

**BOOK REVIEW**

**EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES, THE STATE AND HOST COMMUNITIES: A STUDY OF GOLD MINING INDUSTRY IN GHANA**

*Book by: Agbesinyale, P., Tenkorang, E. Y., Dankwah, M (2012)  
Cape Coast: Marcel Hughes, 280 pages*

**M. Traoré**

*Email: mtraore@ucc.edu.gh*

**ABSTRACT**

*The reader cannot fail to acknowledge that a book of this content and caliber was long overdue. The authors touch upon a delicate topic which is of vital importance and they go about that task with striking devotion, appropriate methodology and a befitting discourse. They set the tone by acknowledging the tremendous contribution of some institutions and individuals that contributed to make their work possible and less cumbersome to some extent and that is spread on the pages from the 'Acknowledgement to the Table of Contents'. The following institutions are mentioned, to be more specific: Oxfam America and its West Africa Regional Office (WARO), the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN), Ghanaian communities and key individuals and also organizations located in Ghana, like WACAM and ISODEC. The preface of the book poses clearly that West Africa and the mining activity have been bed-fellows for centuries and adds that a new dimension was added to that practice in the 1990s, when 'a gold rush on an industrial scale began'(p.3). The first pages of the work also point out that gold mining is present in two other countries close to Ghana (Mali and Burkina Faso), although the focus of the book is the case of Ghana.*

The abstract of the work under study lays bare a sad reality which is subsequently engaged in detail: the vast gold reserve of Ghana does not benefit Ghanaians but rather enriches mining companies and that disheartening remark is captured in these lines:

According to the Ghana Chamber of Mines, increased mineral production and rising exports since the 1990s had placed the mining industry

as the single largest foreign exchange earner for Ghana with gold as the largest contributor. On the flip side however, investment incentives and tax waivers for foreign mining companies amount to millions of dollars in potential revenue lost to Ghana, in addition to serious environmental, economic, social and health problems that mining communities do continually have to grapple with (p8).

The work shows that Ghana falls among the countries known as “mineral rich and developing” and it relies on history to unearth some vital information like the gold rush referred to as the “Jungle Booms” between the periods of 1892 and 1938, after British investors commercialized and ‘modernized’ the mines in a colony whose name (Gold Coast) was synonymous with the mineral involved here. An issue that the authors ponder over and that this writer finds to be very important is the World Bank/IMF inspired Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) that was--sadly enough--chosen by the Ghanaian authorities and compelled the mining sector (as several other socio-economic sectors) to re-adjust and comply to the dictates of the global (mainly Western in reality) economic dynamics. A close reading leads us to the conclusion that the reasons behind the “parasitic” presence of SAPs in the Ghanaian mining sector were invented and unfounded. A set of rationales were drawn and catalogued as the following, to mention just the main ones: “lack of foreign exchange to maintain and rehabilitate the mines; overdependence on old and obsolete technology and machinery; lack of capital investment for exploration and mine development” (p20).

One of the most instructive dimensions of this book lies in the geographic and geological information it provides on gold and mineral resources in Ghana; the Birimian soils, which includes areas like Obuasi, Prestea, Bibiani, Bondae and Brummase yield the bulk of the gold of Ghana. The gold production in Ghana is dissected, the actual and existing gold stocks are thoroughly and clearly listed, the gold production in Ghana and the relevant years are captured; the two main companies involved in gold mining in the country are mentioned, and the specific nature of each of them is pointed out: AngloGold Ashanti, which is involved in both underground and surface mining and Newmont which is so far limited to “open pit mining with a possibility of underground mining in the future”(p.30). While the book stresses the tireless and praiseworthy job that Oxfam and its

allies are involved in, in order to protect the rights and “properties” of the local populations who are rather victims of the gold mining that takes place in their area, it provides a rich review of literature where the legal ramifications of the phenomenon under study are exposed. The institutional and legislative framework involved is provided; specific laws are also provided in that respect and one can for instance mention Article 257, clause 6 of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, and the Mineral and Mining Act, 2006 section one which states the following:

*“Every mineral in its natural state in, under or upon any land in Ghana, rivers, streams, water courses throughout Ghana, the exclusive economic zone and any area covered by the territorial sea or continental shelf is the property of the Republic of Ghana and shall be vested in the President on behalf of, and in trust for the people of Ghana.”(p.51)*

The reader’s attention is caught in this book by the fact that the incongruous malfunctioning or inefficiency of the various sectors which constitute the environmental institutional framework of Ghana has led to a situation where the relations between mining companies and host communities are adversarial. The book clearly poses that the Ministry of Lands, Forestry and Mines (now Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources) is responsible for implementing mining policy in Ghana and each of these three sectors is represented nationwide by commissions, departments and agencies: the Mineral subsector, represented by the Minerals Commission (MINCOM) is entrusted with the management and implementation of the mining laws, regulation and policy; the Lands Commission “maintains a registry of exploration licenses and mining leases and participates in the examination of new license applications”(p.56) and the Forestry Commission manages the country’s forest. The lack of appropriate equipment and the absence of “cross-sectorial linkages” among these departments makes it impossible for them to discharge their

task efficiently and protect the forests as well as ensure the well-being and security of the communities, especially the ones located in mining areas. The overall result of this situation is the huge price that host communities have to pay in the mining areas: a power relation emerges among the communities, mining companies and the government, and local communities find themselves with only one thing in hand, which is the loss of land and livelihood. The authors present that miserable and unjust tableau in the following words, reinforcing their observation with evidence from previous research:

“monetary compensation has not been adequate to address concerns of mining communities (Sweeting and Clark, 2000)” and the corollary of this failure is perfectly summarized in a situation where “mining activities have led to the alienation of local communities from both their settlements and their source of livelihood.”(p.60)The authors display the magnitude of this alienation in Aubynn’s terms: procedural exclusions, which are substantive alienations (Aubynn, 2004). The woes of the communities stem from the fact that government forcefully acquires land for mining activities and the original landowners have no say in the land use and the manner in which the mining activities are carried out. They silently and powerlessly watch their land being snatched away from them and their environment being degraded, pollution reaching peak levels and their lives being more and more jeopardized every other day.

A distinctive feature of this book is the light that it sheds on the numerous cases of human rights abuses perpetrated by the mining companies on their host communities and small scale miners, also referred to as “galamsey operators”. In order to buttress the veracity of this bellicose relationship, the authors rely on the reports and observations emanating from the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice, CHRAJ. In that respect, CHRAJ clearly contends that since the commencement of the “gold boom” in Ghana, ram-

tant cases of violation of human rights have been recorded among the people living in the mining areas, with particular emphasis on the gold mining communities. The violations of human rights and degradation of the environment are the bone of contention between the host communities and gold mining companies and they have been decried by community leaders and Civil Society Organizations. The authors capture that non-symbiotic rapport in these words:

According to CHRAJ (2008), since the onset of the recent gold boom in Ghana some two and a half decades ago, there have been increasing reports of violations of human rights of people living in mining communities--particularly in gold mining communities. Community leaders in mining areas and civil society campaign groups as well as local and even international mine watch groups claim large scale surface mining undertaken by large multinational companies are responsible for widespread social and environmental degradation and demand urgent action and compensation (p.77).

They further expatiate on the injustice and cruelty meted out to the host communities by gold mining companies and their security contractors, with minute details that unravel the appalling nature of such ferocious profit-mindedness, tragically laced with inhuman brutality:

Allegations of violations of the rights and fundamental freedoms of people living in mining communities include: violent, illegal arrest and detention of community members, torture of persons illegally arrested and detained. Others include assault and battery (sometimes involving the use of firearms and other deadly weapons) of the youth accused of trespassing on mine property and illegal mining and interference (often violent, involving the use of firearms) against citizens engaged in public protests against activities of mining companies (p.77).

The ray of hope comes from the proactive role that the CHRAJ played by putting in place a Commission in 2006, in order to investigate and determine the state of rights and fundamental freedoms of people living in all mining communities in Ghana.

This book also points out an important issue in mining activities: the role of NGOs and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). These two entities are stakeholders that enable community participation in matters related to the mining industry and become the mouthpiece of the mining communities who are most of the time totally excluded from all decisions and activities related to mining in their communities. They sensitize the communities on the issues at stake and also train some selected residents to represent their communities. In a nutshell, the authors demonstrate that NGOs, CSOs and communities insist on their inclusion in decision making and the choice of the specific “technical and technological” activities that are employed by the mining companies. In this case, participation is defined in the following terms: “participation goes beyond mere information which the mining companies do in a typical top-down fashion. Rather, participation should involve consultations, co-decision making and co-determination among others.” (p.162)

The authors also unveil the link between the NGOs, CSOs and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process: the first two entities take part in public forums and patiently and clearly explain important issues to the communities. The NGOs/CSOs can be seen as advocates that insist on having access to reliable information that can enable them to inform citizens about the possible impacts of mining on their communities. Two NGOs that are complimented and held in high esteem in the book are the Third World Network and the Wassa Association of Communities Affected by Mining (WACAM) “who have called for a cost-benefit analysis of Ghana’s mining industry to determine the way forward” (p.167), despite the

general reluctance of mining companies to produce the information necessary for such a task.

Concerning the environment and the protection of the ecosystem, the book touches upon a theme, which is the core of any environmental activity: the Environmental Impact Assessment process and all the agencies involved or related to it in one way or the other. The authors clearly write that companies must go through an Environmental Impact Assessment process which is required by law, as part of the licensing process of the mining sector in Ghana. The book expatiates on the EIA process in the following lines by stating what follows the licensing stage:

This process requires that the company reviews all their activities and state the environmental and social impacts of all their activities. They are then to develop an Environmental Action plan to deal with all the stated impacts. These documents are reviewed by the Environmental Protection Agency and recommendations for licensing made to the sector minister. (p.61)

The book goes further to list and explain the other stages that are added to the EIA in these terms:

In addition to the EIA process, the Forestry Commission also has to endorse the application for the mining activity noting that it will not lead to damage to any forest reserve. After the company has received approval to mine, the EPA and the Inspectorate Division are required to ensure that the mining operations are consistent with environmental and other mining and health related requirements (Act 490;Act 703).(p.61)

The unpleasant picture that faces us is that a noble and useful instrument like the EIA and its requirements has not “been made to work” in Ghana, when one looks at the tragedies that have visited the environment in Ghana recently. There have been eight major accidental cyanide spillages caused by mining companies and ma-

major water bodies were affected. Mining companies are moving into forest reserves (like the Subri River Forest Reserve) which is a globally significant biodiversity area and a water shed for major rivers such as the Bonsa and Pra. The authors reveal that other forest reserves might be violated sooner than later and several examples are mentioned: the Supuma Shelterbelt, Opon Mansi, Tano Suraw, Cape Three Points' Reserve, etc.

The importance of the EIA transpires through examples like the results of the one undertaken by Haskoning: major diseases like the following: malaria, upper respiratory tract infection, diarrhea and skin diseases (p.62). The book provides suggestions and solutions that can help mitigate the "dilemma" that the mining industry has visited upon Ghana by stressing key aspects like governance and its responsibility, but the writer finds the most striking statement in the book to be couched in these terms "the gold-poverty paradox" of Ghana (p.194). The findings and recommendations made by the authors towards the end of the work are incisive and of tremendous importance: community participation, eradication of human right abuse, eradication of the gender-related violence (especially the one affecting women) in this mining process, both the "galamsey"(local artisanal gold mining) and industrial deep mining. This book is a "must read" which meticulously engages a phenomenon that represents a real bane for Ghana: surface mining, industrial deep mining and the "galamsey", and the national structures put in place by the country to deal with the issue. It is a seminal and ground-breaking research which directly and boldly lays the blame where it exists. The sine qua non to the survival of humanity in general and Ghana in particular is in this book. It can serve as a guide or eye-opener to many countries in the sub-region and other continents where mining is being conducted. The peroration of the book elucidates alternatives that can help eradicate the cancerous nature that gold mining has ultimately metamorphosed into, thus overtly plunging the country and its

citizens into an Augean Stable. The message which the careful reader gets is a call to arms that helps prevent and ward off all environment-related tragedies, unjust politico-economic transactions and the importance of the habit of record keeping, planning and the adherence to the fundamental rules, decisions, measures and actions that make a milieu secure for human habitation.

This book also demonstrates that gold mining is not the only activity that can antagonize or jeopardize human existence. Although implicitly stated, it shows that putting the environment at the core of any daily activity and policy nullifies calamities of all sorts: careless implantation of facilities like factories, gas stations, sports stadia, etc. Had we read this book carefully and taken the appropriate action by using the power that lies in our hands as conscientious citizens in whom no iota of docility or laissez-faire attitude exists, we would have perceived the gigantic and prophetic feature that lies beneath these carefully written lines which impeccably convey the result of good multidisciplinary research: gold mining is a double edged sword, and furthermore, incidents caused by the neglect of environmental management practices can be wiped away or reduced. The June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2015 calamity in Accra, Ghana is one of those tragedies that remind us of one and only one thing: the Environment first.

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113 *Traoré*

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