

## COMMUNIQUE

### **Towards Women Inclusive Safeguarding for Sustainable Environment and Mineral Governance**

#### **The Outcome of a Stakeholder Engagement held on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2024 at Akorabuokrom and AduAddae Hotel Bibiani in the Western North Region.**

In recent years, illegal mining activities in Ghana have been on the increase and have worsened environmental degradation and existing socioeconomic vulnerabilities. The impacts are manifested through widespread pollution of rivers, degradation of farmlands, and exposure of communities to hazardous mining chemicals and toxins. Women and children are disproportionately affected and bear the brunt of the socioeconomic fallouts.

Often, dialogue and interventions on addressing the impacts of mining in affected communities, especially in the agro-productive landscapes, have centred on tackling illegal miners and their financiers without restoration of the environment, building the resilience of communities and sustaining livelihoods. More so, the economic rather than the social costs of illegal mining find their way into policy discourse. However, the social costs of illegal mining are enormous, especially against women.

To broaden the scope and prioritize the concerns and needs of women and children in mineral governance in Ghana, SOCODEVI, A Rocha Ghana—Building Resilient and Active Communities in Extractive Landscape (BRACE) project funded by the European Union (EU) and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) Economic Policy Competence Centre organised a two-day forum on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of March, 2024 at Akorabuokrom and AduAddae Hotel Bibiani in the Western North Region to highlight the socio-economic effects of unregulated mining illegal mining on women in

agriculture-productive landscapes; discuss inclusive pathways to addressing illegal mining in Ghana for cocoa communities and to project women-led strategies for sustaining livelihoods in their communities amidst increased illegal mining.

### **Urgent Actions Needed**

The following constitute action points for addressing the effects of illegal mining (galamsey) on women living in affected areas:

- There is an urgent need for leadership re-orientation and investment in non-extractive job creation opportunities for women and the teeming youth.
- Forest reserves, rivers and streams as well as other protected areas provide critical safety-nets and support functions for communities. Mining sector policies and laws must declare these areas as 'No Go Zones' for mining operations.
- Water resources in mining landscapes are under siege and at risk of depletion and pollution. We therefore propose that Section 17 of Act 703 of the Mining Act, 2006 which grants water rights to mining companies be removed and replaced with provisions that will protect water bodies.
- In line with the signing and ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury (2013) Article (7), the state should repeal the use of mercury for mining operations in all relevant laws.
- To protect rivers and streams from pollution, siltation and discharges of harmful contaminants, the buffer zone policy must be given the compliance and enforcement obligation of law.
- The state should fully and urgently enforce existing protections for cocoa farms under the Economic Plant Protection Act, so women can adequately secure their farmlands against forceful takeover by individual operatives and mining companies without consent and approval.

### **To address the social impacts of both regulated and unregulated mining;**

- Laws that prohibit children under 18 from labouring on any mining site MUST be enacted.
- Policy and legal framework development must ensure inclusive participation of women at all levels - from the community to the national level - and respect human rights provisions on the right to free prior and informed consent both for access to benefits and in its sharing.
- Providing accessible healthcare services to address the health risks and issues associated with illegal mining activities.
- Offering training programs and support to enhance women's skills and create economic opportunities beyond mining, reducing their dependency on the mining sector.
- Promoting education and awareness programs that focus on women's rights, gender equality, and the impacts of illegal mining on their well-being.
- The prices of cocoa must be attractive to retain and increase the interest of the youth in Cocoa farming to discourage them from indulging in galamsey.
- Factories and Industries should be established to provide decent jobs to the youth.

### **Recognition on both regulated and unregulated mining;**

- There is a high rate of unemployment in most mining communities thus:
  - illegal mining becomes a means of livelihood for many households.
  - Women have taken up menial jobs to support their homes when the men go to the illegal mining sites.

- Some younger women also join the men on the mining sites to generate income at the peril of their lives.
- Some chiefs and traditional leaders fuel the galamsey menace by giving out lands to illegal miners.
- The failure to consult with women when negotiating a community's Free, Prior and Informed Consent to develop a mining project, access to land, and compensation. In some instances, consulting women may go against traditional decision-making structures.
- The payment of compensation to men "on behalf of" families and communities denies women access to and control over the financial benefits resulting from mining. This promotes women's economic dependence on men, disempowering them, skewing gender relations, or exacerbating existing inequalities. Additionally, women-headed households may not receive payments if they do not have a male representative.
- Loss of land and displacement can lead to loss of livelihoods and increased work burdens for women in providing for their families. Where women are traditionally responsible for meeting the subsistence needs of families and are no longer able to do so due to the loss of land, they are forced to become economically dependent on men. With the advent of illegal mining, the youth have abandoned farm work, affecting the ability for women farmers to produce on a larger scale which has implication on food security and government's revenue generation efforts.
- The surge in illegal mining threatens cocoa production as lands used for cocoa production are being forcefully taken over by illegal miners.

### **Concerns Raised by Women during the two-day Forum**

- The use of certain chemicals like mercury in illegal mining affects farm yields as clean water is inaccessible to irrigate farms.

- Most pregnant women are affected by the chemicals used for illegal mining. They are exposed to all manner of complications during childbirth, as well as malnutrition due to poor farm yields.
- Child delinquency has increased; school children have become truants. They drop out of school at the primary level because illegal mining has become attractive to them.
- Degraded lands become death traps for people in communities. Children fall into these pits and are never found.
- Women are at risk of Infertility due to exposure to toxic substances used for Illegal mining. Women are forced to take on more roles and responsibilities to support their families in the absence of men who are engaged in illegal mining activities.
- Due to the decline of traditional mechanisms of social control and the influx of a transient male workforce, social and health problems can become more prevalent in communities. These problems include;
  - increased alcohol use, domestic violence, sexual violence, sexually transmitted infections and HIV and AIDS, and prostitution.
  - Ghana EITI (2023) Technical report on the Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining |(ASM) sector (2023), documented the ASM sector as a breeding ground for gender-based violence and sexual exploitation of young women as incidents associated with the ASM operations.
  - Women, working under precarious conditions, often become targets of physical and sexual violence or are coerced into sexual encounters with males involved in the industry. These exploitative practices not only expose women to sexually transmitted illnesses but also contribute to the epidemic of adolescent pregnancies, further limiting their opportunities and well-being.
- Economic necessity sometimes drives some women with children to mining sites, which exposes such children to the same risks and hazards faced by adults in the sub-sector.

- Incidence of Child Labour effects a cycle of vulnerability and deprives children of education and a safer upbringing.
- Issues of food security- low yield because of the encroachment, and contamination.

## **Conclusion**

Participants at the International Women's Day 2024 forum unanimously recognised the intergenerational negative ramifications of illegal mining on women's livelihoods, other vulnerable groups, communities, and the environment. As a way forward, participants present called for a more concerted effort to create sustainable jobs and seek the well-being of women and the youth; for the political will to fight illegal mining; and for strong institutions to effectively regulate mining activities in Ghana.

## **For All follow-ups**

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**1. Omolara Aka Oyelakun Tay, Gender Specialist, SOCODEVI**

Tel : 0243520911/Email: [o.tay@socodevi.org](mailto:o.tay@socodevi.org)

**2. Eunice Asiedu, Programmes Coordinator, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Economic Policy Competence Centre**

Tel : 0540127204/Email: [Eunice.Asiedu@fes.de](mailto:Eunice.Asiedu@fes.de)

**3. Daryl Bosu, Deputy National Director, A Rocha Ghana**

Tel: 0202555727/Email: [daryl.bosu@arocha.org](mailto:daryl.bosu@arocha.org)