Is illegal mining socio-politically entrenched? An opinion piece of the interaction between formal politics and chief dominance in mineral governance, and its influence on fighting Galamsey in Ghana

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Abstract Gold mining has been the backbone of Ghana’s development since pre-colonial times. It has been essential in revenue mobilisation and the provision of employment to many people. However, in recent times the sector has received severe public backlash due to its inability to effect appropriate socioeconomic change; and the consequential destruction to forests, croplands and water bodies that has accompanied the livelihood activity. While the need to curb this menace has been hyper-crucial in recent times, these attempts have failed cyclically. This paper argues that the deep-seated linkages between different power actors such as politicians and chiefs/kings are the driving forces thwarting the fight against the menace. Recently, constructive criticisms from the public have rejuvenated the fight against galamsey, however, the modalities of the fight and socio-political power relations have jointly militated against the effectiveness of the fight. It is particularly argued that policymakers should rather take advantage of the evolved nature of the political landscape of Ghana, where politicians sometimes negotiate with chiefs/kings for political expediency during elections. This can be achieved by motivating chiefs/king’s to become principal “galamsey-fighters”. In the meantime, the authors also suggest that the confiscated excavators from the mining sites which are usually burnt should be stopped and rather sold to generate capital for reclaiming the lands.

Keywords Galamsey · Chief dominance · Politicians · Mineral governance · Political settlement

Introduction

Gold mining follows two divisional lines in Ghana; the large-scale multi-national and the small-scale mining sectors (Wireko-Gyebi et al., 2020). Typically, the small scale mining aspect of gold extraction can be further divided into two classes (legal and illegal) depending on its legal approval and operational protocols (Boateng et al., 2014). However, the major concern has over the years been on the illegal small-scale mining (popularly known as galamsey), since its operations lead to significant environmental degradation. Their activities have caused an unbearable and unacceptable level of environmental damage and associated social impacts such as child labour, teenage pregnancy, and school dropouts (Boadi et al., 2016; Duncan, 2020; Fold et al., 2018; Owusu & Dwomoh, 2012). Illegal small-scale mining has therefore been
targeted as a major driving force of socio-environmental destruction and natural resources depletion as illustrated in Fig. 1.

Political debates have erupted over how to address issues that the mining sector faces in Ghana (Teschner, 2012; Ntewusu, 2018). The patterns of power relations among diverse stakeholders, as well as their engagement in small-scale gold mining and land management, have been a source of significant debate in not only Ghana but several sub-Saharan African countries. We contribute to the ongoing discourse by examining a prospective linkage between political settlement and chiefdominance and proffer some recommendations needed for the "galamsey" fight in these critical moments. According to Amoako et al. (2021), small-scale mining in Ghana is dominated in many respects by corrupt institutional individuals. The mining industry in Ghana, in particular, faces difficulties in translating governance processes and procedures from paper to successful practice. The small-scale mining legislation of 1989, which was later changed under the 2006 Minerals and Mining Act (Act 703), aimed to regulate small-scale mining operations in Ghana. However, despite several institutional and regulatory reforms enacted since 1989, the mining industry continues to be plagued by allegations of corruption and shady activities (Crawford & Botchwey, 2016, 2017). As charges were substantiated by numerous Chinese respondents with first-hand experience as foreign miners, Crawford & Botchwey (2017) accused state officials, chiefs, and other members of customary institutions of accepting bribes from Chinese miners.

Illegal and ambiguous concession regimes constitute another set of issues for Ghana’s artisanal and small-scale gold mining industry (Amoako et al., 2021; Andrews, 2016). Small-scale gold mining entities are frequently accused of making illegal payments to customary leaders who are caretakers of mineral-rich lands in many cases, ignoring existing structures and regulatory processes (Amoako et al., 2021). Smallholder farmers who cultivate these lands are frequently evicted without adequate compensation, leaving them landless and impoverished.

Fig. 1 Illustration of how galamsey has damaged the water bodies, forests and soils in Ghana
due to the greed of some traditional authorities (who are trustees of communal resources, including lands) (Amoako et al., 2021). Though the government of Ghana has attempted to eradicate the phenomenon through the implementation of strategies like the inter-ministerial task force and the banning of all artisanal small-scale mining activities, these have been short-lived due to the influence of power relations in the mining sector (Amoako et al., 2021; Crawford & Botchwey, 2016, 2017).

Considering the devastative impact galamsey presents to both humans, vegetations and animals, it is unsurprising how social media users, various pressure groups, non-governmental organisational bodies and researchers in Ghana are relentlessly campaigning against its persistent flourishing (Amoah-Frimpong, 2013; Jorgen Stangeland Bach, 2014; Quansah et al., 2016; Adu-Baffour et al., 2021; Hilson & Maconachie, 2020). However, successfully ending illegal mining has been difficult. It is the biggest enigma for decades in Ghana, as its survival rests on the shoulders of the complex interplay of political, social and cultural forces and complicated power relations (Arhin, 1978; Aryee, 2001). The state’s inability to confront illegal small-scale mining reveals power relations that shield the true perpetrators (Crawford & Botchwey, 2016). There are propositions and accusations that the mining industry has complicated socio-political dynamics that conflate its operations with illegal small-scale mining (Amoako et al., 2021). Whether politics and electioneering dynamics or chiefs’ dominance in land tenure systems are the main driving factors in sustaining galamsey is a matter of a debate, as their relations are integrally complex. Here we apply the environmental governance and political settlement philosophical lenses to examine how the two flanks; politics and “chief’s dominance”, work individually or jointly in sustaining illegal mining in Ghana, and how to counter its perpetuation, especially in an era where galamsey activities are having the greatest burden on our lands, water, air and the health of the people.

Two flanks; politics and chief dominance, where is the nexus?

Considering that Ghana is a model of best practice in terms of natural resource governance in Africa, as it was ranked 15th out of 58 mining countries globally and best in Africa for transparency and accountability in natural resource governance (Standing, 2014), her mineral resource governance in terms of monitoring, accountability and distribution of mining related royalties remains a significant puzzle in practice (Bebbington, 2015; Bebbington et al., 2018; Ntewusu, 2018). Startlingly, the situation on paper has not reflected what is happening in reality, consequently requiring more probing through a socio-political lens, in what Abdulai (2017) describes as political settlement. In this opinion piece, an attempt is made to argue, from a political settlement perspective, why and how illegal mining is still in its full force alongside recommendations, to counter the problem.

What is political settlement?

When considering resource management in Africa, the analysis invariably focuses on political and traditional elites. Elite-based political coalitions are central to the political economy of natural resources and development, wherein the nature of a ruling coalition at the moment when resources are discovered has important implications on how and whose interests those resources are governed. In analysing the role of elites in the political economy of resources, there is a crucial need to understand the political settlement of the country in question. The political settlement involves how the balance of power among social groups shapes the type of social institution that emerges and its overall implication on the society itself. At the heart of this philosophy is that “societal institutions exist in an association of co-constitution with power relations in the society” (Bebbington, 2015: 88). This theory was expanded by an academic, Mushtaq Khan (Khan, 2010). For Khan, a political settlement emerges when the distribution of benefits supported by its institution is consistent with the distribution of power in society, and these institutions are sustainable over time (Di John & Putzel, 2009; Khan, 2010). The political settlement theory is an important mechanism that brings clarity and understanding to the resource curse of most African and developing countries.

An important contribution of this concept is the primacy it accords to the informal institutions for understanding governance and development
outcomes in developing countries, where the clientelistic nature of politics is widely acknowledged. Khan regards clientelism as the most pervasive form of politics because the formal economy is not developed enough to allow the allocation of resources through more formal mechanisms (Behuria et al., 2017). Thus, Khan argues that in Africa and other developing countries, there is the predominance of informal politics; politics that is not enacted through formal structures as pertains to the western world. Hence, to understand the dynamics of resource allocation and management in developing countries, the power of political elites and how they operate in terms of the factions and the coalitions they create must be assessed (Behuria et al., 2017). These factors shape the activities and actions of elites in Africa. For example, in Ghana, two big political parties (the National Democratic Congress [NDC] and the New Patriotic Party [NPP]) have, traditionally over the past 20 years – if not longer, vied for the political power and legitimacy to govern. Interestingly, political power and the legitimacy to govern (which is conferred through elections) has alternated on three occasions (2001, 2009 and 2017) between these parties at an eight year periodic interval. This phenomenon has created a fluid political environment and so what you see in terms of how that governs natural resources is that the party in power often make short term decisions because they are eager to secure enough resources to run for the next election. Even though in expectation, formal political structures are key to ensuring natural resources are well governed (management, protection, and distribution of benefits), well the reality in Ghana seems almost different. We principally argue that uncovering and deciphering the complex channels under which these formal political structures operate are crucial to establishing effective accountability. For example, some politicians usually make “shady” deals with foreign miners such as the Chinese, which give them [politicians] the advantage to claim the gold proceeds, and to channel these proceeds into their coffers even if it is illegitimate. How this happens with chieftaincy dominance is still a matter of debate.

Ghana is a prime example of a country with a "resource curse". The distribution of resource earnings (proceeds), as well as their poor translation into poverty reduction, social welfare, and socio-economic development, has long been questioned. The enclaved character of commercial mining; its lack of benefits to local people, and poor mitigation and compensation of its negative impacts have all had adverse socio-economic impacts on the people and environmental sustainability (Akabzaa, 2009; Akabzaa & Darimani, 2001; Ayee et al., 2011; Essah & Andrews, 2016). Notwithstanding, research on resource management and mining in Ghana has largely focused on macro-economic aspects, national institutions and policies. Sub-national institutions and structures such as chieftaincy have been largely neglected (Lawer et al., 2017). Traditional institutions are largely involved in natural resource management in most developing countries. As expected, the involvement of informal politics through chieftaincy authority and its interaction with formal politics is to yield positive mineral governance outcomes where the benefits are felt both nationally and locally. But what we are observing today in Ghana is not entirely the situation. The import [we are obtaining] from the ongoing galamsey situation is that, whether chiefs become instrumental in effective resource governance in their localities or not will partly depend on the intention and motivation behind their regular engagement with the politicians. Chieftaincy authority, chieftaincy conflicts, rulers’ self-interest, and unaccountable local institutions suffocate people’s livelihoods, limit their access to mining income, and obstruct poverty reduction and socio-economic growth. The case demonstrates how important local institutions may be in alleviating the resource curse.

Chieftaincy is one of the oldest and most respected local governance institutions in Ghana (Lawer et al., 2017). Despite several institutional modifications over the years, it remains a very important institution influencing the lives of most Ghanaians daily. The government also accords the chieftaincy institution a relevant role in natural resource management. For example, Ghana’s mineral and mining act grants chiefs and other traditional rulers the power to manage the benefits of mining in local communities. This constellation is practically linked to the chief’s control over both public and private lands as they are allowed to control and manage lands in Ghana in trust for the subjects of the stool – “the people”. However, according to Lawer et al. (2017), the acknowledgement of chiefs as custodians has empowered them to keep the charge of all mining activities on their land. Recent research has revealed that chiefs have abused
this power by managing mining activities with reference to the benefits it brings to them at the expense of the community (Lawer et al., 2017; Valsecchi, 2007), even though some chiefs have been instrumental in fighting illegal mining in their communities. Since socio-political institutions are the result of elites’ bargains, their role in shaping and manipulating developmental results and how they influence the formal political landscape can be best deciphered within the context of embedded power relations (herein theorised based on political settlement). This analytical framework helps us to examine how the state is connected to the society and what lies behind the formal representation of politics in a state (Abdulai, 2017). To illustrate this clearly, we periodise the situation.

**Periodising the manifestation of political settlement in mineral governance in Ghana: implication on galamsey fight**

Before colonialism in Ghana, mineral mining was purely in the hands of chiefs and kings who served as trustees of the lands that were owned by the people. During these times people were at liberty to mine everywhere as far as it was within the enclosure of their stool lands (Dumett, 1999). Chiefs especially used traditional means of exacting gold surplus and benefits from miners, such as the abuse system; where miners retained a third of the gold and returned a third to the local chief and the other third to the paramount chief or king (Dumett, 1998:16). Through this system, kingdoms situated on mineral-rich lands became prosperous and powerful (such as the Asante Kingdom). However, the gold proceeds did not have a significant impact on the overall well-being of the people, as it was used mainly for maintaining and extending state power (Arhin, 1978). Historically, proceeds from gold mining have been used for the refinement of the king’s regalia and expanding palaces rather than improving the conditions of people. This observation has followed us even to the present where most chiefs are only interested in using royalties from mining to enrich themselves and expand palaces (Abdulai, 2017). However, we should acknowledge that there are exceptions to this claim, as some chiefs have been crucial in the socio-economic development of their communities through the proceeds from minerals with some chiefs’ being eager to fight galamsey given the necessary support. For example, in an interview with Nana Boakye II, Benkumhene of Twifo Traditional Council he stated, “Give us documents and legal backings to exercise our mandate to drive out illegal miners from our lands” (Ghana Business News [GBN], 2021).

Following the advent of colonialism and expatriate capitalism, the relationship between political settlement and gold governance has deepened; but simultaneously affected the informal politicisation of mineralised lands, as chiefly dominance began to decline. According to Abdulai (2017) and Ofosu-Mensah (2016), the commercialisation of mineral lands was responsible for the latent attenuation of chiefly dominance. Gradually, most mining transactions and governance issues came under the control of the white rulers (even though some traditional rulers continued to enjoy traditional political power) (Dumett, 1999; Ofosu-Mensah, 2016). Nevertheless, after colonial rule, the government of Ghana pursued the process of broad sovereignty over natural resources such as gold and other minerals. During the period between 1957 and 1986 for example, there was active state involvement in mining activities. Specifically, following a series of legislative processes during the 1960s, all mining companies had been nationalised and brought under the full control of the government at the time. Particularly, State Gold Mining Corporation (SGMC) was established in 1961 to take over existing mines. Many of the post-colonial coalitions defended this notion of mineral nationalisation based on generating mass employment and enhancing the generation and management of foreign exchange (Tsikata, 1997). But as to whether this “nationalistic” claim was genuinely based on the national developmental agenda, is a matter of deep-seated debate. It is worth noting however that, although the legislative provision weakened chiefly dominance over mineralised lands, it did not fully take away the land ownership power of chiefs, especially in rural communities.

According to literature, one significant problem they [the politicians] faced, which has historically and contemporary complicated the management of illegal mining activities, is chiefs’ involvement in leasing out mineral lands (van Donge, 2015). Nevertheless, we are of the view that their [chiefs] involvement is/was not necessarily the problem, but the intentionality and motivation behind their involvement (resource negotiation between formal
and informal political forces). By intentionality, we attempt to conceptualise the central “resolve” of the chiefs/kings during their negotiation with formal political actors. The motivation of such resolution may take on various forms—which may either be developmental or otherwise. Even though the informal politicisation eroded during the colonial times, chiefs within the rural areas and kings still retained and enjoyed some minimum degree of power at the end of the colonial rule. But for effective resource governance, all mining related activities were under the trust of the central government as provided by the constitution. Following the first mineral Act (Act 126), mineral ownership was vested in the president, who was to oversee its effective management and distribution of its benefits to the general citizenry in the form of developmental projects. This constitutional provision has even manifested in later versions of the mining Acts since 1969 (such as the Minerals and Mining Law of 1986) and subsequent revisions in 1993 and 2006 (Abdulai, 2017). These provisions reserved for the president the powers to decide upon how lands were to be managed, including those owned by the communities as presided over by kings and chiefs of these communities (stool lands).

However, after Dr Kwame Nkrumah was overthrown in 1966, chiefs’ control over lands became eminent again. One substantial theory that explains why chiefs gained almost full dominance over lands (including mineralised lands) was that the post-Nkrumah era saw a new dawn in the political landscape where the electioneering process took a new form and direction. This made political parties somewhat vulnerable to chiefs, as they needed their full support to win elections (Whitfield et al., 2015). For this, political parties had to strike a new deal with the chiefs in the form of a power bargain; where the chiefs’ dominance of lands was respected and reinforced in exchange for their support to win the election. Two instances were that of I.K Kutu Acheampong in 1972 and JJ Rawlings in 1992 (Chazan, 1982; Whitfield et al., 2015). This resulted in parallel land management and ownership systems [stool lands and state lands] which persist even today. Currently, about 80% of lands in Ghana are stool lands whereas about 20% is for the state; compulsorily acquired by the government (Abdulai & Ndekugri, 2007). This deepened the relationship between chiefs and politicians and therefore created stronger power relations within the landscape of resource governance, further worsened by power coalition vulnerability (Khan, 2010). Some scholars (Amanor, 2008, 2009) also argued that the political involvement of traditional rulers (chiefs) was a result of the initial failed attempt by the British colonialists to control lands, [including mineralised lands] through their indirect rule system.

Following the historical political and cultural power relations that characterised the governance of natural resources, it is unsurprising why banning or regulating artisanal small-scale mining (ASMs) has become very difficult, given that not the majority of these chiefs are effectively contributing to ending this menace. Most scholars believe that the political setting of the country such as electioneering machinery has become a bottleneck to fighting galamsey (Aidoo, 2016). Ntewusu (2018) argued that the inability to stop galamsey is because of political leniency and management corruption which has characterised the political system in Ghana. As reported by Abdulai (2017), most chiefs and politicians; including ministers of state, Members of Parliament (MPs), Assembly members (AMs) and other elite parties in mining communities behave like “one” as they are unresponsive to the illegal mining complaints because they all benefit from such activities. It is embarrassing how illegal mining is still in good fate, simply because its outcome benefits a wide range of power actors spanning the political pool to the traditional leaders (Aidoo, 2016; Dumett, 1999). For example, chiefs receive royalties in exchange for lands whereas government representatives support chiefs to win political favour from them. Sometimes some politicians openly engage in the act [galamsey] without facing the law due to corruption (Teschner, 2012). Evidence even exists that politicians and chiefs receive bribes from foreign miners especially the Chinese to fund political campaigns during elections (using the 2012 election as a case study) (Abdulai, 2017; Crawford & Botchwey, 2017)).

It is particularly sad to realise that due to the vulnerable nature of the ruling class (political parties) to the chiefs and voters, resulting from competitive clientelism, the nation is currently suffering from weak implementation and law enforcement inefficiencies (Khan, 2010). Considering a nation where over one million people (including some chiefs) earn
their livelihood from small scale mining (Afriyie & Abass, 2020), and in which a political party can sometimes win an election with just a 50,000 votes margin, it is apparent how relevant the illegal miners and the chiefs are in determining election outcomes and in shaping the political settlement and mining governance in general. Regarding the disproportionately large number of youths in illegal mining due to pervasive poverty and unemployment (Baah-Boateng, 2013), in addition to the "swift economic dividend or rent" it provides, it is particularly suicidal for any political party which is interested in winning an election to prevent them (the youths) from mining as that party does so at its peril. The percentage of unemployment in the total labour force increased from 5.13% in 2009 to 6.81% in 2015. While there was a dip in 2019, we have observed a rise from 2020 (Fig. 2) (certainly due to the COVID-19) which might explain why the issue of galamsey activities became very intense during 2019/2020 which led to large-scale water and vegetation destruction.

Considering the relatively high unemployment rate; and on grounds that illegal mining support over 1 million people, supporting illegal mining is an optimal way the politician can show sympathy to the unemployed, the chiefs and all dependents of illegal mining to gain their vote and support during elections (Ntewusu, 2018). The political play between the NDC, NPP and the Traditional Leaders [TL] recently has made the fight against galamsey even more socio-politically sensitive. It is not startling why a few months after general elections, widespread demonstrations about galamsey continuation always abound in the country. For illustration, the attempt to ban galamsey at Obuasi in 2016 led to a violent demonstration with the hashtag (no galamsey, no vote) which resulted in the vandalisation of political offices, even though chiefs were silent about the issue (see Daily Graphic, 2016; Silver News Online, 2016). We however argue that while the electioneering machinery and the power relation between the chiefs, the ordinary citizenry and the politicians have realistically posed a challenge, it still depends on what "we" do with such an electioneering landscape. For example, if the direction of power bargain between these power actors typically takes a wrong direction (where the outcome of such power negotiation was/is not people and environmentally centred), inversing the direction and intentionality of such bargains may be crucial. We acknowledge how difficult this reversal could be, but we believe extensive public conscientization as well as identifying and getting insights from chiefs who are already making positive strides may be a good start. It may also be crucial to grant some legal backing to chiefs to help in the fight against galamsey. Even with that, we still experience fierce inter-political party friction and power struggle which are also posing a significant challenge to the fight against illegal mining.

Therefore, any attempt to fight galamsey should also be based on (1) developing frameworks that insulate the ruling party against grassroots pressures
(particularly from galamseyers) while independently monitoring the activities of such party and (2) fostering the nature of inter-political party negotiation about a common goal. It appears that the fight against galamsey by a ruling party becomes an automatic voting point to the opposition party. For instance, like the NDC in 2008, the NPPs campaign message in 2016 was rooted in the deep support of galamsey to win an election (Starr FM News, 2021). In 2012 also, the fight against the galamsey was hampered on the basis that the task force targeted only members belonging to the opposition party (NPP) whereas members of the ruling party (NDC) continued to mine (Daily Guide, 2013). The foul interplay between NDC and NPP has sometimes been aggravated by the involvement of traditional leaders such as the chiefs and other traditional leaders. It seems that, since most chiefs benefit from the royalties they take from illegal miners through leasing of mineralised lands, they render their support to any government that promises to perpetuate the activity (Abdulai, 2017; Quansah et al., 2016). Since traditional leaders also play a significant role in influencing community members to vote for a particular party through their political endorsement, the nature of political settlement and power relations have interactively acted to dim the prospects of the fight against galamsey in Ghana (Khan, 2010; Wireko-gyebi et al., 2020).

Recently (2020–2021) pressures on the ruling government [NPP] from all sources; social media, pressure groups, academics, NGOs and ordinary citizens in light of the rapid depletion of water and forest resources – have reignited the fight against the galamsey. But as the story has always been, it is not without political interference as the ruling party risks losing an election in 2024 partly due to its open fight against the menace. Since the commencement of the operation (operation vanguard) on 28th April 2021 with 200 deployed soldiers, an appreciable number of excavators, suspected to belong to some politicians, elite class and traditional leaders have been confiscated and burnt (Citi Newsroom, 2021) (Fig. 3). While these steps are commendable at the start, two sets of questions emerge: (1) are traditional leaders’ (chiefs) involvement going to optimise the effort against galamsey; and how do we achieve that? And (2) is the burning of the confiscated excavators during the operation economically sound? Even though the second question doesn’t bear directly on the theme discussed above, it is worth including it as it provides better insight into the short and long term solution hunt. These pertinent issues are discussed shortly alongside some recommendations. Based on the discourse so far, it is noted that the power interplay and relation with regard to mining during the pre and post-colonial times have worked jointly to shape the socio-political effort in fighting illegal mining in the country. On this ground, we proposed some short and long-term recommendations amidst the complications among power actors.

Fig. 3 Illustration of excavators being burnt due to galamsey in Ghana

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The way forward

The first recommendation is based on the argument that since chiefs and kings do not necessarily risk losing an election – as a result of stopping galamsey (unlike the politicians), they must be tasked and encouraged to enforce the laws against illegal mining activities in their various communities. This can be achieved when chiefs are motivated to invert the power bargain between themselves and the politicians for the betterment of their communities. For example, Mr Benito Owusu Bio, Deputy Minister-designate for Lands and Natural Resources indicated that the support of Asantehene for example is critical in winning the fight against galamsey [Joyonline, 2021]. Small Scale Miners Association (SSMA) also supported the idea that the fight against galamsey should be more decentralised to include multiple stakeholders, particularly the chiefs [City Newsroom, 2021]. While it is appreciated that, most chiefs in the rural areas are directly or indirectly benefiting from the illegal mining activities (Abdulai, 2017), their support in fighting this menace is agreeable likely to be very difficult. Therefore, there should be an external audit body that supervises and audits their participation and performance in the fight against illegal mining. A better performance should warrant an award and other incentives whereas non-compliance must be accompanied by appropriate punitive measures. To make their involvement effective, it may also be crucial to give the chiefs/kings legislative backing. For example, in an interview with Nana Boakye II, Benkumhene of Twifo Traditional Council stated, “Give us documents and legal backings to exercise our mandate to drive out illegal miners from our lands” (Ghana Business News [GBN], 2021).

In the short term, it is also recommended that the nation reforms its punitive procedures or methods immediately, such as the burning of the excavators. It is rather economically meaningful to confiscate and sell the machines to generate revenue which can then be used to reclaim the affected lands instead of burning them. Since the operation commenced on Wednesday, 28th April 2021, a great number of excavators, pumping machines and changfans have been destroyed. For example, as of 29th April 2021, about 127 changfans and 9 excavators have been burnt [City Newsroom, 2021]. Particularly considering how expensive excavators are, confiscating and selling them legitimately and using the proceeds to engage in large-scale land reclamation and afforestation projects can help solve two major problems concurrently; provide temporary employment for the miners (while long term solutions are sought) and long-term renewal of the polluted lands and water bodies. However, most comments on social media including Facebook and Twitter point to the fact that the ordinary politician may embezzle the funds generated by selling the confiscated machines, we, therefore, recommend an establishment of a committee headed by a politically independent or neutral person (even if he/she comes from outside the country) to oversee that the monies are used for their intended purpose.

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