

Keynote Speech Delivered at Maiden FSOGH Forensic Science Symposium on the theme “Forensic Science: An Interdisciplinary Field for Achieving Sustainable Development in Ghana” By Lydia Quansah (PhD), HoD Forensic Science Department, University for Development Studies On June 24, 2021

1. Introduction

The need for sustainable development became eminent in 2015 at the United Nations General Assembly with 17 goals incorporated into each other towards achieving a better and more sustainable future agenda by 2030. In brief, if there is a clean environment and affordable energy while focusing on climate change, decent work and economic growth, proper industrial and infrastructural management, safe life below water and on land, responsible consumption and production, equality, peace, justice and strong institutions there is going to be poverty and hunger reduction, quality education, good health and well-being and a better world for all.

Forensic science is a public good that plays a crucial role in legal issues by seeking to understand valuable information that goes into identifying and demonstrating the association between groups of people, places and things that are involved in criminal activities. Forensic science has a positive influence on social and economic stability as it enables the rule of law in solving contemporary social and environmental matters of the law court to bring us hope.

The technology revolution has played an immense role in global endeavours and it has shaped the way of life of people today. It has caused dramatic changes in the way, ease, speed and time in which human activities are carried out. Today, the world has seen changes in various aspects of crimes, accidents, incidents and disasters and it is appropriate that the positive influence of forensic science is equally available to all the people of the world in the expedition towards achieving sustainable development in the future. The big question today is, “what is the state of law and order, rule of law and freedom and justice in Ghana as the country looks forward to achieving peace and sustainable development in the various sectors of its economy”?

2. The State of Forensic Science in Ghana

In the short history of forensic science in Ghana since major advancement took off in 2011, the discipline has played a few significant roles in solving crimes related to sexual assault, cybercrimes, human identification, environmental protection, paper and document fraud, food crimes and other related civil and commercial issues. The overwhelming impact of forensic science practice in the diaspora today is a result of forensic science concepts being captured in movie shows and literature and this has led to the proliferation of interest in the discipline over the years.

Many a time when contemporary social and environmental issues of forensic need occur in Ghana, people’s attention is been drawn to many issues surrounding forensic science practice in Ghana. Most especially people tend to question the quality, access and relevance of forensic science in the country. Regardless of the few achievements of forensic science practice over the years we still have only a few stories to tell and therefore more needs to be done.

Over the past decades, the relationship between justice delivery and solving crimes, such as burglary, cyber-crime, corruption, document fraud, murder, environmental crimes, food crimes, sexual assault, familial and litigious issues and other civil and commercial issues have been a challenge in Ghana. This challenge is persistent even though Ghana's adversarial system has adopted forensic science in its mode of operation. The introduction of modern DNA profiling and the establishment of automated fingerprinting systems seems to bring hope however, we still live with many offenders of such heinous crimes because of impunity and weak systems of identifying real perpetrators and justice delivery. The low prioritization of forensic science has an impact on sustainable development. Discouragingly for a country like Ghana, the effect reflects in the underdevelopment of various sectors of the nation's economic and developmental progress.

3. How Far Have We Come with Forensic Science

Ladies and Gentlemen, Ghana has been challenged with fundamental issues in the forensic science industry which over the years key research tend to highlight. In 2020, (Yahaya and Quansah) assessed the state of forensic support for criminal investigations in Ghana. It was reported that forensic science is underutilized in Ghana with a good proportion of the population unaware of the hope forensic science brings to crime-solving including some people in the security service. The widening gap in terms of understanding of the scientific discipline was identified to be a result of poor forensic science outreach in Ghana. Key findings included identifying a generally poor state of forensic science in Ghana which in reality was attributed to the poor access, quality and relevance with regards to forensic science education in Ghana.

Also, a review of the policy-related aspects of forensic science in Ghana was undertaken by Amankwa et al., in 2019. Their study showed gaps in legislation, governance, service provision, quality assurance and accreditation, education and research. Their research recommended that when all these are resolved and strengthened there will be the guarantee for a more robust application of forensic science in delivering safe justice and enhancing public security and safety in Ghana.

4. How Far Does Ghana Want to Go With Forensic Science

Distinguished audience, looking ahead into the future Ghana needs to apply a holistic theory towards achieving sustainable development with forensic science. The case of Ghana reveals the size of the challenge and also the opportunity surrounding it. This should encourage both public and private actors to put more effort into forensic science education to meet the demands of the nation.

Through this platform I confidently say "without a forensic science revolution through education and inclusive forensic policy building, the war against crimes and other matters of the law court in Ghana will remain a challenge, and further impede the sustainable development and growth of the nation". When we establish more forensic departments to train more men and women to be the professionals of the next generation in forensic sciences it will influence forensic science policy in Ghana. By enforcing forensic science policy in Ghana, a key SDG (**SDG 16**) will be achieved. The SDG 16 is an accelerator of all SDGs and it is very critical to achieving sustainable development as it has a very strong linkage with the remaining 16 SDGs. Forensic science should be considered a priority because a nation without peace and justice institutions, human rights, and effective governance through the rule of law cannot boast of proper security, sustainability, and prosperity.

In achieving these developments, there should be more synergistic intellectual discourses to discuss and debate the way to create real-world impact from our side of the world. For the benefit of today's occasion, we shall concentrate on a few objectives; We shall discuss and debate the gaps and priorities for sustainable development, opportunities in forensic science considering women as the subject of discussion, and forensic science education in Ghana against the new era of forensic science. Finally, we shall end the debate by identifying the opportunities forensic science brings to people in different fields of study, research and work based on its interdisciplinary nature and its impact and vice versa for sustainable development in Ghana.

Thank you.

Reference

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