

Greetings from Ghana #43 Starting From the Bottom Up

I have found there are two mindsets here when it comes to being employed. The one is, "I can't find a job." And they are right, they can't. (The power of thought once again proven). The other is held by people I admire, those determined to eke out a wage in whatever way they can.

On the bottom rungs are the beggars. Women will park themselves along certain areas where cars back up waiting for traffic and deploy their children to approach the stopped vehicles. The children, sometimes as young as five, will approach a car, trotto or pickup truck and raising their hand with fingers together as if trying to eat, plead with their eyes and frown on their face. Some have no words. Others will lean on the car window and call out "Hello" repeatedly to get you attention before going into their act. They will work from vehicle to vehicle and when the cars begin to move the children scamper back to their mother and deposit the coins they have collected. Then they line the median waiting for the next pause in traffic. Sometimes it is only the children in attendance, the elder guiding the younger, with no parent evident.

There are also crippled people in wheelchairs being pushed by family members or blind elders escorted by a child politely imploring. You will also see men with crippled legs sitting on skateboards using flipflops like gloves on their hands to propel themselves along the pavement between the cars. Most people tend to ignore the beggars but there are enough who do not and that keeps them coming back to their traffic stop.

Some of the children have learned they do better (apparently) to sell something so they wander through with the hawkers selling earbuds (think wooden shaft Q-tips) or a shoe shine product that you wipe on your shoes for a better shine. Typically the cost is five cedis (fifty cents). I personally detest beggars because they portray themselves as victims and it is oft time a scam. And though I do not need any, I will buy the earbuds and occasionally the shoe shine to support the entrepreneurial effort.

In Ghana, they have landfills – kind of. They have landfills but they keep reaching capacity. When that happens the garbage collection shuts down until an expansion occurs or a new one is opened. It is nowhere as robust an effort as in other countries, but you will find that there are salvage operations and recycling of sorts going on here.



People here find a design that works and then adapt it as they can. This is a salvage cart that people use to scour the streets and neighborhoods for scrap that can be sold. This one is new and made of really nice materials. Typically the sides are made from refrigeration grills other discarded parts. Yes, a scrap cart made from scraps.





People build their own variation by what they can cobble together. You will see them in every neighborhood. . . young men looking for discards that can be reclaimed for funds of some kind. It is not easy work. At times exhausting. But honest work.



Another cart, also ubiquitous, is the phone accessories cart. Where the scrap carts are sturdy and made

from pipe and angle iron, phone accessory carts are usually made from discarded baby strollers or anything with wheels that can be adapted.



If you cannot afford to build a cart, there are still a couple other options. The first, and highly popular, you get a product cart from a supplier and plant yourself in the midst of traffic to get what you can. Baked goods and cold yogurt bar vendors are common to see .



Another option is that you get a wheelbarrow and ply your wares on the streets and in the market lanes in front of vendors who have stalls. Everyone understands the situation and they all get along.



The political season is on here as well and the current government is tripping over itself trying to hide their problems and put up a front of success from their policies. The NPP (New Patriotic Party) current vice-president has secured the candidate position. He cannot be dislodged from that position and now says he had nothing to do with many of the president's failed programs and policies. He is promising to repeal several of highly unpopular taxes that he instituted (according to him) while under political duress.

People of all ranks are now openly criticizing the president, something rarely seen in the past seven years. (He is known to be vindictive). A week ago a police official said Nana Addo was ruining the country with his corruption. The next day he did not have a position.

The government has had to withdraw one of their recent taxes, this one on electricity usage. The business community said 15% was an excessive increase and to either ditch it or the entire commercial community would go on strike. As much as the removal is considered a good sign, it was also revealed a couple days ago that the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) has added a Value Added Tax (VAT) of 21% on books. The government is also trying to justify a new tax on drivers for using their vehicles. They had a tax on gas. Then they recently added a VAT of 30% on auto insurance policies. Now they are trying to add an annual user fee of 100 cedis for anyone with a car.

The GRA removed all taxes on Ghanaian made sanitary pads and touted it as a major step toward helping young women. Those represent only four percent of the market. This week they announced they were adding a luxury tax on all imported sanitary pads. The government keeps adding VATs where they can and all the taxes go into the general fund with no specific accounting. People are objecting as taxes seems to come from nowhere and the protests keep getting louder.

THE 'LUXURY' TAXES ON SANITARY PADS

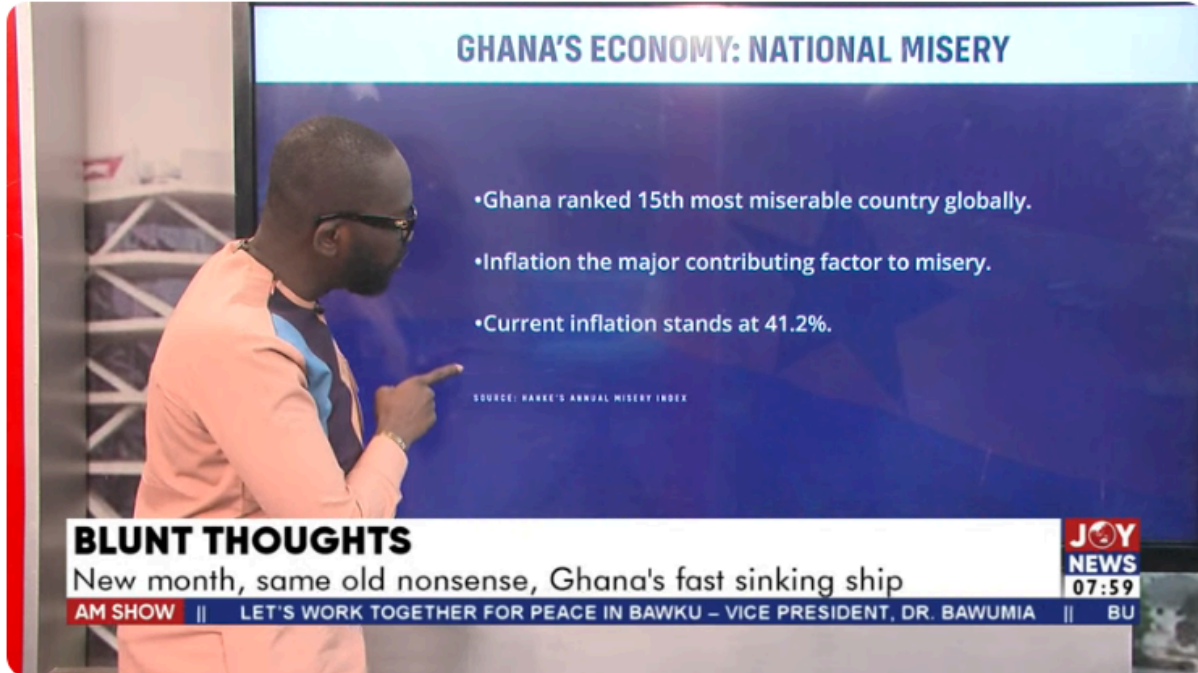
- Government must scrap 'luxury tax' on sanitary pads.
- 20% import tax is unjust and unethical
- Rural girls cannot keep menstrual hygiene owing to high cost.
- Adolescent girls are vulnerable to menstrual complications.
- Others have become victims of transactional sex to afford sanitary pads.

BLUNT THOUGHTS
New month, same old nonsense, Ghana's fast sinking ship

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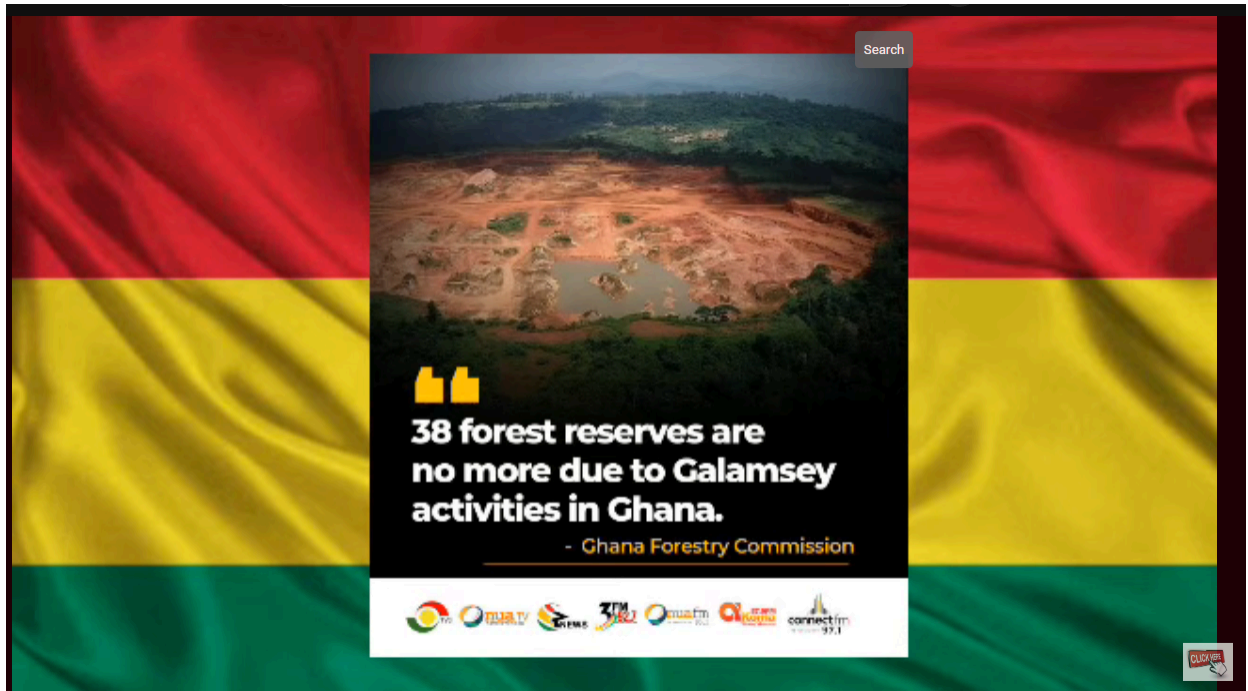


One of Ghana's biggest cash crops is cocoa. Everyone knows what chocolate looks like as a candy, but have you ever seen a cocoa plant? Here are two cocoa pods next to two mangoes for perspective. The skin is fibrous and thick. When you cut the pod open you will find the cherished cocoa bean. It is dried, then roasted to make cocoa powder.

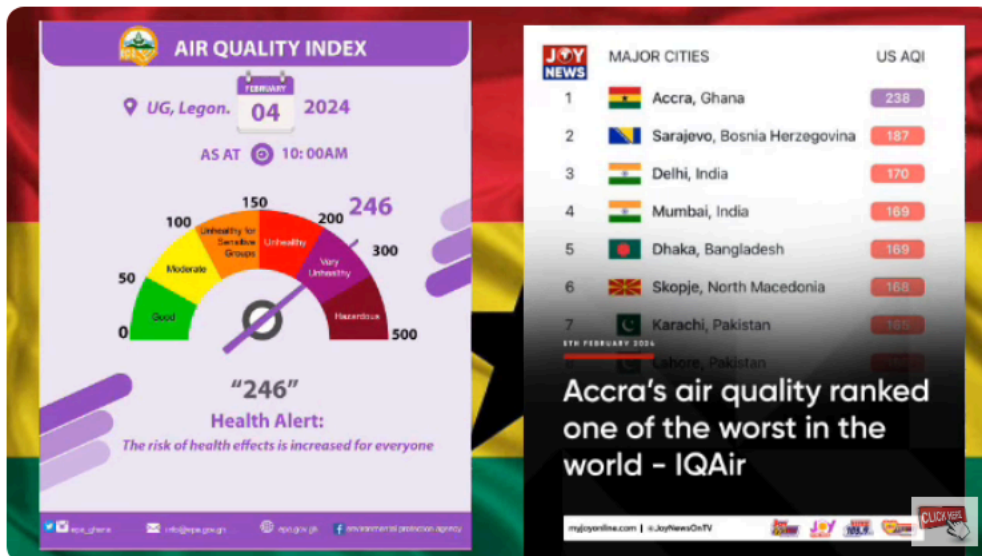


The hierarchy of the industry has pretty much not changed since the days of British colonialism and many coco farmers are paid so little for their crops that they cannot afford to buy a chocolate bar. This leads to two different situations. In one, the farmer's family all participate in the harvesting to get the biggest crop possible.

That leads to sensationalistic headlines like, “Major Corporation Uses Child Labor to Harvest Chocolate!” The second option that unfortunately more and more farmers are opting for is to turn over the farm to illegal gold mining, galamsey, that will surface mine the land and give the farmer a small cut of the proceeds. Illegal mining operations persist throughout the central area and they are taking out national forests along with the cocoa farms.



You can only pollute for so long before people notice.



There is an old phrase I am fond of and it applies here as well as in the U.S., “People should not be afraid of their government. Government should be afraid of their people.” Politicians here are trying to separate themselves from

the current government and vowing to change the country for the better. The vice-president is

trying to say he put forth the financial items that have “worked” but none of the excessive taxes; (although he was the one who initiated all of them).



Bawumia Speaks: Bawumia lacks credibility, no one trusts his word - Minority Leader, Ato Forson

The fact that he is suggesting that all he needs to do to be successful is to abolish most of the taxes, institute a flat tax for everyone, cut the size of government, and modify the constitution . . . has not gone over well.

It is nice to see the citizen’s criticism becoming louder. It is rather humorous to see politicians jumping ship and trying to protect themselves. The president is furious as his position is criticized and his performance derided. It would appear his hands are tied and the truth long known is finally being said.

I firmly believe that if those who are finding a way to scratch out a living can find their way to the voting booths then this country will change for the better. It will be interesting to see how this all shakes out.