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Would the Earth Survive the Next Half-Century? Review of the Devasting Menace Of ‘Galamsey’ And Its Impact on Sustainable Development in Ghana

Prof. Dr. Joseph Teye Ignatius Buerthey and Felix Atsrin

Pentecost University

Abstract

This paper explores the severe environmental, social, and economic impacts of ‘galamsey’ (illegal small-scale mining) on Ghana’s natural resources and communities. The study provides an in-depth analysis of how uncontrolled ‘galamsey’ operations have led to widespread deforestation, water pollution, and the destruction of arable land, particularly in rural mining areas. These activities undermine the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 15 (life on land) and SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), threatening long-term environmental sustainability in Ghana. The study offers a unique perspective on the intersection of illegal mining and sustainable development, drawing from both field observations and existing literature providing a comprehensive and multi-dimensional analysis of galamsey. Through qualitative research methods, including interviews with local communities, environmental agencies, and government officials, the paper offers a comprehensive view of the causes and consequences of ‘galamsey’. Analysis of field data gathered revealed that overwhelmingly, the role of weak governance, corruption, and socio-economic factors are catalyst for the devastating ‘galamsey’ menace. This paper contributes original insights into the intersection of illegal mining and sustainable development in Ghana but also addresses its social and economic causes. Furthermore, the study’s multi-dimensional approach-linking environmental damage to broader socio-political challenges provides a holistic understanding of the crisis. In response to the challenges, the paper offers practical perspectives that align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), making it relevant for policymakers, environmental advocates, and international development organizations. These including strengthening the enforcement of existing mining laws and environmental protection regulations, promoting alternative livelihood programs, such as sustainable agriculture, formalizing artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) through simplified licensing processes and providing miners with access to cleaner technologies that reduce environmental harm and raising public awareness about the long-term environmental and health risks associated with galamsey.



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The paper is particularly valuable to policymakers, environmental activists, and development practitioners seeking to align Ghana's mining sector with the goals of sustainable development and environmental conservation.

Keywords: Economic, environment, galamsey, gold, sustainable development, water bodies