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Beyond Blocked Drains: Understanding the Growing Flood Crisis in Ghana

Across Ghana, scenes of flooded streets, submerged homes, stranded commuters, and displaced families are becoming increasingly common. What was once perceived as a recurring challenge largely confined to parts of Accra is now affecting communities across different regions of the country.

Each time devastating floods occur, public discussions often focus on blocked drains, poor waste disposal practices, and settlements built in waterways. While these are important factors, they may not tell the whole story.

The growing intensity and frequency of flooding should compel us to ask a deeper question: What has changed in our relationship with the environment?

For decades, forests, wetlands, floodplains, and healthy river systems acted as natural buffers, absorbing and regulating excess water during periods of heavy rainfall. These ecosystems played a critical role in reducing surface runoff and mitigating flood risks. Today, however, many of these natural systems are under increasing pressure. Illegal mining activities, commonly known as galamsey, have degraded vast areas of land and severely impacted river systems and surrounding ecosystems. Wetlands continue to disappear, forests are being lost, and water bodies that once supported ecological functions are increasingly threatened.

Beyond the challenges of blocked drains and inadequate drainage infrastructure, it is worth reflecting on how our own development choices may be contributing to the growing flood problem. Across many communities, homeowners are increasingly covering entire compounds with concrete, pavement, and tiles, often leaving little or no exposed soil. While these designs may enhance the appearance of our homes and reduce maintenance, they also prevent rainwater from naturally infiltrating the ground. When heavy rains occur, every tiled surface becomes a pathway for water to flow rapidly across the landscape. In areas where drainage systems are overwhelmed or where natural watercourses have been altered, this excess runoff can contribute to flooding.

As images of homes submerged to window level and in some cases nearly reaching roof level continue to emerge from affected communities, we must ask ourselves an important question: If every available space is paved or tiled, and the ecosystems that naturally manage excess water are being degraded, where will the rainwater go when heavy rainfall occur? The answer is increasingly visible in our communities.

Allowing portions of our compounds to remain permeable through green spaces, vegetation, gardens, and exposed soil may seem like a small step, but collectively, such measures can help improve water infiltration and reduce surface runoff.

Addressing flooding requires more than emergency responses. It calls for rethinking how we build, plan, and interact with the environment around us.

Flooding is not simply an urban planning issue. It is also an environmental issue. It reflects the cumulative consequences of decisions about how we manage our forests, wetlands, rivers, landscapes, and settlements.

As Ghana continues to confront the realities of climate change, addressing flooding will require more than dredging drains and responding to emergencies. It will require protecting and restoring the natural ecosystems that help regulate water, strengthening land-use planning, tackling illegal mining, preserving wetlands, and promoting sustainable urban development.

The devastating floods we continue to witness should serve as a wake-up call. Nature has limits, and when those limits are exceeded, communities bear the consequences.

The question is no longer whether flooding will occur. The question is whether we are prepared to address its root causes before the next storm arrives.

Additional Visual References

The following videos provide additional visual context to some of the flooding and environmental challenges discussed in this article. Readers can access the original footage through the links provided below:

1. Video footage showing homes in Ashaley Botwe affected by recent flooding events:
(<https://www.facebook.com/share/r/1B6B9kKPHh/>)
2. Footage showing flooding at Mallam Junction in Accra, where roads and public infrastructure were submerged following heavy rainfall:
(<https://www.facebook.com/share/r/1TvPrHF6c1/>)
3. Video published by Dunkwa TV showing sections of a galamsey site at Manso-Essuowin submerged after heavy rainfall:
(<https://www.facebook.com/share/r/17uKDYNHCi/>)

Note: The videos referenced above are not reproduced in this article and remain the property of their respective creators and publishers.