

Resolving artisanal and small-scale mining challenges: Moving from conflict to cooperation for sustainability in mine planning

T. Zvarivadza, A.S. Nhlekoa

Abstract

Despite the considerable challenges posed by artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM), it remains part of our lives. Conflict between ASM miners as well with large-scale mining companies, civil strife, social unrest, and corruption to mention a few problems are the order of the day in ASM. Environmental damage and possible contribution to economic meltdown are a cause for concern. The main thrust of this paper is to discuss the challenges posed by ASM across the whole spectrum of political, social, economic, and environmental and health and safety issues. The paper also proposes some proactive and realistic approaches to resolve the challenges discussed in order to move from conflict to sustainability in mine planning. ASM is characterized by relatively uneducated and unregistered miners, and policies targeting ASM miners should be disseminated in a comprehensible manner lest such policies remain in our dreams and the policy books. Since it is the government that funds clean-up of the mess from ASM, one of the best ways to avoid this expenditure is developing cooperative approaches through different governmental instruments, persuading the ASM miners to mine responsibly. The contribution of ASM to unemployment reduction cannot be ignored, but being mainly an informal sector, it is very difficult to quantify its contribution to economic development. Capturing meaningful rent from these miners may also remain a dream if non-consultative policies are imposed on this sector. Tracing the miners can be a nightmare when reactive approaches are implemented. Large-scale mining companies, government, and civil society at large have to adopt a cooperative approach to devise sustainable, workable, and realistic ways to convert ASM miners into contributors to sustainable development.