criminal gangs and/or powerful businessmen capture and manipulate policy formulation and formation, and influence the decision-making process to their own advantage. We are also seeing a gradual descent of the state into a galam-state. A galam-state, like a narco-state, is a state that is captured and linked to a higher form of grand corruption. In a galam-state, galamsey practice is "normalised" and the people are silenced or limited to mere criticism of the negative practice while these criticisms are met with a counter-narrative (clothed in legalese and big English) indicating that, compared to the previous regime, strenuous efforts are being made or have been made by the government in power to deal with the menace. A galam-state is identified by the types of state institutions captured (the legislative, executive, judiciary, regulatory agencies, public works ministries) by large private firms, political leaders, high ranking officials, and interest groups such as transnational criminal networks. Also, in a galam-state, there is a perfect blend between criminally-minded politicians and politically-minded criminal gangs, creating a hybrid form of governance. In such a scenario, the traditional role of the State to arrest, investigate, prosecute, adjudicate cases, convict accused persons and incarcerate or fine them – key ingredients of resilience factors or the ability to withstand and disrupt TOC as a whole – are compromised. A weakened criminal justice system in turn promotes patronage and clientelism, with the latter contributing to creating hybrid forms of governance. The next stage in the consolidation of the galam-state would be the formation of mafia-style criminal gangs whose typology includes militia and guerrilla groups exercising identifiable membership and territorial control (Appiagyei-Atua, 2024).

The above literature review underscores the fact that illegal mining in Ghana is a **multi-layered and multidimensional threat**, impacting environment, community stability, and state security. However, the **nexus between *galamsey* and national security, elite patronage, state capture and organized crime** remains under-

explored in academic and policy discourse. This Report contributes to this gap by contextualizing how illegal mining serves as a manifestation of broader governance and security challenges, while proposing pathways for reform grounded in transparency, inclusivity, and political accountability.

3. Discussion of Key Issues

3.1 Ghana's National Security in the context of ASGM

But where does Ghana's National Security Strategy (NSSD) document fit into the discussions around security and ASGM, and why critical questions that have been raised above become even more compelling when the multidimensional security threats faced by Ghana as a result of illicit ASGM are examined in the light of existing security frameworks. Titled "*A Secure and Prosperous Ghana, with Regional, Continental and Global Reach and Influence*," the NSSD posits that,

> '...the Strategy will optimise the effectiveness of the security and intelligence sector, by evolving the current systems and structures, ... prioritise the use of our resources, and promote effective decision-making, through an institutional system [to] ensure integrated and efficient coordination in all spectrums of national security. ... provide a new institutional structure, which

will be equipped to tackle strategic security and crisis management issues requiring rapid, coordinated and comprehensive responses' (Republic of Ghana, 2020).

Yet, another critical security document is the Security and Intelligence Service Act 2020 (Act 1030) which relates to the National Security Council (NSC), provides for the establishment of regional and district security councils; specify and coordinate the activities of the agencies responsible for the security of the State and to protect and preserve the unity and stability of the State, and to provide for related matters. In conjunction with these two documents is the National Signals Bureau, 2020 (Act 1040), which is to is to provide an integrated signals system for the national security and intelligence agencies for the purpose of: (a) the security of the State; and (b) protecting and preserving the unity and stability of the State.

These three documents demonstrate that, in terms of threat identification, Act 1030 empowered the councils under the NSC namely the Regional (REGSEC), Metropolitan (MESEC); Municipal (MUSEC) and District (DISEC) which all operated as committees of the NSC to perform the functions of the Council in the regions and districts. In terms of their specific functions, REGSEC's were to 'provide early warning to Government of the existence or likelihood of any security threat to the region, to the country or to the Government', while DISEC's were to 'provide early warning to Government of the existence or likelihood of any security threat to the district, to the country or to the Government'. In formally establishing an Act that guided the functions of the NSC and its ancillary structures, were brought under the authority of the NSC, to Parliamentary and Judicial oversight; and second, improve the centralisation of the three existing intelligence services under the control of one body. The above raises very difficult fundamental questions about the failure of the security institutions and their oversight bodies to protect Ghana from what has been descried in sections 1 and 2 of this Report.

3.2 Threats and Insecurity from Illegal Mining

Illegal mining, or *galamsey*, poses significant and multidimensional threats to peace, security, and community resilience across Ghana. At the heart of these threats lies severe environmental degradation, particularly the contamination of major rivers such as the Pra, Ankobra, and Offin with mercury and other

hazardous chemicals used in gold extraction. This pollution does not only compromises drinking water and agricultural viability; but, also heightens food insecurity and public health risks in rural communities (Mensah & Tuokuu, 2023). Deforestation caused by illegal mining operations further exacerbates Ghana's climate vulnerability, increasing the frequency and intensity of floods and soil erosion (Armah, et al., 2013).

These environmental challenges are deeply intertwined with social tensions, as competition over land, mineral resources, and the profits from *galamsey* often ignites local conflict. In many mining communities, actors such as youth groups, traditional leaders, and migrant labourers compete for control over mining sites, leading to the erosion of social cohesion and the rise of inter-group and inter-ethnic rivalries. (Crawford and Botchway, 2017) The absence of effective state presence and dispute resolution mechanisms allows these tensions to escalate into violence, sometimes prompting the formation of vigilante groups.

Compounding these challenges is the growing militarisation of illegal mining zones. Criminal networks and vigilante groups often equipped with firearms have emerged as de facto authorities in some areas, operating with impunity and using violence to protect their interests. These networks are increasingly sophisticated, employing private militias or retired military personnel to fortify their activities. They have been known to intimidate local populations and aggressively resist state-led enforcement operations, such as *Operation Vanguard and Operation Halt* (Yeboah, 2023). Further undermining the state's authority is the politicisation of anti-galamsey efforts and the alleged complicity of elements within Ghana's security institutions. Reports by civil society groups and the media have implicated some members of the national security and military apparatus in shielding illegal miners or facilitating their operations in return for bribes (Frimpong-Boateng, 2021). One notable example involved a galamsey site in Adansi North District (Ashanti Region) reportedly operating under the protection of national security officers (https://www.myjoyonline.com/police-arrest-illegal-miners-at-a-site-under-national-security-protection-in-adansi-north-district/). These revelations have cast doubt on the integrity of the state's commitment to eradicating *galamsey*.

The issue is further intensified by poor regulatory enforcement and a lack of transparency in information management. Despite the introduction of surveillance technologies such as drones and the deployment of security forces, operations remain poorly coordinated and largely unaccountable. Data on interventions are often classified under the guise of national security, which restricts oversight and undermines public trust. This information vacuum leaves communities vulnerable to misinformation and manipulation by criminal actors. Collectively, these interlinked threats erode the legitimacy of state institutions, weaken community cohesion, and create a fertile ground for radicalisation, organised crime, and illicit financial flows.

3.3 Organised Criminal Networks and Illicit Activities

Illegal mining in Ghana is increasingly interconnected with organised criminal

networks and a wide range of illicit activities, posing profound threats to national security, governance, and social cohesion. A key aspect of this convergence is the laundering of proceeds from *galamsey* operations through informal financial systems. These illicit funds are often channeled into political financing; particularly, during electoral cycles, where they are used to bankroll parties and candidates—thereby undermining democratic accountability and incentivising state complicity (CDD-Ghana, 2022). Simultaneously, gold extracted through illegal means is traded on black markets, bypassing official channels and contributing to transnational money laundering schemes that deprive the state of critical revenue. However, the taskforce established by the GoldBoD has begun a crackdown on illegal traders. Just four days after the government announced a nationwide ban on foreign involvement in the local gold trade, the GoldBod Taskforce arrested 10 Chinese nationals in Asankragua in the Western Region. Briefing the media on the crackdown, the Chief Executive of the GoldBod, Sammy Gyamfi, noted that engaging in illicit gold trade would no longer be tolerated (https://www.myjoyonline.com/goldbod-taskforce-arrests-10-chinese-in-illegal-gold-trading-bust/).

Alongside financial crimes, *galamsey* settlements have become hotspots for human trafficking and sexual exploitation. These unregulated, male-dominated mining communities; particularly, in the Western and Ashanti regions, serve as destinations for trafficked women and children who are coerced into sex work or

forced labour (Eduful, et. al., 2020). Prostitution and human trafficking has increasingly become lucrative business in galamsay host communities, attracting sex workers from neighbouring countries (https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Galamsey-Economy-The-good-bad-and-ugly-1977918).

A 2013 study in Obuasi in the Ashanti Region reveals that many boys drop out of school to mine in galamsay sites, while girls face sexual exploitation under economic pressure, often with family complicity.[iii] Both genders suffer health risks and social consequences. The study further highlights that traditional child protection systems are weak, community awareness of legal protections is low, and local authorities lack the will or capacity to intervene. As a result, child labour and exploitation persist with little accountability or legal redress. The lack of legal oversight in such enclaves allows for widespread gender-based violence and the normalisation of exploitation, compounding the socio-economic vulnerabilities of marginalised groups.

Equally concerning is the role of *galamsey* zones in the trafficking of narcotics and small arms. Evidence indicates that illegal mining camps function as nodes in broader smuggling corridors, where drugs and weapons are transported and exchanged by transnational syndicates. Media reports indicate that due to the physical nature of the galamsey activities, site workers such as machine operators, labourers and security guards tend to use illicit drugs such as Indian hemp, energy drinks mixed with tramadol, cocaine, heroin and other chemicals (https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Galamsey-Economy-The-good-bad-and-ugly-1977918). Armed groups frequently use weapons to secure control over mining sites or enforce dominance against rival factions, while narcotics serve as both currency and a tool for coercion within the illicit economy. This fusion of extractive crime, arms proliferation, and drug trafficking creates a volatile security landscape that challenges the state's authority and exacerbates local instability.

Compounding these threats is the involvement of political elites and influential actors in perpetuating and protecting these criminal networks. Investigations by civil society and media have exposed how high-level figures exploit their power to manipulate mining licenses, obstruct enforcement actions, and even deploy state security apparatuses to safeguard illegal operations (Frimpong-Boateng, 2021; Yeboah, 2023). This elite complicity does not only embeds corruption within the state apparatus; but, also obstructs meaningful reform and enforcement, making policy interventions largely ineffective

3.4 Secretive Power Dynamics and Regulatory Capture

The persistence of illegal mining in Ghana is underpinned by entrenched and opaque power dynamics, elite complicity, and systematic capture of regulatory institutions. These conditions have fostered an environment in which *galamsey* thrives—not merely as an economic activity, but as a politically protected and institutionally-enabled enterprise. At the core of this phenomenon is the use of illegal mining as a vehicle for political patronage and campaign financing. As reported by Yeboah (2023) and detailed in the Frimpong-Boateng Report (2021), politicians from both ruling and opposition parties have relied on proceeds from illegal mining to fund electoral campaigns. This has created perverse incentives for political elites to shield galamsey operators from law enforcement, thereby legitimising and entrenching their activities. Investigative journalism and civil society reports have further highlighted the role of so-called "party big men" in sustaining illegal mining, where electoral gains are prioritised over the rule of law (Abdullai, et al., 2025).

This political protectionism is mirrored in the compromise of state institutions; particularly, the security sector and local administrative bodies. Numerous accounts have documented the involvement of national security operatives, military personnel, and district-level officials in galamsey operations. Similarly, political party officials have become complicit in the illegal mining. The high-profile Akonta Mining case exemplifies this pattern, as revealed in CitiNews reports and several media outlets (https://www.myjoyonline.com/some-government-officials-and-politicians-are-involved-in-illegal-mining-asantehene/#google_vignette).
Although the Minerals Commission, the regulatory body for mining companies, issued a press release indicating that Akonta Mining had no licence to operate in the Tano Nimiri Forest Reserve, (https://www.mincom.gov.gh/press-releases/alleged-

operations-of-akonta-mining-ltd/) the then President, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, reportedly cleared the company, according to a Citi News report (https://citinewsroom.com/2023/01/akufo-addos-defense-of-akonta-mining-firm-unfortunate-ken-ashigbey/). The Chief Executive Officer of the Ghana Chamber of Telecommunications and convenor of the Media Coalition Against Illegal Mining, Kenneth Ashigbey expressed reservations about the President's defence of Akonta Mine (ibid)[iv], suggesting political complicity, which complicates the fight. The Frimpong-Boateng Report (2021) also named state actors involved in facilitating or protecting these activities. Such revelations expose the blurring of boundaries between regulators and violators, corroding the legitimacy of state enforcement and weakening institutional integrity.

Compounding this institutional weakness is the fragmented and weak regulatory framework governing small-scale mining. Oversight responsibilities are dispersed across multiple agencies—such as the Environmental Protection Agency, the Minerals Commission, and local district assemblies, creating regulatory overlaps, competition, and inefficiencies. Teschner argues that this fragmentation erodes accountability and fosters bureaucratic rivalries (2012). As a result, licensing processes remain opaque, enforcement is applied inconsistently, and political interference frequently distorts technical decision-making. Issuance of licenses has thus become a political game, generating debates about which of the two main political parties has issued more than the other. While the politics creates difficulties to monitor and regulate the miners, it also allows galamsey operators—often fronting for political elites or operating under the guise of formal permits to exploit grey areas in the law.

Adding to the problem is the withholding of critical information under the guise of national security, which reinforces a culture of strategic ambiguity. Successive governments have shielded anti-galamsey operations—such as drone surveillance, arrests, and enforcement outcomes—from public scrutiny (https://thefourthestategh.com/2024/09/17543/). This deliberate opacity allows selective enforcement and political manipulation of the law while obstructing citizen oversight. As noted Yeboah, the current approach to security remains reactive, ambiguous, and detached from community-based frameworks that could enhance transparency and public trust (Yeboah, 2023). These secretive power dynamics, institutional vulnerabilities, and regulatory loopholes have normalised illegal mining and insulated its actors from accountability, making the fight a complex one.

3.5 Implications on Peace, Resilience, and National Security

Illegal mining has evolved from a localised environmental challenge into a profound threat to peace, community resilience, and national security. At the community level, *galamsey* has become a potent driver of violent conflict; particularly, in areas where land tenure is ambiguous or contested. As Abdulai notes, competition over mining sites frequently ignites disputes among local youth, traditional leaders, and foreign actors, especially Chinese nationals (2017). These tensions often result in violent confrontations, protests, and retaliatory attacks that fracture local cohesion. The perception that some chiefs and political figures are complicit in facilitating or benefiting from illegal mining activities only deepens mistrust and undermines traditional and political legitimacy (Crawford and Botchway, 2017).

From the perspective of Johan Galtung's peace theory, these dynamics reflect not only a disruption of **negative peace**—the absence of direct violence; but, also a fundamental breakdown of **positive peace**, which involves the presence of justice, equity, and structural well-being (Galtung, 1969). The pollution of rivers, destruction of farmlands, and degradation of ecosystems associated with *galamsey* weaken the adaptive capacity of communities and diminish their resilience. As Armah, et al., argue, environmental degradation severely threatens agricultural livelihoods and food security, pushing rural youth into informal, and often criminal, mining networks (2013). This erosion of traditional livelihood systems constitutes what Galtung terms **structural violence**—conditions that systematically deny people the opportunity to reach their full human potential. Even in the absence of overt conflict, such structural violence precludes genuine peace.

At the national level, illegal mining has emerged as a critical security concern. Successive Ghanaian administrations, including that of the immediate former President, Nana Ado Dankwah Akufo-Addo, and the incumbent president, John Dramani Mahama, have acknowledged *galamsey* as a direct threat to national stability. In 2017, President Akufo-Addo declared that he was "prepared to put his

presidency on the line" (https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/i-will-put-my-presidency-on-line-to-stop-galamsey-president.html) to fight illegal mining, while the incumbent President John Dramani Mahama, during his "Thank You Tour" on Tuesday, July 15, in the Western North Region, described galamsey as a national emergency and called for the arrest of rogue taskforces (https://www.myjoyonline.com/mahama-declares-galamsey-a-national-emergency-orders-arrest-of-rogue-taskforces/). The question is, are these declarations genuine commitment to fight the menace? While many remain skeptical about the commitment to fight the menace, it also allows and increases the ability of criminal syndicates and politically connected actors to operate parallel power structures sometimes with armed protection and official cover, undermining state authority and the rule of law. The exposure of illegal mining operations under the protection of national security personnel, as in the 2023 Adansi North District case illustrates the extent of institutional compromise (https://www.myjoyonline.com/police-arrest-illegal-miners-at-a-site-under-national-security-protection-in-adansi-north-district/). Moreover, the use of national security prerogatives to withhold information about anti-galamsey operations fosters a climate of strategic ambiguity, thereby weakening public oversight and accountability (https://thefourthestategh.com/2024/09/17543/).

In sum, illegal mining in Ghana poses a triad of interlinked threats: it disrupts local peace, weakens community resilience, and compromises national security architecture. Although few individuals enrich themselves, viewed largely through Galtung's lens, *galamsey* is both a source of direct conflict and a form of structural violence that entrenches poverty, inequality, and institutional mistrust. In this report, the contention is that it cannot be addressed solely through environmental enforcement or military interventions. Rather, a holistic strategy is required—one that integrates environmental justice, community empowerment, and political accountability. Rebuilding peace in affected communities must involve restoring livelihoods, enforcing equitable land rights, and ensuring that state institutions act transparently and without political interference.

4. Practical Steps for a Coordinated National Response

The above analysis has highlighted key issues and challenges within the *galamsey* mining industry. Addressing these complex challenges and their impacts on the environment, governance, and local communities requires a holistic and multi-sectoral strategy. A coordinated national response must not only focus on enforcement; but, also ensure inclusive participation, building resilient communities, and ensuring transparency and accountability across institutions. The following practical steps outline key areas of intervention that can contribute to a sustainable and effective solution:

- **Reform Enforcement Institutions**
  - Depoliticise operations and related enforcement units.
  - Establish independent oversight mechanisms to regulate and monitor the deployment of security forces in mining areas
  -
- **Community-Led Governance**
  - Empower local authorities and traditional leaders to enhance community ownership and accountability in managing natural resources.
  - Institutionalise Community Mining schemes within clear, enforceable, and transparent regulatory frameworks
  -
- **Market Regulation**
  - Implement gold traceability systems to track the flow of minerals from source to export. The taskforce established by the Goldbod is significant in this sense.
  - The crackdown by the Goldbod on informal gold buyers and exporters to reduce illegal trade and loss of state revenue should be sustained.

- **Financial Monitoring**
  - Strengthen collaboration with the Bank of Ghana and the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) to identify and trace illicit financial flows associated with illegal mining.
  - Enforce anti-money laundering (AML) laws, particularly in relation to political party financing
- **Gender and Human Security Protections**
  - Establish safe shelters, psychosocial services, and legal assistance for women and vulnerable populations in mining zones.
  - Mainstream gender-sensitive approaches in all mining-related national policies and programmes.
- **Transparent National Dialogue**
  - Promote inclusive and non-partisan forums to depolarise public discussions on mining governance.
  - Ensure the implementation of key recommendations from the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Illegal Mining (IMCIM) and civil society actors, including those highlighted in the Frimpong-Boateng Report (2021).

5. Conclusion

Illegal mining in Ghana known as galamsey is both a symptom and a driver of systemic governance failure, institutional fragility, and elite-driven polarisation. It thrives in an environment marked by regulatory capture, political interference, fragmented oversight, and deep socio-economic disparities. What began as a survival strategy for the economically marginalised has evolved into a highly organised criminal enterprise—one that implicates political elites, security operatives, and transnational networks.

The consequences of galamsey extend far beyond environmental degradation. It fuels violent conflict in mining communities, erodes the adaptive capacity of rural livelihoods, facilitates human and arms trafficking, and undermines the credibility of state institutions. The convergence of criminal networks, elite complicity, and weak regulation has turned illegal mining into a national security threat—capable of destabilising governance systems and fragmenting social cohesion.

Efforts to address this menace through military-style interventions and securitised strategies while sometimes necessary—have been inconsistent, reactive, and often compromised by the very institutions mandated to enforce them. The politicisation of anti-galamsey campaigns, the opacity of state responses, and the use of national security justifications to withhold critical information further weaken public trust and civic engagement.

Tackling illegal mining requires more than short-term enforcement. It demands long-term structural reforms, starting with the depoliticisation of small-scale mining regulation, transparent licensing, and the accountability of public officials—including those in the highest echelons of power. There is a pressing need for an inclusive national dialogue that goes beyond blame to address systemic power asymmetries, resource governance, and the role of political financing in perpetuating illegality.

Building resilience will also mean restoring community livelihoods, rehabilitating degraded environments, and empowering local actors—especially youth, women, and traditional authorities—as co-creators of sustainable alternatives. Civil society, the media, and academia must be enabled to play their watchdog roles without fear or obstruction, while regional cooperation is essential to addressing cross-border dimensions of illicit mining.

Ultimately, resolving the galamsey crisis is a test of Ghana's democratic maturity and governance integrity. Only a coordinated, inclusive, and justice-oriented approach—grounded in transparency, rule of law, and genuine political will—can dismantle the entrenched networks sustaining illegal mining and restore peace, resilience, and national security.

References

Abdulai, A. G. (2017). The Galamsey Menace in Ghana: A Political Problem Requiring Political Solutions? *Policy Brief* No. 5;

Abdulai, A. G., Buur, L., & Stacey, P. (2025). Party political campaigning and the illegal extraction of gold in Ghana. *World Development, 192*, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X25000932

Appiagyei-Atua, Kwadwo. 'State of Emergency as Panacea to Galam-State', https://www.myjoyonline.com/prof-kwadwo-appiagyei-atua-state-of-emergency-as-panacea-to-galam-state/ 17 September 2024.

Armah, F. A., Luginaah, I.N., Taabazuing, J., & Odoi, J.O. (2013). Artisanal gold mining and surface water pollution in Ghana: Have the foreign invaders come to stay? *Environmental Justice*, 6(3), 94-102.

Arthur-Mensah, Godwill. 2023. '34 major forests in Ghana significantly impacted by Mining – Commission', at https://gna.org.gh/2023/05/34-major-forests-in-ghana-significantly-impacted-by-illegal-mining-commission/

Ayambire, R. A., Nunbogu, A. M., Cobbinah, P. B., Kansanga, M. M., Pittman, J., & Dogoli, M. A. (2024). Constructing alternative interpretation: Embeddedness of illegality in small-scale mining. *The Extractive Industries and Society*, *17*, 101430;

Bokpe, S.J. Edmund Agyemang Boateng. 2024. 'Forest Invasion: Companies owned by Wontumi, Kumasi mayor & others scramble to mine in Ghana's forest reserves', at https://thefourthestategh.com/2024/09/forest-invasion-companies-of-wontumi-kumasi-mayor-npp-juaben-parliamentary-candidate-others-scramble-for-mining-in-ghanas-forest-reserves/ 5 September

CDD-Ghana. (2022). Understanding How Dirty Money Fuels Campaign Financing in Ghana: An Exploratory Study. Accra.

Crawford, G., & Botchwey, G. (2017). Conflict, collusion and corruption in small-scale gold mining: Chinese miners and the state in Ghana. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 55(4), 444-470

Crawford, G., & Botchwey, G. (2020). Ghana: Controversy, Corruption and Chinese Miners. *Global Gold Production Touching Ground: Expansion, Informalization, and Technological Innovation*, 185-205;

Eduful, M., Alsharif, K., Eduful, A., et al. (2020). The illegal artisanal and small-scale mining (galamsey) menace in Ghana: is military-style approach the answer? *Resources Policy*, 68, 101732

Frimpong-Boateng, K. (2021) 'Report on the Work of the IMCIM (Inter-Ministerial Committee on Illegal Mining) and the Way Forward'. 19 March 2021.

Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6(3), 167–191.

Hilson, G. (2017). Shootings and burning excavators: Some rapid reflections on Ghana's handling of the informal galamsey menace. *Resources Policy*, 54, 109–116.

Hunter, M. (2020). Illicit financial flows: Artisanal and small-scale gold mining in Ghana and Liberia. OECD Development Co-operation Working Papers.

McQuilken, J., & Hilson, G. (2016). *Artisanal and small-scale gold mining in Ghana: Evidence to inform an "action dialogue*. London: IIED.

Mensah, A. K., & Tuokuu, F. X. D. (2023). Polluting our rivers in search of gold: how sustainable are reforms to stop informal miners from returning to mining sites in Ghana? *Frontiers in Environmental Science*, 11, 583

Republic of Ghana (2020). National Security Strategy at https://mofa.gov.gh/site/images/pdf/national_security_strategy.pdf

Teschner, B. A. (2012). Small-scale mining in Ghana: The government and the galamsey. *Resources Policy*, 37(3), 308–314.

Tuffuor, K. A., & Takora, R. B. (2024). *Effects of illegal mining on human security in Ghana*. Medicon Engineering Themes, 6(2), 15-36;

Yeboah, R. (2023). Galamsey Fight in Ghana: An Analysis of Failure of Government Interventions Since 1989. *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* (EHASS), 455–472;

Internet Sources

Myjoyonline (2017). Chiefs, politicians, others cited in BNI report on galamsey, at https://www.myjoyonline.com/chiefs-politicians-others-cited-in-bni-report-on-galamsey/

'Revealed: NPP 'big men' involved in galamsey to support the party', General News of Thursday, 6 February 2020 available https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Revealed-NPP-big-men-involved-in-galamsey-to-support-the-party-858034 (accessed 21 Octobe 2023).

https://www.modernghana.com/news/1226663/report-on-the-work-of-the-imcim-so-far-and-the.html

MyJoyonline (2025) Police arrest illegal miners at a site under National Security protection in Adansi North District https://www.myjoyonline.com/police-arrest-illegal-miners-at-a-site-under-national-security-protection-in-adansi-north-district/;

General News (2024) Gov't hides behind national security to withhold information on drones for anti-galamsey fighthttps://thefourthestategh.com/2024/09/17543/

'Harnessing drones and satellite imaging to tackle Ghana's galamsey challenge' https://www.myjoyonline.com/harnessing-drones-and-satellite-imaging-to-tackle-ghanas-galamsey-challenge/

GhanaWeb (2025) 'I'm yet to see the drones NPP bought to fight galamsey - Lands minister' https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/I-m-yet-to-see-the-drones-NPP-bought-to-fight-galamsey-Lands-minister-1978889

'Vigilante groups have ventured into 'galamsey' and law enforcement – Kwesi Aning' https://www.myjoyonline.com/vigilante-groups-have-ventured-into-galamsey-and-law-enforcement-kwesi-aning/

Ghanaweb (2018) 'Military taking bribes to sabotage fight against galamsey - Kennedy Agyapong alleges' https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Military-taking-bribes-to-sabotage-fight-against-galamsey-Kennedy-Agyapong-alleges-648617

Myjoyonline (2025) Police arrest illegal miners at a site under National Security protection in Adansi North District https://www.myjoyonline.com/police-arrest-illegal-miners-at-a-site-under-national-security-protection-in-adansi-north-district/

Myjoyonline (2025) 'GoldBod taskforce arrests 10 Chinese in illegal gold trading bust' https://www.myjoyonline.com/goldbod-taskforce-arrests-10-chinese-in-illegal-gold-trading-bust/

https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Galamsey-Economy-The-good-bad-and-ugly-1977918
'Free the Slaves, Participatory Development Associates, & Social Support Foundation. (2013, January). Child slavery, child labor and exploitation of children in mining communities: Obuasi, Ghana – Summary of findings. Free the Slaves. https://www.freetheslaves.net/

https://freetheslaves.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Summary-of-Findings-Child-Rights-in-Mining-Ghana-January-2013.pdf

Ghanaweb (2025) 'Galamsey Economy: The good, bad and ugly', https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Galamsey-Economy-The-good-bad-and-ugly-1977918

Joyonline (2022) 'Some government officials and politicians are involved in illegal mining – Asantehene', https://www.myjoyonline.com/some-government-officials-and-politicians-are-involved-in-illegal-mining-asantehene/#google_vignette

https://www.mincom.gov.gh/press-releases/alleged-operations-of-akonta-mining-ltd/

CitiNews (2023) 'Akufo-Addo's defense of Akonta mining firm unfortunate – Ken Ashigbey' https://citinewsroom.com/2023/01/akufo-addos-defense-of-akonta-mining-firm-unfortunate-ken-ashigbey/

See 'Gov't hides behind national security to withhold information on drones for anti-galamsey fight'
https://thefourthestategh.com/2024/09/17543/

'I will put my Presidency on line to stop galamsey- President' July 11 2017, available< https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/i-will-put-my-presidency-on-line-to-stop-galamsey-president.html (accessed 20 July 2025)

'Mahama declares galamsey a national emergency, orders arrest of rogue taskforces'
https://www.myjoyonline.com/mahama-declares-galamsey-a-national-emergency-orders-arrest-of-rogue-taskforces/ (accessed 20 July, 2025).

MyJoyonline (2025) Police arrest illegal miners at a site under National Security protection in Adansi North District
https://www.myjoyonline.com/police-arrest-illegal-miners-at-a-site-under-national-security-protection-in-adansi-north-district/

General News (2024) Gov't hides behind national security to withhold information on drones for anti-galamsey fight https://thefourthestategh.com/2024/09/17543/

Tuffuor, K. A., & Takora, R. B. (2024). *Effects of illegal mining on human security in Ghana*. Medicon Engineering Themes, 6(2), 15-36;

MEDIA FOUNDATION FOR WEST AFRICA
Aar-Bakor Street, Ogbojo
Telephone: +233 (0) 302 555 327
Twitter: @TheMFWA
Facebook: Media Foundation for West Africa
info@mfwa.org
www.mfwa.org