

Ghanaian traditional authorities and the funeral rites of galamsey

By Mawutodzi Kodzo Abissath

CAN some smart evangelist quickly crosscheck this passage in the Bible - Mark 8:36? I paraphrase: "For what inheritance shall a traditional ruler bestow his descendants if he

accumulates all the 'Chinese Dollars' in the globe but desecrates the forests and rivers bequeathed him by his ancestors?"

On Monday, July 10, 2017, President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo elevated the spirit of the fight against galamsey to another level. It was on that day that the President proclaimed: "I will put my presidency on line to stop galamsey". I dare say that this presidential declaration has supplied afresh oxygen to the initiative of the media coalition against galamsey launched on Tuesday, April 4, 2017. May the gods of the environment bless the President.

In this article, I shall try to play the role of an environmental Okyeame to interpret and amplify the voice of the President as an environmental Paramount King who sent two bottles of schnapps to announce the death of galamsey and appealed to his colleague traditional authorities to support him to give a befitting burial to the departed spirit of galamsey.

Vision of media coalition against galamsey

Some observers are of the opinion that the vision and philosophy behind the advocacy of media coalition against galamsey today may take some souls the next 2000 years to appreciate it because their action is not only meant for the present but the future generation as well.

Fortunately for Ghana, President Nana Akufo-Addo's pronouncement indicates that he is in tune with the Ghanaian media as far as the galamsey menace is concerned. And I can place my right hand on my heart and pledge that if this government succeeds in conquering galamsey once and for all, the President's declaration quoted above will become legendary like what Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah said 60 years ago at independence.

"Our independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent."

In December 2000, BBC World Servicelisters in Africa voted Kwame Nkrumah, their "Man of the Millennium". Continental survey indicated that it was largely due to that singular statement Nkrumah made about Ghana's independence that placed him over and above other great leaders of the continent like Nelson Mandela of South Africa.

When the environmental Paramount King Nana, was addressing his colleague traditional authorities at that galamsey forum here in Accra, he stated, (...) "But we have also to recognise that as difficult as things have been and we are looking for employment and stuff, there are things that we cannot allow to happen and one of them is the heritage, the inheritance that our fathers and our grandfathers bequeath to us especially the space, the Ghanaian space which we all occupy. We have a duty to preserve it for those who are coming after us."

If this statement is not environmentally profound then I don't know what it is. Then President Nana Akufo-Addo continued, "And if our river bodies are drying up, our landscape is being desecrated, we here, leaders of our society, leaders of our nation, political leaders, traditional rulers, religious leaders, we have a responsibility to say NO; we can't allow this to go on for our own common survival and the survival of those who are to come. We can if we allow it, we are jeopardising our own future." This sounds like Pope Francis speaking in June 2015 somewhere in the world.

Patriotism of Nana Akufo-Addo

For the President to look directly into the faces of the most powerful monarchs in Ghana and state unequivocally that he was prepared to sacrifice his presidency on the altar of galamsey

speaks volumes of the depth of his statesmanship and patriotism.

But that was not the first time Nana Akufo-Addo demonstrated his patriotism to Ghanaians. In August 2013 during his post-verdict speech at the Supreme Court, the then Presidential candidate of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) said: "The Supreme Court of our nation has spoken and the result of the December 2012 presidential election has been confirmed as having been won by the candidate of the NDC, President Mahama."

Then he added, "Although I was saddened by the decision, I accept that what the Court says brings finality to the election dispute. We shall not be

asking for a review of the verdict so we can all move on in the interest of our nation." That statement made Nana then an instant global angel of democracy in Africa.

Again, at the galamsey forum, the President reminded the chiefs, "...when I took the oath that I am sworn into office to protect the integrity of the

nation, Ghana, I swore to uphold its constitution, its sovereignty, that is, the care of the nation, its people, its resources and its nature have been put to my care temporarily as a trustee like Nananom are trustees of the lands of which they occupy for their people. So you are at the national level a trustee of the lands and resources of our nation. So you ask yourselves, how best you can discharge this trust, do you sit back and say; "well all these young men don't have anything to do so let it go on?"

A big challenge to traditional authorities

This was a big challenge the President had thrown to the traditional rulers if galamsey is to be stopped in Ghana. It is common knowledge that in Ghana, traditional rulers are not elected. They are leaders who were born with "divine rights" to rule over their subjects. Whenever they mount their thrones they wild monarchical powers and reserve the rights to rule until thy kingdom come. All lands in Ghana are held in trust by traditional rulers for the people of Ghana. They are highly revered in society. Therefore, they are the alpha and omega of the continuation or otherwise of galamsey in Ghana. That is what President Nana Akufo-Addo means when he said the traditional authorities had a responsibility to support the government to perform the final funeral rites of galamsey once and for all.

The President cited a very embarrassing diplomatic incident suffered by the country to the amazement of some of the traditional authorities who were hearing it for the first time. The environmental

Paramount King narrated the incident in a story telling format like this:

Once upon a time, there lived a very prominent Ghanaian Professor Heart surgeon in Ogyakrom. The said famous heart operating engineer also became a Minister for Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation of his country.

Galamsey diplomatic embarrassment to Ghana

One day the famous Professor who is also teaching at a medical school, went to Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire for a very important town hall durbar of chiefs and people in that country. After the durbar, the Professor was on his way to a certain junction to get a calabash of palm wine to quench his thirst.

Then just as the noble Professor was about to gulp the first throat full of the wine, without any protocol, some inquisitive ordinary mortals holding writing sticks, microphones, mobile phones and sorts of modern communications gadgets, confronted him and started bombarding him with unnecessary environmental queries. "Why is your galamsey country polluting rivers in our land?" "Why do you allow illegal mining taking place in Ghana affecting our water bodies, to the extent that we cannot treat water for our people to drink?" "Why, why, don't you have control over the looting of precious minerals in your country?" "Is it that is how you govern your nation?"

The President told the traditional authorities that the Ghanaian Professor felt very embarrassed, and very apologetic that the galamsey activities of Ghanaians was jeopardising the space of another fellow neighbour country in our sub-region. In fact, the Professor was so embarrassed that he could not even quaff the first calabash of palm wine in his hands.

Cabinet body to find solution to galamsey menace

So, when he came back to Ghana he reported the humiliation to the Commander-in-Chief of the Republic who sent him on that mission. Consequently, the President disclosed at the galamsey forum that the government had composed a cabinet body of very responsible eminent Ghanaians headed by the same renowned Professor Kwabena Frimpong Boateng to try and arrest the galamsey menace to "preserve our heritage" once and for all.

As a humble environmental "watch dog", with particular sniffing for galamsey stench, this writer wishes to humbly suggest that Professor Frimpong Boateng Cabinet Committee must not allow the neck of President Akufo-Addo's presidency to be led to the galamsey gallows to be truncated. Before they start their operations, they should endeavour to ascertain why ex-President Mahama's inter-ministerial anti-galamsey taskforce disappointed Ghanaians in 2013.

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• President Akufo-Addo interacting with traditional authorities