

• Galamseyers should be assigned lead roles in the effort to reclaim land destroyed by mining



The eight plagues of galamsey in Ghana (2)

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Plague 5 - Effects on Agriculture

AGRICULTURE, the backbone of Ghana's economy, employs more than half the population on formal and informal basis and accounts for almost half of GDP and export earnings. Danyo and Osei-Bonsu (2016) suggest that the proportion of Ghana's agricultural lands which is being degraded by 'galamseyers' is increasing at an alarming rate, thus affecting crop productivity and threatening food security.

The sale of cocoa farms to galamseyers will have a lot of implications for cocoa. According to the Ghana Cocoa Board, cocoa accounted for 8.2 per cent of the country's GDP and 30 per cent of total export earnings in 2010.

Recent estimates suggest that cocoa rakes in about \$2 billion annually, representing half of the country's total foreign reserve. Essentially, if care is not taken, cocoa exports may dwindle over the years which will affect the country's foreign exchange and agriculture's contribution to GDP. Another threat is contamination of cocoa with these heavy metals causing

severe discredit to our reputation on the international market and heavily affects our foreign exchange earnings.

Plague 6 - Effects on Land

Destructive activities such as galamsey remove vegetative cover, destroy flora and wild fauna, and leach the land, thereby causing an imbalance to the ecosystem. Mining activities on both large and small scales accounted for a total area of 31,237 km² and represented 13.1 per cent of total land area of Ghana. Desertification and land degradation have been described as two closely interrelated processes, which is not only peculiar to northern Ghana but also visible in all small-scale mining areas. If illegal mining continues, it is expected that the effect of land degradation would impact food security, productivity and human settlements.

Plague 7 - Effects on water bodies

In March 2017, water pollution from galamsey activities posed water supply

risk for the nation even halting machinery used in national water treatment due to chemicals in the water. Two news bulletins from *myjoyonline* (June 5-8, 2017) reported improved water turbidity of the River Pra and fish supply from the River Ankobra.

Despite the good news, caution should be taken when using water from these rivers since these chemicals (heavy metals) do not automatically disappear with flow, instead they spread and settle on the riverbeds. Therefore, fish, drinking supply and irrigation from these rivers still pose harm to human health and should be tested.

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Plague 8 - Public health consequences

The aforementioned plagues can lead to broader public health concerns. For example, polluted water, high cost and inefficient supply of clean water are associated with disease outbreaks such as cholera and typhoid. Infections transported through dust particles are also of public health concern. These include respiratory diseases such as

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tuberculosis, chest and allergic skin infections. Abandoned holes from excavations serve as death traps for unsuspecting children and adults alike and breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

Recommendation

In the face of the short and long-term adverse effects of galamsey activities, we highly encourage a well-coordinated multi-sectoral team to review and follow through with all relevant knowledge for addressing the menace. In particular, we call for:

Education as key-a change in the mindset of citizens will ensure sustainability of our long-term developmental goals. Environmental concerns should hence rank high for both school and adult education media.

Joint efforts by the Ministries, Departments, and Agencies in charge of employment and social protection, with assistance from the private sector, need to identify, counsel, retrain and recruit ex-galamsey workers into other productive alternative employment ventures, and where necessary, provide temporary livelihood support.

Reclaim land, forest cover, water and other vital natural environmental assets through engagements among local government, communities and development partners. Galamseyers should be assigned lead roles.

Establishment of a sound multi-sectoral institutional framework for research and managing environmental resources.

Involvement of our public health agencies to evaluate and monitor health effects, as well as follow up evaluations in affected regions.

Conclusion

Galamsey may look lucrative but the short and long-term effects of this activity on our physical, mental, reproductive health and our children's development, local and international crop production, our land, vegetation and water resources far outweigh the human and financial value of the former. Let us protect the health and well-being of Ghanaians. God Bless Our Homeland Ghana.

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