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**Ecological Resistance Movements:  
A Case Study From Ghana**

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**Abstract**

The issue of mismanagement of natural resources and its attendant effects of environmental degradation across the globe has engaged the attention of environmentalists, activists including organisations that can be described as environmental resistant movements. Ghana is facing serious environmental problems and one factor for this is its increased dependence on the extractive sector of the economy. Many have shown concern about this problem and have taken bold initiative to do something to address the problem. This has concretely manifested itself in the formation of a number of movements mainly in the form of NGOs which are locally--based over the years. Wassa Association of Communities Affected by Mining (WACAM), which has been selected as a case study is informed by the successes it has chalked in the areas of activism, advocacy and influencing policy especially on mining in the Wassa Area in particular, and Ghana in general and possibly beyond.

**Key words:**

Activism, Eco-Resistance Movements, Galamsey, Mining industry, NGOs, Wacam, Wassa

## Introduction

It has been noted that the ecological resistance movements are springing up across the globe<sup>1</sup> with varying degrees of success of different emphases. These eco-resistance movements seek to resist any form of anthropogenic activities that disturb the wellbeing of the ecosystem. Some of these movements are seen as 'explicitly radical in their ideas and militant in their tactics while others have emerged from a variety of social movements' all in response to 'environmental deterioration'<sup>2</sup> the world is facing today. These grassroots and at times radical environmental movements have become important actors in global environmental politics.<sup>3</sup> This explains why they are becoming the focus of academic research. Wassa Association of Communities Affected by Mining (WACAM), which is the focus of discussion in this paper, has developed its advocacy and campaign strategies on the basis of the principle of non-violence generally. It mostly uses dialogue and diplomacy in its approach. WACAM has drawn attention as a premier anti mining advocacy NGO in Ghana in the area of grass root mobilisation of the local mining communities to protect their rights and natural endowments against over exploitation by multinational companies with far-reaching effects on their daily lives and the environment as a whole.

WACAM's story fits within the rising literature across the globe on the efforts of ecological NGOs against multinational corporations plundering the resources of indigenous people with impunity. Gedicks, for instance, points out that over the past three decades there has been evidence of resource wars being waged by international corporations and development-oriented governments against native peoples<sup>4</sup> but these wars have been resisted both from the front of 'native rights and environmental movements'.<sup>5</sup>

The central argument advanced in this paper is that WACAM's success story should serve as a model for all the mining communities in Ghana in particular and Africa in general, and perhaps beyond Africa to combat the dangers that mining and particularly, surface mining, pose to the health and livelihood of

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<sup>1</sup>B. R. Taylor, *Ecological resistance movements: The global emergence of radical and popular environmentalism*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999).

<sup>2</sup>Taylor, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>A. Gedicks, International native resistance to the new resources war. In *Ecological resistance movements: The global emergence of radical and popular environmentalism*, ed. B.R. Taylor. (Albany, NY: Sunny Press, 1995).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 89.

the communities in which multinational mining corporations operate.

I employed qualitative research tools to source the data for this study<sup>6</sup>. I used seven months (July 2015 to March 2016) to gather the data. The data were gathered from both the primary and secondary sources. The purposive sampling technique<sup>7</sup> was used to select my interviewees. The primary data were collected through interviews mainly through the media of e-mail, WhatsApp and phone-call discussions with the Co-Founder and Executive Director of WACAM, Mr. Daniel Owusu-Koranteng. This was augmented by secondary sources which were publications sent to me by the Co-founder and a few I found on the internet myself, which enabled me to cross-check the veracity of my discussions with the co-founder.

### **The study context**

In addition to WACAM, there are other likeminded eco-resistant movements operating in Ghana. These NGOs have the objective of resisting the wanton destruction of the country's environment through awareness creation, advocacy and *activism*. Many of such movements are locally or community-based and are aimed at assisting local communities to secure environmental justice and protect their environment. Some of them include, Environmental Protection Association of Ghana (EPAG), Forest Watch Ghana (FWG), Friends of the Earth-Ghana (FOE), Ghana Association for the Conservation of Nature (GACON), Ghana Wildlife Society (GWS), Rural Environmental Care Association (RECA) and many others. This paper, however, focuses on the Wassa Association of Communities Affected by Mining (WACAM). WACAM has had over 20 years' experience of sustained mining advocacy and environmental activism. WACAM's environmental activism is based on Article 41(k) of the 1992 constitution of Ghana which

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<sup>6</sup>J.W. Creswell, *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. London: Sage Publications, 1998; R.K. Yin, *Qualitative research from start to finish*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2011; S. Kemmis, The imagination of the case and the invention of the study. In S. Huffman, *Towards a Science of the Singular* (Norwich: CARE, 1980, 93-142).

<sup>7</sup>Dixon, R. B., G. D. Bouma, & G. B. J. Atkinson, *A handbook of social science research*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); H. R. Bernard, *Research Methods in anthropology: qualitative and quantitative methods*, 3rd edn. (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2002); J. L. Lewis, and S.R.J. Sheppard, Culture and communication: Can landscape visualization improve forest management Consultation with Indigenous Communities? In *Landscape and urban planning* (2006), 77: 291-313. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2005.04.004> ; Ghana Chamber of Mines, 1998.

states that, "It is the duty of every citizen to protect and safeguard the environment."

Ghana is now fraught with numerous environmentally-related problems. According to Ghana's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)<sup>8</sup>, it is estimated that over 90% of Ghana's high forest<sup>9</sup> has been logged since the late 1940.<sup>10</sup> Available records indicate that 'the original forest cover was about 36% of the country's landmass, reducing to 23 % by 1972, 13.3% in 1990 and 10.2 % 2000.'<sup>11</sup> According to UNICEF/WHO Joint Monitoring Platform, in 2006,<sup>12</sup> Ghana ranked 14<sup>th</sup> out of the 15 countries in West Africa and 48<sup>th</sup> out of the then 52 (now 54) countries on the continent in terms of sanitation. These environmental problems are particularly evident in the mining industry in Ghana.

## An Overview of the Mining Industry in Ghana

The mining industry, particularly Gold, may be said to be as old as humanity.<sup>13</sup> Available literature and oral sources note that the mining industry in Ghana pre-dates the arrival of Europeans in the country in 1471.<sup>14</sup> Ghana was said to have accounted for 36 % of total world gold output (8,153,426 fine ounces) between 1493 and 1600.<sup>15</sup> It has been estimated that over 14.4 million ounces of gold were produced between 1471–1880<sup>16</sup>, lending to its name as the Gold Coast until its independence in 1957. Records show that 2,488 metric tons (80 million ounces) of gold was produced in Ghana

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<sup>8</sup>W. Tamakloe, State of Ghana's environment-challenges of compliance and enforcement, (2008). [http://www.inece.org/indicators/proceedings/04h\\_ghana.pdf](http://www.inece.org/indicators/proceedings/04h_ghana.pdf) (accessed 18 May 2016).

<sup>9</sup>A woodland that is managed to allow the majority of trees to reach maturity, See Park, 2007, p. 211.

<sup>10</sup>Tamakloe, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Ghana News Agency (GNA), Bogoso gold spills cyanide into River Ankobra. (2004) <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Bogoso-Gold-Spills-cyanide-into-River-Ankobra-68407> (accessed 12 October 2016).

<sup>12</sup>UNICEF/WHO, Ghana, second "dirtiest" country in West Africa -UNICEF/WHO joint monitoring platform. (2006). <https://www.modernghana.com/news/177409/ghana-second-dirtiest-country-in-west-africa-unicefwho.html> (accessed 12 October 2016).

<sup>13</sup> S. Awuah-Nyamekye, & P. Sarfo-Mensah, Mining or our heritage? Indigenous local people's views on industrial waste of mines in Ghana. In S. Kuan-Yeow & G. R. Xinxin, (Eds.) *Industrial Waste*, (Croatia: In Tech, 2012), 151-172.

<sup>14</sup> T. M. Akabzaa, & A. Darimani, 2001. Impact of mining sector investment in Ghana: A study of the Tarkwa mining region. A draft report prepared for SAPRI (2001).

<sup>15</sup> F. S. Tsikata, The vicissitude of mineral policy in Ghana. In *Resource. pol.* 23(1/2), (1997), 9– 14.

<sup>16</sup> E. Adadey, The role of the mining industry in the economy of Ghana: The mining industry and the environment, Proceedings of a National Symposium, (Ghana, Kumasi: UST/IDRC Environmental Research Group, 1997).

between 1493 and 1997.<sup>17</sup> Agra reports that the first 'Gold Rush' in Ghana was said to have been started by one Pierre Bonnat, a French trader who was said to have set up a company with several concessions in Ashanti region.<sup>18</sup> But the institutionalisation of mining as a formal industry in Ghana, however, began with gold production at the later part of the 19th century by the British and other foreign investors.<sup>19</sup>

The industry has now expanded tremendously. As of 2008, Ghana has 23 large-scale mining companies producing gold and other minerals like diamond, bauxite and manganese. In the same year, over 300 small-scale mining groups were registered together with 90 mine-support service companies.<sup>20</sup> Ghana was ranked as Africa's second largest gold producer after South Africa and the 10th in the world.<sup>21</sup> This has economic implications for the nation. For instance, according to Hayford *et al.*, the mining industry contributed about 7% of Ghana's total corporate tax earnings. This formed about 41% of total export, 12% of Government revenue collected by the Internal Revenue Service and 5% of the total GDP. Majority of the mining takes place in the Western region. For instance, the Anglo Gold Ashanti and Newmont, the two major producers of gold in Ghana are based in the Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo regions respectively, but the largest concentration of mining companies is found in the Wassa area in the Tarkwa-Nsuaem Municipal Assembly where WACAM activities are prominent.<sup>22</sup> Extensive literature exists on negative environmental aspects of mining.<sup>23</sup> Hilson has observed in respect of harmful effects of small-scale mining thus:

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<sup>17</sup> G. O. Kesse, The mineral and rock resources of Ghana. In *Journal of African earth sciences* 7: (1985), 601-610; Ghana Chamber of Mines, 1998.

<sup>18</sup> V. Agra, Current environmental practice in the mining industry: The mining industry and the Environment, Proceedings of a National Symposium, (Kumasi, Ghana: UST/IDRC Environmental Research Group, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> Akabzaa & Darimani, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> E. K. Hayford *et al.*, Impact of gold mining on soil and some staple foods collected from selected mining communities in and around Tarkwa-Prestea area. In *West African Journal of Applied Ecology*, (2008), 14, 1-12.

<sup>21</sup> Hayford *et al.*, 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Y. Serfor-Armah, B. J. B Nyarko & D. Adomako, Levels of arsenic and antimony in water and sediments from Prestea, a gold mining town in Ghana and its environs. In *Water, air and soil pollution*, (2006), 175, 1-4; K. Yelapaala, *Mining, sustainable development and health in Ghana. The Akwatia case study.* (Providence, RI: Brown University Luce Environmental Scholars Programme, 2004); G. Hilson, Promoting sustainable development in Ghanaian small-scale gold mining operations. In *The Environmentalist*, (2002), 22, 55-57.

Mercury, which is used in excessive quantities in mineral refining processes, has been released uncontrollably into natural ecosystems surrounding operations, accumulating to toxic levels in soils, water bodies and flora. Perhaps more important, however, is that small-scale gold mining, as a migratory activity, has caused a significant amount of land damage in Ghana.<sup>24</sup>

The social unrest and its associated tensions, coupled with the environmental damage which mining activities have wreaked on the communities where WACAM operates have been vividly underscored by Akabzaa and Darimani:

The heavy concentration of mining activities in the area has generated environmental and social issues in the area. The issues centre on resettlement and relocation, negotiation and compensation and environmental damage. The persistence of these socio-environmental problems accounts for the occasional and frequent resistance from the affected communities as well as clashes between them and the mining companies. The destruction of sources of livelihood and the spate of resistance and clashes have given rise to an environmentally conscious population from which local social movements are emerging.<sup>25</sup>

The above dangers have been reiterated by other scholars. There is evidence that the processing of the ore body and its waste product disposal method are the major sources of environmental pollution.<sup>26</sup> Again, the crushed ore and rock bodies after most of the needed metals have been removed are often toxic and pose serious threats to human, animal and plant life.<sup>27</sup> Pollutant especially from mercury used by small-scale miners,<sup>28</sup> and cyanide spillage into bodies of water has also become a major source of concern.<sup>29</sup> This practice is against indigenous traditional beliefs

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<sup>24</sup>Hilson, 2002, 54.

<sup>25</sup>Akabzaa & Darimani, 2001, 30.

<sup>26</sup>Hayford *et al.*, 2008.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>28</sup>Amankwah & Sackey, 2002; Hayford *et al.*, 2008.

where rivers and other bodies of water are viewed as deities and accorded all the sacredness that they deserved.

It was amidst these long-standing economic and environmental issues that WACAM emerged.

## **A Brief Historical Background of WACAM**

WACAM (Wassa Association of Communities Affected by Mining) is a human rights and environmental advocacy organisation that works with mining communities to develop the capacity of affected people to struggle against the negative effects of mining.<sup>30</sup> WACAM thus, emerged to respond to some perceived pressing problems of the people of Wassa area in the Western region of Ghana. The Wassa area is endowed with extensive mineral deposits. This endowment has attracted a lot of mining operations by both local and foreign multinational companies. Another key issue that made the emergence of WACAM was the allegations of violations of the economic, social and civil rights of indigenous people in the Wassa area by these multinational corporations.<sup>31</sup> WACAM's development was particularly precipitated by the local transition from underground mining to surface mining and the new environmental problems that such a transition brought. From the outset, most of the gold mining operations in the Wassa area was limited to underground mining but later on, about eight multinational mining companies started surface mining operations in the then Wassa West District. This is evidenced in the statement made by Daniel Owusu-Koranteng and Hannah Owusu-Koranteng, the Executive Director and the Associate Executive Director of WACAM respectively:

The technological change from underground mining to surface mining and the use of cyanide in the heap leach method of gold extraction, changed the mining sector drastically which unleashed myriad of problems including but not limited to cyanide spillages, loss of livelihood, water and air pollution, mining related health problems, resettlement and relocation, youth

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<sup>30</sup> D. Owusu-Koranteng & H. Owusu-Koranteng, Wacam @15: Looking back to look forward (statement made at the celebration of the fifteen years of existence of WACAM).

<sup>31</sup> N. A. Anyidoho & G. Crawford, Leveraging national and global links for local rights advocacy: WACAM's challenge to the power of transnational gold mining in Ghana. In *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, (2014), 1-22.



unemployment, environmental degradation, human rights abuses, noise pollution, distortions in socio-cultural settings and low compensation.<sup>32</sup>

The above thought of the founding members of the organisation under discussion and, particularly the firm belief of the founders stated below, can definitely, be argued to be the catalyst for the take-off of WACAM:

Popular mobilisation of the vulnerable mining communities around the critical issues became the only option to seek local and national attention to solve the problems of the mining communities in the Wassa West District and we redirected our focus on community mobilisation.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of September 1998, saw the birth of WACAM at the Fiase Cinema Hall in Tarkwa under the able leadership of Daniel Owusu-Koranteng and his wife, Hannah Owusu-Koranteng and the likeminded people such as the late Ibrahim Issahaku, Baba Umaru Tsalhatu, Professor Ralph K. Asabere, and Ralph Agbalenyo. Some foundation community activists of Wacam include Peter Yeboah, Ahmed Pelpuo, J. A. Osei, Mr. Gavor, Sophia Ayensu, Agnes Ackon, Mathew Quacoe, Kwasi Aduakwah and Kwadwo Amponsah. This became a major landmark in the history of WACAM because the launch was attended by representatives of people from all the 17 mining communities from the then Wassa West District. In attendance were Chiefs from the area, Representatives of NGOs such as Third World Network (TWN), Centre for Public Interest Law (CEPIL), Friends of the Earth, Food first International Action Network (FIAN) graced the occasion, and Representatives of two mining companies. Five media houses were also invited to cover the occasion.<sup>34</sup>

According to Owusu-Koranteng and Hannah Owusu-Koranteng, WACAM started with community mobilisation around 1993 and by 1996, they 'had been able to mobilise some communities including Atuabo and Akontanse and other smaller communities which involved the resettlement of about 30,000 people by Goldfields Ghana Limited from their original settlements

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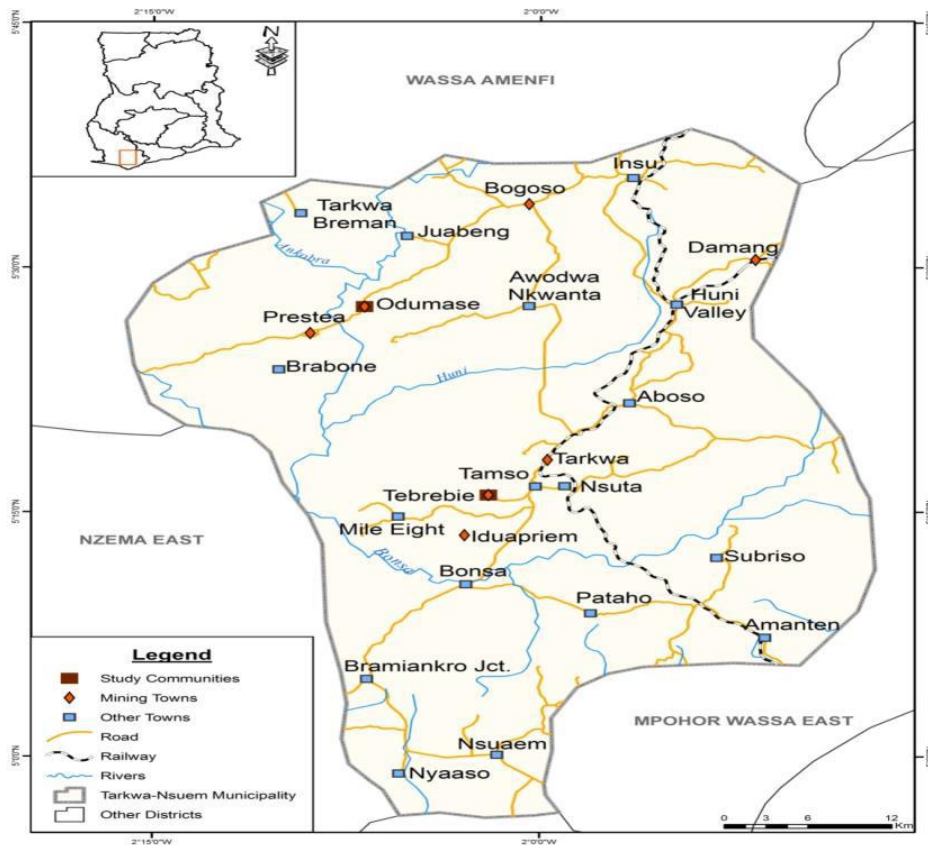
<sup>32</sup> D. Owusu-Koranteng & H. Owusu-Koranteng, 2013, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

to New Atuabo near Tarkwa.<sup>35</sup> The dream was realised not without much sacrifice as in his own words: '[T]he difficulty of fighting state policy of promoting surface mining and as public servants, we had to quit the public service in order to have the independence to continue the community mobilisation' (2013).<sup>36</sup> WACAM is thus, the brain child of Daniel Owusu-Koranteng and his wife Hannah Owusu-Koranteng and other like minded people who 'were members of a nationalist organisation of intellectuals and workers who showed great interest in the mining advocacy' (2013).<sup>37</sup>

**A map showing the areas where WACAM's operation began**



Source<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Adapted from Asamoah, Y, K.B. Antwi, O. Akyeampong, P. Baidoo, and D. Owusu-Koranteng, Daniel. 2013. "Now I Know the Law": Empowerment of Mining Communities by an Environmental Non-Government Organisation (ENGO)," *Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective*: 8: (1& 2):45-68 [p. 53] (originally from the Department of Geography and Regional Planning, University of Cape Coast, 2010).

Initially as stated above, WACAM was a response to problems the people of Wassa area alone were facing, but the organisation had to change its name from WACAM to “Wacam” when its influence began to be felt across the country. In an email conversation with Mr. Daniel Owusu-Koranteng, the Executive Director of the association, he explained that when the organisation spread to other areas outside its original territory, it became necessary to have a name that reflected its national character. Accordingly, after a long deliberation among all the stakeholders, especially afflicted communities countrywide, the name “Wacam” was adopted because “Wacam” sounded like the Akan statement, *Wakame*, which literally means “You have bitten me” or “You have disturbed me”. Since the affliction of the affected communities was comparable to being ‘bitten’ or being ‘disturbed’ by the multinational mining companies, the new name reflected the struggles of the communities. Therefore, the use of “Wacam” in this chapter henceforth, does not only refer to the people of Wassa area but to all the people of the areas in the country that have been afflicted by harmful effects of mining and have embraced the ideas of the association. The official change of name took place on 17<sup>th</sup> day of July 2009 and it appeared in the Ghana Gazette No. 59 of 17<sup>th</sup> July 2009.

### **Achievements of Wacam**

One significant achievement of Wacam in its almost two decades of continuous and sustained campaign against the large scale mining in the country is that it had not only increased the local people’s awareness about the dangers of large scale mining, especially gold mining on local communities but also the country as whole. It has also been able in a way to influence the policies and practices of the multinational mining companies. For instance, through its sustained campaign against the then Ashanti Goldfields Company (AGC) and AngloGold Ashanti (Obuasi mine) for over a decade, the company negotiated and paid compensations to victims of its human rights abuses.

A clear example of helping the people to protect their rights was that Wacam is on record to have been the first organisation in Ghana that has lodged a formal complaint on human rights abuses in mining communities with the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) in 2000. In view of this, a panel was constituted under the chairmanship of Mr. Emile Short (then Commissioner of CHRAJ) on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2001 to listen to testimonies from victims of human rights abuses by mining companies in Tarkwa. Further complaints were presented to

CHRAJ for investigation by the National Coalition of Mining (NCOM) in 2005. These efforts resulted in the preparation of the report on the “State of human rights in the mining communities” by CHRAJ in 2008 which catalogued the human rights abuses in mining communities by mining companies.

Again, due to the awareness creation by Wacam, there has been evidence of increased compensation for loss of farm lands to mining corporations. One of such achievements of Wacam in this respect, is the pressure it mounted on Goldfields Ghana Limited to seek an out-of-court settlement, in a case involving the resettlement of people of Atuabo. This resulted in increment in the compensations ranging from 18 million cedis (1,800 Ghana cedis) to 20 million cedis (2,000 Ghana cedis) and an eventual construction of a clinic and three boreholes for the people.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, Wacam can now be described as an international organisation, since its influence has gone beyond the Wassa area in the Western region of Ghana to other parts of Ghana and some countries in West Africa where mining takes place. At the time of its launch Wacam members covered only 17 communities in the Wassa area but as of now, Wacam is working in over 100 mining communities in Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo, Western, and Eastern Regions of Ghana. Wacam works with NGOs and mining communities in Mali and Senegal.

Beside the above, and under the auspices of Integrated Business Information System (IBIS), Wacam now shares its mining advocacy experience with NGOs and mining communities in the three Northern Regions of Ghana.

In addition, and through its workshops and outreach programmes, Wacam’s activists are sensitised on varied topics such as the Minerals and Mining Act, the Public Order Act, Leadership skills, Negotiations, Mining and development, compensation and human rights. Paralegal training was provided by Centre for Public Interest Law (CEPIL) and Centre for Labour Rights and Community Service (CLARCS). Consequently, Wacam has been able to train more than 2,000 activists including community activists, NGOs, students, Trade Unionists, Faith-based organisations among others. These outreach programmes have been so effective to the extent that its community activists are able to quote freely from the national constitution and the Minerals and Mining Act to support their claims for the protection of their rights and campaigns.

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<sup>39</sup> See D. Owusu-Koranteng, 10th anniversary celebration of WACAM: Anniversary speech of the executive director at the British Council auditorium, (Accra: 29 October 2008).

Moreover, based on experiences with campaigns on cyanide spillages, Wacam has trained its community activists on the identification of cyanide spillages as part of the Early Warning system to prevent fatalities when there are incidences of cyanide spillages.

Another key success of Wacam has to do with its policy advocacy with other NGOs. This has resulted in reforms of the new Minerals and Mining Law (Act 703) resulting in the inclusion of 'compensation principles which takes into account loss of expected incomes depending on the nature of crops on the land and their life expectancy' in the mining laws.<sup>40</sup> And according to Mr. Owusu-Koranteng:

The campaigns for reform in Minerals and Mining Act with respect to the fiscal regime by advocacy NGOs including Wacam led to some reforms in the Minerals and Mining act. For example, the minerals and mining act gives a sliding scale of 3% to 6% royalty rate of gross minerals mined but all the mining companies were paying 3%. The campaigns for the change in the fiscal regime compelled government to fix the royalty rate at 5%. Additional changes in the fiscal regime which resulted from advocacy campaigns include capital allowance which was changed from 75% in the first year of the operations of the mine and 50% of remaining balance to equal payments of 20% for a five year period.<sup>41</sup>

Not only this, but also Wacam has taken a step forward by establishing the Victims' Support scheme by way of providing financial support to victims of human rights abuses who needed medical care and educational support.

Wacam believes in rights education and training for the empowerment of its staff and activists. On the basis of this, Wacam has provided both formal and informal training to its activists at all levels up to Post graduate level. For example, in the New Abirem area where Newmont operates the Akyem mine, financial support was provided to Kwabena Frimpong to undertake a degree programme in social work at the University of Ghana. He

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>41</sup> D. Owusu-Koranteng, email correspondence, 2 March 2014.

graduated at the age of 60. Mr. Frimpong is now in charge of the Akyem wing of Wacam.

Wacam now has its own Quarterly Newsletter – *Asetenapa* – which serves as an official mouthpiece for the association for raising community issues relating to the rights of marginalised people. The first volume came out in August 2009. Daniel Owusu-Koranteng, the Executive Director of Wacam paid a deserving tribute to Oxfam, America, for its assistance and individuals like Mr. Emmanuel Kojo Kwarteng, a Journalist who was adjudged the Best Journalist for Environmental Reporting in 2007, for mooted the idea of a newsletter for Wacam.

The influence of Wacam is resonating in the West African sub-region to the effect that it has resulted in the development of the ECOWAS Directive on the Harmonisation of Guidelines and Policies in the mining sector. Mr. Owusu-Koranteng, the Executive Director of Wacam even served on the committee of experts that was tasked by ECOWAS secretariat to prepare a draft for ECOWAS Mining Directive. This document has been ratified and gazetted by the government of Ghana.

The activities of Wacam have travelled so far that as of now it provides internship to foreign students. Michael Birks and Robyn-Michelle LeRoux, Interns of Trent University in Canada, made the following remarks about their impression on Wacam:

The experience at Wacam has provided us with an incomparable opportunity, which we will forever be grateful for. The members and volunteers of WACAM are some of the most inspiring people we have met in our lives. Their dedication and commitment to the course of justice for the poor, which are presented to them on a weekly basis, is limitless and can serve as an example for all people and nations, trying to make a difference.<sup>42</sup>

The above testimony confirms the huge success of Wacam judged against the environment of low awareness of the rights, poverty and illiteracy of the communities where Wacam operates. There is no wonder that today Wacam is one of the leading NGOs in Ghana championing the rights of the vulnerable and the protection and conservation of the environment. In fact, Wacam is acknowledged

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<sup>42</sup>WACAM, *Asetenapa*, (August 2009), 1 (001).

as the premier mining advocacy organisation in Ghana. Where many eco-resistant organisations/NGOs take inspiration from.

## Challenges

The realisation of the dream of the formation of WACAM did not come without much sacrifice as in the words of Mr. Owusu-Koranteng: 'we had to quit the public service in order to have the independence to continue the community mobilisation' (2013). Furthermore, the multinational mining companies are very powerful in terms of their financial and lobbying capabilities. Obviously it is a daunting task to engage in advocacy against these powerful multinational companies that are well connected, politically and preventing them from achieving their profit maximisation objectives.<sup>43</sup> This was the situation Wacam found itself. An evidenced of this can found in the statement made by Ms. Janet Fishlock, an expatriate staff working with Goldfields Ghana Limited to the effect that: "Wacam's initiative of mobilising community people to protect their rights was a good one but it was too late to merit anybody's efforts".<sup>44</sup> She said this when she attended the inauguration ceremony and got the opportunity to address the gathering. This woman was able to make such a statement due to the subtle means she had used to endear herself to some of the women in the community, particularly through her involvement in the resettlement of the Atuabo and Akontanse people. According to Daniel Owusu-Koranteng, Ms. Fishlock went to the extent of convincing the people to abandon their struggle against the resettlement package of Goldfields Ghana Limited.<sup>45</sup> Her statement testifies to some of the efforts the mining companies made to kill the Wacam before it began to have any negative effect on their operations.

Another major challenge of Wacam has to do with the continuous overstretch of its human and financial resources resulting from more demands on it to expand its activities to cover more mining communities in the country. Daniel and Hannah Owusu-Koranteng described this situation of Wacam as being "a victim of its own success". Because of the tremendous work that Wacam has been doing over the years, especially in sensitising the members of the affected communities of the harmful effects of mining, particularly *galamsey* (a popular term for illegal mining in Ghana) operators, on their environment and lives in general, "it

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<sup>43</sup> D. Owusu-Koranteng, 2008.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

receives constant requests from communities, NGOs, Faith-based organisations and state institutions to provide direction and response to the environmental, social and economic consequences of mining".<sup>46</sup> The demands for expansion of the organisation's activities also over-stretched its financial resources. But Wacam strongly believes in maintaining its independence so as to be able to pursue its core objectives without any external influence and, thus, the organisation is extremely careful in sourcing for funding. Due to financial constraint, Wacam began to source funding from within and without Ghana and fortunately the leadership got in touch with Oxfam America. According to the organisers, Oxfam has been the main funding source of Wacam until Oxfam America became affected by the recent economic recess in the USA. This has affected the activities of Wacam, particularly in 2013. In view of the funding constraints some of Wacam staff had to leave to seek relatively more lucrative employment after they had benefited from Wacam's educational support and training. In view of this, the association relies on Community Activists, Volunteers and Part time officers, and a lean permanent staff to implement its programmes.<sup>47</sup> This constitutes a constraint in the achievement of Wacam's objectives and its desire to match up to the growing challenges in the mining sector.

In the face of the above seeming insurmountable challenges, Wacam has remained resolute and focused and thus, can be credited with some level of successes as evident from the achievement section of the paper.

### **How did Wacam achieve these in the face of the challenges?**

A major contributing factor for Wacam's success in its advocacy is attributable to its grass root mobilisation approach, which the theory of rights-based approach emphasises. Anyidoho and Crawford (2014) relying on Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi (2004) on the rights-based approach 'posit that local people should be the agents of their own development by building their capacity to make right claims of duty-bearers, notably of state institutions.'<sup>48</sup> That is, knowing the power that these multinational corporations

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<sup>46</sup> D. Owusu-Koranteng & H. Owusu-Koranteng, 2014.

<sup>47</sup> D. Owusu-Koranteng, 2008.

<sup>48</sup>N. A. Anyidoho & G. Crawford . Leveraging national and global links for local rights advocacy: WACAM's challenge to the power of transnational gold mining in Ghana, *Canadian Journal of Development Studies / Revue canadienne d'études du développement*, (2014), p. 2.  
DOI: [10.1080/02255189.2014.936369](https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2014.936369).



wield, Wacam resorted to grass root mobilisation of people of mining communities, media, intellectuals, NGOs, Faith-based organisations and organised labour. This *Modus operandi* offered Wacam an effective means to confront these mining companies with some degree of success.

Coupled with the above, is Wacam's tenacity and adeptness to form partnerships with like-minded national and international movements such as OXFAM, America, Earthworks, Global Response, Jaringan Advokasi Tamba (JATAM), GRUFIDES, and Foodfirst International Action Network (FIAN). At the same time, Wacam keeps its local focus by not playing to the whims and caprices of funding agencies. These traits of Wacam according to Anyidoho and Crawford<sup>49</sup>, have been regarded by many scholars as the major difference of Wacam's mode of operations compared to other major NGOs such as Environmental Protection Association of Ghana (EPAG), Forest Watch Ghana (FWG), Friends Of The Earth-Ghana (FOE), Ghana Association for the Conservation of Nature (GACON), Ghana Wildlife Society (GWS), and Rural Environmental Care Association (RECA).<sup>50</sup>

Aside the above, Wacam's success in the face of all its challenges is due to unrelenting challenge to both corporate and state power in terms of doing the right thing to mitigate the adverse impact of mining on both the livelihood of the people and the general weal of the environment.

### Wacam and the Future

Mr. Owusu-Koranteng says, despite its achievements, Wacam is not resting until it is able to negotiate a decent livelihood for members of the affected communities with the view to ameliorate or eradicate the poverty inflicted on the people by the activities of these mining companies. It must be underscored here that compensating the affected people wasn't the central aim of the multinational companies, but rather it is used just as a bait. Compensations take years before they are paid, and, even when paid, are not commensurate with the damage resulting from the operations of the mining companies. Mr. Owusu-Koranteng stresses further that Wacam wants to implement its 'vision of

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> A. Darkwah, N. Amponsah, & E. Gyampoh, *Civil Society in a changing Ghana: An assessment of the current state of civil society in Ghana*. (Accra: GAPVOD and The World Bank, 2006); D. Tsikata, Women's organizing in Ghana since the 1990s: From individual organizations to three coalitions. In *Development* (2009), 52 (2), 185–192; N. A. Anyidoho, *Ghana: Review of rights discourse*. (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2011); see Anyidoho & Crawford 2014, 2.

working on economic empowerment of mining communities'. In view of this, Wacam has designed an economic empowerment initiative under the Sustainable Livelihood Network (SULNET), which will take off in the coming years. To facilitate the easy take-off of this initiative, Wacam is institutionalising its training programmes to give the people alternative skills of livelihood. Such alternatives include cash crop production, kente cloth weaving, teak tree planting, and bee keeping to discourage local people from being enticed into *Galamsey* operation due to poverty in these mining areas.

## Conclusion

The foregoing discussions have demonstrated that in all respects, Wacam is a success and deserves celebrating by all environmentally minded people worldwide. Wacam's success is achieved against the backdrop of the power and influence of multinational large-scale mining in the areas they operate, particularly in the so-called 'Third World Countries', where they are able to control everybody including the governments. These corporations usually capitalise on the vulnerability – poverty, high level of illiteracy – of the people in the areas they operate. Wacam has demonstrated that with determination, vulnerability could be turned into a positive weapon of self-protection against all that lowers one's safety and dignity. Wacam's *Modus operandi* – grass root mobilisation coupled with astuteness and dexterity of its leadership – have been the association's trump card and thus should be a guiding principle for other likeminded movements in Ghana in particular and Africa and beyond in general.