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China, Illegal Mining, and Security in Ghana

Introduction

China's pursuit of influence and resources through relations with Africa raises international concerns, with most critics postulating that China's aid to Africa increases Africa's debt burden, promotes economic mismanagement and disrespects human rights by some African governments. (i) Discussions on China are usually centered on their governmental activities a perpetuation of illegality and destruction of the livelihood of African communities by Chinese nationals. Illegal activities of some Chinese nationals have led to tensions and occasional clashes between Chinese and indigenes of affected communities as is the case of mining communities in Ghana. In Ghana, some Chinese nationals are engaged in illegal small scale mining activities popularly known in the local circles as "Galamsey". (ii) Security in 'Galamsey' areas remains fragile. (iii) The Chinese nationals are armed, have sophisticated mining equipment and enough resources to pursue their trade to the detriment of locals. (iv) Huge farmlands have been destroyed. (v) Previously clear running waters have been polluted from illegal mining by Chinese Nationals in Ghana's water bodies. (vi) Tensions are increasing in these areas as people continue to lose their livelihood with women and children being adversely affected. (vii) This research examines the extent to which Chinese relations with Ghana and the sub-region in general serve as a boost for its citizen to perpetuate illegality in Ghana. It studies the national and human security dimension of the illegal Chinese miners in Ghana and the effect on women and children in such mining communities.

Purpose of the study and Research Design

Essentially, the research finds answers to the following questions;

1. What is the state of bilateral relation between China and Ghana?
2. Is this relation a factor for the continuance of illicit activities of Chinese in Ghana's small scale mining industry?
3. What are the security implications of the activities of the illegal Chinese miners on communities in mining areas in Ghana and Ghana in general?
4. What are the effects of the activities of Chinese miners on women and children in mining communities in Ghana?

Qualitative methods are employed for this research work. Interviews were conducted with some residents including locals working in Chinese operated Galamsey fields in selected mining towns in the Western North Region of Ghana. Interviews with some local authority officials, security operatives and gender and security experts in Ghana were also conducted. The paper also draws on secondary information sources including articles and books.

Findings

The research findings suggest that China's relations with Ghana, especially the granting of loans and other financial aids to Ghana, emboldens Chinese nationals to travel to Ghana for their illicit mining activities. To protect this China – Ghana relations, Ghanaian authorities have been lax in prosecuting illicit Chinese miners to serve as a deterrent to others seeking to engage in Galamsey. Another factor accounting for the activities of the illegal miners is

the financial gains for both the Chinese miners and their Ghanaian counterparts involved in the trade.

Furtherance to the aforementioned findings, the research findings also suggest that the activities of the Chinese illegal miners impacts adversely on women and children in Galamsey areas particularly in terms of their human security. Proliferation of arms is on the increase in such areas as Chinese miners seek to protect themselves from armed robbers in the area. In some instances where protesting residents of Galamsey areas have clashed with Chinese illicit miners, these arms have been used on protesting community members including women. The Study also found that the volatile nature of Galamsey areas could create conducive conditions for harboring of criminal networks for mobilization purposes. Aggrieved young people who have their source of livelihood taken from them due to the activities of the Chinese members could easily fall prey to recruitment for extremism and terror attacks. The study also suggests that there are perpetuation of sexual abuses on women working in Galamsey areas. A number of deaths have been reported in Galamsey areas, resulting from caving in of mining pits, locals falling into pits and clashes between miners and protesting locals. Affected relatives of such fatal incidence who are usually wives and mothers of the deceased locals are left to fend for their families by themselves. The livelihood of residents in Galamsey areas has also been badly affected due to the destruction of farmlands and water bodies. Women and children have resorted to working under dangerous circumstances in illicit mines in order to survive. Crackdown by the government on the Chinese miners have also led to deportation or voluntary repatriation of some Chinese who fathered babies to Ghanaian mothers. Such mothers now bear the sole responsibility of catering for these children. Children from Chinese miners may also suffer psychological abuses from the ridicules from community members mostly because of their mixed race and perceived 'sins' of their mothers engaging in sexual relations with the Chinese.

Importance of the Research and Conclusion

This research project brings to the fore the rippling effects of relations between countries on their citizens including women and children, in this case, Ghanaians who are experiencing the adverse effect of China – Ghana relations, resulting from the involvement of Chinese nationals in the small scale mining sector of Ghana. The research concludes that given the adverse impact of the activities of Chinese in Ghana's mining areas as result of Ghana's relations with China, there is the need for Ghana together with its African counterparts to re-examine relations with China with the aim of achieving a win – win situation for both China and Africa, while protecting the rights of women and children on the continent.

Notes

ⁱ Robyn Dixon “China has spent billions in Africa, but some critics at home question why” Los Angeles Times, Sep 03, 2018 , <https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-china-africa-20180903-story.html>

ⁱⁱ Edward Burrows and Lucia Bird “Gold, Guns, and China: Ghana's fight to end Galamsey” Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 30 May 2017, <https://globalinitiative.net/gold-guns-and-china-ghanas-fight-to-end-galamsey/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Brigadier General Emmanuel Kotia “Illegal mining may prove breeding grounds for terror recruits - Security expert” Joy News, May 15,2019

<https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2019/May-15th/illegal-mining-may-prove-breeding-grounds-for-terror-recruits-security-expert.php>

^{iv} Gabriel Botchwey, Gordon Crawford, Nicholas Loubere, and Jixia Lu, 2018. South-South labour migration and the impact of the informal China-Ghana gold rush 2008–13. UNU-WIDER 2018

^v Peter Amewu “Gov't to provide jobs to illegal miners in massive land reclamation project” Joy News, April 24 2017. <https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2017/april-24th/govt-needs-gh20bn-to-repair-damaged-galamsey-lands.php>

^{vi} Afua Hirsch, “Influx of Chinese goldminers sparks tensions in Ghana”, The Guardian April, 23 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/apr/23/influx-chinese-goldminers-tensions-ghana>

^{vii} Afua Hirsch, “Influx of Chinese goldminers sparks tensions in Ghana”, The Guardian April, 23 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/apr/23/influx-chinese-goldminers-tensions-ghana>