

Chinese gold rush and Ghana's informal mining space: an environmental justice perspective

In approximately 80 developing countries across the world, close to 100 million people derive their daily livelihoods from a low-tech, mostly informal mining activity: artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM). In Ghana, despite ASM being a major source of employment for millions of rural folks, poor regulations, ineffective and exclusive policies open up the sector to a wide range of socio-environmental damages. Recently, there has been increasing proliferation of foreign gold prospectors (the largest concentration being Chinese nationals), in this indigenous sector, despite this mining branch being reserved by law for Ghanaian nationals. This development has been widely noted to be aggravating environmental degradation in many mining communities across Ghana. Whilst scholars use various causal theories in accounting for possible drivers of persistent informality and foreign proliferation in this mining branch, seldom is this phenomenon studied as a matter of justice: equity, fairness and inclusiveness in mineral wealth distribution and governance. In this talk, through the lens of environmental justice, I draw insights from political literature of justice to unpack various spaces of pervasive systemic marginalization and relegation of these indigenous diggers, triggered by a bias mining policy regime that favours multinational corporate mining. I argue that, having rendered many indigenous miners dispossessed and impoverished, these injustices are at the core of Chinese infiltration in this sector. Artisanal and small-scale mining needs greater inclusion in the mining policy realm since a well-regulated ASM has a tremendous potential in contributing to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.