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Research paper

Living with conflicts in Ghana's Prestea mining area: Is community engagement the answer?

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ABSTRACT

Large scale mines acknowledge that their continuous existence in indigenous communities is threatened without the cooperation and support of local people. In recent times, large-scale mines have attempted to secure Social License to Operate (SLO) and ensure sustainable development (SD) by reconciling business interests with local needs and aspirations. Accomplishing local cooperation and support without threatening business interest remains a top priority for the large-scale mines. Community engagement forms part of the broader Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy initiatives which are often promoted as a way of enhancing sustainable development. This paper examines the local perceptions of the design and application of Golden Star Resources' (GSR) community engagement program. This paper contends that this community engagement model has a positive impact on conflict management regardless of age, sex, education, marital status and occupation of participants. However, presently the model remains symbolic and has not yet attain the status of a real functional strategy since many of local grievances that result in clashes are unresolved. Furthermore, it is believed that GSR's community engagement program is not adequately developed, systematic or moulded to achieve the exact or intended community relation. This paper further contends that the dominant sources and causes of conflict in Prestea is land use conflicts and environmental impact issues.

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1. Introduction

In this article, a critical synthesis of the local perceptions of the design and application of the Golden Star Resources' (GSR) model of community engagement is provided. Prestea is an old mining town in the Western Region of the south-western part of Ghana. It is about 50 km north of the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. Prestea is the forty-sixth most populous town in Ghana with a population of 35,760 people (GSS, 2012, pp. 1–103). A railway line connects Prestea to Tarkwa and beyond to the coastal city of Sekondi-Takoradi. The Prestea mines in Ghana have produced about nine million ounces of gold and this is the second highest level of production of any mine in Ghana (Adonteng-Kissi, 2015). It is an undeniable fact that some communities around the globe have been positively transformed by the mining industry, but the same cannot be said about the Prestea community. Regardless of about a century

of mining, Prestea continues to be a poor community. There are prolonged community-level differences in the face of current international standards and increasing expectations for the mining industry to convert the rhetoric of corporate social responsibility (CSR) into real practice. These kinds of conflicts may explode at different levels of the operations of a large-scale mining company's life span (see Fig. 1).

Generally, one of the sources of conflicts at different levels of the community relations is contending for mineral rich parcels of land in the Prestea mining area (Adonteng-Kissi, 2015). Thus, ownership and control of mineral rich lands is at the core of many conflicts. Conflicts amongst community stakeholders regarding land use are due to fluidity in land ownership, control and rights, which are common in local communities (Adonteng-Kissi, 2017). The economic, social and environmental welfare of the local populations are usually at the core of such conflicts (Idemudia, 2014). Moreover, the order of the day is "deagrarianization" and "depeasantization" of communities which is adversely affecting the livelihoods of farmers in Prestea (Adonteng-Kissi, Adonteng-Kissi, & Asamoah, 2016). Deagrarianization is "a process of occupational adjustment,

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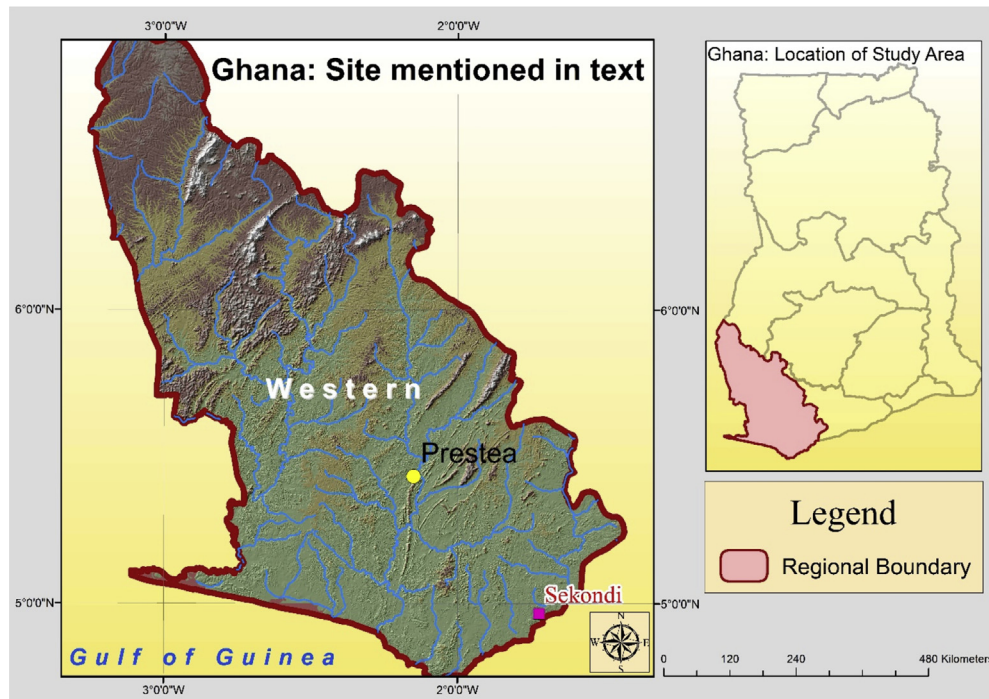


Fig. 1. Map of Ghana with Location of Study.

Cartography by: Samuel Kwesi Osei (2016), Department of Environmental Planning, Brandenburg Technical University, Germany.

income-earning reorientation, social identification and spatial relocation of rural dwellers away from strictly agricultural-based modes of livelihood" (Bryceson, 2004, pp. 617–618). "Deagrarianization" in Prestea is predominantly caused by the mining operations in the area that have resulted in the removal of topsoil, vegetation and forest cover (Adonteng-Kissi et al., 2016). Additionally, "deagrarianisation" and "depeasantisation" are terms applied to describe the continuing and changing nature of the present pattern (Bryceson, 2004). The age-old arrangement of the bush fallow system through which substantial levels of nutrients are recycled in the farmland, which makes the following farming cycle fruitful, is no longer possible in Prestea due to inadequate available land area. Farmlands and forest cover in Prestea, used for agrarian production, are disintegrating and decreasing in size to the extent that biodiversity is being destroyed. This situation has led to a decline in the fallow time duration from 10–15 years to 2–3 years (Adonteng-Kissi et al., 2016). Moreover, substantial percentages of farmlands in Prestea are suffering from deprivation and the once substantial level of economic wealth is fast decreasing. Golden Star Resources (GSR) is clearly playing a major role in this situation through its extensive mining activities. There is usually intense competition for mineral rich lands in the local Prestea communities (Adonteng-Kissi, 2015). There have also been instances when land use and environmental impact issues have culminated in violent conflicts between GSR and the Prestea community with the mines forfeiting their social licence to operate (SLO). Indeed, the relationship between the local community and GSR is a battleground on which the activities of mining firms are disputed (Calvano, 2008). This paper will tackle the knowledge gaps relating to perceptions of community engagement in mining communities. This paper's evidence emerges from surveys and key informants' interviews in the Prestea community. Simple random sampling was used for the selection of survey respondents and purposive sampling was used for the selection of all the sample units purposely identified to provide explicit information on the study population.

The relevance of this case is that Ghana's Prestea mining community is noted for violent confrontations with GSR over land use and environmental pollution. It is therefore important to answer the research questions below:

1. What are the sources and causes of conflicts in the Prestea mining area?
2. Is it true that community engagement has a positive impact on conflict management in the Prestea mining community?
3. Are perceptions of the impacts of community engagement on conflict management influenced by sex, age, education, marital status and occupation?

These research questions are critical in directing the analysis of the study owing to the need to develop scientific understanding of "community engagement" and formulate mining policies to address conflicts that erupt in the mining communities.

It is widely known that operating in indigenous areas is associated with a vast range of inconveniences (Spillan & King, 2017). Mining companies need to grapple with issues such as integrating or harmonizing the expression of indigenous populations about rights and justice and to utilize the minimum amount of force to suppress clashes (Gilbert, 2013). GSR assumes a firm position, acknowledging that in a local community like Prestea, the creation of a 'win-win' partnerships with the local interest groups must become an essential component of its business strategy to gain local legitimacy in the mining area. This orientation towards community engagement involves listening to and engaging with community groups and probably consenting to their participation in some company decision-making processes which is a viable tool to secure their SLO. Thus, GSR's community engagement has shifted policy development which affects the local population to different interest groups, permitting them to make contributions (Leigh & Blakely, 2016). This discourse possibly expresses a shift in power relations among large-scale mining companies, local communities

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