

Galamsey Operation and Informal Institutions: The Winners and the Losers of Young Small Scale Miners in Ghana

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Gold mining is not only one of the leading foreign exchange earners in Ghana it also provides an important source of employment, especially for youth who otherwise face very limited employment opportunities. Even though much of the gold comes from large mining companies with mining concessions, about a fifth comes from illegal small-scale operators commonly referred to as ‘galamsey’ operators. Since Galamsey operators function outside of formal regulations, their operations are often governed by informal institutions. This paper explores how different actors (in terms of gender, ethnicity, education etc) engage with these institutions with regards to access to land for mining, finance, sharing of benefits etc. How do these institutions evolve and who determines them? Do the institutions differ by type of mining (surface or deepshaft)? How are agreements enforced in case of default? This paper presents preliminary results of a study of small-scale galamsey operators in the largely unknown mining settlement of Kui in the Bole District of the Northern Region of Ghana and Ahafo Kenyasi No. 2 in the Brong Ahafo Region.