The queen-mother of Wassa Dawurampong in the Wassa Amenfi East District of the Western Region, Nana Akua Ampomaa II, has appealed to government to as a matter of urgency, construct bore-holes in the area to serve as alternative water sources for the people.

She said close to “99 per cent of water sources” in the district have been polluted through the operations of illegal miners, popularly called “galamsey”. This, she said, has resulted in serious water crisis, particularly, within Wassa Adansi area where community members had no option but to continue to depend on the polluted rivers and other water sources for their household activities.

Speaking at a stakeholder forum in Accra, Nana Amponmaa II said her people were living in such a critical moment that if something was not done, there would be serious health implications in the community for the country to contend with.

The forum was organized by Ghana Coalition of NGOs in the Water and Sanitation Sector (CONIWAS) and SEND-Ghana to share with national stakeholders’ findings of a research dubbed: “Impacts of Mining Activities on Water Resources Management” which was carried by the Water Resources Institute (WRI) of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).

The research which was centered on the Hiawa River, a major tributary to the Ankobra River at Wassa Akropong that is being used by the citizens of the town for drinking and other domestic purposes showed high levels in colour, turbidity and total suspended solids due to activities of illegal small scale miners.

The research, which falls under a project title “Deepening Linkages between Research, Advocacy, and Media practitioners in Ghana, for greater policy influence and impact” revealed that activities of illegal miners, was polluting water bodies and threatening the health of the citizens who depend on water from such bodies.

Ghana News Agency and the Public Agenda newspaper were the media partners.

According to the report, the levels of chemicals like mercury used by the miners for gold refinery, recorded in the water bodies revealed very high levels far above World Health Organisation's (WHO) recommended levels.

It indicated that mercury vapour through inhalation could cause memory and speech loss, numbness, vision problem, convulsion and in some cases death.

The report explained that the miners used greater quantities of mercury to wash their gold in their bid to extract all available gold and that was dangerous since it exposed the miners to inhale contaminated soil, tailing, stream sediments and water close to the processing sites. Lan d degradation was also a major issue in the districts as several lands had been degraded because of illegal mining activities in the area thereby depriving farmers of their livelihoods.

The report, therefore, recommended that the Water Resources Commission and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) should take bold steps to protect water bodies from being destroyed by galamsey operators.

The EPA and the Minerals Commission and Ghana Chamber of Mines have also been urged to develop programmes to address environmental pollution and its associated health risk on citizens in the Wassa Akropong area.

The law enforcement agencies such the Police had been asked to enforce the relevant provisions in the criminal code and the Minerals and Mining Act, Act 703 to help in curbing the menace.

Again, government was asked to invest into finding innovative ways of either treating some of the polluted streams and rivers or providing clean and safe drinking water to citizens in the affected areas.

Commenting on the findings, Mr Siapha Kamara, Chief Executive Officer, SEND West Africa

said government ought to take immediate steps to address the problem through the partnership of various stakeholders. He said other six countries in Africa were undergoing same research to help reduce poverty in mining areas.

Mr Kamara commended the Ghana News Agency in particular, for its sustained media coverage and the promotion of environmental issues.

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