**Revisionary Ghana & Africa-From Gold to Bread**

**David Nana Ofori, Jr. MSc. PhD.**

Ghana is blessed with an abundance of natural resources, and its mineral resources – particularly bauxite, manganese, diamond, oil … and especially gold, as well as natural gas, salt and silver – are among its most precious, arguably second only to its human resources, the proud and noble people of Ghana. Comprised of a wondrous mix of elements and compounds formed over Millenia of geologic creativity, our minerals are, in effect, sacred, imbued with the potential to make nations wealthy, self-sufficient, powerful, modern.

Though they are largely unseen to most people, accessible only through extractive mining, our reverence for our minerals should be felt as profoundly as one feels for the beautiful land on which one’s cows graze and one’s food is grown, and on which one’s farm and home sit and family lives, and through which the spirit of all our ancestors have passed.

Gold glows: it sparkles… No wonder it is the envy of all. And we, the people of Ghana, should be its most stalwart guardian. Yet we are not! Our mineral resources should be the pride of the nation and its people. Yet, we have a system that is arguably as sadistic and abusive as the Colonialism that we finally threw off. Only now it is not foreign powers who control our government, rather it is our own leaders –national and local, constitutional and duly elected as well as tribal and traditional – and the system under which they operate, that allow their country to be sold down the river, and their countrymen to suffer for it, while they garner some benefit for themselves.

Other nations are garnering the benefits of Ghana’s natural resources, raping its lands and causing environmental hardship, leaving Ghana little better off economically from where it was 50 years ago – and far worse off environmentally – while also leaving a legacy of physical unhealthfulness, impoverishment, and criminalization within many communities.

For our environment, this leaves a legacy of land degradation, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, pollution of our drinking water, heavy metal pollution, and increased incidence of malaria, as well as mercury intoxication and a host of occupational injuries that are the direct consequences of those engaged in the mining. In addition, unregulated and careless mining does irreversible damage to farming land, disrupting local food markets – on top of inadequate compensation for the food crops lost by the locals, many of whom must also suffer the humiliation and heartache of being dislocated from the homes where they and their ancestors have lived for decades or even centuries. Add to this all the economic and social costs of such mining, from increased school dropout to sometimes-violent conflict between competing miners and with immigrants and police. And the related criminal IFFs (Illicit Financial Flows) syphon from government the very revenues that could be otherwise used to support infrastructure improvement and other economic and social betterment programs.

Especially as gold prices soar, more and more citizens, companies, and nations daily turn to mining, and as the abuses continue, the government often turns a blind eye – or, more particularly, a greedy eye, accepting bribes or engaging in negotiation practices that leave the negotiators happy, but at the expense of the happiness of the people of Ghana.

While other nations are exploiting our lands with impunity – usually with the complicity of our government institutions and even local chiefs – and leaving it used, abused, scarred, and its inhabitants worse off, we can only dream of what we, Ghanaians, could do if we were the ones doing the mining *for ourselves*. How great could our nation be if *we*, our own companies, were extracting and selling our mineral resources? We could lead the world in the field of mineral exports…and the people could reap the economic benefits from the development that it would afford – rather than having to increase the national debt and further weaken our economy. Why don’t we see Ghana as glowing gold in its potential, just as so many other multinational corporations and foreign entities see us? This is, after all, *our* homeland.

*We* are responsible for our destruction. But we *shall* also be responsible for our uplift!

A million or more individuals, mostly Ghanaians of the working class and impoverished, primarily young men, engage in the small-scale, or artisanal small-scale mining (ASM, also known as galamsey) sector. Largely operating without licensing, it is, technically, criminal (indeed, the process of securing proper licensing presents difficult bureaucratic and economic hurdles for many galamseyers). But at least their excuse is their desperation for a livelihood in the face of poverty, lack of agricultural land, and limited opportunity for employment. And as quickly as they are paid for their work – usually by foreign countries or their surrogates – they are nearly as quickly indirectly punished for their actions by the physical illnesses that they will suffer from – not the least of which are from their exposure to the mercury they use to extract the gold – as well as by the gradual degradation of their homeland.

Yet, as detrimental as some of the effects of galamsey are, whether committed by local workers or foreign migrants, large-scale mining (LSM) equals, and in some cases, dwarfs, the deleterious effects of galamsey. Ultimately, however, a host of foreign nations, including China as well as the U.S., India, and other nations, must be held accountable – and so too must the Ghanaian government, its ministers, and its regulatory agencies – as well as many of the local chiefs – who sanction, formally or informally, the behavior of other nations’ mining companies.

The informal mining of the ASM, or galamsey, is the illegal or illicit sector. Yet, it is a multi-billion-dollar industry. While both sectors, ASM and LSM create their share of economic, environmental, and social destruction, it is more often the small-scale operators, the “galamsey,” that are derided and ridiculed, a pawn in the back-and-forth of political power competition, while the LSM is treated as the “gold standard” of prizes, the sector that international finance and governments stumble over to attract and expand.

Aware especially of high unemployment rates and the significant percentage of the population that is supported by galamsey, politicians have a self-interest, at times, in showing support for the galamsey illegal mining, especially as election times approach. They don’t want to appear insensitive to the unemployed, or to the chiefs and all others who depend on the mining – and on whose votes they depend for their elections.

So, at times, one party claims that it supports the galamsey millions while the other party resorts to implementing policies against galamsey, such as Operation Vanguard, sending the police and military against galamseyers. Social media too, with the support of government, either outright or implicit, engage in vilifying galamseyers through anti-galamsey campaigns, such as #StopGalamseyNow.

But both ASM and LSM, galamsey and formal, have their drawbacks *and* their benefits. We must not continue to see them in a simplistic dichotomy of good versus evil. Both are inextricably linked in the socio-economic and environmental milieu that is Ghana and Africa.

It is said of airplane accidents that there is no such thing as pilot error, but only design flaws. *Design a good system, with ample checks and balances, top-of-the-line training, laws that are fair to all parties, and transparency*, and corruption cannot maintain its foothold in Ghana. Angels don’t often run governments; but sound organization, planning, creative input and collaboration are stumbling blocks even to devils.

The solution, then, to all this requires, firstly, to see each actor – the government, the chiefs and other traditional local leaders, regulatory commissions, mining companies, investors, and other countries, smugglers, and every Ghanaian citizen generally – all as part of a multi-dimensional chain of factors, all of which must be addressed, link by link, to truly solve the problem and convert the ever-present driving forces of greed, fear, pain and pettiness into national pride, economic strength, and, ultimately, environmental, social, and physical well-being.

In Ghana, authority over the land and its minerals has ambiguity. On the one hand, responsibility for overseeing mineral ownership has been vested in the president, who is supposed to provide effective management and see to its proper distribution to the benefit of the general citizenry through developmental projects. On the other hand, local chiefs still retain much informal authority to do the same.

While many chiefs exercise wisdom in their authority, too many are motivated primarily by selfish interests and acquiring percentages of mineral extraction profits for themselves rather than for the good of the people generally. *Local citizens need to be enabled to communicate their concerns to their local chiefs*, who, in turn, need to be moved by their innate concerns for the betterment of their people and must be given the encouragement and resources to enforce the laws against improper mining activities in their communities.

And the same may be said of many in the chain of mining oversight and management throughout government and parastatal organizations. *The unbridled power of the executive needs to be reined in.* As it is, all too often the president can bypass legislative accountability, invoke discretionary powers, and designate any number of ministries, institutions, and other administrators, while sponsoring outright electioneering and bribery, all of which effectively thwart efforts and processes designed to regulate land and mineral management and insure transparency.

*Revamping regulatory mechanisms and community development, improving the functioning of representative democracy, and disrupting favoritism* are all vital starting points. They will require the strong will of all actors, from government to nations to mining companies to the citizens of Ghana. Special attention should be paid to initiatives that enhance democratic processes and public leadership employing openness – transparency! – and efficient democratic accountability. *Ghana’s national debate on minerals, oil politics and governance should include a genuine discussion on democratization and evaluation of the fields where an infusion of mineral revenue – the "resource curse" – into the political power mix will so often only exacerbate current problems.*

True democracy requires that *we must have election reforms that lessen the abuses of incumbency, oversee proper use of campaign funds, and present a more-level playing field for all candidates*.

While steadfastly maintaining strict sovereignty over our resources, we should also *promote efficiency through regional economic co-operation and integration*. There must also be a *complete and honest re-evaluation of the entire approach to Ghana’s acceptance of external assistance from entities such as the IMF* for underdeveloped nations. With beneficiaries’ permanent dependence, financial liberalization has not been a reliable alleviator of poverty, as the constraints attached to assistance have often led to terrible experiences as the nation is forced to withdraw, or place impediments to, the implementation of certain welfare programs, prohibiting the employment of low-income people, when taxes have gone up, causing hyperinflation, to dissuade lower-income people, only escalating the impoverishment of more of its people.

To break the leverage of criminal control over the supply chain, we must, among other things, *find ways for LSM and ASM operations to cooperate with each other*. LSM could provide galamsey operators access to working capital and promote compliance, which would help avert the inevitable ensnarement of galamseyers into the waiting arms of unscrupulous financiers and buyers.

And at the very heart of any effort to manage the mining and distribution of our gold and other mineral resources, *we must know precisely where it is and how much of it, we have*. We can do so by using digital satellite scanning and other techniques in conjunction with block-chain technologies that are essential to securely record, monitor and publish such information to the relevant actors. These are technologies that Ghana already possesses and needs to utilize.

Gold is Ghana’s greatest industry. It is gold that has given the region its most famous and enduring moniker, the Gold Coast. It was the source of the wealth of its ancient empires in the 15th and 16th centuries, and in modern times, it remains Ghana’s greatest mineral commodity, as Ghana now produces more gold than any other African nation, including South Africa.

And with gold enumerated, monitored, protected, honored, respected, embraced and secured for Ghanaians – *all the tribes in* Ghana – Ghana will rid itself of some of the nation’s most pernicious blights and dangers and take one of its most meaningful steps towards truly improving the environmental health of its waters, land and other ecosystems, the political health of its governance, and the social and medical health of its citizens.

CONTENT OF THE SPEECH:

* To be delivered to the Parliament of Ghana with all protocols addressed.
* Express my appreciations for the opportunity to address the national concerns detailed in the book, namely:

1. The management of the Country’s Natural Resources including Human Capital Resources, Mining and Petroleum resources.
2. Destruction of the environment, ecosystem, water pollution, proliferation of diseases in rural mining villages, deforestation, long term climate changes, increase in poverty, death of illegal miners and destabilization of the local government (friction between chiefs and families owing mining lands), and the dislocation of families.

* Identification of the country’s Galamsey problems as listed above.
* Presentation of the Road map to the problems:
* Conversation with the key steak holders including the families owning the mining /cocoa lands, the local subchiefs, the paramount chiefs, district commissioners, ministers in charge of the mining, import & exports, finance ministry, FEED Team (Front End Engineering &Development Team) and petroleum industries, government legislatures and managing directors of the listed industries. This body created a system of operation that respects and indulge these individual sectors and set up the hierarchy and structures that provide proper responsibility, compensation and responsibilities upon those engaged in the extractive operation.
* The creation of MOUs, and agreements with the individual families and local governmental bodies for the oversights, security and reporting system that eliminates illegal mining and provide the cause for the prosecution of offenders.
* Establishment of a Natural Resources Task Force (NRTF) a task force responsible for the monitoring, surveillance, recording and reporting all the mining and drilling activities to the DOJ for the prosecutions.
* Immediate Executive Government Moratorium to be issued to suspend all mining licenses, and permits issued to all foreign entities, and operator in the mining and crude oil fields. The government reassumes full ownership of all the mining and oil theaters and renegotiates, reassigns and reclaims the gold, bauxite, manganese, diamond, lithium, iron ore, etc.

1. Decentralization and diversification of the ministries:

Restructure and relocate the various headquarters of the mineral and oil/gas industries to the regional capitals where the raw minerals and the resources are mined or drilled or produced. This will create massive jobs in the region, discourage migration to the capital cities, attract local equitable infrastructural developments, construction of factories and manufacturing plants, affordable housing, construction and expansion of healthcare facilities, commerce, small business incubation, educational institutions of learning, establishment of banks and credit unions, small business promotions, and the empowerment of all the various pillars of the local government.

* The Ghana government to issue a special appeal and invitation of all Ghanaian intellectuals in the diasporas, including professional in mining and petroleum, finance, computer sciences, manufacturing, process engineers, seismology, digital technologies, AI, and construction. These Diasporas Intellectuals to return to support the country’s industrialization revolution, implement the block chain technology, advance mining and drilling technologies, and the design and construction of new manufacturing and innovations to boost the economy and add value to the country’s raw natural resources to compete in international markets.