

*Review*

# Role of public participation in achieving development agenda of developing countries: The case of communities affected by surface mining of gold in the Asutifi district of the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana

Jones Lewis Arthur

Department of Commercial Studies, P. O. Box 206, Sunyani Polytechnic, Sunyani, Ghana. E -mail:  
[jonesarthur2002@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jonesarthur2002@yahoo.co.uk), [jonesarthur2002@gmail.com](mailto:jonesarthur2002@gmail.com).

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The cumulative evidence of increasing human vulnerability to environmental change calls for a significant policy response and action on several fronts. At least since the 1960s, when environmental politics became institutionalised within western developed countries, scientists, interest groups, the media and local protests have been significant in shaping the development definition and resolution of environmental issues. Of recent, there has been a shift in focus of environmental policies from centralization to decentralization. The onset of conditions that give rise to threats and vulnerability can often be gradual or inconspicuous. The paper examines the transition period in participatory environmental governance in Ghana with a focus on surface mining of gold and the extent of the involvement of the affected communities in mining. Particular reference was drawn from the experience of communities in the Asutifi district where surface mining of gold is on a progressive ascendancy. Field data as well as available literature were reviewed. It was resolved that there are various levels of consultancy and public participation in the operations of Newmont Ghana Gold Limited (NGGL) in the Asutifi district. Communities are violently reacting to inefficient participation as a result of the 'masses' being considered as inappropriate for 'insider' roles in mining. More so, the findings proved that Ghana has gradually moved from a state of near stifling of community participation to the phase where it makes affected communities key participants in the achievement of social and economic development. Public participation is a key to socio-economic development and effective environmental growth. Mining companies should realise and work with communities and note that the protection of the environment would not necessarily bring economic cost. The government should also empower and mandate communities, whilst their resources are being used for wealth generation, to negotiate their benefits and challenges with mining companies. Mining companies should also desist from the idea of using intimidation and legal frameworks to restrict community empowerment and desire to fight for their share of the economic 'cake'.

**Key words:** Public participation, decentralization, transitions, mining, environmental protection.

## INTRODUCTION

Human institutions over the years have moved from societies of near 'exclusive' governance to popular public participation in both social and economic issues. Of greater concern has been the global movement from single party rule to multi-party governance, a common practice worldwide. Public participation in Ghana has transcended over ages and so has its state and nature of implementation. Ghana has moved through transitions in public

participation and that has included periods of colonial leadership and control, self governance, military autocratic interventions and democratic participatory governance. Of each of these periods were major transitions from centralized administration to local governance and decentralization.

Before Ghana's independence, the British colonial government concentrated its development agenda on

trade and education. The environment could not attract much attention as population was low and the level of environmental degradation too, minimal. This development meant less emphasis on issues of environmental concerns. The low levels of illiteracy also meant that people did not see meaning in harnessing environmental issues in the context of the social and economic well-being of the populace. Our chieftaincy institution surge less into national administration but also limited its focus on chieftaincy related issues. Of equal importance were the fragmented states that largely fought among themselves for territorial control and leadership.

Gradually, our chieftaincy became motivated into mainstream governance by the colonial administration hence a gradual move from total seclusion to participatory decision making. Some of the leaders were selected and introduced into the planning, control and coordination of local administration in the then Gold Coast (Now Ghana) by the colonial government. As these Chiefs started trusting the colonial administration, their subjects became drawn into both local and national issues of concern.

Trade liberalization in Ghana has opened the communities to the global world and much has been witnessed in the form of massive economic investments and foreign participation in the economy of Ghana. The policy has brought about major industrial partnerships including the multinational corporate investments in Ghana. Many of such companies are driven by profit maximization which in effect has major adverse impacts on human wellbeing and the environment. Of equal concern has been the degradation of land and its resources, displacement of communities and the loss of livelihoods.

Recently, communities that have witnessed massive industrial investments, including the mining fields of Tarkwa and Kenyasi, have been bedevilled with violent community protests. Of major concern have been the activities of mining companies most of which are multinational. The major queries have centred on communities aggrieved by the operations of such companies. The security agencies that have been a major tool in addressing many of the community projects have been labelled as insensitive to the plight of the ordinary and aggrieved Ghanaians.

The expansion in the media landscape of Ghana in recent times has increased the level of media participation in national affairs. Currently, the country has seven television stations operating nationwide and with an F.M. station strength of over a hundred, a key to an effective community participation in national development. Notwithstanding these media advancements, the majority of the people continue to use the traditional ways of seeking redress in issues affecting their livelihood. The paradox is whether the current development in public popular participation has culminated into attitudinal changes that include an active involvement and participation of the ordinary person in issues that concern him and the

environment.

## **TRANSITIONS IN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

### **Public participation in the 'Dark' period**

The world over has seen tremendous changes in people's approach to addressing issues including those of environmental concerns. Much of the changes have been driven by the influence of cultural transformations and acculturation by foreign merchants and missionaries. African, which was mainly colonised by the West, had a major societal transformation characterised by the influence of the West. Ghana, previously called "Gold Coast", became a British colony prior to its independence in 1957. Western European interests in the land they christened the 'Gold Coast', due to the abundance of the precious mineral, was primarily trade. Trade in gold and later in human beings became foremost in their minds and consumed their energies.

The media, which forms a major tool for dissemination of information, was basically non-existent in the then Gold Coast. There were some few newspapers which were mainly inaccessible to the majority of the populace. The few that existed were used as state machinery to propagate state policies as well as suppress the masses. As a prelude, in 1851 the Methodist Mission opened a printing press in Cape Coast, Ghana (Eyiah, 2002). People could not afford radios as they were considered luxuries that could only be afforded by the affluent of the society. It was a privilege to have an opportunity of listening to one of them.

Technology used in the early 1900s was outmoded and what existed was also basically manual. People who desired to make calls or send a message had to access the point of communication from the office of the Colonial Officer (Commissioner) and the challenge was an ineffective information management. Commuting between communities was either by sending a messenger with the use of the 'talking' drums or dispatching a messenger who could take days to reach his destination. History also foretells of the situation where before the introduction of vehicles into Ghana, people had to personally arrange and carry the Colonial Officer on their shoulders from their community to the next that is, whenever he visits. Participating in local and national issues was therefore dependent on the frequency and efficiency at which the Colonial Officer could visit.

Education, a major tool for community capacity building and empowerment has improved since the early introduction of the castle schools in Ghana by the early missionaries. Most of these castle schools emphasised on the 3 Rs that is, reading, writing and arithmetic. People were educated in order to communicate and trade with the European merchants rather than providing knowledge that would empower the individual to become a better partner for development.

Such developments led to the weakening of the capacity of the people to demand their share of governance and resources. Of great concern were the Anglo-Asanti wars fought during the First Anglo-Ashanti War (1863 - 1864), Second Asanti War (1873 - 1874) when the British sacked the Asanti capital of Kumasi, Third Asanti War (1893 - 1894) occurred because the new Asanti Asantehene, ruler of the Asanti, wanted to exercise his new title and in 1895 - 1896 Fourth and final Asanti War fought, where the Asanti fought for and lost their independence (Wikipedia, 2008).

As early as the latter part of the nineteenth century, a growing number of educated Africans protested the arbitrary political system that placed almost all power in the hands of the governor through his appointment of council members. In the 1890s, some members of the educated coastal elite constituted themselves into the Aborigines' Rights Protection Society to protest a land bill that threatened traditional land tenure. The protest led the foundation for popular participation in state governance that eventually led to independence.

### **Contemporary issues of public participation**

The overflow of the popular uprising in latter nineteenth century had little impact but the stage was however set for a major upsurge of the majority for self-governance and participation in both local and national affairs. However, by 1945, demands for more autonomy by the Gold Coast population were beginning to arise, in the wake of the end of the Second World War and the beginnings of the decolonization process across the world.

Although political organizations had existed in the British colony, the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) was the first nationalist movement with the aim of self-government 'in the shortest possible time'. Founded in August 1947 by educated Africans such as J.B. Danquah, A.G. Grant, R.A. Awoonor-Williams, Edward Akufo Addo (all lawyers except for Grant, who was a wealthy businessman) and others, the leadership of the organization called for the replacement of chiefs on the Legislative Council with educated persons. For these political leaders, traditional governance, exercised largely through indirect rule, was identified with colonial interests and the past and therefore the need for the change.

This scenario overturned the stakes for Ghanaian to start to agitate for participatory governance that is rooted in self governance. Such developments that led to the formation of the United Gold Coast Convention and the Convention People's Party enabled independence and consequent legislative assembly in Gold Coast in 1957. The people therefore sought for a fair distribution of the national wealth and this was encapsulated in the general desire and effort towards an all inclusive public-private sector involvement in governance and national affairs.

Quite recently, the levels of literacy of the average Ghanaian has improved. People have become aware of

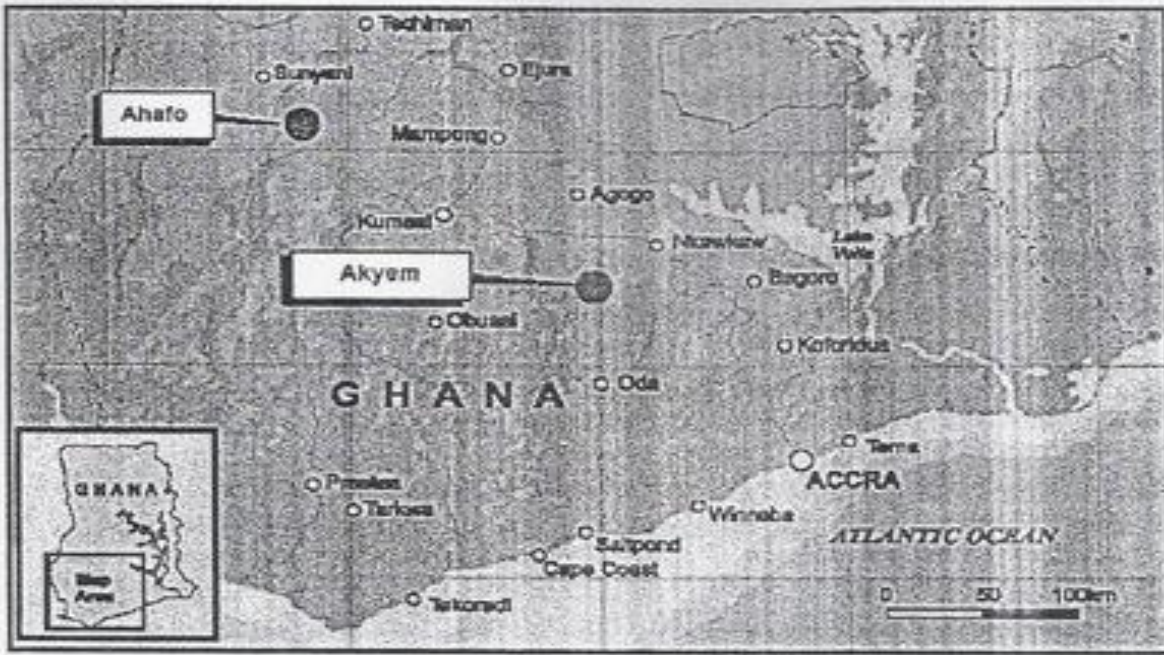
their right and political obligations. The nation now enjoys a literacy rate of 74.8 with 82.7% for males and female representing 67.1%. However, a National Population and Housing Census showed that 43.4% of those who are three years old or more have never been to school and 49.9% of the adult population of 15 years or more are totally illiterate (www.ghanaweb.com, 2008).

The media, a major tool for information dissemination, has been growing in strength over the ages. It currently have a force of 7 television stations, over 100 Frequency modulation(FM) stations, 30 dailies and a host of weeklies, bi-weeklies and monthlies. Its capacity, which has grown over the ages, has made it possible for government policies and development agenda to be adequately explained to the people. More so, these expansions had promoted indigenous knowledge for the overall growth and development of the Ghanaian economy. The mass media in Ghana has been instrumental in the nation's developmental agenda in many ways including but not limited to surveillance of the environment, transmission of social and cultural heritage, educating the masses, harnessing entertainment and mobilization of the people for national development. Of equal concern has been the spate and levels of acculturation as stimulated by the media houses. The people have as a result become enlightened and made aware to effectively participate in issues that are development oriented. These include community participation in local governance and developmental projects.

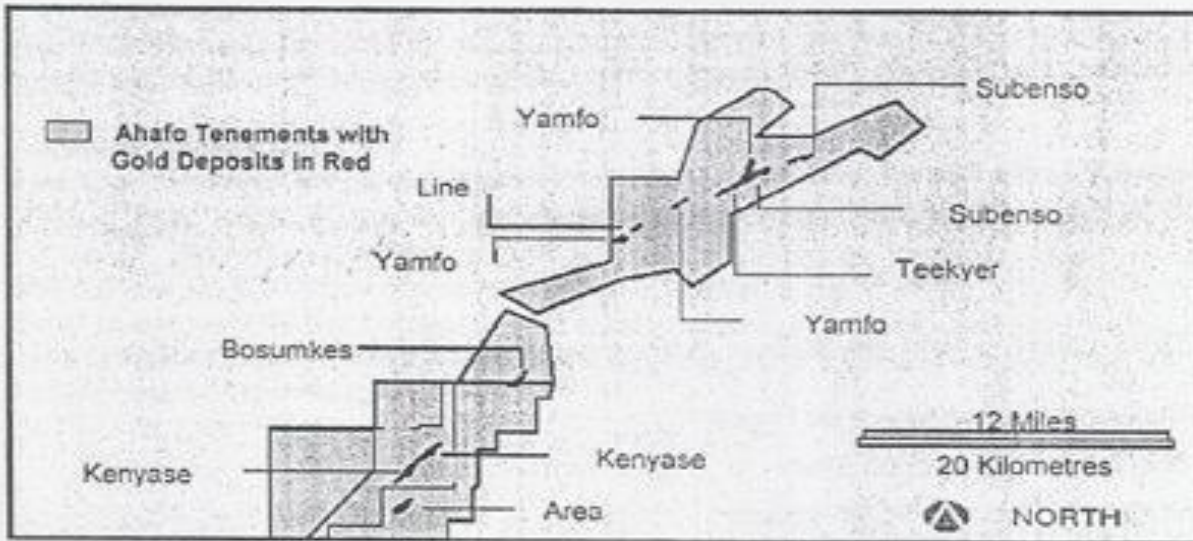
### **THE STAKES OF COMMUNITIES IN THE SURFACE MINING OF GOLD IN ASUTIFI DISTRICT OF GHANA**

Human needs are quite insatiable; therefore, efforts whether individual or corporate have been made towards making life comfortable and hence improving livelihood systems. Of key emphases is the drive towards improvements in the quality of life of people whilst at the same time ensuring a reduction in the cost of living. The Millennium Development Goal 7 that looks at ensuring sustainable development has a key development threshold for most private and public sector areas in Ghana.

Mining, a profitable and viable economic activity, has been on growth ascendancy in Ghana. The minerals sector for example, contributes \$2.5 billion which makes up to about 5% of GDP and 12% of government revenue. Its influence in Ghana's economy is therefore substantial. Many old mine fields have been revamped with new ones being established. Newmont Ghana Gold Company Limited (NGGL), operating the surface mining of gold in the Ahafo and Akyem sites, is one of the newly established multinational mining companies in Ghana. The company operates two mines, one in Ahafo in the Asutifi District and the other in Akyem in the Birim North District of the Brong Ahafo and Eastern regions respectively (Figure 1). The Ahafo project covers approximately 720 km<sup>2</sup> (278 square miles) of land (Newmont, 2005). The



NGGL		Project Title	Date
SGS Environment		Environmental Impact Statement	September 2004
Scale	Map N°	Title of Figure	
As shown	1.1	Location Map of Project in Ghana	



NGGL		Project Title	Date
SGS Environment		Environmental Impact Statement	September 2004
Scale	Map N°	Title of Figure	
As shown	1.2	Distribution of NGGL Pits and Leases	

Figure 1. NGGL Mining Concessions in Ahafo.  
Source: SGS Environment, 2004.

The development of the project has resulted in many mitigating measures. The displaced for example, have been provided with modern constructed housing estates. Farmers have also in additions to receiving new farm-lands being given seeds and seedling to assist in cultivation. Over 90% of constructional works were awarded to the indigenes whilst many have also been fully employed in the mainstream mining operations of NGGL. Access roads have been constructed for the settlements by the company and also as means to link the various communities.

Livelihoods have been enhanced and it is worthy to note that, the general standards of living of the people in the mining communities have been improved.

Communities in the Ahafo mining enclave are actively being engaged in the overall mining project. NGGL has involved the various communities in projects including an 'open door' policy and Livelihood Enhancement and Community Empowerment Programme (LEEP). The baseline of such programmes is to enhance communication with affected communities, receive feedback from resident as well as initiate a local community-public-education campaign to obtain feedback and create an understanding about the facilities of NGGL. These programmes have been fully embraced and ever since been used by the communities. Of equal concern was a report by a Collaborative Learning Project which referenced positive community feedback about Newmont Ghana's approach to dealing with local stakeholders. This response was the result of the company's transparency, inclusiveness, accessibility and respectful approach in dealing with key stakeholders within the mining communities.

NGGL as part of its impact mitigation measure participated in International Finance Corporation (IFC) evaluation process of the social and environmental process. At the corporate level too, NGGL formalised a partnership with an environmental policing team, Conservation International, to apply international environmental best practices at Newmont's Ghana Project sites. As a prelude to the standards at NGGL, it participated as a founding member to the International Cyanide Management Code sponsored by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The task was in respect of a global industry programme intended to provide a comprehensive guidance for gold companies on best practices in the storage, use and transport of sodium cyanide.

On the local scene, NGGL has been instrumental in integrating the affected communities in most of its projects. Of key emphasis is the evaluation of compensations for lost property and livelihoods, resettlement schemes, recruitment of staff for both constructional and mining purposes and provision of feedback in respect of the general operations of the company. However, in many cases, the rights of local people in the mining communities have often being abused as a result of lack of information and minimal local involvement in projects that

impact on their livelihood systems. Sometimes, too, the mining communities become aware of the concerns of the communities only at the time of eviction and when the bulldozers move in to clear the land for mining operations to start. Many aggrieved parties in the Asutifi communities indicate that they were not adequately contacted and integrated into the operations of the mining company. Notwithstanding, NGGL as part of its resettlement action plan budgeted US\$51million (Newmont, 2005) and much of this amount has already being disbursed to the affected individuals and parties.

Recently, however, consultation and flow of information have improved. NGGL on every Friday organizes meetings with the Asutifi communities to which the communities are fully represented. Stakeholders of such meetings have included the District Assemblies, the Health Services directorate, community leaders and relevant government agencies in the Ahafo District. The mining company has also established information centres at Ntotroso, Gyedu, Kenyasi I and Kenyasi II, in the Asutifi District, to facilitate interaction and flow of information with the people (Nsiah-Gyabaah, 2006). A public forum is regularly held on Radio BAR, a local radio station in Sunyani, to increase environmental awareness, improve understanding and ensure the participation of the people in its mining operations.

The mining communities have actively being collaborating with NGGL in the provision of quality and affordable health care services. The company has been instrumental in providing resource for the major health centres in Hwidiem and Ntotroso in the Asutifi district. Through NGGL's initiative, it has established a testing and counselling centre in the St Mary's hospital at Hwidiem for people living with HIV/AIDS. At the centre, it conducts a voluntary testing and counselling for HIV/AIDS. Infected patients are also provided anti-retroviral drugs to help boost their immune system. More so, the company had partnered with Netmark's public/private partnership, through education, to provide treated bed nets and other preventive educational campaigns, to reduce the incidence of malaria as well as promote sustainable malaria prevention in the mining communities.

However, upon further consultation with the executives of the Kenyasi II Youth Association, a contrary view from that of NGGL was obtained. Though, NGGL has been organising periodic meetings with the communities, the association was not particularly involved in discussions of issues of critical importance to the people. Some of their grievances are centred on land acquisition, fixing of compensations, modalities for valuing concessionary lands and property as well as skill training for indigenes. Such negotiations and transactions are executed through middlemen that have little knowledge of the underlying social and economic conditions in the various communities. The corrupt tendencies of some of the intermediaries, such as private valuers, also result in the communities themselves not getting the best, whether



material or value, for the loss of their livelihood to mining.

## **MAINSTREAMING COMMUNITIES IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS: THE LESSONS LEARNT IN ASUTIFI**

Industry-community relationship, though complex, can be effectively addressed and managed by proactive public participation policies that involve all. Conflict resolution measures have been quite successful in areas of NGGL operations. By practice, NGGL addresses concerns and complaints, it receives, through an established grievance process. Communicating with half of the community, that is illiterate; mainly occur through a face-to-face interaction. This takes care of more than 90% of the cases addressed whilst the remaining are handled through a formal meeting between the aggrieved person/parties and NGGL. The extreme and complex issues that arise are addressed by involving the traditional leadership structure since this has in most cases completely led to an amicable settlement.

Critical thinking and comments from critics aid in managing the direction and implementation of state policies. NGGL has been particular with criticisms it has received in respect of its activities. Of late, there have been many conflicting developments and outflows within the mining communities in which NGGL operates. In 2006, a violent confrontation occurred between NGGL, youth in the community and police force. The crust of the matter was the result of some aggrieved youth who demonstrated against unfair NGGL deals including the rejection of their employment application and non involvement of their executives in most of the decision taking by NGGL. The use of brutal force led to many casualties, of which the majority were the youth, in the various communities in which NGGL operates. This created an uneasy tension in the communities and a further call for a critical examination of NGGL policies and social responsibility package for the communities in which it operates. It has usually been misconstrued that the government can effectively negotiate on behalf of the people. However, recent developments call for re-examination of the policy for an all inclusive and decentralised negotiation mechanism in the execution of projects bound to have adverse impacts on the livelihoods of people in such communities.

Recruitment of indigenes into NGGL's activities has been swift and mostly successful for periods prior to the commencement of active mining of gold ore. Many people from the mining communities were employed to aid in the constructional works including the building of residential accommodation and site structures at the mining enclaves. However, over two thirds of them lost their jobs after the execution of the projects. This has created an uneasy tension within the communities since most of the present mine workers were recruited out of the communities as the requisite skills were unavailable

locally. The argument has been the need for the training of local staff to be mainstreamed into the general mining operations of Newmont Ghana Gold Limited (NGGL). It is therefore crucial to mention that human resource development of local potential workers should be integrative of the main framework of the company's corporate strategy. This would obviously ensure that people within the mining communities are empowered with job opportunities as their active involvement in NGGL would require training in the requisite skills and know-how for the job.

The central government has been very active and crucial in negotiating for mining conditions as against the few local stakeholders who bear the full impact of the adverse impacts created by the operations of the mining industries. This scenario normally disintegrates the link that exists between the key stakeholders, including the government and local communities. The bottom-to-top approach in public participation should therefore be actively pursued in such negotiations since it would make the local communities active participants in projects that mainly concern them. It is quite critical to empower communities to become active participants whose informed judgement would have a key interplay in community projects including an effective resource development and utilization as well as environmental protection and conservation. Such actions would ultimately lead to improved incomes and livelihoods for people whose very existence is dependent on the resources to be mined by the mining companies.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Mining is a key contributor to revenue both at the local and national levels. It is therefore important to realize that the very existence of the industry is crucial to improving the standards of living of people in the communities and the nations as a whole as income levels would improve. It is therefore important to pursue an integrative programme of action that would seek to make use of the values and contributions of all stakeholders.

Public participation is a key to socio-economic development and effective environmental growth. Mining companies should realise and work with communities and also note that the protection of the environment would not necessarily bring economic cost. It is also important to mention the vital role that government negotiation machinery can play in Ghana's economic growth and development. As central governments 'bargain' with mining conglomerates for a better 'deal' it is relevant that the needs of the ultimate beneficiaries, the communities, are factored into the overall projects. Such moves can be harnessed through a thorough and active decentralised mode of negotiations.

Educational planners and administrators should also consider fashioning out curricula that would deal with community participation and conflict resolution. As people

become informed they become better placed to issue out appropriate analysis and judgements in addressing critical issues of environmental concerns. Let us therefore be sensitive to current social and economic developments so that we can promote appropriate decisions and mechanisms towards meeting the challenges of modern societies including community participation.

## CONCLUSIONS

The mining industry has received a major boost and attention in contemporary Ghana. Huge investments have been channelled into the mining sector by major stakeholders including the multinational companies and the government. Key among them has been the capital investment and expansion projects at Tarkwa mine and Ahafo and Akyem projects in Ghana.

Various levels of consultancy and public participation continue to exist and function in the operations of Newmont Ghana Gold Limited (NGGL) in the Asutifi district. Local stakeholders have been regularly consulted in the mining operation of NGGL. The consultations have ranged from resettlement packages, moratorium and employment opportunities. However some communities have violently reacted to some of NGGL's policies and operations as a result of inefficient participation since the 'masses' are considered inappropriate for strategic 'insider' roles in mining. For example, the youth are mainly not consulted on issues including employment of the indigenes and the development of mining concessions.

Transition in public participation in Ghana has been progressive. The country has transcended through a gradual state of near community blackout to making affected communities key participants in the achievement of social and economic development. In the colonial periods 'The Gold Coast' experienced a non participatory stream of governance but with globalization and institutional transformations, stakeholder roles have become critical and vital to the success of many projects. Of late, project developers are keen to solicit the support of stakeholders including the communities since they have realized that they can only succeed with the active support of the communities who would be largely affected by their proposed projects.

Education and active community empowerment undoubtedly promote active public participation in community projects. Over the decades, popular participation has improved with an increase in literacy including expansions in mass media contributions to growth and development of Ghana.

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