

Exploring economic-security nexus and *galamsey*: The case of Tarkwa-Nsuaem Municipality – Ghana

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Abstract

Natural resources exploitation, including mining are essential in global development either directly or indirectly. Some of these resources serve as sources of raw materials for industrialisation, add to countries' gross domestic product (GDP) and foreign exchange, serve as exports, and provide avenues for employment, income, wellbeing, and technology transfers. Despite the importance of natural resources to socio-economic development, their exploitation also elucidates serious economic, security, and environmental discourses. Similar to most parts of Africa, the long history of resource exploitation, including mining, is fraught with environment, security, and political challenges. In Ghana, small scale mining has become topical in recent times due to its devastating environmental consequences. Activities of small-scale illegal mining, often known as *galamsey* is generating serious environmental challenges, including polluting waters bodies. Ghana government attempts to deal with the challenges of *galamsey* and pollution of water bodies has necessitated the deployment of security agencies to stop the phenomenon. However, we argue in this paper that given that economic circumstances drive people into mining, how do we use a securitised approach to tackle an economic phenomenon. It is easy to securitise the problem for a quick fix, but how can such an approach be sustained amidst enduring the economic issues underpinning mining. Most of issues concerning mining seem to have been analysed in silos. This study, thus, analyse *galamsey* menace with economic-security nexus. Mining in Africa has been undertaken by both large-scale (mostly transnational companies) and small-scale (local) miners. Often the small scale mining is poorly unregulated or described as illegal as in the case of *galamsey* in Ghana. Because of its unregulated nature, the *galamsey* space is characterised with insecurity, conflicts, environmental degradation, social, and political upheavals. Whereas there are substantial studies on mining and *galamsey* in Ghana, much of the existing studies appear to largely view *galamsey* either within a socio-economic or safe-security lens. This does not provide a broader picture of the *galamsey* phenomenon. Based on field data through interviews, focus groups and review of existing literature, this paper interrogates the relations between economic-security nexus and the *galamsey*. We move the study beyond binaries (economic, security, environment, social, etc.) to highlight the complex ways in which economic-security, socio-economic-security issues play out in the *galamsey* space at the sub-national and local scale. We observe that *galamsey* is a complex phenomenon with social, economic, political, environmental, and security dimensions. Yet in recent times, Ghana government campaign against *galamsey* has been framed within a security lens as evidenced in the deployment of a joint police-military taskforces in: 'Operation Vanguard' and 'Operation Calm Life II' to uproot the *galamsey* menace. We contend that the over securitisation *galamsey* is highly problematic since it obscures the economic, political, environmental, social, and cultural dimensions of the phenomenon. This also seems to complicate and undermine ongoing efforts by the government to address *galamsey*.