

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER FOR LANDS AND
NATURAL RESOURCES, HON. SAMUEL A. JINAPOR, MP, AT
THE FIRST NATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE ON NATURAL
RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE
(YOUTH – NREG), HELD AT THE BRITISH COUNCIL,
ACCRA, ON THURSDAY, 27TH APRIL, 2023**

Thank you very much for the warm introduction.

I recognise the presence of all of you present here today,
particularly,

The Deputy United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
Resident Representative;

Representative of the British High Commissioner;

The Chief Executive Officer of the National Youth Authority;

The Executive Coordinator of Strategic Youth Network for
Development;

And of course, our dear young men and women who have come
from across the sixteen regions of our country to deliberate on how
to empower young people to become change agents in promoting
good governance in the Natural Resources and Environmental
sector.

I acknowledge all those joining us virtually from across the world. We appreciate your presence and your interest in Natural Resources and Environmental Governance issues.

Mr. Executive Coordinator, I want to thank you and your team at Strategic Youth Network for Development (SYND), as well as all your partners, for convening this timely Conference, and for the invitation to speak on the topic "***Promoting Effective Youth Participation in the Governance of the Natural Resources and Environmental Sector.***" It is always a pleasure to be in the accompany of people like you and to share ideas on matters of both national and global importance.

I am aware of the work your institution has been doing over the years in this area, including your 2019 publication on The Gaps, Opportunities and Recommendations on Youth Inclusion in the Governance of Ghana's Natural Resources and Environmental Sector, and I believe the outcome of this Conference, will go a long way to support the measures being adopted to bridge the gaps you identified.

Friends, you know very well that issues of Natural Resources and Environmental Governance is multifaceted, and go beyond the work of the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources. They include for example, issues of oil and gas and renewable energy, which are under the Ministry of Energy; Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), under the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources; fisheries, food security, among others, which fall under different Ministries. But since I am the Minister responsible for Lands and Natural Resources, I believe you will indulge me if I emphasise more on matters of land degradation, forestry, mining, climate change, biodiversity, and wildlife protection, which are largely within my Ministry. But, even more importantly, because these matters have direct and devastating impacts on our lives and livelihoods as a people, and particularly the youth of our nation.

President Akufo-Addo, for example, has described climate change as “***the greatest threat to the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals. [Because] It has enormous impact on the fundamentals required for our survival on earth.***”

And if you take issues like illegal mining and forest degradation, apart from their debilitating effects on climate change, our environment and water bodies, they deny young people of arable lands for farming, and are the sources of diseases, life threatening injuries, deaths, delinquencies, school drop-outs, drug and substance abuses, trafficking among others. This is, also, because many young people are involved in these illegalities.

Indeed, I noted that the Concept Note for this Conference, singled out issues of forests, mining, and unsustainable land use for agriculture, which is said to have cost the nation some two point eight percent (2.8%) of GDP in 2017. I am therefore on "*terra firma*," if I focus my address on these areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is important to recognise the centrality of the Natural Resources and Environmental Sector to our socio-economic development. About a century ago, the American Forester and former Governor of Pennsylvania, Gifford Pinchot, remarked that "***Without natural resources life itself is impossible... Upon them we depend for every material necessity, comfort, convenience and protection in our lives.***"

Ghana's export receipts in 2022 from gold alone, for instance, was over Six point Six Billion US Dollars (US\$6,600,000,000.00), while timber exports generated in excess of One Hundred and Fifty-Three Million Euros (€153,000,000.00). In addition to these export receipts, the sector is the source of employment for thousands of our people, and generate other sources of income locally through the payment of taxes, royalties, rents, among others.

The right of each country to exploit its natural resources for its development has always been recognised, even under international law. United Nations Resolution 626 of 1952, for example, recognises the right of each state to "***exploit and use their natural resources wherever deemed desirable by them.***" But the unsustainable use of these resources, have dire consequences, not only for the country, but for planet earth. To borrow the words of the Former US President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "**A nation that destroys its soils destroys itself.**"

Unfortunately, our Natural Resources and Environmental sector is under threat from a range of environmental challenges, including illegal mining, illegal logging, deforestation, forest degradation, land degradation, soil erosion, climate change, water pollution, and so on.

If we are to develop and prosper, we must efficiently and effectively manage these resources. And the active involvement of the youth, who are said to constitute about thirty-six percent (36%) of our national population, cannot be overemphasised. For apart from the fact that we, as youth, which I believe I still qualify despite having attained forty (40) years a couple of days ago, are the custodians of these resources and bear the consequences of environmental degradation and the depletion of our natural resources, young people always bring fresh perspectives to natural resource management, and are more likely to embrace innovative and sustainable solutions to environmental and natural resources management.

By involving young people in Natural Resources and Environmental Governance, we are also likely to solve one of the biggest challenges that confront young people, youth unemployment. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that we actively engage the youth, tap into their creativities, unleash their energies, and find more and effective ways of protecting our environment and natural resources.

It is instructive to note that most of our policies recognise the important role the youth play in Natural Resources and Environmental Governance. The Forest and Wildlife Policy, for example, recognises the need to build the capacities of the youth to enhance their participation in sustainable resource management, and to train them to assume optimal management responsibilities. However, over the years, implementation of these policies has not actively involved the youth.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the commitment of the Government of President Akufo-Addo, to promote the involvement of the youth in all matters of governance, is reflected in the National Youth Policy, adopted last year, on the theme "***Benefit for Youth, Involve Youth: Together for a Prosperous Future.***" We recognise that if we are to build the Ghana we aspire for current and future generations, the youth must be at the centre. It is for this reason that since 2017, several policies have been adopted to mainstream the youth in Natural Resource and Environmental Governance.

When President Akufo-Addo launched the Green Ghana Project, in 2021, we followed it up with a tailored programme to get the youth actively involved, through the One Student and One Tree Initiative.

This initiative, which was implemented in the various second cycle institutions, sought to instil in young people, the culture of tree planting and the importance of protecting our natural resources and environment. Students in these schools were encouraged to plant, at least, one tree each, every Green Ghana Day, and nurture them to maturity. In addition, Green Ghana Clubs were formed in some selected schools, to ensure that we sustain the initiative.

I am happy to note that through this initiative, we have been able to engage a good number of students who have taken active interest in forest and natural resources management. It is our hope that we can sustain this interest, and promote their active involvement and participation in the governance of our natural resources and environment.

This year's edition of the Green Ghana Day, which will be held on Friday, June 9, 2023, is just weeks away, and we intend to plant some ten million (10,000,000) trees on that day, in support of Government's aggressive afforestation and reforestation programme.

I will urge the Strategic Youth Network for Development, and indeed, all of us gathered here, to take active part in this exercise, to signify our commitment and willingness to engage in matters of Natural Resources and Environmental Governance.

Apart from the Green Ghana Project, the Youth in Afforestation Programme, which was launched in 2018, did not only seek to create employment opportunities for the youth, but, also, engage them to undertake forest restoration, management and protection interventions nationwide. The over forty thousand (40,000) young men and women who were engaged in the programme, have so far cultivated a total of One Hundred and Seventy-Nine Thousand Eight Hundred and Sixty-One point six hectares (179,861.6 ha) of forest, in addition to the development of seedlings, and the maintenance of forest plantations. Some of these youths have left to pursue other carriers in the forestry sector, contributing to forest protection and governance. Despite the challenges that confronted the programme, due to the large number of employees, the Programme has been very successful.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Forest Plantation Development Fund, through the Youth in Plantation Establishment as an Occupation Programme, is, also, sponsoring graduates to go into forest plantation. Some seventy-five (75) graduates have been engaged by the Programme in forest plantation and management in Ashanti, Bono, Bono East, Oti and Volta Regions.

Government is also implementing the Forest Investment Programme (FIP), under which concessionary loans are being granted to support small to medium scale plantation development and stimulate private sector investment in commercial forest plantation. We are aware that one of the major challenges the youth face is access to financing. I, therefore, urge all of you to take advantage of this Programme, and contribute to the protection and preservation of our forest resources.

Excellencies, Under the Ghana REDD+ Strategy, we are, also, implementing the Ghana Cocoa Forest REDD+ Programme and the Ghana Shea Landscape Emission Reductions Project, to address the drivers of deforestation in the cocoa and shea growing areas. These two programmes, engage a number of youth and women.

As you may know, we have already begun receiving emission reduction payments from the Cocoa Forest REDD+ Programme, which was launched by President Akufo-Addo in 2019.

In the mining sector, we have revamped Community Mining Scheme, which we are promoting as an alternative to illegal mining practices. These Schemes have engaged thousands of young men and women in sustainable and responsible small scale mining practices, in Ashanti, Central, Eastern, Western, Western North, Savannah and Upper East Regions.

In addition to the Community Mining Schemes, the National Alternative Employment and Livelihood Programme (NAELP), also seeks to provide alternative employment and sources of livelihood to young men and women engaged in illegal mining. Currently, the Programme employs several youths in direct and indirect employment in the production of seedlings and reclamation of degraded mined lands. The apprenticeship and entrepreneurial modules of the programme, is set to be rolled out later this year, to train the youth in mining communities in agriculture, technical, vocational, industrial, and mining skills.

With the support of the World Bank, we are, also, implementing the Ghana Landscape Restoration and Small Scale Mining Project (GLRSSMP), to strengthen integrated natural resource management and increase benefits to communities in the targeted areas. This Project, which also has the youth as a core target group, will see to the restoration of our degraded landscape and sustainable management of our natural resources.

Fellow young people, as can be seen, a lot is being done by Government to actively engage the youth in Natural Resources and Environmental Governance. At the risk of sounding repetitive, I want to re-emphasise that the role of the youth in this sector is very pivotal, and we will continue to do our very best to ensure that you play an active role in this regard.

But we require the support of all and sundry. We have to intensify education on the Natural Resources and Environmental Governance. Once again, I applaud the initiative of the Strategic Youth Network for Development in this regard, and hope that you will continue to work hard to bring all the youth in the country on board.

We must continue to build the necessary partnerships between civil society organisations, youth groups and government agencies, to educate our youth, and promote youth involvement in environmental and natural resources issues.

Our educational institutions must find means of mainstreaming Natural Resources and Environmental Governance into their curricula. Colleges and Universities must develop tailored programmes that train people in this area, and equip them with the necessary skill and knowledge to become stewards of our natural resources and environment.

Excellencies, Chief Executive Officer of the National Youth Authority, Executive Coordinator, Fellow young men and women, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, the natural resources of our country, are by our national Constitution, the property of the people of Ghana. The management of these resources is not just about protection and exploitation, but more importantly about sustainability, environmental protection, mitigating climate crisis, and ensuring optimal benefit for the owners of these resources, the Ghanaian people.

Our compatriot and former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Busumuru Kofi Annan, once remarked that, "***All our efforts to defeat poverty and pursue sustainable development will be in vain if environmental degradation and natural resource depletion continue unabated.***" The future of our country, and our socio-economic development, depends on how we manage these resources. The Government of President Akufo-Addo is fully committed to the efficient, effective, responsible, environmentally-sound and sustainable exploitation, management and use of our natural resources for the benefit of the Ghanaian people. Let me make it clear that we cannot achieve all these if we do not act transparently, anchored on the highest standards of integrity and utmost goodwill.

But, above all, it will require the commitment and the cooperation of all of us, public officials, private sector actors, civil society organisations, the media, and more importantly, you, our youth. It is obvious, that we haven't fully tapped into, and unleashed the full potential of our youth. Fortunately, the youth of our continent are awake and palpably determined not to settle for less. Whether in Accra, Addis Ababa, Cairo, Abidjan, Bamako, Ouagadougou or Jubah, the consciousness of our young men and women is at an all-time high, as demonstrated by this Conference.

It is my hope that out of this Conference, more young men and women will take active part in Natural Resources and Environmental Governance, including career paths in this sector. Let us discuss the issues dispassionately, and come out with a common position to protect our natural resources and environment. Yesterday was for our forebears, today is for others, but tomorrow, undoubtedly, is for us, the youth of the world. Let us get to work to protect our future.

On this note, I have the singular honour to declare the National Youth Conference on Natural Resources and Environmental Governance duly opened. I wish you fruitful discussions and look forward to the outcome of the Conference.

I thank you for your attention.