

REPORT



BY WACAM

FACT FINDING MISSION (FFM) ON HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES OF ASHANTI GOLDFIELDS COMPANY (OBUASI MINE); THE CASE OF SANSU COMMUNITY

**PREPARED BY
HANNAH OWUSU-KORANTENG
DIRECTOR OF TRAINING AND RESEARCH**

FEBRUARY 2003

INTRODUCTION

Sansu is a farming community with a population of about 2500 and located in the heart of the concession of Ashanti Goldfields Company, Obuasi Mine. Sansu has a long history of artisanal mining, which served as an economic activity for the Youth of the community long before Ashanti Goldfields Company embarked on surface mining operations in the early 1980s. It is said that, before surface mining, the people of Sansu could pick gold nuggets from river Saa during heavy rainfall.

EFFECTS OF SURFACE MINING ON SANSU COMMUNITY

Sansu had lived in harmony with AGC when the Company was operating only the underground mine. Problems started developing when AGC decided to use Sansu area as a waste dump in the surface mining operations. Large tracts of agricultural lands were lost in the process resulting in the loss of livelihood for the people of Sansu who are predominantly farmers.

Though there are no physical barriers like fences around Sansu to demarcate restricted areas of the Obuasi mine, areas surrounding Sansu are considered by AGC as restricted and ordinary farmers could be arrested for trespassing when they use the haul road to their farms. This is because the road for hauling ore from the underground mine shaft lies close to the Sansu village and it is a road that leads to other villages and farms of Sansu people.

The Saa River served as source of drinking water for the community. During periods of heavy rainfall, sediments from the waste dumps are washed directly into river Saa. The pollution of river Saa is a major worry to the people especially when the only alternative borehole provided by AGC is insufficient for the Sansu community. Residents of Sansu queue for long hours at the borehole for water. Buildings in Sansu developed cracks from blasting when AGC was engaged in surface mining operations.

COMMUNITY CONFLICTS

The following problems form the basis of conflicts between Sansu community and AGC Obuasi Mine: -

- Human rights abuses
- Conflicts between small scale miners and AGC Obuasi Mine
- Loss of agricultural lands
- Pollution of river Saa which served as a source of drinking water by AGC mine waste
- Emissions
- Youth unemployment
- Harassment of farmers, hawkers and villagers who use the AGC haul road to their farms and villages.
- Cracking of buildings from blasting during the period of surface mining activities. Though AGC has suspended surface mining activities at the Obuasi mine, the cracked buildings exist.

The Sansu community has responded to these conflicts through demonstrations, which sometimes got violent. On such events combined team of Police, Military and Mine Security is employed to attack demonstrators even when demonstrations are peaceful. The perceived influence that AGC

exercise on the traditional institution in Sansu has brought mistrust between the people of Sansu and the chief of the town.

SPECIFIC CASES OF HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

1. Killing Of Kwame Opoku By Combined Police, Military And AGC Obuasi Mine Security

Isaac Ofori gave an eyewitness account of how the team of security personnel comprising the Police, Military and AGC mine security beat up Kwame Opoku to death in February 1994. According to Isaac Ofori, they were engaged in 'galamsey' when the team of security personnel gave them a hot chase. Kwame Opoku could not run fast and was arrested by the team because they heard Kwame Opoku shouting for help as the security team kept beating him up. He was found dead in the bush later with blood in his nostrils and a broken arm.

2. Killing Of Justice Oppong (Alias Papa Yaw) By Combined Police, Military And AGC Obuasi Mine Security

Justice Ofori gave an eyewitness account of the killing of Justice Oppong by the combined team comprising, AGC Obuasi Mine Security, Military and Police in December 1996. According to the account, they were engaged in 'galamsey' (small scale mining) when a Military armour car was used to chase them. There were warning shots from the combined security team who chased them and arrested Justice Oppong. According to Justice Ofori, he witnessed the beating of Justice Opoku to death by the combined team when he took refuge in a nearby bush. Justice Oppong was later found dead at the point of arrest by the security team.

3. Killing Of Kofi Sarpong By Combined Police, Military And AGC Obuasi Mine Security

Isaac Ofori gave a narration of how he witnessed the events that led to the arrest, and beating of galamsey suspects which led to the death of Kofi Sarpong in January 1997. According to Isaac Ofori, they were arrested panning for gold when a heavily armed combined security team of about 70 people comprising AGC Security, Police, Military and officials of Prisons Service arrested them with the help of 13 guard dogs. The galamsey people arrested numbered 16 including the narrator of the account.

Isaac Ofori said they identified one expatriate that they knew was a white South African among the security team. The suspects were severely beaten and thrown into a big truck that conveyed them to the security office of AGC Obuasi Mine.

According to the account of Isaac Ofori, about 40 of the security team lined up at both sides of the pathway to the AGC Security cells and the suspects got brutalised as they moved from the vehicle into the AGC cells.

In the AGC cells, Kofi Sarpong started complaining of pains in the groin and he showed signs of weakness. Isaac Ofori narrated that he shouted for help when he realised that Kwame Awuah and Kwame Kusi had collapsed in the cells whilst Kofi Sarpong had become very weak. According to Isaac Ofori, AGC Mine Security opened the cells and dragged the 3 unconscious people on the

ground into a truck to the AGC hospital. Kofi Sarpong died on the way to the hospital whilst Kwame Awuah and Kwame Kusi were hospitalised for 5 days.

4. Death Of Kofi Ampomah

Mr Ben Opoku Acheampong who gave an eyewitness account of how Kofi Ampomah died said he was a Security Officer for BCM and was on duty when he saw the AGC Mine Security chasing Kofi Ampomah with guard dogs. The incident occurred in 1997. According to Mr Ben Opoku Acheampong, the security chased Kofi Ampomah into a mine pit. He narrated that Kofi Ampomah got hold of a rock, which he held on to for a long time when he was unable to neither descend nor climb up. According to Mr Ben Opoku Acheampong, Kofi Ampomah held on to the rock until he got exhausted and fell from the top of the pit and crushed on a rock down the pit

The Mine Security and himself witnessed the horrific incident, which has traumatised him to date.

5. Kwaku Bio Alias Kwaku Firi of Old Anyiman

Madam Abena Dansoah (Mother of Kwaku Bio) of Old Anyinam, a suburb of Obuasi narrated how AGC arrested her 25-year-old son who had gone to look for firewood on 27th April 2001. According to Madam Abena Dansoah, the guard dogs of AGC chewed Kwaku Bio to death. The police Officer who took pictures of the dead body has refused to give the pictures to Madam Abena Dansoah. The woman complains that she doesn't have the resources to take legal action against AGC. The firewood that Kwaku Bio fetched was found beside him when he was found dead.

6. Shooting Of Kwaku Addae

The people of Sansu undertook a peaceful demonstration in April 1995 on livelihood issues, employment, and payment of adequate compensation, construction of market, school and toilet, which AGC Obuasi Mine had promised to provide. Kwaku Addae was a sportsman and a farmer who took part in the peaceful demonstration. The Police shot him in the leg. AGC Obuasi Mine accepted responsibility for the shooting incident and bore the cost of the surgery at the orthopaedic hospital in Koforidua. AGC is yet to provide the necessary funds for an operation to remove a plate fixed in his leg. The young man has a deformed leg and cannot undertake any economic activity.

7. Using Guard Dogs To Feed On Galamsey Suspects

There had been reported cases that AGC Obuasi Mine, brutalised 'galamsey' suspects who are arrested by the mine security. According to statements from the victims of the guard dogs attacks, they are beaten and handcuffed at the back before guard dogs are ordered to chew them. After such ordeal, the suspects are kept in the cells of AGC or in the Police Station before being arraigned before court.

A number of young men who had been victims of the guard dogs attacks had fled the village for fear of being jailed by the court. The swollen big scars on the bodies of the victims indicated big wounds. Most of the victims were arrested for picking stones that had fallen from haulage trucks. The haulage road is not fenced and it is used as an access road by many villages. The following victims of AGC dog attacks were interviewed;

- **AMOS ABU**

Was arrested on 25th March 2002 for picking stones that had fallen from haulage trucks on the haulage road. According to his narration, he was beaten and handcuffed at the back and guard dogs released to feed on his body. He sustained deep wounds on his body. According to Amos Abu, he was kept in AGC cells over night whilst bleeding and was sent to the Police Station the next day. Amos Abu was arraigned before a magistrate court and WACAM is providing legal support to him.

The scars from the wounds on Amos Abu sometimes develop into boils.

- **KWABENA NTI**

AGC Mine Security arrested Kwabena Nti in December 2001 on the suspicion of engaging in 'galamsey'. According to him, he was beaten handcuffed and guard dogs ordered to chew him up.

- **KWAME KANKAM**

According to Kwame Kankam, the AGC Security arrested him in October 2002 at the waste dump of AGC Obuasi Mine. He was beaten, handcuffed and the guard dogs were ordered to attack him. Madam Abena Dansoa is so poor that she cannot bring up an action against AGC Obuasi Mine.

OTHER VICTIMS OF GUARD DOGS ATTACKS

Other victims of dogs' attacks include:

1. Kwame Sakoah
2. Kwabena Antwi
3. Yaw Oduro