

ГАЛАМСЕЙ: ФОРМАЛЬНАЯ И НЕФОРМАЛЬНАЯ БОРЬБА ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИХ ЭЛИТ В ГАНЕ

GALAMSEY: FORMAL AND INFORMAL FIGHT OF POLITICAL ELITES IN GHANA

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Аннотация. Это исследование раскрывает причины ро-
ста масштабов незаконной мелкомасштабной добычи
полезных ископаемых (галамсей) в Гане и объясняет, по-
чему, несмотря на многочисленные нормативные акты,
обеспечивающие борьбу с этим явлением, они дают
неоптимальные результаты. Исследование направлено
на изучение роли политических элит в борьбе с неза-
конной мелкомасштабной добычей полезных ископае-
мых в Гане. Сегодня Гана сталкивается с антропогенным
разрушением окружающей среды в поисках «красных
денег» (Sika kokoo). Существует множество заявлений
о том, что к 2030 г. Гане придется импортировать воду.

Цель исследования — выявить и проанализировать
влияние политической элиты на борьбу с незаконной
добычей полезных ископаемых в Гане. Эти результа-
ты бросают вызов правительству и оппозиционным
партиям, которые обеспокоены эффективным управле-
нием природными ресурсами. Как показывает анализ,
политические элиты с обеих сторон подрывают кратко-
срочную и долгосрочную политику, которая позволит
эффективно управлять последствиями незаконной
добычи полезных ископаемых. Политическая элита

- глубоко вовлечена в горнодобывающую отрасль и обла-
• дает большей властью, чем землевладельцы (вождества),
• что подрывает борьбу правительства с галамсей в Гане.
• Сделан вывод о том, что политическая снисходительность
• и коррупция привели к бурному развитию мелкомас-
• штабной горнодобывающей промышленности в Гане.

- **Ключевые слова:** политические элиты, окружающая сре-
• да, добыча полезных ископаемых, вождества, теория
• концессий

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- **Abstract.** This research unravels the determinants of the
• rise of illegal small-scale mining in Ghana and why in
• spite of the many regulations to make it functional, it is
• producing sub-optimal results. The study seeks to examine

the role of political elites in the fight against galamsey in Ghana. Today Ghana is faced with man-made destruction of the environment in search of red money (Sika kokoo). How did we get here? There are many claims that by 2030 Ghana will have to import water. The research seeks to highlight and analyse the influence of political elites in the fight against illegal mining in Ghana. These findings challenge government and opposition parties who are both concerned about the effective management of minerals and environmental resources. As the analyses reveal, political elites in both political angles are undermining short and long-term policies that will effectively manage the effect of illegal mining. The political elites are deeply involved and more powerful in the area of mining than the landowners (chiefdoms), undermining the government's fight against galamsey in Ghana. The paper concludes that political leniency and corruption have resulted in a booming small-scale mining in Ghana.

Keywords: political elites, environment, mining, chiefdoms, concession theory

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INTRODUCTION

Illegal mining (galamsey) has become a notorious issue in Ghana, to the extent that key stakeholders including government, local elders, chiefdoms and policy makers cannot find a solution to the problem. Galamsey which comes from the English words, gather them and sell, but the locals who are mostly uneducated could not pronounce the name well so they romanced the name galamsey (gather them and sell). The mining sector has been the pillar of Ghana's development for over 200 years. Agriculture and mining may well have been the first and second, respectively, of humankind's earliest endeavours, as the two are considered "the primary or basic industries of early civilization" (Hartman & Mutmansky, 2002: 1). Alhassan (2014) and Ampaw et al. (2024), have argued that the mining industry has played an important part in human existence since prehistoric times. Likewise, Ampaw et al. (2023) aver that in most developing countries where there are no fuel deposits, mining has been the mainstay of their economies and in Ghana mining attracts about 50% of its FDI. Indeed, Ayelazuno and Aziabah (2023) have noted that small-scale mining used to be the time-honoured and environmentally friendly employment and revenue generating activity of rural communities. Afriyie et al. (2023) explain that galamsey provides livelihood support base of such communities, providing jobs and incomes to many households. Afriyie et al. (2016) also opine that these benefits are often overlooked in public and academic discourses.

Declining agricultural fortunes have triggered income diversification efforts among most rural dwellers in Africa seeking to meet daily needs. However, in recent times the mining sector has received severe public criticism due to its inability to effect appropriate socio-economic change; and the consequential destruction of the environment in terms of massive degradation of land, tress and water resources. While the need to limit this threat has become critical, the attempts have failed to deliver the expected benefits (Asori et al., 2023; Baddianaah et al., 2022; Tease et al., 2023). It is worthy mentioning that in the last four decades, many legislations have been promulgated to formalize small scale mining and make it more functional, including but not limited to The Small-Scale Gold Mining Law, The Mercury Law,

The Precious Minerals and Marketing Corporation Law and the Prestea Action Plan (Hilson, 2001:21). These laws and regulations were expected to help promote sustainable development (Ayee, 2003). Surprisingly, Afriyie et al. (2023) have argued that Galamsey operations are partly the result of policy failures and they offer miners and others a range of social and economic benefits.

Many studies also suggest that the reforms of the 1980s to revitalize the economies of many developing countries contributed in no small measure to the rising trend in galamsey activities. Antwi-Boateng and Akudugu (2021) explain that the retrenchment of many trained miners following the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) introduced in the 1980s made the situation worse, as many of them resorted to small-scale extraction of these natural resources, particularly gold, giving rise to illegal mining activities. Obviously, the benefits of galamsey cannot be understated but so are the negative effects in terms of the damage to water bodies and forests. It is estimated that about 25% of water resources ravaged by galamsey activities and more importantly around 50 % use it for the purpose of supplying drinking water (Nti et al., 2024; United Nations, 2022, 2023). Apart from the environmental havoc, galamsey poses significant human health risks, physical injury, loss of arable land, booming sex trade, conflict and other security challenges (Tease et al., 2023; Nyantakyi-Frimpong et al., 2023; Tejan-Sie, 2020; Boadi et al., 2024).

Ghana is believed to be the epicentre of illegal gold mining (IGM) in the world. In many developing countries, local societies participate in artisanal and small-scale mining operations due to the high-poverty rates (Baddianaah et al., 2022). The authors suggest that there are 13 million miners working today worldwide, and an average of 90 million people is indirectly dependent on ASM activities, with the majority in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Wongnaa et al. (2024) have also reported about 20 million ASM with another 100 beneficiaries and another 10 million indirect employment. The ASM activities have gained roots and currently, about 1 million Ghanaians are directly employed in the sector, and also provide additional indirect jobs for over one million people. ASM accounted for 83 % of Ghana's diamond production and 9.5 % of its gold production. It is not surprising therefore that ASM is ravaging Ghana's ecological health with catastrophic consequences as it gathers steam year by year (Ampaw et al., 2024). In discussing the health effects, Boadi et al. (2024) argue that because most of galamsey activities occur at the periphery of the Ghana Health system, it has been difficult to get accurate data.

In Ghana, galamsey refers simple to the practice of illicitly mining or extracting gold found either at or below soil and water surface in Ghana. It is an illegal or unreg-

ulated form of artisanal small scale gold mining (ASM) and could either be in a stand-alone mining mode, a stand-alone processing or gold extraction mode or in a simultaneous mining and processing fashion. Galamsey is illegal because operators work without regulatory approvals (from either the Ghana Minerals Commission, Environmental Protection Agency, Water Resources Commission, Forestry Commission or the host Municipal Assembly) (Owusu-Nimo et al., 2018). The discussion of galamsey has come to the forefront because the survival of the next generation is endangered through the destruction of farmland and water bodies. This is even more pertinent when one considers the fact that arable lands have been converted into artisanal small-scale mining (galamsey) sites, which means that food crop production now competes with mining activities for land and labour. Darko et al. (2023), for example, revealed that galamsey had resulted in an increase in total suspended solids (TSS), turbidity and colour of the Pra river. Similarly, Nyantakyi-Frimpong et al. (2023) have reported that galamsey has resulted in degradation of, otherwise, fertile agricultural land, and contamination of freshwater sources leading to reduced cultivable land, crop production, and essential staple foods. Likewise, Bonah and Belford (2022) show that the direct and indirect discharge of mining waste have resulted in disturbances in soil geochemistry evident in high degrees of contamination by mercury and arsenic. On the other hand, it has led to an increase in food prices and increased consumption of ultra-processed foods.

The government of Ghana has tried to deal with the problem of galamsey through many policy and governance reforms, however, the reforms have not yielded the desired results. Asori et al. (2023), for example, have observed that the mining industry in Ghana faces difficulties in translating governance processes and procedures from paper to successful practice. The small-scale mining legislation of 1989, which was later changed under the 2006 Minerals and Mining Act (Act 703), aimed to regulate small-scale mining operations in Ghana. However, despite several institutional and regulatory reforms enacted since 1989, the mining industry continues to be plagued by allegations of corruption and shady activities (Crawford & Botchwey, 2016, 2017; Yeboah, 2023).

The big question is why the galamsey menace continues in spite of the many policy initiatives employed to deal with the issue. How is the nexus between the informal and formal agencies affecting the galamsey activities? Is there any role for politics in the galamsey fight? This study contributes to the extant literature in answering these questions. Obviously, with a projected total gold reserve of 1,000 tonnes US Geological Survey (USGS,

2022), it is important to leverage its benefits and minimise negative tendencies from its extraction. Additionally, the study contributes to the literature that is suggestive of the fact that the discussion of the menace cannot be discussed without a consideration of the political environment in which it occurs.

In the sections that follow, the literature is presented after which the methodology is described, results are discussed and conclusions and policy implications offered.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a brief review of the theoretical foundation and empirical studies related to the study

Many theoretical arguments have been used to explain the persistence of the galamsey problem in Ghana, including political settlement theory, deep state theory, access theory, concession theory and stakeholder theory. In this paper, we discuss two of the most popular theories (political ecology and political settlement). The political ecology theory seeks to explain the complex relations between environment and social institutional lives by a critical analysis of the different means of access and control over environmental resources (Kiranmayi Bhushi). In effect, political ecology emphasizes the conflict over resources by stakeholders and how this affects their development. In other words, the political perspective seeks to answer questions like what are the causes of environmental degradation, who are the losers and beneficiaries, how do the sociocultural and political dynamics impact on the livelihoods of the community? Basically, the political ecology theory asks questions of whether interactions between humans and their environment are devoid of politics? In other words, political ecology highlights the politics of environmental change. Accordingly, political ecology rejects the view that the galamsey problem can be considered different; (scholars like Dianne Rocheleau, Arturo Escobar, Richard Peet, Piers Blaikie, Bunyan Bryant, Eric Wolf, Johnston Barbara etc. have contributed to its intellectual foundations and established the tradition of political ecology examining the relationships social power and functioning of ecologies) as a mere economic or socio technical issue to be addressed by scientific and technical fixes. In sum, Political Ecologists stress that there is ecology of politics and a politics of ecology (Kiranmayi Bhushi). The former refers to central role that natural resources—their distribution, allocation, and extraction — play in shaping the nature of political and social institutions within a society. Ecological conditions influence, the development of social structures and institutions, by imposing challenges and opportunities for meeting basic needs. Moreover, ecology is political. The central theme of political ecology

therefore, is power and how it is distributed in a community or society, which means that a discussion of the environment cannot be done devoid of politics.

According to Svarstad, Overå, and Benjaminsen (2018, p. 351), political ecology focuses on the varied uses of power and how they affect access to natural resources. Newmann (2009) explains that in political ecology, property rights are viewed as an expression of the social relations of production, forged in specific places in specific political-economic contexts and embedded in locally generated meanings of land and resources. In effect, political ecology highlights the significance of wider economic, political structures as well as cultural discourses in shaping the way people are related to environmental conditions. This is to suggest that the field of political ecology rests on the dynamic relationship between power relations and the social relations such that it plays a critical role in not just shaping our environment but also in how we respond to the changing environment. Boateng (2023) explains the concept of power from two main perspectives - the empiricist and the realist. Ordinarily, empiricism is the philosophical belief that knowledge comes primarily from sensory experience, while realism is the belief that reality exists independently of the perception of it. The empiricist view of power is seen as power as constraint such that Power is exercised to constrain the actions or possible actions of (Bachrach & Baratz, 1970). Bachrach and Baratz (1970) suggest that non decision-making is a means of identifying certain areas of community power neglected by reputational and issue analysis approaches. However, they also argue that the concept of nondecision has not been shaped into a useful analytic tool, and does not make any demands which cannot be met by decision-making analysis. In natural resource management, this means powerful individuals and institutions limit the inputs by other stakeholders in decision-making that may be contrary to their personal gains (Boateng, 2023). The realist, on the other hand, sees power as discursive, which is an indication that powerful individuals exercise power through the establishment of discourses on issues and narratives on the use of specific resource in ways that are suitable to themselves. Government, for example, can influence citizens to act in accordance with policies through coercion. As explained by Boateng (2023), the realist view is based on identifying enduring structural preconditions that shape contingent human interaction. The realist view therefore provides a synergy between the agent/structure dualism and argues that both depend on each other. These ideas are supportive of Ayelazuno and Mawuko-Yevugah's (2019) assertion that harmful impacts of mining on the ecology of Ghana are neither class-neutral nor free of politics. This they argued

could be described as ecological imperialism, which implies that galamsey is embedded in power structures and relations, in which the interest of the ruling class is supreme. An example, they claim can be seen in policies that directly or indirectly biases toward foreign mining companies at the expense of small scale Ghanaian miners. Similarly, Boateng (2023) claims that galamsey activities are characterized by traditional patrimonial rule with legal-rational bureaucracy and is marked by clientelism, a network of patron-client relationships that uses state power and resources to generate loyalty. These observations are not new because nearly two centuries ago, Tocqueville did suggest that modern democratic power does not reside in a centralized sovereign authority but it is exhibited as a diffuse social force. Robbins (2011) makes a similar claim that modern experience of democracy shows power as a social, cultural, and political force transforming the nature of sovereign power and political authority. That is, Robbins idea of power is contrary to the modern liberal view of power that operates in a neutral public space and offers a more contemporary assumption of power being fully embedded in the social, cultural and political aspirations of society.

The ideas discussed above are consistent with the political settlement theory, which suggests that a settlement emerges when the distribution of benefits supported by its institutions is consistent with the distribution of power in society, and the economic and political outcomes of these institutions are sustainable over time (Khan, 2010; 2018). This distribution of power across organizations is typically relatively stable and reproduced over time, even though incremental and sometimes disruptive changes in the distribution of power can take place. This might explain why the galamsey problem has been pervasive. According to Baddianaah et al. (2022), political settlement refers to the forging of a common understanding, usually between political elites, that their best interests or beliefs are served through acquiescence to a framework for administering political power” (Di John & Putzel, 2009:4). Similarly, Frederiksen (2019) avers that political settlements helps to explain a wide range of integrated, but a complex way of understanding the impact of politics, power, and institutional arrangements. He suggests that when exposed to an alternative political dynamism and motivations, these same institutional arrangements will automatically yield varied economic and developmental consequences. Laws and Leftwich’s (2014:1) observation is worth reiterating here as it describes political settlement as the formal and informal processes, agreements, and practices that help consolidate politics, rather than violence, as a means for dealing with disagreements about interests and resources. Institutions are defined in the New Institutional Econom-

ics as rules that emerge to solve particular ‘transaction’ problems. Transactions can broadly describe any social interaction, and rules emerge to govern these interactions, usually with the aim of achieving better results. This is why we have rules for regulating traffic flows to enable faster and safer journeys, rules for organizing firms to clarify who does what, rules for making political decisions about taxing and spending, or rules for organizing the many transactions involved in making long-term investments. However, it soon became clear that the solution to any specific transaction problem depended not only on the specific technical problems and the characteristics of the transacting parties, but also on the broader social context in which the transaction was embedded. The latter determined, amongst other things, the probability that particular rules would be adhered to or enforced. However, the social context is complex, and there were soon many debates on the ways in which the social context mattered, and the most important characteristics of the social context that needed to be captured in an analytical frame to enable institutional analysis to be more useful. This was clearly not just an analytical question but also one of how to interpret complex historical evidence.

The institutional literature began to provide a variety of answers to the growing evidence about the confusing effects of institutions. In particular, the literature began to look seriously at how cultures, norms and enforcement capabilities of governance agencies affected the choice and effectiveness of particular institutions. The political settlements framework emerged as a critique of approaches that ignored the conflictual aspects of institutions and the conflictual nature of the social transformations that development entailed. It used historical evidence to argue that the distribution of power across organizations affected by particular institutions was usually the most important determinant of the path of institutional change, and the effectiveness of particular institutions. Organizations are groups of individuals who work together in structured ways and are subject to the rules of interaction set by institutions in their transactions with other individuals or organizations. Organizations have internal rules that define their internal interactions, so there are institutions within organizations. The state is a set of organizations that operate under rules that are more or less effective in different contexts, and governance agencies like the police or courts are also organizations. Significant institutional changes are typically not preceded by cultural or normative changes in a society, or autonomous changes in the enforcement capabilities of governance agencies. Rather these changes are typically driven by changes in the distribution of power across relevant organizations, as a result of new

political mobilizations, new technologies and economic opportunities, or external shocks. Ideologies, leaderships and external conditions can all play an important role in these mobilizations, but the sustainability of the institutions that emerge depends on whether the changes in the distribution of power required for their effective operation had already come about, or could be brought about as a result of ongoing mobilizations.

The determinants of the fluidity or rigidity of organizational power therefore plays a critical role in the political settlements analysis. The distribution of organizational power can therefore determine the institutions and policies that are likely to persist as well as the ones most likely to be developmental in that context.

Gafaru (2017) has also reported that politics is deeply embedded in the ASM sector of Ghana to the extent that any anti-galamsey crusade that fails to tackle the political drivers of the problem is unlikely to succeed. A related study by Boafo et al. (2019) alluded to the fact that there exist wide disparities between formal institutions at the national level and traditional authorities in governing the ASM sector of Ghana. Similarly, the nefarious engagement of traditional rulers in facilitating ASM activities is highlighted by Botchwey and Crawford (2018). Moreover, a large body of scholarship has come to a point of convergence that the illegal mining activities are spreading in Ghana because of political interference (Crawford & Botchwey, 2017a; Hilson, 2017; Botchwey & Crawford, 2018; Boafo et al., 2019) as opposed to weak institutional framework mostly reported by other scholars (Debrah et al., 2014; Bansah et al., 2016; Boadi et al., 2016). On the other hand, Asori et al. (2023) argue that the deep-seated linkages between different power actors such as politicians and chiefs/kings are the driving forces thwarting the fight against the menace. Likewise, Gray (2019) contributed to the discussion on political settlement and argue that the main theoretical building blocks of the political settlement framework are institutions, power, and rents. There are key differences within the literature between research that conceptualizes political settlement as action and political settlement conceptualized as a process. In understanding political settlement as process, a political settlement is conceptualized as a stable political order that has not necessarily been planned or consciously willed by different social groups.

In recent times, constructive criticisms from the public have rejuvenated the fight against galamsey, however, the modalities of the fight and socio-political power relations have jointly militated against the effectiveness of the fight. Ocquaye (2023) makes a similar argument in the assertion that the persistence of illegal Chinese mining in Ghana is a result of a collaborative effort between

some local patrons in Ghana and some Chinese. The persistence of illegal Chinese mining is also at the core, a partnership between 'comrades in need' (local patrons) and 'comrades with power' (illegal Chinese gold miners) to primarily satisfy economic motives. Additionally, the paper builds on insights from a previous publication (Alden & Ocquaye, 2021) to argue that local patrons are key to the successful absorption of the Chinese into the political economy of illegal mining in Ghana.

Antwi-Boateng Akudugu (2021) provide evidence in support of Gary's findings when they reported that at the forefront of the galamsey activities are rent seeking elites, though structural factors such as population growth and unemployment also matter in explaining the incidence of galamsey. More important, they report that low barriers to entry, political corruption and institutional inadequacies are additional factors. In the end, the study concludes that most illegal small-scale mining communities are characterized by increased rent-seeking activities by diverse stakeholders particularly the elites, poor investments in human capital development, and weak institutional structures and processes. Accordingly, this directs our attention to the importance of accurately identifying the relative power and capabilities of relevant organizations that describe a particular political settlement and how these may be changing over time. These issues make this study pertinent. The purpose of the study is to examine the drivers of galamsey and in particular, the role of political and economic elites and local agents in the galamsey trade in Ghana. The methodology for the collection of data to achieve the research objectives is described next Methodology.

The study was taking across the country the total number of interviews contacted were 125 key stakeholders, from three towns in Ghana — Obuasi in the Ashanti region, Bolgatanga in the Upper East Region and Tarkwain the Western Region. Primary data was collected from interviews and field work observation; secondary data was obtained through existing literature. Focus group discussions were conducted in Obuasi with 10 people and another focus group of discussions in Bolgatanga with 15 people. The total number of interviewees was 125 as stated earlier, in Eastern Region, there were 20 interviews, Western Region 10 interviewees were **interviewed, Ashanti region 50 interviewees, Central Region 25 interviewees, and Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Mines, minerals commission and Ministry of Defence in Greater Accra 10 interviewees were interviewed.** The data obtained was analysed and presented.

It will be good to have a table to show how many from each region. Check to be sure it is three or four regions.

Region	Number of respondent
Ashanti	50
Central	25
Eastern	20
Greater Accra	10
Upper East	10
Western	10
Total	125

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected were grouped and presented to highlight the key issues of the research.

WHY ARE GHANAIS INVOLVED IN GALAMSEY?

Ghanaians involved in illegal mining (galamsey) can be classified into two, either as an individual self-employed, who goes to the forest with simple tools to dig or in search for gold and the second class is made up of normal labourers who are contracted to work for a daily wage. Generally, the two groups of people work at galamsey sites without knowing the negative effects they are doing to the environment. One key respondent in the mining sector who sells and supplies mining equipment at Tarkwa responded:

“illegal mining is an industry for the big men, the small guys they go around chasing don’t even have money to feed themselves not to talk about buying mining equipment, the big men who are into this business and they are aware of the destruction to the environment yet they are free from arrest. To end galamsey, a white person from outside Ghana should be contracted to fight against galamsey, the white man has integrity to fight galamsey without compromise, and the white will go for the big men without compromise.” The political elites and political actors are sponsoring illegal mining activities. They are hiding their faces in the political parties either by sponsoring the political parties or occupying political office that they are able to corrupt porous mining rules.

DO POLITICAL ELITES INFLUENCE THE FIGHT AGAINST GALAMSEY?

Politicians in Galamsey Activities

Ghana is a democratic nation that elects political leaders to manage the country’s resources. This means that anything happening in the country whether it is good or bad must be associated with political leaders or the government in power. It is general knowledge that getting a mining licence, getting a mining equipment, and even the appointment of the heads of institutions regulating the mining activities are all political processes. For

example, the mining equipment that the Chinese bring for their work or sell to miners, for mining activities go through our borders, so the question is: why nothing is done about the importation of these equipment? One respondent at a galamsey site made a point that:

“all the heavy duty mining equipment are for the political elites who will never be arrested, boss look I only come here to get my daily bread, yet if the soldiers come here they are going to arrest me and they will end up beating me or detaining me, yet I don’t even have money to buy a tire of an excavator. So you see how unfair the situation is to the poor, they should rather go and find out who is responsible for the mining and arrest him and all the mining we are employed to do here will stop. That is why I say people with power and money are into this galamsey business but not we the labourers”. Almost all the people who answered the research question said the same thing: that people with money and power are actively involved in the galamsey business. It is obvious that they are politicians or have links with the government in powers who are actively involved in galamsey business.

These things have been made possible because the economic elites have political networks that enable them to get mining licences either for mining or for prospecting, especially when the party they are affiliated to is in power and then they can sell their licenses to higher bidders (mostly Chinese). Since a foreigner is not allowed to do small-scale mining, a Ghanaian citizen will take the licence and lease it to the foreigner to work without recourse to protecting the environment. The influence of the political elites can be seen in the statement of one of the chiefs in a mining community: “when we arrest the illegal miners, especially the Chinese, the court and the police will allow them to come back to the mining site again and when you ask why they did not punish them, they will say the people they work with gave them a court bail. So you see the people with money and power will not allow them to face the laws of Ghana.” Well it is obvious that it is the political elites that will do that and I know the system in Ghana here with regards to arrest and court proceedings and how politicians can manipulate the system.”

These observations are seen especially when a new party comes to power such that you will see that new people or bosses begin to dominate the galamsey activities. Thus, the local party sponsors change to allow the new party that is in power to control the galamsey activities and consequently allow the process of destruction of the environment. So it is clear that both political parties

promote galamsey activities of their party affiliates or supporters and therefore, making it difficult to stop the galamsey activities. The observed responses to galamsey are consistent with the political ecology and political settlement principles which are indicative of the dynamic relationship between power relations and the social relations, which play a critical role in not just shaping the environment but also in the response to the changing environment (Boateng, 2023; Syarstad et al., 2018). As Ayelazuno and Mawuko-Yevugah's (2019) have explained, the harmful impacts of mining on the ecology of Ghana are neither class-neutral nor free of politics.

In support of these arguments, one party executive of the National Democratic Congress NDC (opposition party) stated that:

“We have the constituency chairman leading a group of foreign and local people who want to do small-scale mining which is legally right, but as soon as they start working they begin to be doing the wrong things. The people involved are members of the ruling political party or constituency executives that lead them to the community. They make sure that they protect the people who destroy the environment for money and therefore the galamsey activities continue.”

THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE POLITICAL ELITES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST ILLEGAL MINING

The involvement of political elites has been an issue of interest for some time now in Ghana.

A renowned journalist who is in the forefront of the fight against illegal mining has stated that:

“They (political elites) can with the snap of a finger stop galamsey if they want to, but unfortunately they are the ones doing it.”

This statement is an indication that galamsey can easily be stopped if there is a willingness by the elites to stop it. But the question is whether it can easily be done? The political elites can stop the galamsey with just a step, but they are rather involved, an indication that we cannot succeed in the fight against galamsey. The fact is that because politicians are involved in galamsey it will only make it worse rather than finding solutions to the problem.

Another respondent (a security officer) claimed that:

“we follow orders from our superiors, and you also know and understand that our superiors follow orders from the minister or whoever is in power, so if they say go and guide this mining company I cannot

complain I just have to go so that I do not lose my work and suffer the consequences”.

What is driving the galamsey activities is obviously desire to get rich. Beneficiaries of galamsey are willing to do anything to get money. On the other hand, Hilson (2017) explains that in the fight against galamsey, some analysts ignore the underlying reality that small-scale mining developments affect livelihoods well beyond the village to include sponsors of such activities who are city dwellers and mostly powerful elites. These elites have the resources to influence the chiefs and community members, in particular the youth that get land for illegal mining. This supports the view of Ayambire et al. (2024) that understanding the galamsey problem requires an appreciation of the complexity of socio-economic, socio-political, and power dynamics within mining-affected communities. One respondent (a politician) intimated that:

“People will do anything to get money, they don't care about the masses. The political elites are aware of their actions but what they need is to make money, all they will do is to destroy the environment to get the money.”

Those who are employed to protect the public interest rather become agents that help to protect the self-interest of those who are supposed to promote policies that ensure the good of all. So instead of promoting the public good and ensuring democratic governance, the political elites directly and/or indirectly help create a system of “one dollar one vote” which is against the tenets of one man one vote. In the end, the galamsey activities do not only destroy the environment but could deepen poverty and income inequality as the poor become poorer and rich get richer. *These findings are supportive of the foreword of the Natural Resource Governance Index (NRGI) report, where the President and CEO (Mr. Suneeta Kaimal) stated that:*

Decisions about how the oil, gas and mining sectors are governed determine the wellbeing of the billion people living in poverty in resource-rich countries. Where policies and practices ensure informed, inclusive and accountable decision making, natural resources can enable fair, prosperous and sustainable societies, rather than undermine them. The implication is that if we will all win is political win for all of us. The big question is: will politics win for us or for the elites?

Even more important is the question of whether galamsey can be stopped? Yes, if politics will be for

the good of people and not just economic and political elites. This will however need the collective decision by all,” to see the dangers of galamsey and consequently the commitment by all stakeholders to take concrete and decisive steps to put a halt to the degradation of the environment. The all here means that government must create the enabling environment for citizens or community members, local authority (chiefs), and the economic and political elites to not only appreciate the dangers of galamsey but to take the necessary actions to prevent further environmental degradation and health hazards associated with it.

CONCLUSIONS

The research paper analysed and identified the influence by political elites in the fight against galamsey. The results of the study indicate that economic motivations are the key determinants of galamsey. The impact of galamsey ranges from water body pollution, harmful chemical exposure, or children choosing gold mining over education, among others. These findings indicate that short-term financial benefits at the expense of long term harm to the community, its residents, and overall development.

The results of the study suggest that the galamsey problem is multifaceted and cannot be resolved by anyone party, which is calls a multifaceted approach based on stakeholders’ commitment to deal with the problem. This means that there should be a thorough engagement and inclusive stakeholders’ participation in the policy design and implementation of the strategies to deal with the galamsey canker. For example, the owners of small scale mining in each district could form one unit location that they can build a sump and this sump should have an artificial dam, which will be the only location that small-scale miners can wash the sand to extract the gold. The Minerals Commission and Forestry Commission with oversight responsibility of the Chiefs and elders in the community should be encouraged and empowered to play their roles in the protection of the environment.

Further, the Chiefs as the custodians of the land are strategically placed to help combat the galamsey menace and therefore they should be incentivized with government support for their communities to encourage them to be active agents of development. This could be complemented by the collaboration with the security services such that offenders are punished when community laws are violated. There should be the political will and commitment so that the laws of the land are applied fairly to all without fear or favor.

Further scientific research conducted could better uncover the research questions posed in this study with

deeper analysis of the relationship between the political elites, political actors, chiefdoms, media and mining policy development.

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