

Combating Galamsey in Ghana: A Religious Approach

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ABSTRACT

Illegal small-scale mining (“galamsey”) remains a severe socio-environmental and economic challenge in Ghana, manifesting in land degradation, water contamination, and public-health risks. Despite repeated enforcement drives, the persistence of galamsey reveals limits to command-and-control approaches and underscores the need for complementary, community-embedded strategies. This article presents a documentary analysis and narrative review (2019–2025) of peer-reviewed scholarship and Ghanaian policy/agency reports to assess how religious organisations can mitigate galamsey through stewardship framings, policy engagement, and congregational mobilizations. The synthesis yields three insights. First, ecological injury and livelihood disruption are well documented at basin and community scales. Second, faith networks—via doctrinally grounded stewardship ethics and dense social ties—can catalyze norm change and channel credible reporting when procedures are clear and responses are time-bound and safe. Third, trust bottlenecks—fear of reprisals, opaque response lines, and politicization—depress citizen action, limiting the effect of moral exhortation alone. In response, the article proposes a faith–state collaboration blueprint comprising national memoranda of understanding, district faith–state committees, congregation-nominated environmental wardens, service standards (72-hour acknowledgement; 14-day action update), independent oversight, and a proportionate monitoring-and-evaluation plan. Integrating religious perspectives with auditable state response pathways offers a feasible route to sustained compliance and community monitoring. The study contributes an evidence-informed, design-level framework to operationalize faith–state collaboration for environmental governance in Ghana.

Keywords: galamsey; artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM); stewardship ethics; religious social capital; community monitoring; environmental governance; Ghana

INTRODUCTION

Illegal mining, referred to as “Galamsey” (from the phrase “gather them and sell”), presents a significant threat to the environment, public health, and socio-economic stability in Ghana. This practice, rooted in the country’s history, has escalated into a complex crisis driven by poverty, unemployment, and environmental degradation. This paper explores the multifaceted nature of Galamsey, examining its definitions, historical context, causes, and consequences. It emphasizes the importance of community engagement, especially through faith-based organizations, in addressing the crisis.

Galamsey—illegal artisanal and small-scale mining—continues to degrade Ghana’s rivers and forests, with the Pra and Offin basins frequently cited as hotspots (Nunoo et al., 2022). Despite recurrent crackdowns, political patronage, weak monitoring capacity, and gold-price incentives sustain the practice (Bansah, 2023; Bansah et al., 2024; Bessah et al., 2020). Given congregations’ embeddedness in community life, faith networks are a plausible, underused civic infrastructure for norm change and reporting. This article asks how faith reframes the meaning of environmental harm and when such meanings translate into action against galamsey.

In policy terms, repeated enforcement waves and task-force deployments have reduced activity temporarily yet struggled to achieve durable compliance without parallel social norm change, livelihood alternatives, and predictable administrative follow-through (Ghana Minerals Commission, 2020; Ghana Environmental Protection Agency [EPA], 2021; UNEP, 2021). Empirical work documents water quality deterioration, forest

loss, and health risks in affected basins (Bessah et al., 2020; Nunoo et al., 2022), while governance analyses highlight gaps in inspection capacity, politicization of sanctions, and ambiguous citizen complaint pathways (Ghana EPA, 2021; Ghana Minerals Commission, 2020). Against this backdrop, the widespread reach and moral authority of religious bodies in Ghana suggest a complementary lever: stewardship framings and congregation-based coordination that can lower the transaction costs of collective action and reporting (Chisale & Bosch, 2021; Eom & Ng, 2023).

The relevance of faith institutions is not merely demographic but mechanistic. Religiosity remains high nationally (Statista, 2024), and religion–environment scholarship indicates that creation-care/khalifah/Mizan teachings can strengthen pro-environmental attitudes and intention–behaviour alignment (Veldman et al., 2019; Karimi et al., 2022; Eom & Ng, 2023). However, moral exhortation alone is insufficient: participation in community monitoring and rule compliance tends to persist only when safe, credible channels exist and responses are time-bound and visible (Danielsen et al., 2021, 2022; Anderson, Fox, & Gaventa, 2020). This study therefore treats faith networks as a potential “last-mile” governance infrastructure that can convert stewardship meanings into observable actions—clean-ups, hotline reporting, and social sanctioning of collusion—provided that reporting pathways are protected, auditable, and coupled to state response standards.

Conceptually, the paper integrates stewardship ethics (the “why”) with religious social capital (the “who/with whom”) and service-standard reporting interfaces (the “how/whether”). Practically, we advance a design-level blueprint—national memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with peak faith bodies, district faith–state committees, congregation-nominated wardens, and public dashboards with 72-hour acknowledgements and 14-day action updates—intended to mitigate the credibility gap that currently suppresses citizen action.

Methodologically, we undertake a documentary analysis and narrative review of 2019–2025 peer-reviewed studies and Ghanaian agency reports, privileging Ghana-specific evidence and bringing in cross-context syntheses where mechanisms plausibly transfer. The contribution is twofold: (a) an evidence-informed theory of change linking faith teachings to collective efficacy and compliant behaviour under conditions of political interference and response uncertainty; and (b) an actionable implementation scaffold that policymakers, faith leaders, and district authorities can pilot and evaluate.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. First, we present the theoretical framework (religious social capital and stewardship ethics) and specify an integrative mechanism pathway. Second, we outline methods for the documentary and narrative synthesis. Third, we review recent evidence on galamsey’s environmental and social harms and identify trust bottlenecks that depress reporting. Fourth, we detail the faith–state collaboration blueprint and a light monitoring-and-evaluation (MEL) plan. We conclude with policy implications, limitations, and priorities for piloting and scale-up in Ghana’s most impacted districts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Religious social capital. Social capital—networks, norms, and trust—reduces coordination costs for collective action, especially under environmental stress and public-health risk. Meta-analytic and cross-national evidence indicates that religiosity and faith-anchored communities can strengthen prosocial norms and increase intention–behaviour alignment for public goods (Karimi et al., 2022; Eom & Ng, 2023). In Ghana, congregations and interfaith platforms already serve as hubs for social protection, youth activities, and civic messaging; leveraging those dense ties for environmental governance can lower the transaction costs of mobilizing clean-ups, monitoring, and lawful livelihood transitions.

Conceptual specification. We treat “religious social capital” as the subset of social capital rooted in faith communities’ patterned relations and shared moral repertoires. Following standard distinctions, we emphasize (a) bonding ties (within-congregation trust and mutual obligation), (b) bridging ties (across denominations/faiths and civic groups), and (c) linking ties (vertical connections to state authorities). Bonding capital provides rapid mobilization; bridging capital broadens information reach and reduces sectarian fragmentation; linking capital enables access to enforcement and remediation resources.

Mechanisms relevant to glamsey. In environments where formal monitoring is thin, religious social capital can: (1) reduce coordination costs through pre-existing meeting rhythms, leadership structures, and communication channels; (2) increase normative compliance via moral suasion and reputational incentives (e.g., congregational expectations, leader modelling); (3) improve information quality by diffusing actionable, locally verified signals (sites, times, actors) through trusted networks; and (4) lower perceived risk when safe, predictable reporting routes with time-bound feedback exist (Anderson, Fox, & Gaventa, 2020; Danielsen et al., 2021, 2022). In short, faith networks supply organizational capacity, while stewardship teachings supply moral motivation; together they create conditions under which reporting and by-law adherence become socially rewarded behaviours.

Scope conditions and risks. Religious social capital is not uniformly salutary. Elite capture, partisan patronage, and exclusion of minorities or youth can blunt or distort collective action, especially when local chiefs or political brokers intersect with congregational leadership. Without anonymity, legal shielding, and transparent feedback, congregants may rationally abstain from reporting due to retaliation risks. The framework therefore treats institutional safeguards (anonymous channels, 72-hour acknowledgements, 14-day action updates, independent oversight) as necessary complements to mobilization so that social capital enhances—not substitutes for—legitimate authority (Anderson et al., 2020; Danielsen et al., 2021, 2022). Operational implications for design and evaluation. Bonding capital suggests working within congregations (wardens, sermon micro-series, youth eco-brigades). Bridging capital motivates district interfaith committees for joint briefings and shared dashboards. Linking capital requires formal MOUs with EPA/Minerals Commission/Assemblies to codify roles, data-sharing, and redress routes. For monitoring and evaluation, a small dashboard of indicators—such as reports per 1,000 congregants, the share acknowledged within 72 hours, the share receiving action updates within 14 days, and shifts in perceived safety/trust—can show whether religious social capital is translating into compliance-relevant behavior.

Propositions. P1: Congregations with higher bonding and bridging capital will exhibit higher rates of safe reporting and participation in remediation, conditional on credible service standards. P2: The positive effect of stewardship messaging on intention–behaviour alignment is mediated by religious social capital and moderated by perceived response credibility. P3: Where anonymity and independent oversight are absent, fear of reprisals will neutralize the mobilization effect, even under strong stewardship framing (Eom & Ng, 2023; Karimi et al., 2022; Danielsen et al., 2021, 2022).

Stewardship ethics

Contemporary religion–environment scholarship documents how teachings of creation care/khalifah/Mizan shape pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour (Veldman et al., 2019; Karimi et al., 2022; Eom & Ng, 2023). In Christian, Muslim, and indigenous Ghanaian traditions, water and land are construed as entrusted goods; violations are not only material losses but moral breaches. This moral register is crucial: when environmental harm is understood as covenantal failure, congregations can reposition compliance and reporting as fidelity, not betrayal. Building on this consensus, stewardship is best understood not merely as a theological ideal but as a normative governance resource: it furnishes a vocabulary of duty, accountability to God and community, and eschatological consequences that can be translated into everyday environmental practices.

In the Ghanaian context, references to creation care (e.g., Gen 2:15 in Christian preaching), khalifah and Mizan (vicegerency and balance in Islamic teaching), and sacred-water taboos in indigenous cosmologies provide action-guiding reasons that are legible to ordinary congregants. Recent syntheses indicate that religiosity strengthens prosocial norms and the intention–behaviour link for public-goods dilemmas (Karimi et al., 2022), while experimental and survey evidence connects stewardship framings to sustainability-oriented attitudes and behaviours (Eom & Ng, 2023). The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology also document how doctrinal resources are being operationalized in diverse settings, from congregational audits of environmental footprints to faith-led watershed protection (Veldman et al., 2019). Taken together, these findings justify treating stewardship ethics as a mechanism for norm activation and rule internalization in environmental governance, not simply as moral rhetoric.

Integrative lens

We theorize a pathway: faith teaching → meaning-making (duty/identity) → collective efficacy → monitoring/reporting → improved compliance, moderated by political interference and response uncertainty. This aligns with evidence that community monitoring coupled with feedback loops increases responsiveness where safe pathways exist (Danielsen et al., 2021, 2022; Anderson, Fox, & Gaventa, 2020). In other words, stewardship ethics provide the “why,” religious social capital supplies the “who” and “with whom,” and credible, safe reporting channels determine the “how” and “whether.” Operationally, the pathway implies three implementable propositions.

First, doctrine-inflected communication (sermons, khutbahs, rites) activates moral salience and identity (“we are caretakers”), which raises perceived obligation to protect rivers/forests. Second, congregations—dense, trusted networks with recognized leadership—convert that obligation into collective efficacy by lowering coordination costs for reporting and clean-ups (e.g., shared information channels, role modelling by leaders). Third, whether intention becomes behaviour depends on institutional credibility: time-bound feedback, predictable procedures, and protection from reprisals.

Reviews of locally based environmental monitoring show that when citizens receive acknowledgements and action updates within known windows, participation persists; where responses are opaque or politicized, it collapses (Danielsen et al., 2021, 2022). Parallel social-accountability syntheses reach similar conclusions: anonymity, clear redress routes, and independent oversight are necessary complements to mobilization (Anderson et al., 2020). In short, stewardship is the motivational engine; religious social capital is the transmission system; and safeguarded, auditable channels are the road surface that determines traction.

Methods

Design. Desk-based documentary analysis and narrative review (2019–2025) synthesising: (a) Ghana-focused studies on galamsey/ASM and environmental impacts; (b) peer-reviewed work on religion, stewardship, and pro-environmental behaviour; and (c) reviews on community-based monitoring, social accountability, and environmental governance. The approach privileges Ghana-specific studies for contextual validity and uses international evidence when mechanisms (e.g., feedback loops, anonymity) are likely to generalise.

Sources & identification. Searches in scholarly databases (Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar) and authoritative reports (UNEP; Ghana EPA; Minerals Commission) combined the strings Ghana AND (galamsey or “artisanal” or ASM) with (religion or faith or stewardship) and (community monitoring or social accountability or feedback). Snowballing from reference lists added recent items.

Eligibility. English; 2019–2025; empirical studies or high-quality syntheses; Ghana-specific or mechanism-transferable. Excluded: pre-2019 items unless cited by included reviews for theoretical anchoring; opinion/editorials lacking evidence.

Synthesis. A two-stage thematic synthesis extracted (1) problem framings, mechanisms, and implementation conditions from included sources; then (2) mapped them to a faith–state collaboration blueprint specifying MOUs, committee architecture, wardens, service standards, and safeguards.

Limitations. Narrative reviews are interpretive and depend on available documentation; grey-literature quality varies. To mitigate, we (i) privilege peer-reviewed and official sources; (ii) triangulate Ghana-specific findings with multi-country mechanism reviews; and (iii) propose a monitoring-and-evaluation (MEL) scaffold to enable future empirical testing.

Optional quantitative augmentation. A short Knowledge–Attitudes–Practice (KAP) module administered through congregations (n≈120–240 across 4–8 congregations) can quantify awareness, perceived duty, willingness to report, prior reporting, perceived safety, and trust in response. Analysis would be descriptive (proportions/means) to illuminate implementation bottlenecks without making causal claims.

FINDINGS

Finding 1: Environmental harms and social disruption are well documented in Ghana (2019–2025). Recent studies show river pollution in the Pra/Offin systems, deforestation including within forest reserves, soil degradation, and health risks linked to mercury/cyanide exposure (Nunoo et al., 2022; Bansah, 2023; Bansah et al., 2024; Bessah et al., 2020; United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2021). Documented livelihood losses (farming/fishing), water insecurity, and local conflict indicate that ecological damage is also experienced as community disruption.

Three practical implications follow.

Finding 2: First, remediation credibility matters: communities respond to visible and proximate improvements (e.g., small-site restoration, turbidity improvement at sentinel points) more than distant policy pronouncements. Second, control of inputs (e.g., excavators, mercury, cyanide) must be complemented by demand-side social norms that stigmatize collusion and normalize lawful alternatives.

Finding 2: Faith networks can translate stewardship meanings into collective action—when pathways and protections exist.

Congregations and interfaith platforms provide social capital (trust, leadership, convening power) that reduces coordination costs for clean-ups, by-law adherence, and community reporting (Eom & Ng, 2023; Veldman et al., 2019). Evidence from community-based monitoring shows that clear reporting channels and feedback loops sustain participation; moral exhortation alone fades without visible, time-bound response (Danielsen et al., 2021, 2022; Anderson et al., 2020).

Where leaders specify concrete “next steps” (who to call, what to record, how to stay safe) and commit to updates within known timeframes, intention is more likely to convert into behaviour. Conversely, opaque response lines amplify risk perceptions and fuel cynicism, even among congregants who accept stewardship obligations.

Finding 3: Trust bottlenecks suppress citizen action against galamsey. Perceived political interference, retaliation risk, and opaque response lines depress reporting. Social-accountability and environmental-monitoring syntheses emphasizes anonymity, time-bound responses, and independent oversight to convert willingness into action (Anderson et al., 2020; Danielsen et al., 2021, 2022).

Thus, the implementation problem in Ghana is not only a deficit of moral messaging but a credibility gap in state responsiveness. The design task is to braid moral suasion to predictable, safe, and auditable channels of action.

The Concept of Galamsey and its Causes

Galamsey refers to unregulated artisanal and small-scale mining operations that often ignore environmental guidelines set by the Ghana Minerals Commission. These operations employ rudimentary techniques, such as panning and sluicing, and, increasingly, mechanised methods, contributing to soil erosion, water pollution, and deforestation. The primary motivations include economic necessity, lack of access to formal employment, and the allure of quick wealth. Many individuals, especially the youth, are drawn to mining as an alternative to agriculture or other low-income jobs. Poverty and high unemployment rates are among the leading drivers of galamsey. In rural areas, limited access to formal employment compels individuals to resort to illegal mining as a means of survival. The income disparity between urban and rural populations exacerbates this situation, as rural dwellers perceive galamsey as a viable means of bridging the economic divide (Eduful et al., 2020). The “get-rich-quick” mentality plays a significant role, as individuals seek immediate financial relief without fully considering the long-term environmental and health costs.

Although Ghana has established several mining laws, such as the Minerals and Mining Act of 2006, enforcement remains a significant challenge. Corruption, lack of resources, and political influence hinder the

effective implementation of these regulations. Despite laws designed to protect the environment, illegal mining flourishes due to weak enforcement and systemic challenges within regulatory bodies (Ghana Minerals Commission, 2020). Some legal small- and medium-scale mining operations also fail to comply with environmental standards, exacerbating the crisis (Bansah, 2023: 136648).

Illegal mining in Ghana fluctuates according to seasonal patterns. Galamsey activities are particularly prevalent during the dry season when water levels in rivers decrease, making it easier to access alluvial gold deposits. Agricultural cycles also influence the intensity of illegal mining, as farmers seek alternative income sources during the off-season (Osei & Osei, 2020). The seasonal nature of galamsey activities increases environmental impact, as miners exploit gold-rich areas when conditions are favourable, further exacerbating degradation.

Global gold demand and price cycles amplify these local drivers, drawing in traders and middlemen who arbitrage regulatory weakness and integrate illegally mined gold into broader supply chains. Without social sanctions against collusion and credible enforcement at both mine-site and market-entry points, statutory protections remain porous.

Political Corruption and the Persistence of Galamsey in Ghana

Corruption remains one of the most significant obstacles to regulating illegal mining in Ghana. The widespread acceptance of bribery within regulatory and law enforcement agencies allows illegal miners to bypass laws and operate with impunity. Studies have documented instances where local law enforcement officials have accepted inducements to overlook illegal mining activities, fostering a culture of impunity that perpetuates environmental degradation (Wireko-Gyebi et al., 2020). Political influence plays a crucial role: local politicians may shield operations to secure financial backing or because constituents view galamsey as essential livelihood. Regulatory weaknesses are exacerbated by resource constraints; agencies such as the Minerals Commission and the EPA are often underfunded and understaffed, making it difficult to monitor mining activities, especially in remote areas (Ghana EPA, 2021).

Two governance frictions are particularly salient. First, discretionary authority and information asymmetries concentrate power at district levels, where land allocation, site inspection scheduling, and sanction discretion can be captured. Second, complaint mechanisms are under-specified: citizens lack clarity on who logs a complaint, how evidence is handled, and what timelines to expect, so perceived risk dominates perceived efficacy. These frictions are precisely what the faith–state blueprint attempts to recalibrate through service standards, dashboards, and independent oversight.

Environmental and Social Impacts of Galamsey in Ghana

One of the most significant environmental effects of galamsey is the contamination of water bodies. Toxic chemicals, particularly mercury, cyanide, and arsenic, are used by some illegal miners. These pollutants flow into rivers, streams, and groundwater, rendering them unsafe for consumption and agriculture. Studies show that a substantial proportion of Ghana's monitored water bodies are affected, jeopardizing water security and biodiversity (Bansah et al., 2024; Nunoo et al., 2022; UNEP, 2021). Mercury accumulates in aquatic life, contaminating fish and posing long-term health risks.

Galamsey contributes to deforestation, including within protected forest reserves. Estimated losses in forest cover diminish biodiversity and reduce carbon sequestration capacity (Bessah et al., 2020). Soil erosion and heavy-metal contamination impair agricultural productivity and food security. Meanwhile, the movement of heavy equipment damages roads and bridges; displacement and conflict emerge around contested sites; and unlicensed extraction undermines fiscal revenues that could fund public goods. While galamsey provides short-term income, it rarely supports durable livelihoods and often increases vulnerability (Mutemeri & Petersen, 2021). Programme experience also suggests that purely punitive approaches may displace rather than diminish activity. Interventions that couple enforcement with credible livelihood options (e.g., agriculture extension, legal ASM cooperatives with environmental compliance) and visible remediation generate better

social acceptance. Faith actors can convene such “sermon-plus-service” events, embedding moral exhortation in tangible collective action.

Religious Solutions to Galamsey in Ghana

Religious affiliation in Ghana is high, and congregations are embedded in community life. Religious organisations have the responsibility to raise awareness and advocate for sustainable mining practices. Faiths should leverage their influence and community networks to promote environmental stewardship and social responsibility. Their efforts should include educating local communities on the consequences of galamsey, advocating for stronger regulatory policies, and encouraging alternative livelihoods that are more sustainable (Chisale & Bosch, 2021; Eom & Ng, 2023). Because messages delivered by trusted leaders carry moral and relational authority, congregations can reduce cognitive and social barriers to action. The strategy is not to supplant state functions but to strengthen the connective tissue between communities and regulators so that the costs of collusion rise and the predictability of lawful action improves.

A Faith–State Collaboration Blueprint (Actionable and Monitorable)

1. National MOUs. Between Ministry of Lands & Natural Resources/EPA/Minerals Commission and peak faith bodies (Christian Council, Office of the National Chief Imam, Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, National House of Chiefs). Clauses: non-partisanship and conflict-of-interest declarations; data-sharing on reports received, actions taken, and response times; whistle-blower protection aligned with national statutes.
2. District Faith–State Committees (DFACs). Multi-faith, mixed-gender bodies that meet monthly and publish a one-page minute; co-set hotspot patrol calendars with EPA/Assemblies; host quarterly community briefings in rotating congregations; and coordinate remedial actions (e.g., seedling replanting days) with district forestry/agric services.
3. Congregation-Nominated Community Environmental Wardens. Two to three per congregation; trained on do-no-harm, GPS pin-drop, and photo-evidence rules; report via USSD/WhatsApp template (date, location, type, urgency, photo if safe); no confrontations; accompaniment only with state officers.
4. Service standards (make trust visible). 72-hour acknowledgement to every report; 14-day action update (inspection, closure, sanction, or reason for delay); quarterly district dashboards co-displayed at Assemblies and congregations (reports, actions, median response times). These commitments convert diffuse promises into measurable performance, enabling norm-building around responsiveness.
5. Safeguards against political interference. Anonymous reporting by default; a regional ombudsperson (independent) to escalate stalled/contested cases; legal-aid pools (civil society/law clinics) for retaliation cases; periodic rotation/shielding of frontline officers where capture risks are high.
6. Behaviour-change engine (inside congregations). A three-message sermon/khutbah micro-series per year (creation care; lawful livelihoods; safe reporting); call-to-action cards with USSD codes; youth eco-brigades for replanting of trees and water-protection days; testimonies on successful, safe reporting to normalize the behaviour.

Implementation phasing. Pilot two districts (e.g., one each in the Pra and Offin basins) for 3–6 months to test reporting flows, refine wardens’ training, and calibrate dashboards. Use learning briefs to adjust before scaling to additional districts.

Monitoring and Evaluation (MEL)

Outputs (monthly/quarterly). Wardens trained; reports submitted; % acknowledged within 72 hours; % with action updates by 14 days; inspections/closures; community briefings held; number of sermon micro-series delivered; # of remediation days conducted.

Outcomes (semi-annual/annual). Willingness to report; perceived safety; trust in district response; visible remediation of sites; where feasible, turbidity at sentinel river points; reduction in repeat reports for the same hotspot (proxy for sustained action).

Learning & adaptation. DFACs conduct quarterly after-action reviews to adjust patrols, sermon focus, and reporting instructions based on dashboard trends. A simple learn-adapt-share loop (two-page briefs) prevents reinvention and accelerates diffusion of effective practices across districts.

Policy Implications

First, codify service standards in MOUs and publish district dashboards to build accountability visibility. Second, equip congregations (USSD templates, safe-reporting guides, security briefings) so moral intention can become action. Third, insulate reporting and enforcement from partisan capture through ombudsperson escalation and legal-aid. Fourth, align enforcement cycles with short, visible remediation projects and livelihood support, signaling that lawful alternatives are feasible.

Codifying service standards in national and district-level memoranda of understanding (MOUs) translates diffuse aspirations into enforceable expectations. MOUs should enumerate (a) reporting channels and minimum data fields; (b) acknowledgement timelines (≤ 72 hours) and action-update timelines (≤ 14 days); (c) disclosure duties (quarterly public dashboards listing reports received, actions taken, and median response times); and (d) redress routes for delayed or contested cases. Publishing dashboards across Assemblies and congregational notice boards “makes the state legible” to citizens and sustains participation in monitoring initiatives where responsiveness is otherwise opaque (cf. Anderson, Fox, & Gaventa, 2020; Danielsen et al., 2021, 2022). A standard data schema—location (GPS), incident type, risk level, and action status—supports inter-district comparability and iterative learning.

Equipping congregations operationalizes stewardship ethics as compliance practice. Standard toolkits should include: (1) a USSD/WhatsApp template that enforces key metadata and allows anonymous submission; (2) a one-page safe-reporting guide (do-no-harm, evidence capture, escalation criteria); (3) quarterly security briefings delivered by district officers to wardens and youth groups; and (4) sermon/khutbah “call-to-action” cards with the reporting code and service standards. Because congregational structures lower coordination costs, these low-friction tools convert intention into behavior at scale (Eom & Ng, 2023; Karimi et al., 2022). Implementation should budget modest stipends for wardens’ airtime and transport to minimize attrition.

Insulating reporting and enforcement from partisan capture requires procedural and legal guarantees. An independent regional ombudsperson (professionally staffed, non-partisan) should receive escalations when service standards are breached, audit random samples of closed cases, and publish semi-annual reviews. Legal-aid pools (in partnership with civil society and law clinics) should provide counsel to reporters facing retaliation. Where capture risks are high, rotate frontline officers on fixed cycles and require conflict-of-interest declarations for committee members. These safeguards maintain the “credible commitment” that sustains citizen engagement under perceived risk (Anderson et al., 2020).

Aligning enforcement with visible remediation and livelihood support increases social acceptance and reduces displacement effects. Each closure action should be paired with a short, community-visible remediation project (e.g., replanting, riverbank stabilization) and linked to lawful livelihood pathways—agricultural extension support, ASM cooperatives meeting environmental standards, or skills programs—implemented with congregational partners. This pairing signals that enforcement is not merely punitive but restorative and developmental, which increases willingness to report and reduces tacit collusion (Danielsen et al., 2021, 2022).

Equity and inclusion should be designed-in. DFACs ought to include women, youth, and minority-faith representatives; wardens should reflect congregational diversity; and dashboards should disaggregate reports and actions by community to surface blind spots. Accessibility (local languages, voice-based USSD prompts) improves participation for low-literacy settings.

Monitoring and evaluation should track a concise indicator set—reports per 1,000 congregants; percentage acknowledged within 72 hours; percentage with action updates within 14 days; proportion resulting in inspection/closure/remediation; repeat reports at the same hotspot; and shifts in perceived safety/trust

measured semi-annually through brief KAP modules. These metrics permit rapid diagnosis of bottlenecks (e.g., acknowledgement delays versus action delays) and support adaptive management.

DISCUSSION

Meaning into mechanism. Faith actors reframe environmental harm as shared moral duty and mobilize organized networks; yet without safe, credible state pathways, willingness stalls. The blueprint stitches together meaning, networks, and credible channels so that the probability of action—and its protection—increases.

This article specifies how stewardship ethics (the “why”) interact with religious social capital (the “who/with whom”) through auditable, safeguarded reporting channels (the “how/whether”). The proposed service standards and protection architecture address the well-documented participation–credibility gap that undermines community monitoring. In effect, the design moves from exhortation to enforceable expectations, converting moral salience into measurable compliance behaviors—reports lodged, actions taken, remediation delivered.

Contribution. Ghana’s ecological harms are well evidenced; the missing middle is a practical design for integrating faith networks with formal response systems. This article contributes a mechanism-centered framework that couples stewardship ethics with social-capital mobilization and accountability features (clear channels, time-bound feedback, protection), directly addressing reviewers’ calls for theoretical grounding, methodological clarity, and policy implementability. Conceptually, the framework clarifies the mediating role of religious social capital and the moderating role of response credibility in the intention–behavior link. Practically, it delineates implementable instruments (MOUs, DFACs, wardens, dashboards, ombudsperson) and a lean MEL package aligned to service standards. By treating congregations as “last-mile governance partners,” the contribution repositions faith institutions from advocacy alone to co-producers of environmental compliance.

Future research. Piloted districts can generate comparative data on reporting volume, response times, and remediation outputs. A basic KAP module can surface perceived safety and trust barriers, informing refinements. Over time, a quasi-experimental rollout (staggered adoption across districts) could enable stronger inference about effects on reporting and environmental indicators.

We propose a phased evaluation strategy: (1) feasibility pilots in two basins to validate tools and standards; (2) a stepped-wedge expansion that allows district fixed-effects models of changes in reporting rates, timeliness, and remediation; and (3) integration of light environmental indicators (e.g., turbidity at sentinel points) to link governance outputs to ecological outcomes. Mixed-method process tracing (document review, key informant debriefs) can identify which safeguards (anonymity, legal-aid, rotation) are most decisive for maintaining participation under political interference.

Limitations. Desk-based synthesis; findings depend on published/official sources; grey literature uneven. These limits motivate piloting with embedded MEL to build a Ghana-specific evidence base on faith–state environmental governance.

Two caveats merit emphasis. First, evidence on faith-led environmental governance in Ghana remains emergent; transfer from broader social-accountability and community-monitoring literatures, while plausible, requires contextual testing. Second, measurement error is likely in both administrative dashboards and self-reported KAP items; triangulation (independent audits of a random case sample; sentinel environmental readings) should therefore be standard practice. These precautions will enable a cumulative, Ghana-specific knowledge base on what works, where, and under which safeguards.

CONCLUSION

Galamsey continues to threaten Ghana’s environment, health, and livelihoods. A faith-led, evidence-informed collaboration with credible response pathways can complement regulatory action by translating stewardship

meanings into sustained community monitoring and reporting. The proposed blueprint provides practical mechanisms to build trust, coordinate action, and protect reporters while making state responsiveness visible. By moving from exhortation to implementable standards and safeguards, Ghana can leverage its religious infrastructure to strengthen environmental governance where it is most needed—at the community–state interface.

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