



Thematic Fact Sheet

RESOURCE CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

NATIONAL SECURITY FACT SHEET

Arrests, Raids and the Limits of Enforcement

What the military, police, National Anti-Illegal Mining Operations Secretariat (NAIMOS) and the Forestry Commission Rapid Response Teams have seized, destroyed and arrested in the fight against illegal mining — what stops the effort short, and what must change. Anchored in RESCONI's evidence from Asutifi North and Atwima Mponua Districts, and the enforcement efforts at the national level as at July, 2026.

RESCONI . AUGUST 2026.

ABOUT THIS FACT SHEET

District-level evidence in this sheet is drawn from the RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), and is referenced to the sections, tables or figures it came from. Enforcement figures, operations and prosecutions are attributed to the agencies and published reports that recorded them, each dated at the point of use. This sheet documents the enforcement efforts and responses. It does not assess the guilt of any person named or referred to in an arrest report; suspects are presumed innocent until convicted by a court of competent jurisdiction.

- 01** | **What the State has actually done**
Identified the potent illegal forces and threats in the field, the perceptions of the local citizens and what security raids yielded.
- 02** | **The raids, and what they meet**
A record of documented operations — dawn swoops, burnt camps, armed resistance.
- 03** | **Where enforcement runs out of road**
The prosecution gap, violence as an operating condition, and the agencies' own account of what stops them.
- 04** | **What must change**
Structural and preventive measures, and the case for treating this as a national security issue in contrast to a policy management failure.

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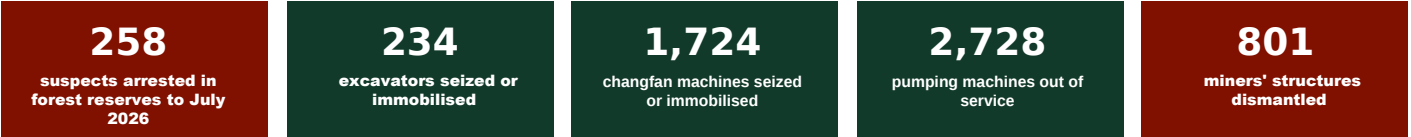
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1. What the State has actually done

Ghana's security agencies are not idle. By July 2026 the forest-reserve operations alone had taken 234 excavators, 2,728 pumping machines and 1,724 changfan machines out of service, and arrested 258 suspects. The machines are confiscated regularly. The men who own and operate them walk away.



Source: Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, *Illegal Mining in Forest Reserves*, figures current as of July 2026, presented at the Ministry-IMANI policy dialogue, Accra, August 2026.

KEY FACTS

- The forces in the field are **Operation Halt II** (Ghana Armed Forces), **NAIMOS**, the **Forestry Commission Rapid Response Teams**, the **Ghana Police Service** and regional anti-galamsey task forces.
- 258 suspects** arrested and **200 excavators** seized in forest reserves as at July 2026, alongside 34 excavators immobilised on site.
- 950 changfan machines** seized and **774** immobilised — the floating platforms used to mine directly in rivers.
- 82 gold detectors** and **801 structures** seized or dismantled.
- More than **4,000 excavators** are held at the ports pending a new import clearance and end-user verification regime.
- Approximately **2,000 Blue Water Guards** have been recruited and trained as community-based first responders on affected water bodies.
- About **8,900 hectares** of forest reserve are recorded as completely degraded — roughly 12,500 football fields.

Who is in the field

Enforcement Body	Mandate
Operation Halt II	Ghana Armed Forces task force launched April 2021 to remove persons and equipment from water bodies and forest reserves. They have conducted operations along the Pra, Offin, Ankobra, Birim and Ayensu rivers
NAIMOS	National Anti-Illegal Mining Operations Secretariat. Intelligence-led task force conducting dawn raids and multi-region weekly operations, with military and Forestry Commission support.
Forestry Commission RRT	Rapid Response Teams and District Monitoring Teams operating inside gazetted reserves, often independently of the military.
Ghana Police Service	Regional and special anti-galamsey task forces; receives suspects and exhibits into custody for investigation and prosecution.
Blue Water Guards	Approximately 2,000 trained community-based personnel serving as intelligence sources and first responders around water bodies.

Table 1. Principal enforcement bodies engaged against illegal mining. Source: Ghana Armed Forces statements; NAIMOS operational reports; Forestry Commission Public Affairs Unit; Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, 2026.

The equipment war is being won

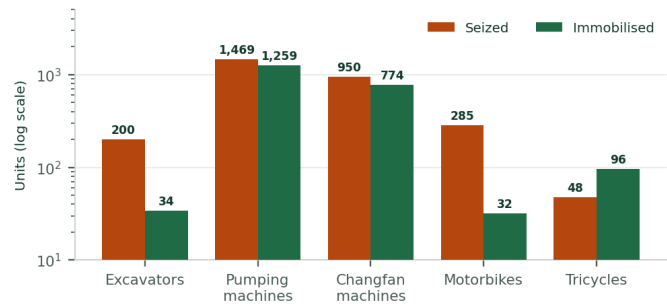


Figure 1. Equipment seized and immobilised in forest-reserve operations, cumulative to July 2026. Source: Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources presentation, August 2026.

Two readings are deduced from this chart. The first is scale: this is not a handful of confiscated diggers but an industrial inventory, sustained by pumps, transport and fabricated platforms. The second is that immobilisation is running almost level with seizure. Where terrain defeats the low-bed trucks, teams disable machines where they stand — a practical answer to a logistical problem, but one that leaves the machines at the disposal

What a three-week operation looks like

The Ghana Armed Forces reported that in a single three-week window of Operation Halt II in October 2022, teams seized 30 excavators, destroyed four and immobilised four more; destroyed 103 changfan machines, nine water pumping machines, five generator sets and two fuel storage tanks; seized six motorbikes and one tricycle; and arrested eight suspected illegal miners, handing them to the police. Operations were ran at Kade, Ofoase, Oda and Pra Anom along the Birim and Pra.

In the first quarter of 2023 the same operation seized six excavators, 120 changfan machines and 27 water pumps, and destroyed temporary structures across several sites — but recorded **no arrests at all** in the period. The pattern recurs throughout the record: machines are far easier to catch than the illegal miners operating them.



Photo Credit: Modern Ghana Website (4 March 2020) (www.modernghana.com/news/987540/from-the-frying-pan-into-the-fire.html)

2. The raids, and what they meet

Dawn swoops, burnt camps, immobilised excavators — and, with rising frequency, gunfire. One of the most instructive operations of the period took place in a community RESCONI's own study had already flagged.

Anhwiafutu, Atwima Mponua — 17 September 2025

A NAIMOS task force, working with troops of the 4th Infantry Battalion and the Forestry Commission, moved at dawn on Anhwiafutu in the Nkawie Forest District and within the Offin-Shelterbelt forest reserve, the team found fresh excavator tracks across the community: heavy machines had been moved out hours earlier. Ghanaian and Chinese operators were seen fleeing into the forest.

Nine excavators were located hidden within the reserve and immobilised on site, low-bed trucks being unable to reach them. Three vehicles were seized, five changfan machines burnt, seven industrial water pumps confiscated and concealed fuel stores dismantled. A nearby residential compound under weeks of surveillance was found abandoned; investigators established that twelve Chinese nationals had been living there, and recovered eighteen excavator batteries, thirty-one drums of industrial grease and seven gas cylinders.

Tipped off

No arrests were made at Anhwiafutu. The machines had moved and the compound had emptied before the force arrived — evidence, the operational account concluded of an underground network monitoring state operations from inside the community or the agencies.

RESCONI named this community in 2023

Two years before the raid, this study identified Ahwianfutu as one of three Atwima Mponua communities where land assigned to third parties was being used for illegal mining — 33.33% of respondents in Achiase, Adobewura, Ahwianfutu, and Kenyasi No. 1 in Asutifi North.

The land-transaction data was a forward indicator of where enforcement would later be needed. Where interests in land pass quietly to third parties, mining follows.

Source: RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Section 2.6.2, Figure 2.31, p. 49; operational account of 17 September 2025 as reported in the national press, September 2025.

Every miner surveyed in Atwima Mponua was operating illegally

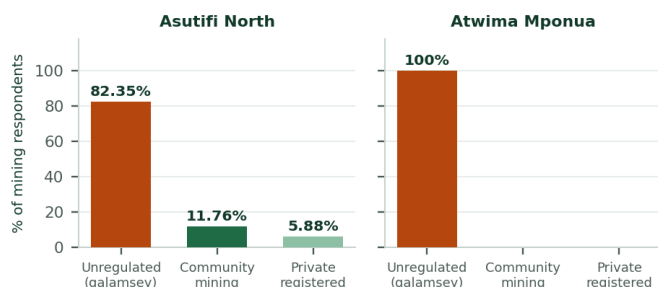


Figure 2. Mining respondents by mode of practice. **Source:** RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Figure 2.13, Section 2.4.1.

A record of documented operations

11 Mar 2025

• **Tano Anwia Reserve, Enchi.** Forestry Commission Rapid Response and District Monitoring Teams arrested twelve illegal miners — nine Ghanaians and three Chinese nationals — and seized an excavator and two gold detectors from Compartments 17 and 63. Two days earlier, 30 military personnel had taken eight excavators, a bulldozer and a pump-action rifle from the same reserve.

Apr 2025

• **Western North.** A joint Forestry Commission and military operation seized 85 excavators, two bulldozers and generators in under three weeks, arresting 28 suspects including four Chinese nationals. Eighteen of the arrests were made by Enchi District staff and the Rapid Response Team.

19-20 Jan 2026

• **Boin Tano and Tano-Boin Reserves, Aowin.** Two Forestry Commission task forces swooped at 01:00 on Jema Asemkrom, uncovering four makeshift mining camps deep inside the reserve; thirteen arrests. A 24-man joint team with local watchdogs torched shelters and decommissioned pumping machines.

9 Feb 2026

• **Anbanzie, Nzema East.** A NAIMOS night operation was confronted by about fifteen men armed with cutlasses who attempted to block the convoy and attacked the officers. Four armed men providing security for the site were arrested; the mining infrastructure was destroyed.

28-30 Apr 2026

• **Nzema East and Ahanta West.** Illegal miners opened fire on a NAIMOS patrol vehicle with pump-action weapons inside a Ghana Rubber Estates plantation; the team withdrew without casualties. An intelligence-led dawn operation two days later screened 114 people and arrested 49 suspects.

29 Jul 2026

• **Mpohor Fiase, Western Region.** Mining was taking place openly near the community police station. A NAIMOS task force destroyed 16 changfan machines, nine water pumps and three structures, stripped an excavator of key components, and arrested 19 people — recovering a pump-action shotgun with four rounds from one suspect and GH¢120,000 in cash from another.

27 Jul-2 Aug 2026

• **Six regions.** A single week of NAIMOS operations across Western North, Western, Ashanti, Ahafo, Savannah and Eastern regions produced 40 arrests, with seizures of excavators, vehicles and weapons along the Ankobra, Bia, Torya, Tano and Butre rivers.

Illegal miners arm themselves to protect their operations, and most of these weapons are unauthorised. — RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Section 3.4

Paraphrased from the report's assessment of threats to national security.

3. Where enforcement runs out of road

Arrests are not the constraint. The Minister for Lands and Natural Resources put it plainly in August 2026: the challenge is not the arrest, it is the prosecution.

The prosecution gap

The Ministry can account for 258 arrests. It has not published a corresponding breakdown of how many of those suspects were charged, prosecuted, convicted, acquitted or remain pending. Independent commentary citing Attorney-General's Office figures has put the proportion of arrested galamsey suspects successfully prosecuted between 2017 and 2023 at roughly one in eleven, with cases stalling on weak evidence-gathering and interference.

The operational consequence is direct. When officers know that arrested miners will be back at the pit within weeks, they have little reason to risk their lives conducting a raid. Deterrence is manufactured in the courtroom, not at the site.

20 years

The sentence imposed by the Accra High Court on 20 July 2026 on a serving regional party chairman, with hard labour, on counts of assigning mineral rights without ministerial approval and facilitating unlawful mining at Samreboi; his company was convicted and fined on two counts. The first conviction of a senior figure under Minerals and Mining Act, 2006 (Act 703), as amended by the Minerals and Mining (Amendment) Act, 2019 (Act 995) — proof the statute works when it is carried to judgment.

Violence is now an operating condition

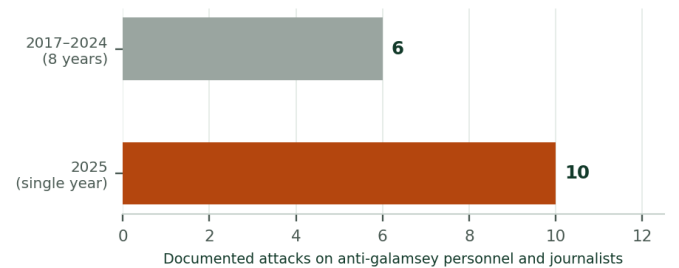


Figure 3. Documented attacks on anti-galamsey personnel and journalists. **Source:** Timeline compiled by Kujenga Amani (Social Science Research Council) and Ghanaian news outlets (i.e. MyJoyonline, Citi Newsroom, AdomOnline, GhanaWeb, etc.) through November 2025.

Gunfire on a NAIMOS vehicle, an armed guard detail at a pit head, a task force blocked by fifteen men with cutlasses: these are not aberrations but the working environment. The report's own finding — that illegal miners arm themselves with unauthorised weapons — has been borne out by the recovery of pump-action shotguns and ammunition during arrests.



An arrested illegal miner armed with shotguns (pump action). **Photo Credit:** Kessben TV - Galamsey update (Facebook Page: web.facebook.com/KessbenTV/) (9th November, 2025)

The agencies' own account of what stops them

At RESCONI's National Validation Workshop, state institutions — among them the Ghana Police Service, the Judicial Service, the Bureau of National Investigation, the Forestry Commission, and the Minerals Commission — were asked to identify the obstacles to intersectoral governance. This is their answer, not RESCONI's logical deduction.

Named constraint	Operational effect
Political and traditional interference	Officers cannot apply the law uniformly where influence reaches the site
Bribery and corruption	Compromises operations and the custody chain
Role conflict	Overlapping mandates leave enforcement unowned
Lack of intersectoral collaboration	Agencies act in isolation on a cross-sectoral crime
Inadequate staffing and logistics	Once the security agencies leave, the miners come back.
Poor roads and communication networks	Response times give operators the warning they need
Inadequate information and data sharing	Intelligence does not travel between mandates

Table 2. Constraints identified by state institutions. **Source:** RESCONI Final Study Report (2023), Section 2.8.2, National Validation Workshop, Fumesua, 3 October 2023.

Three structural weaknesses the record exposes

- Warning reaches the site first.** At Anhwiafutu the excavators had moved and the compound had emptied before dawn. Operational secrecy is leaking.
- Immobilisation is not forfeiture.** Where machines are disabled in place for want of transport, the asset stays with its owner and can be recovered and repaired.
- The supply chain is untouched.** Changfan machines are largely fabricated locally in workshops. Enforcement that stops at the riverbank never reaches the fabricators, financiers or importers behind the operation.

Weak enforcement is what communities name

Residents of both districts independently ranked weak law enforcement among the leading causes of forest loss around them.

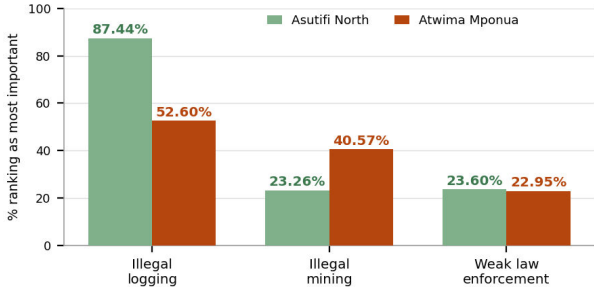


Fig 4. Factors ranked most important for forest loss. **Source:** Report Figs 2.17, 2.18.

4. What must change

Enforcement alone cannot close a gap this size — in one district, every single mining respondent was operating illegally. The structural measures rebuild the state's mandate; the preventive ones reduce the pressure that fills it.

Structural and institutional

- **Close the prosecution gap:** Ensure that people arrested for illegal mining are charged, tried and convicted. Make public aware of how many arrested suspects actually end up convicted in court, and hire dedicated prosecutors within the Attorney-General's Department whose sole job is to prosecute illegal mining cases. Counting arrests without counting convictions only tells you how busy the police are — not whether illegal miners are actually being stopped.
- **Prosecute the chain, not the pit:** Pursue financiers, equipment importers and changfan fabricators using the confiscation and forfeiture provisions available under the Minerals and Mining (Amendment) Act, 2019 (Act 995). The July 2026 conviction of a senior facilitator demonstrates the statute works when it is carried to judgment.
- **Standing multi-agency rapid-response units:** Combining NAIMOS, special police units and military support under clear, lawful rules of engagement — with protective equipment and casualty cover for personnel operating in an armed environment.
- **Sanction facilitation by officials:** Any government worker or security officer found helping illegal miners must be punished swiftly and publicly. Evidence shows that illegal mining survives because some of the very people meant to stop it are helping it instead.
- **Complete the equipment traceability regime:** Extending tracking and geofencing from port clearance through to the declared operational site, and resolve the disposal of seized and immobilised machinery so that assets do not return to the pit.
- **Resolve the policy contradiction** on mining in gazetted forest reserves, so that field officers enforce a single, unambiguous rule.



Photo Credit: Western Regional Co-ordinating Council, Republic of Ghana (wrcg.gov.gh/western-regional-minister-opens-galamsey-fight-56-persons-arrested-and-25-chang-fang-machines-set-ablaze-in-western-region/) (13 March 2025)

Preventive and collective

- **Alternative livelihoods as a preventive security intervention** — not a welfare measure. Unemployment and the absence of alternatives are named among the drivers of galamsey; reducing economic vulnerability in forest-fringe communities cuts recruitment at source and lowers the local cost of enforcement.
- **Traditional Authority consent** should be required before any small-scale mining licence is granted. This restores a layer of accountability over land transactions that the government cannot monitor on its own. RESCONI's research already shows where illegal mining is likely to appear next — wherever land is being quietly handed over to outsiders, mining follows.
- **Protected reporting channels.** Toll-free whistleblower lines, as the validation workshop itself proposed, together with a web-based reporting solution operated with CSOs, and genuine protection for those who use them.
- **Hold reserves after clearance.** When security agencies raid a site and then leave, illegal miners simply return. Staying, restoring the land and keeping watch after every raid is the only way to make the operation count — otherwise everything goes back to the way it was.
- **Protect the agricultural base as a security asset.** A State that cannot feed itself is not secure; contaminated farmland and destroyed cocoa are all in the same environment with armed miners. The ultimate food security challenge.
- **Multi-stakeholder collaboration** across government agencies, MMDAs, communities, NGOs, academia and the private sector. Importantly, national security here is not the work of security agencies alone.

The challenge we are having is not the arrest. It is the prosecution. — Minister for Lands and Natural Resources, August 2026

Remarks at the Ministry-IMANI policy dialogue, Accra, reported August 2026.

REFERENCES AND SOURCES

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2. Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, *Illegal Mining in Forest Reserves*, enforcement figures current as at July 2026, presented at the Ministry-IMANI Centre for Policy and Education policy dialogue, Accra, August 2026, and reported in the national press.
3. Ghana Armed Forces press statements on Operation Halt II, November 2022 and April 2023; NAIMOS operational reports, January 2026 – August 2026; Forestry Commission Public Affairs Unit statements, March 2025 and January 2026.
4. Attacks timeline compiled by Kujenga Amani (Social Science Research Council) and Ghanaian news outlets, September–November 2025. Sentencing: Accra High Court, 20 July 2026, under the Minerals and Mining Act, 2006 (Act 703) as amended by the Minerals and Mining (Amendment) Act (Act 995).
5. Companion RESCONI publications: *Water Quality Fact Sheet*; policy brief *What Happens When There Is No Water to Drink in Biodiversity Rich Atwima Mponua District, Whilst the Rivers Are Flowing?* — resconi.org/publication.php