

## Media Brief

### World Rivers Day 2022

#### *Waterways in our communities*

World Rivers Day is an important day that highlights the many values of our rivers, strives to increase public awareness, and encourages the improved stewardship of all rivers around the world. This year's World Rivers Day focuses on **'Waterways in our communities'** with the subtopic **'a river can make the difference'** which highlights the incredible natural, cultural and recreational values of our rivers and streams in our communities. It also underlines the importance of sustainable management of our river environment in reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly 2 (Zero hunger), 3 (Good health and well-being), 6 (Clean water and sanitation), 7 (Affordable and clean energy), 8 (Decent work and economic growth), 11 (Sustainable cities and communities 12 (Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns), 13 (Climate Action), 14 (Life below Water) and 15 (Life on Land).

#### **Current Threats to Ghana Rivers and Services They Provide**

The day calls for a national reflection on how we value and manage rivers and waterways in Ghana, now and the future. The constant severe degradation of Ghana's rivers reflects a pattern that has persisted especially in the recent decades. We highlight a few imperatives crucial to securing Ghana's water resources.

#### **Halt Galamsey**

When the destruction of rivers in Ghana is mentioned, 'Galamsey' to wit, illegal mining, is a major culprit. Galamsey has become the leading cause of destruction of river systems within the country. According to the Water Resources Commission, 60% of Ghana's water bodies are polluted with many in a critical condition. High levels of unmanaged hazardous chemical waste such as mercury have been released into our rivers. Forests regions which happen to be the water head of several rivers are also bearing the brunt of this—killing the river right from its source. These damages might possibly be irreversible and expensive with costs already estimated to be millions of dollars. Galamsey is an existential threat to Ghana's water security and must be addressed with all the urgency it deserves. #STOPGALAMSEYNOW

#### **Integrated Planning to ensure Intergenerational Equity**

Poor planning and land use has become synonymous with most major cities within the country, particularly with improper construction done along or on waterways, which obscures the flow of rivers, thus leading to persistent issues such as flooding. Increasing reclamation of wetlands and waterways for built residential estates and construction fuel filling stations should stay stop. Integrated planning and management must be prioritised towards the conservation of rivers and waterways, which will enable them to be utilised in a way that ensures the different needs and priorities of diverse user groups are met, as well as ensuring intergenerational equity is not overlooked.

#### **Protecting and Restoration of our rivers**

Restoring our severely degraded river ecosystems through activities such as river buffer protection through tree planting and the exclusion of waste and construction encroachment will increase their benefits to society and biodiversity. Restoration of river ecosystems needs careful, thoughtful and sustainable planning and patience with implementation. It is imperative that we transform our economies and societies by making such restorative actions inclusive, and fair connection woven with intergenerational equity in mind. The importance of such river ecosystems therefore cannot be underestimated and if we continue on the current path, there will be dire consequences for all of us and those yet unborn.

We therefore share a few proposals for consideration and action:

1. All galamsey activities in and near river bodies across the country should be halted with immediate effect. Mining near rivers does not offer any service. In particular, plans by Government to convert a critical watershed like Atewa Range Forest Reserve into a bauxite mine pit should be abandoned with immediate effect.
2. Banning of single use plastics and promotion of innovative greener packaging alternatives from industries with wider public education and support of recycling agencies
3. Government and state institutions must fully enforce all regulations on the preservation and management of Ghana's river environment.
4. There is a need for inclusive and incentive based collaborative engagement with communities neighbouring all river areas. Through shared responsibility, government and state agencies must commit and ensure a transparent share of the benefits accruing from sustainable river management go to local communities

Thank you.

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### For Further Information

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### Editor's note

In 2005, the United Nations launched the Water for Life Decade to help create a greater awareness of the need to better care for our water resources. Following this, the establishment of World Rivers Day was in response to a proposal initiated by internationally renowned river advocate, Mark Angelo. Celebrated on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of September every year, this day is commemorated in over 100 countries all over the world. Rivers in virtually every country face an array of threats, and only through our active involvement can we ensure their health in the years ahead