

Report on the Roundtable to promote the role of Artisanal and Small-Scale Gold Mining in Ghana

Date: 23 May 2018

Venue: Beauty of Nature Ecotourism Lodge, Adankrono-Kade

Sponsored by STAR-Ghana



Introduction

Third World Network – Africa (TWN-Africa) on the 23rd 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 second 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. Close to 50 participants came from Anyinam, Boadua, Oda, Akwatia, Kade, Kusi, Assin Fosu, representing the Eastern Region Miners’ Association, Ghana Diamond Winners Association, GNASSM (Ghana National Association of Small Scale Miners), and Concerned Small Scale Miners. Representatives of the EPA and the media were also at the meeting.

Despite attempts to engage with the District Mining Officer of the Minerals Commission and the representatives of the District Assembly, they were not present at the meeting

The programme began with self-introductions, and a welcome address and rationale of the programme presented Pauline Vande Pallen and was chaired by Alhaji Baba. The programme aimed at placing the spotlight on the ASM sector and its role in Ghana’s economy. It was also to look at the issues affecting ASM operators across country, and present their concerns about the year-long, indefinite ban on ASM, its impacts on their communities, and explore how to resolve the issues towards calling for the lifting the ban. It is also aimed at presenting the complex issues associated with the ASM sector to the public, who do not seem to understand the issues. In doing this, the ASM sector, who unlike the galamsey (illegal small-scale miners) operate under license from state agencies like the Minerals Commission, the EPA etc. will have succeeded in letting the public know that there is a difference between licensed ASM operators and galamsey people.

Presentation One

In New Adankrono near Kade, just like in Dunkwa, Alhassan Quayson, set the discussion on course with a presentation on the importance of the ASM sector in the global, regional, national and local economies. In Ghana, it is believed that the ASM sector contributes 30 percent of total gold production. All major policy documents on mining, from the African Mining Vision (AMV), the ECOWAS Minerals Development Policy (EMDP) and the MMIP all endorse ASM as a critical game-changer in poverty reduction and all call for its promotion. If ASM plays such a critical role in the economy of the country, why ban it? The negative effect of the ban is immeasurable as a visit to the mining areas would reveal a shutdown of most businesses linked to the ASM sector. The hotel industry, the local food industry and employment generated because of all these activities etc. have suffered huge setbacks. Other countries across the world and in Africa, like Ethiopia, Zimbabwe have learnt to introduce measures that allow for the ASM sector to flourish alongside large scale mining operations so why not Ghana. For a sector which is reported to employ hundreds of thousands of people much more than all the large-scale companies combined it makes more sense to put measures in place to ensure sustainable operations that do not harm the ecology too much rather than a complete ban on the sector. He argued that the ban is not the way to go so a quick re-look and the lift of the ban will be in the right direction. The AMV, the EMDP, and the MMIP could not be wrong in the call for a promotion rather a ban on the sector.

Presentation Two

Mr. Samuel Abanga of the EPA made a power point presentation and gave a brief account of the EPA's work as far as ASM gold was concerned. He called on ASM operators to abide by the rules and regulations for sustainable mining. He explained the various EPA processes like EIAs and said they were in place to ensure good environmental practice by all to protect the ecology and mankind. He therefore asked for collaboration between ASM operators and the EPA.

Presentation Three

Mr. Joe Danso, secretary of the Eastern Region branch of GNASSM, in his intervention gave a rundown of the membership and their numbers. There are 1,200 ASM concessions in the Eastern Region which are all under one mining district and officer at Akim Oda. Given the numbers of both concessions and the thousands of workers one district mining officer with worse still limited logistics cannot effectively cope with the monitoring and supervisory role that the mining office is expected to provide. Attempts by GNASSM itself to help in its operations has resulted in an MoU with the University of Mines and Technology for the training of its members on sustainable mining, health and safety work environment. Another member of the branch,

Michael Quarshie (Eastern Region Miners' Association), recounted the numerous challenges confronting the ASM sector. These include licensing, access to land, financial constraints, security of site among others. Critical also is the fact that under the mining law, ASM operators are not allowed to prospect unlike the large-scale miners who invest based on proven mineral find, hence ASM is riskier as one cannot be sure of returns from the venture.

General Discussion

During an open session, it became clear that some members of GNASSM, were not happy with the 'slow' process or near lethargic approach by the national executive in taking the necessary steps to make government lift the ban on small scale mining. They did not appreciate attempts by the executives to explain away the steps they were taking to ensure the ban was lifted soon. In connection with this there were calls for a scaled up and coordinated effort across the various mining areas and districts to advocate for the ban to be lifted. Demonstrations, press conferences and a media campaigns were suggested as a means of 'impressing' upon government to lift the ban as soon as possible.

Below are some general comments from the forum:

1. It is very important to consult us (miners) for our views on issues and this hasn't been done by our leadership (GNASSM) in making decisions hence our current problem, inability to influence the lifting of the ban.
2. Operation Vanguard is just a waste of the nation's resources, the water bodies are still polluted, and we are in the house not working. I think we miners can help the government deal with illegal mining issue (galamsey) since we know what the consequence of their activities could have on our jobs and the environment at large, so the government should lift the ban.
3. I wonder why the EPA, Mines Inspectorate and the Minerals Commission being our regulators are not putting in any efforts to help us in getting the ban lifted. They should at least mention the good practices of we the legal miners.
4. Some miners have been working seriously since the ban. Operation Vanguard is taking huge sums of money from miners to allow them work. Those of us who are law abiding and/or cannot afford these huge sums are the ones not working.
5. DCEs and Traditional Authorities must be educated on the negative effects of illegal mining and the regulations forbidding it. Typical is mining in the buffer zones. Anyone who then fails to abide by the regulations should be punished to serve as a deterrent.
6. Government should specify royalties to pay to traditional authorities directly by miners to avoid the long chain royalties pass through before getting to the chiefs. This would help to curb double leasing of lands by chiefs since there would be royalty arrears.
7. We still need some technical aid from government in our hard rock mines, for the alluvial have mastered it. So perhaps TWN can push this for us to avoid the hard rock mines being taken from us.
8. We used to have officers from the minerals commission to see to our various concerns, now they've all been moved to Accra with no officers to monitor and attend to our concerns.
9. The EPA, Mines Inspectorate and the Minerals Commission have put us in this mess because of the irresponsibility to the execution of their duties. Reports of illegal activities to them often resulted in nothing.
10. Our GNASSM task force against illegal mining even did far better than Operation Vanguard. Our rivers continue to be polluted and yet we are deprived of our source of income.
11. Government decided to offer training to Small Scale miners. But slots for the trainings were put in the hands of DCEs who ended up selecting party members some who weren't miners to attend the training.

12. The Mincom/EPA officers often arrest people working in buffer zones/illegal areas only find out later that they've been released by a Minister or another superior power.
13. The government should allow legal miners to work and task us with timelines to sanitize the systems by reporting and exposing illegal miners.
14. I think the national executives (GNASSM) are stifling our efforts to go all out on a demonstration against the ban on legal small-scale mining. We have been deprived of our source of livelihood without any other option/plan for us.
15. I think the rumored vetting process we are to undergo is a planned move by government to give licenses to party sympathizers.
16. The regulators especially Mincom are very understaffed and lack logistics for effective monitoring.
17. People from all walks of life were being affected by the ban.

In response to a number of the comments on the role of GNASSM, executives noted the following:

18. GNASSM as an association in conformance with the MMIP has planned to;
 1. Register all excavators.
 2. Undertake reclamation activities.
 3. Unite the association.
 4. Put an association monitoring team in place.
 5. Education/sensitization programs for miners, community members and the public.
 6. Encourage the setting up of a fixed rate (royalties)for chiefs to be paid by concession owners to avoid royalty arrears.
 7. Miners should be part of the DMCs by law.
 8. Encourage professionalism in the ASM sector. For instance, every 5 concessions should have a Geologist.
 9. Use the media to propagate the benefits of ASM to the country.
 10. Seek support from CSOs and NGOS like TWN.
 11. Educate association members on the mining policies and regulations.



Conclusion

The meeting ended with Pauline Vande-Pallen on behalf of TWN Africa and the partners organizing the roundtables, thanked the participants for actively participating in the meeting and sharing their views on ASM. She reiterated that the roundtable was to collate views that would feed into the National discussion on ASM to be organized as part of the project. Participants were also reminded that the most powerful voice on the issues would come from the ASM members themselves and that we should also be focused on working together.