

Challenging our Simplistic Notions of Community? A Snapshot of Dynamics and Livelihood Struggles from Dumase Community, Ghana

Gabriel Botchwey

*Department of Political Science Education
University of Education, Winneba – Ghana*

gabbotch@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Conceptions of community tend to influence community development activities and outcomes. However, it appears many community development practitioners gloss over these and operate with a homogenising mindset in rural communities that may appear very simple to the outsider. This paper undertakes a qualitative study of a rural community that has been seriously affected by surface mining problems in the western region of Ghana. It analyses how community dynamics seem to have led to negative reinforcements at the local level, and how these have stalled effective community level responses to the surface mining problems. The findings reveal that collective action is not automatic; community interests may also diverge even in rural settings that may seem laid-back to the casual observer. The paper argues that a lack of in-depth understanding of community dynamics is likely to produce ineffective responses to community problems. Community development workers may therefore need to abandon simplistic, homogenizing and harmonious notions of community and strive to gain more realistic understanding of community dynamics in order to achieve development objectives.

Key words: Community, Development, Interests, Mining, Pollution

Introduction

This paper examines community dynamics, how these influence perceptions of problems at the community level and its impact on efforts to address the problems. It adopts the situation of a community that has been seriously affected by surface mining activities of a large mining corporation in the western region of Ghana, to explore the issues under consideration. The paper analyses the onset of the problems in view of changes in the mining and minerals laws of Ghana under economic liberalisation and state dependence on rents from mineral extraction. It moves on to examine responses at the community

level to the problems posed by intensified surface mining, and exposes how these dynamics seem to have contributed to the persistence of the problems. The paper argues that a more in-depth understanding of community dynamics is required to galvanize people to achieve common goals in the pursuit of critical community development. Notions of common interests, homogeneity and harmony that are popularly associated with rural communities may be very far from the reality. Community development practitioners may have to adopt more realistic conceptions of communities in the pursuit of goals and objectives.

The first part of the paper discusses the theoretical framework within which the study is anchored, especially the contested nature of conceptions regarding community and community development. The second section discusses the case study community, highlighting the surface mining problems and how these have impacted the livelihoods of residents in Dumase community, which was selected as a case study. The next section examines the surface mining problems in view of existing legislation in Ghana, and how these have contributed in various ways to bring about the problems in Dumase community. The paper then discusses the community level responses to the problems and how these have affected efforts in finding solutions to the problems. Finally, the paper undertakes theoretical reflections on the case study and argues for avoidance of simplistic notions of community and the pursuit of a deeper understanding of community dynamics in order to fashion out workable and appropriate responses to community problems.

Theoretical Framework

Community, as a concept, lacks a single definition that is accepted by all, and this stems from the different views and applications of the term in different contexts. Berner and Phillips (2005) pointed to this when they asked the following:

When NGO activists and social scientists talk of how ‘a community’ lobbied local government, built a well, borrowed money or decided on a development strategy, who are they talking about? Do they mean everyone in the community, or just the majority, or just the older ones, just the richer ones, just the men? Is the will of the community the same as the will of the community leadership? (Berner & Phillips, 2005:23).

These questions take us into contestations surrounding the concept of community and how these translate into frames of thought and action in community development (Ledwith, 2005). The different conceptualisations of community could be represented on a spectrum with one end featuring romantic views about community such as harmony, shared values, interests and norms (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler and Tipton, 1986; Bell, 1993; Etzioni, 1993; Selznik, 2002); at the other extreme of the spectrum are the radical pluralist views which associate community with internal opposition, dissent and conflict (Young, 1990; Sennett, 1998; Mouffe, 2000).

Discussing the philosophical foundations of community, Bell (1993) identified three types of constitutive communities. These include communities of place which are based on geographical locations; communities of memory that are based on shared histories, and psychological communities which evolve out of face-to-face interactions governed by trust, cooperation and altruism (Bell 1993, in Ganapati 2008:384). Whilst each of these has relevance for understanding the different aspects of the term, they are unable to bring out the differences in economic circumstances, class, gender, age, race and ethnicity which often characterize the social structure in typical communities. This may in turn lead to the unrealistic and often false assumption that communities are homogenous and harmonious. Communities may have issues that come to be associated with the members and they may have shared problems. However, they may also be scenes of intense competition and conflict over values, resources, interests and power.

Bellah et al. (1986) also described a community as a group of people who are socially interdependent with shared practices, whilst Etzioni (1993:6) has spoken of community as a web of affect-laden relationships with shared commitment to a set of values, norms, meanings, history, identity and a culture. These present a rather romantic view of community and seem to rule out the existence of divergent views, conflict and unequal power relations that privilege some members of the community in terms of access to decision making processes, resources and advantages in the society. In another vein, Selznick (2002:17) stated that communities are 'moral bonds of membership and leadership' which seems to suggest that the leaders and members of communities agree on what is relevant to the group and what is not. However, this appears to be a rather simplistic view of the reality in communities where the leaders and members may have different views on what is relevant for the group. Furthermore, it would be naïve to assume that the wishes or will of the leadership will be the same as the will of the members, since there is always the possibility of the leaders pursuing an agenda of ensuring their dominance and self – interests, as opposed to that of the group (Berner & Phillips, 2005:23).

Barber (1984:232), however, has argued that a community 'owes the character of its existence to what its constituted members have in common and therefore cannot be treated as a mere aggregation of individuals,' which suggests that communities tend to define themselves according to some agreed or common basis, and not just by fact of living in the same location. Members need to identify themselves as part of the community, even though they may share living space. This highlights the existence of issues and interests over which people can agree and come together to pursue, which may lead them to think of themselves as a community; at the same time it points to the possibility of self-exclusion and individual self-interests that may diverge from that of the community (Cain & Yuval-Davis, 1990:7 in Shaw, 2007:29). In support of this view, Young (1990: 47) asserted that a community should be conceptualized in terms of a mere 'co-presence of subjects' and should be devoid of romantic ideas that are often associated with them.

In contrast to the views of Barber (1984) that communities are constituted on the basis of what they have in common, radical pluralists argue against privileging common values over individual ones and insist on emphasizing the differences that exist in communities. For example, Sennett (1998) argued that one cannot speak of a community until differences within it are acknowledged. He goes on to assert that the idea of common values in communities is a myth which serves to produce implicit exclusionary policies. In support of this, Mouffe (2000) argued that communities should be thought of as scenes of 'agonistic pluralism' which feature opposition, dissent, and conflict (Ganapati, 2008:384-385). In short, radical pluralists view community critically and tend to prefer policies that acknowledge differences in opposition to homogeneity and harmony. These critical conceptualisations of community seem closer to real life situations that one encounters in communities in both rural and urban situations and there seem to be very little ground to assume that rural communities are more cohesive than urban ones or vice versa.

Community Development

Community development lacks a universally accepted definition. Due to differences in objectives, perceptions, agenda and power structure configurations, community development has been pursued historically to achieve both honourable and problematic ends. Vasoo (1984) pointed to these conceptual difficulties and practices when he wrote:

The term community development is often misunderstood by those who preach it and wrongly applied by those who practice it. This is so because the term is itself elusive and open to many subjective interpretations by those involved directly or indirectly in community development whether they be community workers, politicians, social and welfare agency administrators, local leaders or concerned citizens (Vasoo, 1984 in: Craig et al. 2008:124).

There have been instances where counter-insurgency strategies, emergency 'resettlement' or forced removals of about half a million people from one village to another location, as happened in Malaya (present day Singapore), were labelled as community development (Mayo, 2008:19-20). However, activities that have come to be interpreted as community development could be classified under locality development, social planning, and social action activities (Vasoo, 1984:122). Locality development activities focus on collective participation at the community level to set and achieve development objectives. Social planning approaches emphasize finding solutions to social problems concerning children, families, delinquency, truancy, housing, mental health problems and others. The social action approach is dedicated to pursuing interests of disadvantaged segments of a population, to tackle issues of social justice and greater democracy for disadvantaged groups. As community development has different meanings and objectives for different groups, the ways to pursue these have been understandably varied in different places.

Montero (2008:667) also discusses two main models of community development: the traditional top-down model and the critical or transformative bottom-up model. The traditional model follows a top-down view, which sees community development in terms of interventions and assistance to the disadvantaged in society, with activities usually originating from and conducted by the State and non-governmental organisations. This tends to be paternalistic because communities have to bow to the demands of external organisations such as the State, NGOs, private or corporate foundations in order to receive sponsorship, even though the language of community partnership and participation are frequently used to obscure the power relations involved (Montero, 2008). This has the risk of weakening communities and producing apathy, dependency and helplessness. This remains problematic because it is very unlikely that people in poor communities with weak bargaining positions will have the confidence to influence decisions and activities funded by powerful external agents who control the purse and have access to 'professional' expertise. On the contrary, there is a high likelihood that they will accept decisions made by sponsors and go along with them instead of raising issues that sponsors may not favour.

In contrast, the critical or bottom up community development model utilizes oppositional politics and tactics against the State, corporations, public institutions and power-holding organisations to demand change. This model takes its roots from critical theory, and was promoted vigorously by Alinsky (1969, 1971) and Freire (1970, 1972), drawing inspiration from Antonio Gramsci's political analysis. It largely follows critical and radical approaches to pursue social change, building on issues that oppressed and deprived people care about and want to change. It is mainly a bottom up process that is located within the everyday experiences of disadvantaged people in communities. The model works from individual experiences, grass root organisations and affected communities against institutions and structures in order to tackle the root causes or sources of deprivation and disadvantage. It is based on a conviction in the ability of people to transform their own life conditions by acting collectively and taking non-violent action against conditions that derive from institutions and structures that affect their lives (Montero, 2008:6). Affected communities or people serve as the locus and agents of social change (DeFilippis, Fisher & Shragge, 2007). This critical model is adopted as the framework to examine why community development challenges may be more complicated than they appear, and may therefore require greater sophistication to resolve.

Methodology

Qualitative methodology was employed to undertake this study. Denzin and Lincoln (2003:4) have defined qualitative research as follows:

...qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret,

phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003 in: Davies, 2007:10).

This study also adopted an interpretive epistemological stance which is located in grounded theory. It draws on the conceptualisation of grounded theory set out by Corbin (2005:49) as follows:

Grounded theory is a theory generating research methodology. The end product of the research endeavour is not a set of findings or a few themes. Rather it is an integrated theoretical formulation that gives understanding about how persons or organizations or communities experience and respond to events that occur ...What can be said of grounded theory is that it is a theory development based on actual data gathered through qualitative research. Despite the fact that events are processed and interpreted through the eyes of both participant and researcher, thus a construction, the grounding of theory in data tends to make it more reflective of practical situations than speculatively derived theory.

Within the qualitative methodological framework, this paper discusses a case study concerning the intensification of surface mining in Dumase by the mining company – Golden Star Prestea Bogoso Limited (GSPBL) and how these have impacted the livelihoods of community members. It then examines how responses to the problems reveal the complicated nature of community dynamics that impact achievements from community development. The study involved in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with community residents and participants drawn from institutions and organisations whose work relate to community development or the community struggles in Dumase such as the Department for Community Development, the Tarkwa-Nsuaem and Prestea-Huni Valley District Assemblies², legal practitioners, Minerals Commission (Tarkwa Office), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Lands Commission (Western Regional Offices). Other respondents include traditional leaders who are unelected such as chiefs and heads of clans; and elected leaders such as Assembly members, Unit Committee³ and Area Council members⁴ at the community level. Informal leaders known as opinion leaders⁵, local organisations and workers of non-governmental organisations whose work related to the issues were also interviewed. The data was collected from February 2009 to the end of 2011, including documents, observations

2 A District Assembly is a local government unit whose population is between 75,000-95,000 (ILGS, 2008:4).

3 Unit Committee is the basic level in the local government structure of Ghana.

4 Area Councils are created for groups of villages and smaller towns which are geographically closest with a population of more or less than 5000 (ILGS, 2008:7).

5 These include retired public servants, knowledgeable people, former elected representatives, religious leaders who are quite respected in the community.

and reports which were regularly updated. Initials of respondents have been used in referencing to protect their actual identities since the case study is still an ongoing struggle, and respondents may be exposed to vilification if specifically identified. Overall, about 55 participants were involved in the study. In terms of advantages, qualitative methodology recognizes the importance of people's perceptions, feelings, understanding and experiences of issues, and provides space for them to express these during the study (Cresswell, 2003). It also allows the use of multiple levels of abstraction or theorising, and the use of information from multiple sources such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and documents (Marsh & Stoker, 2002).

Dumase Community Mining Struggles

Dumase is a rural community with a population of 2,000 people. It is located 5km from Bogoso, the capital of the newly created Prestea-Huni Valley District Assembly. Bogoso lies about 120km north of Takoradi, the capital of the Western Region of Ghana. Some of the key events of the mining problems in Dumase have been well documented in the annual reports of the Wassa Association of Communities Affected by Mining (WACAM) from 2003 to the present. A timeline of the key events are presented in the subsequent section.

On 23rd October 2004, a cyanide spillage occurred from the mines of Bogoso Gold Limited (now Golden Star Prestea Bogoso Limited, GSPBL) which polluted water resources and fishponds of residents in Dumase, and a press conference on the spillage was organised by the community in conjunction with WACAM on 1st December 2004 to bring the situation to the attention of the general public (WACAM Annual report 2004:12). As a follow up, WACAM supported those who suffered losses from the cyanide spillage to take legal action against the company. GSPBL initially agreed to settle the case out of court, but later reneged on this promise, having rejected the compensation payments proposed for owners of the fishponds. Whilst this case was pending, another cyanide spillage occurred within short notice of the first in 2005 (WACAM Annual Reports 2005:31 and 2006:32).

From the 2006 annual report of WACAM, on 17th June 2006, GSPBL released cyanide again into River Aprepre at Dumase. The local WACAM group made a statement on the cyanide spillage on 18th June 2006. Following this, the chief of Dumase made a press statement on the frequent cyanide spillages by GSPBL and the damaging consequences they have had on community water resources and livelihoods on 20th June 2006. Journalists from KYSS FM, a radio station in Takoradi, visited Dumase to cover the damage caused by the spillage and to interview the chief, affected persons and a cross-section of community members on 21st June 2006. These interviews and events were broadcast on their radio network to the general public. On 1st July 2006, WACAM had a meeting with a group of community members who were affected by the 2004 cyanide spillages by GSPBL in Dumase. At the meeting, the affected persons authorised WACAM and the Centre for Public Interest Law (CEPIL) to support them in filing a court case against GSPBL. This legal action was eventually brought against the company at the High Court in Tarkwa in 2006 after all

other avenues of negotiations had proved ineffective (WACAM Annual Report 2006; interview with JM, 23rd March, 2009).

Following these, the people who were affected by the cyanide spillages joined together with another group of farmers whose properties and crops had been destroyed by rock-waste dump trucks of GSPBL, and organised demonstrations against GSPBL on 30th October, 2006. Three hundred community members from Dumase participated with the intention of putting pressure on the company to pay compensation to farmers whose properties had been destroyed by the trucks and the cyanide spillages. Following the demonstrations and a series of meetings, the company again agreed to negotiate with the affected people to pay compensations for their destroyed crops and properties. However, no action was taken by the company on this agreement (WACAM Annual Report 2006; interview with JM, 23rd March, 2009).

On 7th January 2007, the affected persons and some mining activists in Dumase again participated in demonstrations against GSPBL for the refusal of the company to pay for the destruction of fishponds constructed by farmers and the waste dump truck damages (WACAM Annual Report 2007:27-30). This time round, some soldiers, acting on behalf of the company came into the town and beat up the demonstrators in Dumase. Interestingly, in response to a question in Parliament about this incident on 11th July 2007, the Western Regional Minister at the time denied that the military were sent to beat up demonstrators in Dumase (WACAM Annual Report 2007:27-30). However, Adom FM, a radio station in Accra followed up and called one of the demonstrators from Dumase who confirmed the events and stated that the Regional Minister could afford to say that nobody was beaten because poor people are not recognised as human beings (WACAM Annual Report 2007:27-30; interview with JM, 23rd March, 2009). WACAM later supported about five people who sustained various degrees of injuries from the military and police beatings to seek medical care at the Tarkwa Government Hospital. Public attention was drawn to these events through discussions on radio, press releases and conferences which compelled the company to pay some agreed compensation to the affected farmers in Dumase community (Interview with DOK, 9th March, 2009 and WACAM Annual Report 2007).

Interviews and focus group discussions also indicated that the affected people in the community, in conjunction with other groups, have been putting sustained pressure on GSPBL over the surface mining problems through demonstrations (Interview with JM, 23rd March 2009 and local WACAM group, 5th April 2009). Other major problems that some community members have suffered include loss of lands, compensation payment problems, destruction of water bodies, cyanide pollution, cracked buildings due to rock blasting and environmental degradation as result of the surface mining activities of GSPBL. One woman pointed to the blasting problem in interview when she said:

The major problem in our community is blasting from the mining; it has brought about the cracking of our buildings...We have made complaints

to the EPA, District Assembly and WACAM... We expect the EPA to come and stop the miners from blasting (Interview with CB, 1st April, 2009).

Many other community level respondents corroborated this and indicated that they want the blasting stopped. During data collection, it was observed that several buildings in the community have developed cracks, which respondents attributed to the blasting impact of the surface mining operations. The community lies very close to the work site of GSPBL.

The major occupation of the people in the community is farming, but most of their lands have been acquired as mining concessions, and are being destroyed by the surface mining activity. Lands that were previously used for cultivating cash crops and food crops have been taken over for mining purposes. Farmers who had cultivated their crops would receive notices that their lands have been acquired as gold mining concessions. The company would pay compensation for the number of crops on the farm, but not for the land which has been taken over. Worse still, payment would be made for crops for a spot value. This meant that a cocoa tree for example would be valued for about US\$ 7, which will be multiplied by the number of cocoa trees planted on the farm. However, this calculation does not take into consideration the number of years that a cocoa tree will continue to bear fruit until it finally dies off. This meant that if a cocoa tree has a fruit bearing life span of about 30 years, the farmer is only paid for one year and not for 30. In contrast, the compensation principles in Act 703, section 74 states that:

The compensation to which an owner or lawful occupier may be entitled, may include compensation for:

- a) deprivation of the use or a particular use of the natural surface of the land or part of the land
- b) loss of or damage to immovable properties
- c) in the case of land under cultivation, loss of earnings or sustenance suffered by the owner or lawful occupier, having due regard to the nature of their interest in the land,
- d) loss of expected income, depending on the nature of the crops on the land and their life expectancy.

Surface mining destroyed the fertile top soil to a depth of about 200m, making the land unsuitable for agriculture, with deep trenches and chemical pollution (Interview with EA, 11th May 2009 and ES, 2nd March 2009). One community elder who has lost lands as a result of the mining activities related this in an interview when talking about problems in the community:

We are facing land problems. I mean loss of farm lands by the operations of the mining company...Some of us have sent the case to court...The

government should stop giving lease to the mining companies because all our lands are finished (Interview with DEN, 24th March, 2009).

This in the view of many other respondents was worsening the existing poverty situation within the community (DM, 24th March, 2009; JM, 23rd March, 2009). Some members of the community used to work in the Prestea underground mine and the ECOMOG pit near the community, and with their acquisition and closure by GSPBL, they have suffered increased poverty due to high unemployment in the community as revealed in an interview with the chief, one mining activist and one key informant (Interviews with OF, 24th March, 2009; KBR, 1st April, 2009 and NK, 2nd April, 2009). Worse still, women have been at the receiving end of all these problems, especially concerning access to water. One woman respondent commented:

Dumase community needs water; not just water, but drinkable water... Water has become a problem because of the operations of the mining company (DM, 24th March, 2009).

During the women's focus group, one participant also commented:

We do not have good water to drink; the mining company spilled cyanide into our stream. We have appealed to the government through our former MP but the situation is the same...Women and girls have to go far away in order to fetch water when it is dry season (Women's Focus Group, 4th April, 2009).

Further discussions confirmed that women and girls have to walk long distances in order to fetch potable water since most of the water resources have been polluted through cyanide spillages or dried up completely due to a lowering of the water table. Members of the community also suffer frequent health problems and diseases associated with the polluted water resources and the dusty environment engendered by the blasting activities of GSPBL (Interview with OF, 24th March 2009). They also experience acid rains caused by pollution of the atmosphere from the surface mining activities (Interview with FC, 2nd April 2009).

Understanding the Problems in the Context of Existing Mining Legislation

The legislative frameworks that govern mining activities in Ghana are crafted to ensure state control over mineral resources. This top-down orientation which took hold from PNDC Law 153 (1986) vested all mining and mineral rights in the Head of State, and this hold has been carried forward into the 1992 Constitution. This legislation has led to the loss of communal artisanal mining sites for a number of reasons. For example, an interview with an official of the Minerals Commission indicated that in the past, small-scale artisanal mining provided ready employment for anyone interested, and that if one wanted to engage in artisanal mining, all arrangements could be completed for the interested person to start the activity within one hour. All that was required was a pick

axe, a shovel, and a no-objection from the local land owner (Interview with CL, 27th February 2009). However, this changed with the introduction of laws and procedures by the central State. The current law regulating small-scale mining (Act 703, 2006) states:

Despite a law to the contrary, a person shall not engage in or undertake a small-scale mining operation for a mineral unless there is in existence in respect of the mining operation a license granted by the Minister for Mines or by an officer authorised by the Minister (Act 703, 2006, Section 82, 1).

This legal provision effectively put the State in control over small-scale mining activities and communal mining sites which used to be relatively open to all have to be formally re-acquired under license from the Minerals Commission, and renewed every five years upon the payment of fees set by the Commission. Failure to formally acquire or renew the license rendered the site available for acquisition by others. Furthermore, the Minister responsible for mining, acting through the Minerals Commission reserves the right to refuse the granting or renewal of the license, in which case the communal concession gets lost. Many of these are then acquired by larger, well-resourced mining companies. Thus, many artisanal miners have legally lost access to communal sites through these dynamics and have had to work on the same piece of land as 'illegal' miners, combating the new owners, mostly the large mining firms. This is one of the problems in Dumase where GSPBL has acquired concessions that includes communal artisanal mining sites, and thereby led to tensions and confrontations between former artisanal miners and the company; interestingly, this particular site is not even being used by the company but only remains part of their acquisition. The community members' inability to hold on to their traditional mining sites through formal acquisitions and renewals, have led to the loss of these communal sites to the company through their acquisition by GSPBL in 2004 (Interview with NK, 2nd April 2009).

The land acquisition process for mining concessions seems to arrogate greater power and control to the State and mining companies over local populations, exhibiting the 'power over' dimension of power relations. The Mining and Minerals Law of 2006 states that the President may acquire or authorise occupation and use of any land in which mineral resources have been discovered (Act 703, Section 2). This legislation, coupled with the enactment that all minerals are vested in the President grants the State sweeping powers over a piece of land once it is considered to have some mineral potential. In the spirit of these laws and their earlier derivatives, large tracts of land have been acquired in Ghana as mineral concessions, especially in the Wassa area of the Western Region of Ghana. In Prestea-Huni Valley and Tarkwa-Nsuaem Districts, within which lie substantial parts of the concessions of GSPBL, about 60 per cent of lands are estimated to be under mineral concessions (Hilson & Yakovleva, 2007:101).

Concerning water, Act 703 (2006), section 17 states:

Subject to obtaining the requisite approvals or licenses under the Water Resources Commission Act 1996 (Act 552), a holder of a mineral right may, for purposes of or ancillary to the mineral operations, obtain, divert, impound, convey and use water from a river, stream, underground reservoir or watercourse within the land the subject of the mineral right.

This provision effectively grants mining companies considerable power and control over water resources within their mineral concessions and it seems to have been exercised to the disadvantage of local populations, who do not have access to pipe-borne or treated water and have to rely on streams to meet their water needs. The complaints by the Dumase community residents about the destruction and pollution of their water resources is supported by an independent study conducted by Obiri (2007) which examined water quality in Dumase. Obiri's study (2007:455) found high concentrations of the following metals in ground water from Dumase boreholes, which include:

- Iron (Fe) – 7.52 ppm,
- Manganese (Mn) – 1.11 ppm,
- Arsenic (As) – 4.52 ppm,
- Chromium (Cr) – 0.026 ppm,
- Cobalt (Co) – 0.01 ppm,
- Zinc (Zn) – 0.007 ppm,
- Cadmium (Cd) – 0.002ppm and
- Lead (Pb) – 0.005 ppm.

The concentrations of these metals were found to be well above the levels set by the World Health Organisation (WHO) regarding water resources and were highly toxic, thus putting local populations who use the water at serious risk from exposure to health hazards. For example, iron was over 25 times higher and arsenic was over 4 times higher than WHO approved levels for human consumption (Obiri, 2007:462). The health problems found to be associated with the use of such water resources included iron toxicity leading to anorexia, oliguria, diarrhoea, hypothermia, dysphasic shock, metabolic acidosis, most of which can lead to death (Obiri, 2007:461). Other health problems include vascular congestion of the gastrointestinal tract and problems that affect the liver, kidneys, heart, brain, spleen, adrenals, and thymus, in addition to exposure to arsenic which is known to cause cancer (Obiri, 2007:461). Many of these boreholes have been dug as replacements for destroyed streams and water resources of the community members, who have very little power to protect their water resources within the framework of Act 703 (2006). Thus, weak legislation regarding protection of water bodies and replacement of destroyed ones help to account for the problems with water resources in Dumase community.

Community Level Responses to the Mining Problems

In the face of the mining problems, community dynamics seem to have influenced responses in a number of ways. These dynamics include exclusionary decision-making processes, discrimination against women, divergent interests between some leaders and affected community members, espionage by community members on behalf of the mining company and the security services in the district. These seem to have contributed to the persistence of the mining problems.

Decision-making in the community was controlled by the chief and his elders, and on some occasions, a general community meeting was called where everyone could express their views. However, some respondents indicated that most decisions were based on consultations with opinion leaders without the involvement of the larger community. Women faced discrimination at such meetings. They could attend the meetings but their views were usually brushed aside in favour of those expressed by the men. This was especially in reference to the water shortage even though they suffer most because they had to walk long distances to find water for domestic use; and they were also suffering from the other mining problems (Women's Focus Group, 4th April, 2009).

It appears the problems emanating from surface mining have not received the attention they deserved mainly because most decisions were made by community leaders, involving only men. Not a single woman was mentioned by respondents as a member of the decision-making group in the community when asked about the key decision makers at the local level. Those mentioned were the chief, elders, Assembly Members, Unit Committee members and opinion leaders, all of whom were men. It was only the WACAM group in the community which had some women as leaders. Interestingly, the group indicated in discussions that they faced stiff opposition from the community leadership and was not recognized in decision making arenas in the community; they were not invited or welcome as a group but could participate in general gatherings as individuals within the community (WACAM Focus Group, 5th April 2009). This situation exemplified the exclusion of those who were most affected by the water problems and exposed deficits concerning participation and inclusion at the community level. One woman who participated as a respondent had been arrested and prosecuted in court for working on her farm, which GSPBL was claiming to be part of their concession. However, with the support of WACAM, she was acquitted and discharged and the community leadership did not support her in the struggle with GSPBL (Interview with JM, 23rd March 2009). Despite all these, community decision-making arenas largely excluded women who were seriously affected by the mining problems and remained at the forefront of the struggle against the problems.

There were also some unsubstantiated allegations that some key community leaders were benefitting from contracts and regular gifts from the mining company and were therefore unwilling to support the struggles or demand accountability (Interview with KBR, 1st April 2009). There were also allegations that some community leaders served as informants

who report mining activists to GSPBL, who in turn pass this information to the police leading to arrests and prosecution (WACAM Focus Group, 3rd April 2009). Furthermore, the Assembly Member of the community was not interested in helping to address the mining problems. He refused to participate in the study, believing it was to assess and criticise his performance (Interview with JM, 1st April, 2009). Data collected revealed that there was a conflict between the unit committees and the Assembly Member representing the community and so they could not work together on anything.

On blasting activities of the mining company, a member of WACAM commented:

We expect information concerning stopping the mining company from the surface mining activities, especially the blasting; we expect this information to come through our chief and Assembly Member (WACAM Focus Group, 5th April, 2009).

Many respondents also indicated that they received very little information about the issues that really matter to them, with some wondering whether the Assembly Member raised their problems at District Assembly meetings at all (WACAM Focus Group, 5th April, 2009; interview with OF, 24th March, 2009). With the exception of the chief, all other respondents in the community indicated receiving no information from the Assembly through the Assembly Member concerning their problems. From the discussions, information gaps and its related complexities intertwined with weak accountability systems have led to unregulated use of explosives near the community, compensation payment problems and others.

However, the dynamics have not been entirely depressing. On a more positive note, the community members on their own organise communal labour to keep the environment clean, and have built their own public toilets. There was also a remarkable example of one community member volunteering to pay the salaries of two teachers for about four years in response to teacher-shortage problems at the community school due to problems with payment of salaries by central government. This reflected a willingness to undertake activities to improve living conditions in the community (Interview with NK, 2nd April 2009). Some of the community members seriously affected by the mining problems exhibited positive organising capabilities. Others were affected through loss of land, loss of communal mining sites and compensation payment problems; others were also affected through the cracking of their buildings and pollution of water resources. These residents came together to form an activist group to protest against the activities of GSPBL and mounted vigorous campaigns against the negative consequences of surface mining and to seek redress for cyanide spillages. This alliance continues to grapple with violence from the state security forces during demonstrations, which have often been met with violence from soldiers and private security personnel (CHRAJ Report, 2008; WACAM Annual Reports 2004-2007; WACAM Focus Group, 5th April, 2009).

Theoretical Reflections

Why have the problems proved difficult to resolve, and how can we make sense of the existing situation in the light of theory? The dynamics in Dumase community reveal elements of internal conflict, dissent, opposition, mistrust and divergent interests that are similar to what Mouffe (2000) describes as agonistic pluralism (See Ganapati, 2008). This seems to stand in sharp contrast to the views of Etzioni (1993) and Selznick (2002), which consider communities to be held together by harmony and common interests.

One major challenge in the community is the exclusion of women in decision-making simply because they are women. This discriminatory situation is explained by the fact that traditionally, men were supposed to make the decisions, and women were told what the decision was, and what they must do. However, there were very capable women in the community and one of them was the leader of the local group that was campaigning against the surface mining problems together with WACAM. Despite this, she was never invited by the elders to attend meetings concerning those same problems, or any another problems in the community. This suggests that communities may not be as inclusive and egalitarian as many community development workers tend to believe.

Another key theoretical question that emerges from the dynamics is: who actually represents the interests of the community? Is it the chief and elders, all of whom were men? Or the elected leaders such as the Assembly member and the Unit Committee members? Or the people who have actually lost lands, cocoa farms, small-scale mining sites, compensation payments? There is no simple answer to these questions precisely because they highlight the complexity of interest representation at the local level, which many community development activities may take for granted. Perhaps, the dynamics that are portrayed re-echo the concerns raised by Berner and Phillips (2005) about difficulties in ascertaining the will or interests of communities.

Power struggles at the community level seem to have played a significant part in the dynamics. For example, there were intense power struggles between the Assembly member and Unit committees who have been elected to represent the community within the local government system. They had never held a single meeting together about the surface mining problems or about any other community issue. Interestingly, they are supposed to work together to identify the pressing issues of the community and to bring it to the attention of the local government. Thus the official representatives had become dysfunctional due to some unarticulated internal conflicts, and therefore official representation of community issues before the local state was hampered. Theoretically, this challenges the notion of communities as being homogenous and united with a common front.

Notably, some community members were acting as informants for the police, military and mining company in return for favours. This further suggests serious divergence of

interests in the face of problems regarding water pollution and cracked buildings, which had affected almost the entire community. Theoretically, this reinforces the point that common problems may not automatically engender a common agenda aimed at resolving them, and that deliberate efforts may be required to achieve these.

Conclusion

In this paper, various conceptualisations of community have been examined, bearing in mind all the inherent complexities involved. These have been examined in view of the surface mining struggles in Dumase, which seems to be spiralling downwards and continuously destroying the livelihoods of many members of the community. Many other communities located in mining areas in the Western, Ashanti, Eastern, and Upper East regions in Ghana find themselves in similar conditions and are struggling to cope with the problems. The communities on their own may be suffering dynamics similar to what have emerged from the Dumase case study. The complexities revealed by the dynamics make it imperative to remain sober about potential for collective action to achieve social change through community development under such trying conditions. As revealed in this study, communities tend to be the abode of the powerful and the powerless, the rich and the poor, majority and the minority groups; it may also exhibit elements of cooperation and conflict, mutual support and exploitation all at once. Thus, even though a physical, geographical location may qualify to be labelled as a community by reason of sharing a specific space, this does not in any way suggest the existence of common interests, harmony or homogeneity that many community development workers are tempted to associate with the concept of community, be it rural or urban. Thus, greater awareness and appreciation of community dynamics may be required in order to fashion workable responses to community level problems.

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