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Eco-justice and human well-being in Ghana's artisanal mining communities: towards a theological ethic of sustainable community

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ABSTRACT

The negative effects of Ghana's artisanal mining industry on the sustainability of the natural environment and community life, exemplifies the dilemma of the protracted relationship between the quest for human well-being and sustainability of communities. Nevertheless, sustainable communities are crucial if the flourishing of the natural environment and engendering of human well-being would be attained. Indeed, within the indigenous African community, one is not pursued without the other, for both occur in tandem to ensure the sustainability and well-being of community. Drawing on secondary sources on artisanal mining and its drivers – human livelihoods and wellbeing – as against their social and environmental effects, this article sets out to offer an eco-justice analysis of the relationship between the quest for human wellbeing through artisanal mining and sustainable communities towards a constructive eco-justice theological ethics of sustainable community for Christian ecological praxis in the context of artisanal mining.

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Human well-being; eco-justice; artisanal mining; sustainable communities; human livelihoods; *Galamsey*

1. Introduction

Artisanal mining has become one of the ways by which some individuals and groups of people attempt to escape poverty traps in Ghana (Afriyie, Ganle, and Adomako 2016; Baddianaah, Tuu, and Baatuuwie 2021). The artisanal mining industry has received academic and public attention in recent years and attributable to the environmental costs and its impacts on agricultural and other economic livelihoods (Afriyie, Ganle, and Adomako 2016; Akabzaa and Darimani 2001; Hilson, Hilson, and Adu-Darko 2014; Hilson and Garforth 2013). Some of the conspicuous effects of the industry are the unsustainable use of nature's resources, the wanton degradation of the biophysical environment and the undermining of human livelihoods – sustainable communities. Notwithstanding these effects, the immediate social and economic benefits of the industry seem to take priority over concerns of environmental degradation (Baddianaah, Tuu, and Baatuuwie 2021). This proclivity to escape poverty traps, and for that matter a means of social sustenance for those involved in the industry (Afriyie, Ganle, and Adomako 2016) largely serve as drivers of the artisanal mining industry in Ghana. Thus, there is evidence to show that there is an obvious relationship between the quest for human well-being and environmental degradation.

Artisanal mining and its social and environmental costs emerge largely from a group and/or an individual's search for well-being. Therefore, the menace of artisanal mining represents unavoidable manifestation of the complex relationship between the quest for human well-being and

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(environmental) sustainability of the community. Paradoxically, the vulnerability of developing countries to environmental degradation, particularly the removal of vegetation cover and climate change, requires that sustainability of communities must be taken seriously. This is important if human well-being in these societies, which artisanal miners are in search of, is to succeed. This is because "well-being cannot be considered in isolation from the natural environment" (Summers et al. 2012, 328). However, considering that the current quest for human well-being through artisanal mining reflects a dilemma of justice to both humans and biophysical environment in terms of both cause and effect, this would require responses and initiatives that work towards ensuring justice where it is required. Indeed, it is suggested that an ethical problem related to the quest for human well-being "relates to questions of justice, namely *whose* well-being is at stake, and how the provision of particular services might affect the well-being of different social groups in different and even opposing ways" (Jax and Heink 2016, 3).

Plethora of literature has been published on artisanal mining in Ghana and its social and environmental consequences, but there is paucity of research on the role of the Christian community and/or church and its theology in responding to this new threat to the integrity of life. It is in this light that this article examines the role of the Christian community and its theology in Ghana in enhancing sustainable community from the perspective of Christian justice, specifically eco-justice. It is suggested that by responding to the invitation of Christ and God, Christians have become partners with God in delivering justice to unwilling victims of injustice and oppression, which include the oppressed human poor and the oppressed natural world (Boff 1997; Golo 2018). Therefore, the theology of the church must be life affirming in the face of threats to human survival and livelihood as well as responding to the real-life situations of believers and those whom the gospel message would be delivered.

This article, therefore, is a theological ethical contribution to the discourse on artisanal mining. This is done by presenting the reality and analysis of artisanal mining in Ghana, casting the analysis within the framework of eco-justice, and by extension a human-ecologically just community. From this framework, the article argues that the quest for human wellbeing must not necessarily undermine the ability of the human-ecological community to sustain life and opportunities for all species – sustainable communities. This is because attaining human well-being is compatible with it, particularly when one considers the context of the African society and community. The article further argues, from the Christian perspective of eco-justice theology, that the invitation of the church in Ghana into partnership with Christ for human flourishing would mean working to attaining a human-ecologically just community – sustainable community. To achieve this, the article explores how the Christian faith in Ghana, in the context of artisanal mining, can work towards a constructive eco-justice theological ethic of sustainable community that ensures human wellbeing without undermining the environmental sustainability of community. The objectives of this article, therefore, are to: (i) examine the concept of eco-justice; (ii) explore artisanal mining in Ghana as a context; (iii) analyse the dynamics of artisanal mining regarding human well-being and sustainable community, particularly its drivers and effects; and (iv) explore the possibilities of an eco-justice theological ethic for sustainable community in Ghana's galamsey communities.

The article is structured in seven sections. The first section is this Introduction; and the second section offers an exposition of the concept of eco-justice; the third section accounts for the method, sources of data and justification of perspective, while the fourth section explores artisanal and small-scale mining as the context and data for the article. The fifth section analyses the interplay between artisanal mining and just and sustainable communities; the sixth section attempts a constructive eco-justice theological ethic for attaining sustainable community in Ghana's artisanal mining communities; and the seventh, which is the conclusion, sums up the article.

2. Eco-Justice

Eco-justice is more theological than the liberal-humanist philosophical understanding of justice. Defined as "constructive human responses that concentrate on the link between ecological health

and economic justice" (Hessel 1992, 9), it is considered as a form of environmental justice that extends justice to aspects of the nonhuman creation (Haluza-DeLay 2013). Eco-justice examines the link between creation and justice with the understanding that "justice takes place at the intersection of ecology and economy" (Mickey 2020, 7). Eco-justice ethicists and initiatives consider that there is a direct relationship between the violation of the nonhuman world and the violation of the rights of human persons (Golo 2018). In the words of Pope Francis, "we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (Francis 2015, 35). This perspective of the Pope, which is central to the Laudato Si, underscores that "the challenge of remaining just is a challenge of tending not only to the poor, marginalised, and destitute, but also to the interconnected life, land, air, and water of Earth" (Mickey 2020, 7). The understanding is that seeking social justice in a situation of environmental injustice without efforts to address the injustice perpetuated towards the natural world is not far-reaching enough.

Thus, the central argument in eco-justice is that justice for the earth is crucial if we would maintain and sustain the gains of social justice and equality; thereby underscoring that ecological justice must go hand in hand with social justice (Boff 1997). Since there are interlinkages between economic and environmental injustices, the realisation of eco-justice requires that something much more than mechanical is done anew. According to Mickey, this must be "something that reconnects humans to their embodiment and embeddedness in place, something that recuperates the intimate intertwining of humans with one another and with the myriad creatures of Earth, something that returns humankind to its nonhuman kin: in short, ecological conversion" (Mickey 2020, 10).

From a Christian theological perspective, eco-justice is also a specialised form of justice or a theological concept. It emanates from the Christian understanding of justice, which is the understanding that justice is aimed at delivering or rescuing the poor and oppressed from their domination. This is justice that delivers – delivering justice (Stassen and Gushee 2003, 350). The goal of Christian justice is a community of just harmonious relationships characterised by love between human beings – community-restoring justice (Golo 2018; Stassen and Gushee 2003). It is a community-restoring love that yearns to see the victims of injustice, who are also beings created in the image of God, delivered to live a flourishing life in community. Hence, eco-justice is identified as aimed at "working out the needed kingdom-affirming justice and life-transforming initiatives towards justice for the earth and for disenfranchised victims of climate change" (Golo 2018, 73). In eco-justice theology and ethics, this love is extended to all of nature, as created out of God's love to flourish and is, therefore, intrinsically valuable, and purposeful. Thus, eco-justice occurs when "human beings receive sufficient sustenance and build enough community to live harmoniously with God, each other, and all of nature, while they appreciate the rest of creation for its own sake and not simply as useful to humanity" (Hessel 1992, 9).

From the perspective of African communalist ethics, eco-justice, connects with the indigenous African ethos of a just and sustainable community. This is because, as with eco-justice, within African communitarian ethos "decisions and choices that individuals and groups make should not result in the dislocation, disaggregation, and imbalance of other groups of people, the wider community (including the spiritual community), and the natural world" (Golo 2018, 75). This is because, while many indigenous African communities prioritise the individual's quest for well-being, they do not detach human well-being from social, environmental, and spiritual well-being, which are considered the three well-beings that make up the well-being of the community (Gyekye 1996; Golo 2018). Hence, human well-being is not only defined economically (material gains and satisfaction). The well-being of both humans and cosmos occurs in tandem to ensure the sustainability and well-being of community.

Therefore, in African communalist ethics, it is emphasised that humans' commitments to meeting their material needs must not threaten the well-being of the entire community and other dimensions of life that ensure a holistic well-being. This is because the well-being of the individual is a microcosm of the well-being of the community, including that of fellow human members of the shared

community, the natural environment, the spiritual world, especially the ancestors (Gyekye 2000). From an eco-justice perspective, it is emphasized that the well-being of the community, which is defined to include the ecological community, enhances (and is just for) the well-being of human beings and nonhuman beings.

3. Method

This research method is qualitative and data for the discussion and analysis of artisanal mining and for theological ethical reflection was sourced largely from secondary sources – study and review of literature. Particularly, data on the reality of galamsey was sourced from the plethora of research publications on artisanal small-scale mining or *galamsey*, such as journal articles, featured articles, and media reports. Articles were searched for in the databases of JSTOR, AJOL, and Googe Scholar, using the key words "small-scale artisanal mining in Ghana", "small-scale mining in Ghana", "galamsey", and "artisanal mining in Ghana". Similarly, Google search engine was used to search specifically for data, particularly featured articles and media reports on the phenomenon in Ghana, using the keywords. Bibliographic and/or reference list of sourced articles were also important sources of literature. The articles found were analysed and sorted for their relevance and reviewed using the parameter of how extensive they addressed the following: definition and history (including its current dynamics), drivers and extent, and social and environmental impacts and effects of artisanal small-scale mining in Ghana.

These data were analysed in the light of sourced literature on indigenous African notions on well-being. Particularly, for the discussion, the themes and/or concepts of "well-being" and "human well-being", which are central to the discussion, were used to search and select literature from some of the databases. Also relevant for the discussion were some of the articles sourced for the data. These were deemed pertinent depending on how they engaged, if even abstractly, these themes and/or concepts. Furthermore, using knowledge of literature used in previous research in identifying literature for the discussion, especially books from the library of African communitarianism and ecotheology were also significant. This was, particularly, significant for the constructive eco-theological section, which required discursive engagement for a constructive discussion.

This article offers a Christian eco-justice perspective on the complex relationship between galamsey, human wellbeing and social and environmental sustainability, fundamentally for a methodological reason. The religious factor in Ghana means the significance of religious intervention in unsustainable artisanal mining in the country. In Ghana, religious ideas/beliefs, institutions and groups continue to be central in influencing and shaping the discourse on socio-economic development in diverse ways. Furthermore, Ghana's 2021 Census indicates Christianity as the most prominent religious faith in Ghana with 71.3%, trailed by Islam and Indigenous Traditional Religion with 12.3% and 3.2%, respectively (GSS 2022, 96). Consequently, the church reaches a broader audience of believers who accept her moral authority.

4. Artisanal small-scale mining in Ghana – exploring the context and data

Artisanal small-scale gold mining, which involves "low-tech, labour-intensive mineral extraction and processing" (Hilson and Garforth 2013, 348) of gold, dates to pre-colonial times as an indigenous activity (Akabzaa and Darimani 2001; Ofosu-Mensah 2010, 128; Crawford et al. 2015; Afriyie, Ganle, and Adomako 2016). It is an industry where local indigenes engage in the mining of gold and other precious metals for domestic and international purposes, especially through Trans-Saharan trade for trade in North Africa and Europe (Ofosu-Mensah 2010, 127). In Ghana, artisanal small-scale mining, historically, has been a "respected traditional vocation" (Alhassan 2014, 47). This has been officially legalised by the *Small Scale Gold Mining Law 1989*, (PNDCL 218), which "provided for small-scale mining that involved the use of rudimentary equipment such as hammers, pick axes, shovels, metallic boxes and sluice boxes for mining" (Ofori-Atta 2015, 1). Many African

governments today conceptualise artisanal small-scale mining as mining operation that is subsistent, and which involves the use of simple and rudimentary tools to extract minerals and have established legal and regulatory frameworks to formalise the industry into their economies (Alhassan 2014, 48).

When discussing artisanal small-scale mining, it is important to make a distinction between legal and/or state-regulated small-scale mining and illegal unregulated small-scale mining. Small-scale mining in Ghana may be legal, licensed and registered to operate under legal and regulatory frameworks. Artisanal small-scale mining is the underground, unofficial and unregulated artisanal and small-scale mining, and which operates without an official licence from the Ghanaian authorities (see Afriyie, Ganle, and Adomako 2016, 1). Thus, distinguishing small-scale mining from artisanal small-scale mining, popularly called *galamsey* in Ghana, is based on the legality or illegality of the business activity. Baddianaah, Tuu, and Baatuuwie (2021) also designate the legalised as small-scale mining while designating the illegal simply as artisanal mining. They define artisanal mining as "mining by individuals or groups that use simple tools and methods in extracting minerals such as gold, diamond manganese, and bauxite. It takes place in the informal sector where these miners have no formal or legal documents to operate" (Baddianaah, Tuu, and Baatuuwie 2021, 87). This is what has been originally referred to as *galamsey*, which is believed to be a corrupted version of "gather and sell" (Akabzaa and Darimani 2001; Ofosu-Mensah 2010) or "gather them and sell" (Solomon 2015).

Generally, artisanal small-scale mining has impacted significantly on the socio-economic lives of people in several countries and has been the source of livelihood for many families and communities in several countries (Alhassan 2014; Crawford et al. 2015). The industry, therefore, is not unique to Ghana; it is widespread in Africa, Latin America, and Asia (Hilson 2002; Bansah, Yalley, and Dumakor-Dupey 2016). It is estimated that about 80–100 million people worldwide are engaged in artisanal and small-scale mining globally, largely due to its labour-intensive nature (Afriyie, Ganle, and Adomako 2016). In Ghana, the industry contributes significantly to the country's economy (Alhassan 2014). The industry provides employment and income generating streams for many in the rural areas where the industry thrives, and where there are rather limited alternative job opportunities and are low paying (Afriyie, Ganle, and Adomako 2016, 2). With an estimated hundred thousand Ghanaians involved in the industry (Aboka, Cobbina, and Doke 2018), the industry provides direct and indirect employment and livelihood opportunities to about one million people (Afriyie, Ganle, and Adomako 2016, 2; Hilson and Garforth 2013, 348). It is indicated that:

> The fates of millions of other Ghanaians, including dependent family members and those providing "downstream" services such as transport and machine repair, are also intimately tied to the sector. Although the livelihoods of most rural Ghanaians continue to revolve around farming, there is little disputing that in many areas of the country, ASM has replaced subsistence agriculture as the primary income-earning activity (Hilson and Garforth 2013, 348).

In recent years, artisanal mining has become evident and widespread in rural and large forest areas of Southern Ghana and extending to communities that were unknown for the industry (see Owusu-Nimo et al. 2018). Additionally, the industry has recently attracted foreigners from several countries such as Russia, Armenia, and particularly China (Crawford et al. 2015, 4), with Chinese operators very popular in the industry. This has resulted in an immense and intense advanced mechanisation of artisanal mining and processing. Currently, rudimentary tools of mining have been replaced by heavy earth moving machines, such as excavators and dozers (Ofori-Atta 2015; Owusu-Nimo et al. 2018). This heavy mechanisation of artisanal mining legalisation under the guise of artisanal mining and the continuous existence of indigenous artisanal mining, tend to blur the boundaries. It also elevates the heavily mechanised artisanal mining to illegal small-scale mining status. In recent times, although very widespread, majority of small-scale mining is carried out illegally and unregulated, with a rough estimate of about 250,000 illegal miners involved in the business (Ofori-Atta 2015). It is with this understanding this article examines the practice of illegal small-scale mining designating it variously as artisanal small-scale mining, or simply as "artisanal mining" or *galamsey*.

Artisanal mining has become a menace in recent years, as it is socially and environmentally destructive to the human community and the natural world, respectively. The environmental and health impacts of artisanal mining have been well documented (Aboka, Cobbina, and Doke 2018; Bansah, Yalley, and Dumakor-Dupey 2016; Hilson 2002; Mensah et al. 2015). While the industry exposes artisanal miners to dangerous and toxic chemicals, such as mercury, arsenic and liquid hydrocarbons which are used in mineral extraction an processing, the same are introduced into water bodies thereby polluting them. Local rivers, such as Tano, Bonsa, Ankobra, and Pra, around which artisanal mining is widespread, have become heavily polluted (Alhassan 2014; Owusu-Nimo et al. 2018). Human mortality and varying accident and injury rates from *galamsey* prospecting resulting from the extreme and hazardous environmental health and hazards to which *galamsey* operators, host communities and their natural habitats are exposed daily (Owusu-Nimo et al. 2018), are rather troubling. For instance, in June 2010 about one hundred and fifty artisanal miners perished at Dunkwa-on-Offin in the Central Region when a galamsey pit they were working in got flooded (Aboka, Cobbina, and Doke 2018). In 2013 seventeen artisanal miners were trapped and died in an abandoned dugouts at Kyekyewere in the Central Region of Ghana (BBC 2013). Artisanal mining-related deaths in 2011 alone have been estimated to be about three hundred, with some deaths and occupational injuries unreported. Alhassan suggests: "majority of these deaths occur when mine pits collapse, burying the people working underground. In some instances, illegal miners drown in artificial lakes created for the purposes of extracting the metal from the ore before transferring them for further processing" (Alhassan 2014, 52).

The internationalisation and heavy mechanisation of artisanal mining complicates the social and environmental problem related to the industry (Bansah, Yalley, and Dumakor-Dupey 2016). Large tracts of forests and farmlands are degraded and destroyed alongside the pollution and silting of rivers on a massive scale (Crawford et al. 2015; Owusu-Nimo et al. 2018). There has emerged also the exploitation of the youth, women and children in the galamsey industry (Ofori-Atta 2015). For instance, large parts of the Atewa Forests in the Akyem District of the Eastern Region of Ghana, which is home to diverse plant and animal species, have already been destroyed (Erasmus 2015). The pollution of rivers, the decimation of nonhuman life and the natural environment, and degradation of agricultural lands (Hilson 2002; Aboka, Cobbina, and Doke 2018; Owusu-Nimo et al. 2018), which serve as life-support systems for local people and communities and livestock, are getting to crisis levels, thereby rendering artisanal mining a threat to human and nonhuman life.

The risks and threats posed by artisanal mining, which residents in artisanal mining communities of East Akyem in Ghana define as a major security threat (Erasmus 2015), are issues of life and survival. The gravity of the situation has resulted in some government interventions. For instance, government's Inter-Ministerial Task Force on Small-Scale Mining formed in 2013, popularly known as "Anti-Galamsey Task Force", was to "end the operations of both local and foreign illegal miners in the country" (Alhassan 2014, 53). This was replaced by the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Illegal Mining which was commissioned in March 2020 and dissolved in January 2021 (Kojo 2021). Occurring between these two interventions was "Operation Vanguard", which was a Joint Military Police Task Force in 2017 to fight galamsey. The question remains why the industry has become rather widespread and difficult to fight.

Several reasons have been adduced for the unrelenting nature of artisanal mining, such as bureaucratic bottlenecks in acquiring licenses (Alhassan 2014; Hilson, Hilson, and Adu-Darko 2014). However, an enduring and recurring driver is the fear of poverty traps – material insecurity and well-being of the human person (Andrews 2015; Baddianaah, Tuu, and Baatuuwie 2021). Research among *galamsey* communities reveal that those who engage in artisanal mining were not unaware of the destruction caused by their activities but the need to make a living drive them into the industry (Solomon 2015). An extract of a female informant supports this assertion: "Why would I be staying in this bush and under these conditions … ? It's all because of poverty and the hardships in the system. I have to do this to earn a living" (Afriyie, Ganle, and Adomako 2016, 8).

There is consensus that poverty traps are drivers of artisanal mining, irrespective of knowledge of its dangers. Anxieties of livelihood uncertainties and vulnerabilities as accounting for the unremitting nature of artisanal mining in Ghana has been corroborated by researchers (Andrews 2015; Afriyie, Ganle, and Adomako 2016; Baddianaah, Tuu, and Baatuuwie 2021). Located within the context of poverty traps and the search for livelihoods, but also with apparent justice concerns, Alhassan notes that "in most artisanal mining communities, the youth resort to the dangerous illegal activity either because their farmlands have been given to miners or that they lack jobs just like their jobless counterparts from other parts of Ghana and elsewhere" (Alhassan 2014, 52). Quoting a male informant, Afriyie, Ganle and Adomako (2016, 8) note:

> The issue is that many of us in this business have lost our farmlands to big mining companies … I used to have a farmland from which I made a living. But a few years ago, one mining company came to me and said the government had given my land to them to mine gold … I was not happy but there was nothing I could do. Because I lost my farmland, I decided to join some friends in this *galamsey* business.

Those who engage in artisanal mining claim they do so because they must strive for their well-being, generally defined as attaining their livelihoods. This is much more so when many see artisanal mining as more profitable and dependable than farming (Baddianaah, Tuu, and Baatuuwie 2021). Therefore, it is unsurprising that there are often divided opinions on the benefits of galamsey among people in mining communities where "some people may be interested in pointing out its environmental and socio-economic negative effects, others see it as a tool for socio-economic development and empowerment" (Baddianaah, Tuu, and Baatuuwie 2021, 108).

5. Artisanal mining and sustainable communities in Ghana: An eco-justice analysis of their relationships

One would argue that the crisis of economic and material insecurity – poverty traps – drive the growing trend of *galamsey* in Ghana today (Baddianaah, Tuu, and Baatuuwie 2021), and that the practice is "essentially an economic necessity for those engaged in it" (Andrews 2015, 4). Consequently, concerns about human well-being become understood in terms of lack of access to livelihoods and vulnerabilities that deny individuals and groups the ability to secure their basic human needs. These existential realities undermine the humanity and dignity as well as hopes to a secure future of people living in these mining communities. Naturally, the human instinct would be to escape these vulnerabilities to human well-being towards working out alternatives that ensure human security and well-being, which are morally justifiable. In relation to *galamsey*-induced social and environmental effects, one would therefore, conclude that artisanal mining is unavoidable or "the good in evil" (Afriyie, Ganle, and Adomako 2016).

This suggests that environmental degradation is an undesirable, or at best, lower cost tradable for the higher value of human well-being in these *galamsey* communities. It further suggests that the crisis of human insecurity and vulnerability, on the one hand, and the quest for human well-being, on the other, serve as chambers from which environmental degradation largely emerge, particularly in these communities. These occur where threats to human livelihoods and well-being manifest in forms such as poverty and material scarcity, and when groups and individuals strive to safeguard their well-being rather than capitulate to death. Consequently, we come head-on with the issue of the balancing of values, those that have to do with safeguarding the quest for human well-being and those preventing social and environmental injustice.

In principle, as an activity towards enhancing human livelihoods and well-being through the acquisition of basic human needs, artisanal mining may not be the problem per se. This is because, human well-being is the most fundamental value, even within the framework of a plurality of values, because all values and activities can only be justified insofar as they enhance human well-being (Gyekye 2000, 17). Human well-being (HWB) is rather multidimensional, ambiguous and "lacks a universally acceptable definition and has numerous, and often competing, interpretations"

(McGillivray and Clarke 2006, 3). Thus, human well-being has no single or general measure, and even though “there are some dimensions (such as basic needs for food or shelter) which are always valid concepts many dimensions of HWB are dependent on place, culture, and history” (Jax and Heink 2016, 2). Emphasising that human well-being goes beyond economic wealth and includes other dimensions such as health, a rigid definition of human well-being is not feasible. Thus, any definition of human well-being must be generic and understood as “a state that is intrinsically and not just instrumentally valuable (or good) for a person or a societal group” (Jax and Heink 2016, 3). Evidently, this would also include a healthy state of the natural environmental and a just community that enhance human and non-human flourishing. Consequently, one cannot parochially and selfishly pursue his or her individual well-being in a deteriorating natural world because human well-being and environmental well-being are two sides of the same coin (Golo, Majeed, and Mills 2023).

The conception of human well-being in many indigenous African societies is consistent with the complex understanding of human well-being elucidated above. Regarding the communalist ethos, as earlier noted, the quest for human well-being in many indigenous African communities is not independent of the well-being of the natural environment and just community and/or society. It is affirmed in the communalist ethics of many indigenous African communities that it is only within the context of living win harmony with the natural world that human beings have the freedom to express their humanity (Bujo 1998). This is because Africans believe there is “an uninterrupted interaction between human persons and the cosmos, that is, the human persons and the cosmos complement each other to the extent that they cannot exist without this interdependence” (Bujo 1998, 209). It is for this reason that activities of humans in meeting their material needs among indigenous people are regulated using ritual prohibitions, such as taboos, to protect the well-being of the community (Awuah-Nyamekye 2009).

Artisanal mining has been a genuine indigenous industry, a source of livelihood and quest for human well-being among indigenous communities where the industry has now become a menace (Ofosu-Mensah 2010). Thus, in principle, artisanal mining is compatible with environmental and social sustainability. However, current social and environmental (human-ecological) costs of artisanal mining render what appears to be a quest for subsistence (livelihood) and human well-being to become a threat to the sustainability of local communities, particularly their social, economic, and ecological well-being. The effects of artisanal mining are those that impinge on current human livelihoods and well-being, the sustainability of the natural world, and the rights of future generations. These point to the violation of the rights of others in community to environmental goods and services that the natural world provides for their well-being and their future – environmental injustice. Ultimately, it is a question about ecojustice – socio-economic and ecological justice. It is so, because environmental goods and services are tied to the realisation of their well-being and their future goals. This resonates with the assertion that a reason for a better differentiation of conceiving human well-being is the question of justice in terms of “whose well-being is at stake and how the provision of particular services might affect the well-being of different social groups in different and even opposing ways” (Jax and Heink 2016, 3).

The internationalisation and heavy mechanisation of artisanal mining has complicated and enhanced the injustice inflicted on local communities and their biophysical environments. For instance, the industry has turned farms and fertile agricultural lands into un-reclaimed and abandoned wastelands of gullies, mining pits and deforested lands, while rivers are muddied overnight by excavators and other earth moving machines (Owusu-Nimo et al. 2018). When one analyses how these tend to mortgage the security and well-being of fellow humans and nonhuman others in community, then one appreciates the injustices of these activities. It is for these reasons that I consider the ethics of justice more appropriate and defensible for any justice-seeking moral community, rather than prioritising values of individual material needs and livelihoods, and denying the rights of others in the community their fundamental human, communal and/or cultural, and spiritual rights.

Analysed in the light of human well-being, therefore, contemporary (mechanised) artisanal mining in Ghana is laden with existential and moral complexities, such as social injustices (Andrews 2015). The industry cannot be justifiably defined as driven by livelihood threats or the crisis of wellbeing in the face of poverty and material insecurity. Evidently, compared to indigenous small-scale mining using rudimentary equipment for sustenance, which was historically permitted in these indigenous communities (Ofosu-Mensah 2010), current forms of artisanal mining deviate from individuals in search of their well-being that is compatible with the sustainability of both human societies and the natural environment, as indigenously practiced.

This argument remains valid even for those who are actually threatened by poverty traps and livelihood concerns. While these individuals could have resorted to the indigenous approach of subsistent artisanal mining, many have rather abandoned it and opted for seeking employment with the mechanised artisanal mining businesses for increased and quicker financial and material returns. Hence, the short-term and immediate demand for material wealth and human well-being drive artisanal mining businesses to collude with livelihood-seeking local *galamseyers* (see Afriyie, Ganle, and Adomako 2016). Analysed in the light of the indigenous African vision where human well-being is understood in terms of "basic human needs" and "human fulfilment" (Gyekye 2000), these represent human greed. Basic needs, according to the African vision, entail those needs that would be identified as intrinsic to the functioning of human beings and which make human life worth living, and are distinguishable from the unique desires of the particular or specific human beings (Gyekye 2000, 17). These needs extend beyond the purely material to include "non-sensible values such as dignity, liberty, and opportunity for self-development (including opportunity for spiritual or religious development)" (Gyekye 2000, 17).

One then appreciates that beyond the social and economic injustices, the destruction and degradation of the environment are not simply related to physical phenomena but "involve cultural and spiritual values. Losing access to the wondrous splendor of the wild is a spiritual loss" (Mickey 2020, 6). Therefore, one understands that the social and environmental costs of current (mechanised and capitalist profit-oriented) artisanal mining in Ghana emerge from the imbalance between an individual's natural resource use, on one hand, and the well-being of the natural world and others in community, on the other. It is in this light that current mechanised artisanal mining is profoundly human greed which is a community-wrecking virus that the ethics of community seeks to regulate in an individual's quest for well-being in indigenous African communities by setting limits to individual desires. Beyond these limits, the question of justice sets in, as unregulated parochial individual pursuits of materail well-being are destructive to the social fabric as well as the human and environmental well-being of communities – sustainable communities – as has become evident in artisanal mining communities of Ghana today.

These developments undermine attaining a sustainable human-ecological community. Defined as a community which supports and enhances life, sustainable communities "guarantees human flourishing in terms of just and peaceful interrelationships among human beings and between human beings and the natural environment, i.e. a society where present and future peoples' access to basic needs is guaranteed and where their human dignity and personhood are respected and safeguarded" (Golo 2018, 79-80). Hinged on four elements of leadership, civic engagement and responsibility; ecological integrity; economic security; and social well-being (ISC 2023), a sustainable community is also defined as one that "takes into account, and addresses, multiple human needs, not just one at the exclusion of all others. It is a place where people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives feel welcome and safe, where every group has a seat at the decision-making table, and where prosperity is shared" (ISC 2023, 1). It is a community that "manages its human, natural, and financial capital to meet current needs while ensuring that adequate resources are available for future generations" (ISC 2023, 1).

Evidently sustainable communities extend beyond the social and natural environment, However, required at minimum and at the core of sustainable community are concerns of a sense of community where "a healthy, non-degraded, and non-polluted community, just personal relationships, and

sustainable peace are considered basic needs" (Golo 2018, 80). This also resonates with the norms and aspirations of many indigenous Ghanaian communities regarding attaining human well-being, such as among the Akan, where there is an interrelationship between the stability of the natural environment and the stability of human communities (Golo, Majeed, and Mills 2023).

Concisely, analyses of the effects of contemporary artisanal mining indicate the industry does not engender just and sustainable communities irrespective of its immediate socio-economic benefits to individuals engaged in it. The industry undermines the sustainable use of the natural environment and the rights of individuals and communities to benefit from the earth's resources and the right to live in non-degraded andlife-enhancing natural environments, which are basic human rights. Thus, evidence from artisanal mining communities suggests that those involved in the artisanal mining industry engage in using their rights to well-being to override and undermine their own and other people's right to securing holistic well-being. Considering the drivers and effects of artisanal mining in Ghana, what is required are just initiatives towards transforming the quest for human livelihood and well-being. The quest for justice becomes crucial if the sustainability of society would be attained.

6. Towards an eco-justice theological ethic of sustainable community in the context of artisanal mining in Ghana: A constructive proposal

When one analyses contemporary artisanal mining in the light of eco-justice, one would agree that the human-environmental effects of artisanal mining "perpetuates injustice towards social groups that also aspire to the good life and benefits of the common good but are denied access to them" (Golo 2018, 80), common good such as farmlands and clean water. Artisanal mining poses threats to the well-being and survival of human beings, both those involved in the industry and the majority who are not involved. Therefore, occurring in many communities suffering from artisanal mining-induced environmental degradation, is the reality of environmental injustice. Environmental injustice is defined as "a situation in which some people either lack a fair share of environmental benefits (that is, benefits stemming from natural resources) or have to bear an unfair share of environmental burdens (that is, burdens stemming from harms to the environment)" (Caney 2006, 465).

As a moral community the church must take a stand as a community of subversion to any system or systems that have access to the natural world and plunders it for private profits, thereby undermining the well-being and sustainability of creation (Snyder and Scandrett 2011, 34). Any genuine and credible theology required of our time, as noted by McFague, "must be characterised by a sense of our intrinsic interdependence with all forms of life, an inclusive vision that demolishes oppressive hierarchies, accepts responsibility for nurturing and fulfilling life in its many forms, and is open to change and novelty as a given of existence" (McFague 1987, 32). However, it must be emphasised that the Christian theological-ethical perspective offered in this article is just one of the ways of responding to the menace of the imbalanced quest for human wellbeing and the sustainability of eco-systems in Ghana, particularly, through unsustainable artisanal mining.

In this section, therefore, within the context of Christian justice and specifically eco-justice, the article examines the role of the Christian faith in Ghana and its theology in response to *galamsey*-induced eco-injustice. It aims at a constructive eco-justice theological ethic of sustainable community for Christian ecological praxis in the context of artisanal mining. From the foregone discussions, an eco-justice ethic of sustainable community in the context of artisanal mining-induced social and environmental degradation would entail practical commitments from the Christian community to enabling sustainable community. I conceptually suggest two theological pathways and/or options available to the Christian community: a liberating and transforming eco-theological praxis, and an inculturated panentheist eco-theology.

First, eco-justice finds practical expression in the kind of community in which conscientious Christians would want to live – a just community. Consequently, this requires initiatives that safeguard

human and ecological well-being and grounded in a shared vision of our common humanity and community with its attendant moral and practical commitments – theological praxis. The goals of these initiatives would be to deliver justice to the oppressed natural world, and to vulnerable and oppressed human beings who live in dangerous environmental conditions and ecologically deplorable communities. The redemptive work on the cross by Jesus Christ would be interpreted as overcoming such evil and oppressive systems of "earth domination". To the justice-seeking Christian, therefore, salvation becomes a "struggle against sinful structures that deprive countless people of their rights" (Hill 1998, 115), such as rights to clean and life-supporting natural world.

The Christian faith is a liberating faith rooted in the quest for life-abundant (John 10:10) in finding solutions to real-life problems in local contexts, such as *galamsey*-degraded Ghana. Consequently, an eco-justice theological praxis must be liberation themed. An eco-justice theology of liberation in an environmental age would mimic the liberating works and activities of Christ, because being a Christian "implies responding to an invitation to work towards transforming justice – eco-justice ministries" (Golo 2014, 207). This would mean doing the work of Christ in words (teachings) and actions (practical interventions) that facilitate abundant life to all creation – human and nonhuman. This is, particularly, so when there are direct links between ecological oppression and human oppression (Golo 2014). Human beings and the natural world are in this together. This invites Christians to action when the natural world is being degraded and/or destroyed, because it portends the degradation and destruction of human beings. Hence eco-justice theological praxis requires being "concerned about the material and physical well-being of people, including food, clean air, non-polluted water and good health, the very things environmental challenges deprive people of" (Golo 2014, 207), while keeping in focus the flourishing and well-being of the natural world.

The church has the capacity to pursue eco-justice alone, because it has a plethora of resources to deploy towards social and environmental concerns. The church also has a corresponding audience that can be inspired, motivated, and whose worldviews can be influenced to get involved in social issues, such as environmental activism (Jenkins, Berry, and Kreider 2018; Veldmann, Szasz, and Haluza-DeLay 2012). Ghanaian churches are in a privileged position to lead efforts and initiatives towards motivating their followers to action against *galamsey*-induced environmental degradation and justice for victims from such activities. This would include informing and transforming the perspectives and attitudes of the many individuals connected to the artisanal mining industry.

In words and teaching, following biblical prophets of old, such as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah who confronted the injustices of their time, Christian community leaders must loudly and publicly speak against current forms of artisanal mining. They must also actively confront landlords and community leaders who collaborate with businesses to perpetuate socio-economic and ecological injustices against their communities. Confronting those who exclude from community is an active expression of love and compassion for the marginalised and poor in community, as Jesus taught in the parable of the compassionate Samaritan whose acts were an indictment on the Jews at the time (Stassen and Gushee 2003).

In action and practical interventions, this can also be achieved through networking and partnerships with state institutions and secular NGOs, using shared visions and goals. The goal of these partnerships would be to garner institutional legitimacy and coordinated action towards mitigation and adaptation measures in the short term, and the development of environmentally sustainable small-scale and artisanal mining policy interventions, in the long term – transforming initiatives. Developing transforming initiatives would mean Christian communities and its social intervention institutions, such as Christian NGOs, commit their resources to engage the menace of artisanal mining in Ghana, practically and actively. These may be initiatives that provide access to life transforming alternatives and alternative livelihoods, particularly, for those who make a living through artisanal mining. These would be alternatives, such as equipping the youth and rural populations with skills and building capacity for entrepreneurship; provision of sustainable and profitable small holder agriculture, particularly farming; capacity building for climate change adaptation and

mitigation; and the provision of sustainable alternative livelihoods that provide equal benefits or are more rewarding than the dangerous and environmentally destructive artisanal small-scale mining (see Baddianaah, Tuu, and Baatuuwie 2021).

Second, for the Christian community to holistically work out an eco-justice theological ethic and praxis of sustainable community in Ghana, it would require a contextualised inculturation eco-theology. For a transforming eco-justice theology in Ghana, one needs to ponder what it means to live sustainably in community with the abundance that God has provided for the sustenance of human and nonhuman life in context. I suggest this requires an eco-justice theology of sustainable community that finds common grounds with the religio-cultural convictions and norms of indigenous communities and capable of facilitating an eco-justice praxis. This would be a theology that methodologically and deliberately configures reality beyond classical Western-inherited theological constructs for a theological conversation with indigenous cultures. This is, particularly, important when these cultures have rich knowledge and insight regarding living sustainably in the abundance of God's creation (Awuah-Nyamekye 2009; Golo 2020; Golo, Majeed, and Mills 2023). This would not only anchor Ghanaian Christians' theological commitments and moral convictions in a shared vision and ethic of communality; it would also evoke theological commitments and partnerships from indigenous communities towards eco-justice praxis.

The Christian tradition has more often and more successfully "underscored God's transcendence at the expense of immanence" (McFague 2001, 141). However, a credible and effective starting point for such a contextualised inculturated eco-justice theological ethic is configuring God as involved in the natural world. Hence, this paper suggests a panentheistic theology, a theology which attempts to "speak of God as both radically transcendent to and radically immanent in the world" (McFague 2001, 141). This would be affirming the claims of many indigenous Ghanaian groups that the natural world is sacred and a meeting place of the divine, thereby underscoring reasons why they safeguard it with taboos and other norms (Awuah-Nyamekye 2009; Golo, Majeed, and Mills 2023). This inculturated eco-justice theological ethic would also impose on Christian communities to practically seek ways of safeguarding the integrity of the nonhuman world, which means also safeguarding the integrity and image of the most vulnerable humans who suffer from a degraded nonhuman world.

This pathway and/or option is concretely theological, if properly done, and capable of facilitating Christian engagement with indigenous people towards developing practical regimes and interventions for dealing with *galamsey*. Already many Christian communities in Ghana reflect these theological orientations with the growing mountain and forest prayer camps phenomenon (Okyere 2018; Golo 2020). This would mean Ghanaian Christians identifying the natural world with the presence of God by emphasising how valuable the natural world is to God to the extent that God reveals himself through it as suggested by Romans 1: 20. This imposes on human beings who dwell and benefit from it the duty to protect it if they value what God values. This theology would enable churches to, for instance, proactively engage concerns regarding *galamsey*-induced social and environmental degradation proactively in their sermons, teachings and seminars. Through these, the church would be inviting believers and communities not only to an ecological conversion but also to share their conviction with others in community.

7. Conclusion

Artisanal mining, like many other indigenous livelihood activities, such as blacksmithing; pottery making; carving and weaving; and hunting and farming, has been a local industry for eking out a livelihood among the indigenous Ghanaians. Though artisanal mining has been a livelihood strategy among indigenous Ghanaians, the unregulated and illegal nature of the industry have turned the once communally acceptable livelihood activity into an industry which evokes diverse forms of human and environmental infractions – eco-injustice – and undermining a sustainable community. Because the quest for justice is a recognisable Christian goal, and the care of

the natural environment a Christian moral duty, the Christian community in Ghana has the responsibility of working out a Christian theological ethic and praxis that can engage the social and ecological injustice that has become endemic in artisanal mining communities in Ghana.

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