

## **Akyem mine area communities have the right to determine their own futures**

Local communities can be both positively and negatively impacted by economic development activities. Current best practice is to engage local communities to ensure they are consulted and have significant input into the decisions regarding development opportunities. Community engagement and dialogue is also usually required by host country environmental and social impact assessments – which are required prior to government approval of any potential projects. It is also a feature of modern, best practice private economic development. The case of the proposed gold mine in the Akyem Kotoku area of the Eastern Region of Ghana is a clear case of community engagement, acceptance and support of project development.

In this case, due partly to the extensive consultation and engagement that the proponent of the project, Newmont Ghana Gold Limited' has undertaken over the last five years, but also due to the communities' own fervor for development of their local economy, there is demonstrable evidence of significant support by community members for this project. This support is evidenced in all sectors of the society including local government, youth groups, traditional authorities (including both chiefs and Queen Mothers), farmers and local business associations.

Given the important local context and background, it is necessary to highlight several factual errors, misleading statements and falsehoods in the response by the Ghanaian advocacy group, WACAM, to the letters of concern sent by local Akyem people to the media, to government and to various other agencies including the UN Human Rights Commission.

1. The Chiefs and youth in the area have raised the legitimate concern that WACAM – being an NGO from the Wassa District of the Western Region of Ghana, some 250km southwest of Akyem – does not represent them and has not in any way consulted with them in the statements that the group was making to the media. The Communiqué stands as representative of the local leaders' views and has in no manner been influenced by Newmont. The community has demonstrated its ability to speak on its own behalf and does so frequently.
1. It is a false statement to indicate that Newmont did not respond to the query on its Akyem project emanating from the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights. Newmont received a request from the Ghana Government, in late July, for information related to the Akyem project. The Government requested information to develop a response to a letter from the office of the UNHRC, which had been sent to Ghana's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva. The letter contained questions which were based on allegations contained in a separate, stand-alone attachment. There was no indication as to where or from whom the allegations had come. Newmont provided a detailed response to the Ghana Government's request on 13th August, 2009. It is also important to note that prior to receipt of the UN letter, no person or organization had posed the allegations to Newmont directly. Later in August, a similar request came from UNHRC to Newmont Mining Corporation's CEO, and the company responded directly to the UNHRC. Newmont Ghana's responses are posted on [www.Newmont.com](http://www.Newmont.com). The response was also made widely available to a range of Ghanaian government Ministries, Ghana EPA and other interested parties. Newmont did not feel at liberty to make the response widely available out of respect for the Government and the UN process.

In summary, the allegations cited in the letter to the Ghanaian government – whether made by WACAM or FIAN - are false and misleading of the actual facts. There are no indications that Akyem area residents made the allegations or that they had any prior knowledge of the allegations and the efforts by unknown persons to subvert the project using the UN Human Rights mechanism. The majority of issues raised as allegations have previously been addressed in the publicly disclosed Final Environmental Impact Study (EIS), which was approved by the Government of Ghana in February 2009. (WACAM & FIAN continue to rely on an outdated analysis of the *draft* EIS.)

2. WACAM continues to raise the topic regarding payments to the Akyem Traditional Leaders as an effort to 'bribe' them into disagreeing with NGO opposition to project development. Newmont responded to this false allegation in a clear, concise, and completely transparent manner in January 2009. Information related to the agreements between the company and the traditional leaders was publicly disclosed at that time and continues to be in the public domain. (See [http://newmontghana.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=192&Itemid=36](http://newmontghana.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=192&Itemid=36)).

WACAM continues to state that "Newmont blames WACAM for everything." It seems to appear that WACAM does not view the communities' right to express their views as legitimate community voices. The Akyem Kotoku communities have their own views and are not shy about expressing their view points as has been evidenced during the project public hearing process run by the EPA. Just because the communities express a position different to that of WACAM, it is being concluded that someone must be manipulating them. This is patronizing and unjust.

3. The petition that WACAM refers to as opposing the mine project has been sent to a number of government ministers and the media in Ghana under the assumption that it originates from an organization called the 'Concerned Farmers Association of Akyem.' On 2nd October, Ghana's national 'Daily Graphic' reported that farmers in the communities described the petition as 'mischievous and deceitful," and stressed that "those behind the media reports were only doing that for their selfish interests". A spokesman for the group of about 250 farmers from the Akyem communities, Mr. Paul Amo, at a news conference at Hweakwae (one of the mine communities), said: 'Never have we at any time kicked against the proposed mining, except that we have been pushing for a better deal.'

Further investigations in the communities have revealed that more than 80% of the signatories were told they should sign the petition if they wanted higher crop compensation rates from Newmont. According to them, they were not shown the text of the petition as later presented publicly. In other cases, the investigation indicates that some signatories are actually children, others deceased or living in Accra, or were actually paid to sign the petition. Once again, such actions do not show respect for a community or its views.

Another issue, not raised in WACAM's response, is the actions of the German-based NGO. This NGO has also demonstrated an apparent lack of engagement and respect with the local Akyem communities. On 10th August, FIAN representatives visited Akyem with the apparent intent of fostering anti-project sentiments. The Chiefs, youth executive, farmers and other community leaders, on hearing of the visit, summonsed the FIAN visitors to the New Abirem palace and admonished them for both breaking protocol and, also, for claiming to represent the community in working

against the Akyem project.

It is overwhelmingly clear that the Akyem area communities are supportive of the Newmont mine project and, weighing its potential pros and cons, have exercised their basic human right to determine their own socio-economic future. Included are a range of media items documenting this support.

### **Attachments**

- *Daily Graphic*, p. 26. 2 October 2009, 'Group of Farmers Support Newmont'
- 'Concerned Community Members of Newmont Akyem Project area on WACAM's campaign against their interest', 10 February 2009 (signed by Youth Executive Groups of Akyem; similar documents were signed by 149 Akyem community residents and leaders. See all the petitions and the signatures at <http://www.newmontghana.com/>).
- 'Newmont Akyem project earns local support', 26 September 2009. Ghana News Agency
- Media items following public hearings held in Akyem communities by Ghana Environmental Protection Agency, 5-7 July 2008.

**Newmont Ghana Gold Ltd.  
13 October 2009**