

Report on The Roundtable to Promote the Role of Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining in Ghana

Date: 21 May 2018

Venue: Royal Amonoo Inn, Dunkwa

Introduction

Third World Network – Africa (TWN-Africa) on the 21st of May 2018 organized a roundtable discussion to discuss the optimal role of Ghana’s artisanal and small-scale (ASM) gold sector and existing policies regulating the ASM gold sector in Ghana with the view of contributing to on-going reforms of Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM) in Ghana. The roundtable, the first in the series of 3 ASM gold, was supported by STAR – Ghana which is supporting a range of activities being implemented by the TWN-Africa in the ASM sector. Approximately 40 artisanal and small scale miners from Obuasi, Kumasi, Dunkwa, and surrounding areas attended the first roundtable.

In her introductory remarks, Third World Network-Africa’s Pauline Vande-Pallen welcomed participants and after that gave the rationale for the roundtables. Giving the rationale behind the roundtable, Ms Vande-Pallen pointed out that it became necessary given the confusion created by government’s ban on small scale mining in general due to the activities of ‘illegal’ small scale miners known locally as ‘galamsey’ and the confusion it has created with people not able to differentiate



between ‘galamsey’ and legal artisanal small scale miners with licenced concessions. Tied to this confusion is the attempt to ‘downplay’ the contribution of artisanal and small scale miners to Ghana’s economy through employment and income generation, among others. The media campaign against galamsey supported by ‘Operation Vanguard’ has more or less succeeded in painting the ASM sector with a blanket ‘galamsey’/illegal mining brush that is increasingly becoming difficult to undo. The Dunkwa event is therefore, the first in a three-part series undertaken by TWN-Africa with

support from STAR-Ghana to as it were, clear the air, as well as bring forth the contributions of the ASM gold sector to Ghana’s economy and also the challenges of the sector especially with regards to the ban on ASM and the activities of ‘Operation Vanguard’. The other two events would be held in Akwatia and Bolgatanga. An earlier one on ASM salt sector was held in Sogakope. These roundtables will culminate in two national ASM forums on gold and salt. Participants were advised to be frank in the discussions so that a true picture of the ASM sector would be presented to help mitigate the ‘confusion’ in the minds of the general populace about ‘galamsey’ and legal ASM whilst advocating for the lift of the ban on ASM gold. Invariably, the almost lop-sided negative view of the ASM sector based

on the destruction of the environment by galamsey operators needs to be set against the positive impact of licensed ASM operators.

Presentation One

The first presentation by Alhassan Atta-Quayson on the, 'The importance of Ghana's artisanal and small-scale gold mining sector' made the point that ASM plays an important role in the economy of not just Ghana where an estimated 1m people are directly involved in the sector and before the ban contributed approximately 30% of gold production. Globally he stated some 20m are in the ASM sector in 50 countries. In addition, unlike multinational large-scale mining companies whose earnings are repatriated, ASM operators rather plough back their foreign earnings into the country. ASM being a mostly, rural-based enterprise helps to support rural livelihoods, development of entrepreneurship (skills), produces raw material for use by the local jewelry industry as goldsmiths by their gold from the ASM sector. Ultimately, ASM is a means of poverty reduction which has been recognized by government itself as evidenced in the MMIP programme. Given this important role that ASM plays in the socio-economic development of the country, government cannot discount the views of ASM practitioners as an input to government policy on the sector. It is critical for the government to have a relook at the ban on ASM gold sector as it not only contradicts its own recognition of ASM's contribution to the economy but also affects the livelihoods of millions.

Discussion

Remarks by ASM practitioners, indicated that licensing procedures were not only cumbersome but still long and for a sector that offers more employment than the large-scale sector it is worrying. ASM over six years until the ban has contributed some 3 million pounds of gold to the country's total production, raking in close to US\$9million. Additionally, apart from ASM helping in poverty reduction, the sector's linkages with other sectors has made the macro economy stable. Banning ASM and supporting it with 'Operation Vanguard is more like the proverbial throwing the baby away with the dirty water, licensed miners are being punished because of illegal galamsey operators who may have caused damage to the environment. It is obvious that the difference between legal ASM operators and galamsey is not clear to policy makers and government otherwise the clampdown should have been against galamsey not all ASM operations. It is true the ASM sector has challenges, especially, operating under risky situations which often lead to fatal accidents and these should rather be the focus of the state to help ASM operators acquire skills, healthy and less risky working conditions instead of a total ban on their operations.

Presentation Two

The Minerals Commission, represented by the Clemence Adzormahe, the District Mining Officer, took the participants through the policy and regulatory framework and a brief history of the ASM sector.

He advised ASM operators on the need to know the mining laws and LIs governing the ASM sector so as to be abreast with them especially on the issues of penalties, compensation, resettlement, health and safety. He explained that illegal mining is 'galamsey' and not licensed ASM granted by the minister for lands and natural resource. Furthermore, ASM is restricted to nationals of Ghana only, and licensees should be above 18 years and the size of concession is limited to 25 acres. ASM operators are to carry out their work in a sustainable manner with sanctions and penalties for abuse.

Monitoring the activities of ASM operators has been difficult due to inadequate staffing of district mining offices as well as fewer district offices hence the are plans afoot to create more district mining offices. Another challenge is employment in the ASM sector is mostly informal and therefore compliance with regulations is problematic. Interference from influential figures, chiefs, politicians among others make the enforcement of laws/regulations problematic as the law is not allowed to work. In the face of all these, such stakeholder engagements as this are critical as they would lead to cooperation and coordination which are badly needed. Public education with complementary media education is necessary for awareness creation that has to be continuous and sustainable. It is also essential that ASM operators share knowledge especially best practice from one other.

Presentation Three

Given the regional and continental dimensions, Alhassan Ata-Quayson, emphasized the importance that both ECOWAS and the African Union attach to ASM and therefore the rationale for policy documents both bodies have come up with to help promote the sector. For ECOWAS, its Minerals Development Policy speaks to the issue whereas the African Union's African Mining Vision is the answer to the promotion of ASM on the continent. Ghana is signatory to both protocols and is therefore bound to not only protect the sector, but also promote it by helping the ASM operators financially, technically etc as it is a viable socio-economic sector that helps in poverty reduction in the rural areas.

Presentation Four

On the challenges of ASM and the way forward, Mr. Emmanuel Azamati and Festus Kusi, speaking on behalf of the Small Scale Mining Association noted political interference as hindrances to their work as both parties, the NPP and NDC, always come up with new approaches when they come to power. Traditional authorities also pose a major challenge as being the custodians of the land they are often interfering with the work of the ASM operators. Another pressing issue is the takeover of concessions of the legal ASM owners by 'galamsey' operators which gets little or no attention from the security when reported to them. Inadequate land/concessions is one other major challenge facing the ASM sector as most concessions have been given out to large scale operators and what is left may not be viable having not been prospected even as ASM operators are not allowed to prospect. Other challenges, according to the ASM operators are lack of initial capital and credit generally, with the banks and government not ready to help, and inadequate technical know-how. The manufacture of implements by locals is another area that will help deal with the linkages and diversification necessary to propel the ASM sector and the local economy. The non-consultation of ASM operators by policy makers has resulted in incoherent policies and a very challenging licensing regime. A typical example is the various licensing agencies operate different time lines, the Minerals Commission gives you a 5-year license, the Water Commission and the EPA 3 years meanwhile by the time one is through with the different agencies some of the operating licenses will have expired. Another worrisome situation is research from institutions like University of Mines and Technology (UMaT) which seek to provide some solutions to the challenges have been left to gather dust. Environmental issues, water pollution and land degradation, real challenges for which according to the government it has banned small scale mining, are basically the result of weak monitoring institutions who apart from inadequate logistics and staff also face interference in their work. More than a year and a half on after the ban the government does not seem to have any plan in place as it keeps moving from one date to the other as

far as lifting the ban is concerned. The impact of the ban on the ASM sector and its operators is grave as with over a year of the ban and no work done, operators who have loans to pay or service are in dire straits. Unfortunately, even if the ban is lifted it may take some time for work to re-start as most have either lost their capital, have debts to pay or are bankrupt as maintenance of site and equipment have proven very expensive. The reality is that Ghanaians (whose preserve is small scale mining) have been put out of business y the ban and the only solution when the ban is lifted is for the government to go by the Zimbabwe example where there is equipment hire through government support.



General Discussion

Issues raised included the following:

1. Government has not been forthright with the ‘professional development’ of small scale miners at UMaT as all kinds of people, who are not even miners (likely party foot-soldiers) are being sent for training instead of ASM operators. The question was who has the mandate to select the trainees - district assemblies, politicians or the ASM associations?
2. African mining is rather benefiting foreigners whilst Africans gain very little and this has to change.
3. The Ghana National Association of Small Scale Miners, GNASSM must be more proactive, engage the government and not wait to be invited by government. It must also strengthen its front and not allow politicians to infiltrate its ranks.
4. Whilst the challenges facing the ASM sector exist there are plans to implement a medium scale mining sector policy. Does it mean a total disregard for ASM and what does this mean for its future?
5. The ban itself is meaningless because it is supposed to be on ‘galamsey’ an illegal activity which needs no ban in the first place but it is rather on all legal small scale mining while galamsey people are still working.
6. Operation Vanguard is not working and not likely to work as just like previous Joint Military cum police task forces operations that were not well implemented did not work. Starting from Operation Dagnet ’79 which did not work resulting in the legalization of ASM in ’89, further

operations against galamsey have failed. Despite ‘Operation Vanguard’ the water bodies remain polluted, even forest reserves have now been given out to Chinese to mine whilst Ghanaians are banned from engaging in ASM.

7. The ban is a like political ‘football’ which would be relaxed towards elections.
8. Where is Ghana with its Country Mining Vision as envisaged by the African Mining Vision? Won’t this have solved the challenges with ASM if taken seriously?
9. The MMIP is not the solution to galamsey and will kill the ASM sector. Ghana should learn from the Australian experience which rather boosted ASM.
10. ‘Operation Vanguard’ has rather brought more foreigners into the ASM, which is illegal as ASM is solely reserved for Ghanaians.
11. The Media campaign against ASM is so strong so ASM operatives should do same not ‘small campaigns’ like this. There is need to rack up the issues, upscale their own ‘Campaign’ by re-strategizing and eventually the ‘truth’ will come out.
12. Time has also come for ASM operators to partner with CSOs for the fight. .
13. ASM itself needs to be ‘up and doing’ by ‘show casing’ of their contribution to the national economy.
14. There is the need to get faith-based groups involved in the campaign to lift the ban
15. It will also help the cause if they could ‘name and shame’ the politicians involved in ‘galamsey’.
16. Selection of some media houses for use in the campaign to lift the ban will be critical.
17. The difference between galamsey and ASM should be made clear as most people including the media campaign group against galamsey do not know the difference between the legal ASM operators and galamsey.
18. It should also be noted that there is politics at play as some see the ban as an attempt to cripple the NDC financially as most ASM operators are perceived to be NDC. Secondly, it is believed that to become the major players in the sector, the NPP is helping its supporters to have access to concessions even as the ban has not been lifted.
19. One of the greatest worries is whether the government will pay back the lost revenue and give back the lost years of the licence.
20. The impact of the ban has left destruction all over as thousands have lost their livelihood and the time to lift the ban is now not tomorrow.
21. GNASSM has to meet urgently to sort our differences within its ranks especially partisan political differences as all have been affected by the ban and it is time to disregard politicians and protect livelihoods as it is not politicians or their parties that put food on the tables of ASM operators. Livelihood and employment issues know no political colours.
22. Small scale miners need to be familiar with policy and Regulation on mining. The Association is called on the further educate its members on policies.

Conclusion

The meeting ended with all participants resolving to work together to further discuss the issues. TWN Africa thanked the participants for being at the meeting and frankly sharing their views and insight. Pauline told the participants that the issues would help support preparations towards the nation roundtable on ASM.

Following the roundtable there was a radio discussion on Radio Visa (88.5) which serves Dunkwa and surrounding areas.. Alhassan Atta Quayson and Elliot Larne (GNASSM) participated in the discussion which focused on ASM mining and the impact of the ban on small scale mining.