

SHOWERS MAWOWA



SOUTH Africa is experiencing a rise in so-called illegal mining, and this is likely to continue.

In light of SA's triple crisis of unemployment, poverty and inequality, the upsurge in illegal mining provides an opportunity for discussion about economic alternatives and the possibility for artisanal and small-scale mining.

Unfortunately, this opportunity has been missed due to the current bias towards large-scale mining interests and the tendency to deem the phenomenon "illegal and criminal, period".

This has resulted in policy responses that fail to acknowledge the socioeconomic drivers of illegal mining and its attendant political economy.

The conversation on illegal mining in South Africa is also lagging behind the current global development thinking that now sees a role for artisanal mining.

It is fair to acknowledge problems that have been associated with the so-called illegal mining in SA, including underground deaths, violence among rival gangs, sexual abuse of women, environmental degradation, smuggling, links with other crime networks and poor safety standards.

Illegal mining is taking place in existing and disused mines. The occurrence of large expansive reefs in SA as opposed to thin, scattered deposits partly explains the preponderance of large-scale mining. But this in itself should not be used to rule out the possibility for artisanal and small players.

That illegal or artisanal miners target old, disused mines or sometimes illegally access existing mines is not unique to SA, neither are the problems cited above.

Yet other countries, like Zimbabwe, DR Congo, Mozambique to some extent and Tanzania have managed to forge a progressive legal and policy regime that sets parameters for the coexistence and development of a thriving artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) sector.

In some cases, industrial concerns have encouraged and promoted the extraction of pockets of industrially uneconomic deposits within their claims by artisanal miners.

In southern Africa, with growing unemployment and decreasing agrarianism, ASM has become an important means for rural survival.

Despite all its progressive intentions and reference to equity, SA's legal and policy framework is still



WATERBORNE WEALTH: Illegal miners in Welkom, Free State, look for gold particles at the closed Bambanani mine. The number of foreign nationals mining unlawfully in the province is increasing and residents allege that police officers are involved in the trade.

PHOTO: NTWAAGAE SELEKA

SA MUST LOOK AT MINING OPTIONS

A shift in thinking could make 'illegal miners' legal

to provide and promote alternative pro-poor mining activity such as artisanal mining.

Thus far, equity and empowerment are driven through securing shares in existing mines, employment equity and corporate social and community responsibility thus maintaining the existing apartheid inherited mode of accumulation.

Though the government has been mentioning ASM since the late 1990s and the establishment of a directorate on small-scale mining was an important step, public policy discourse is still dominated by the rhetoric of illegality.

The imperative for socio-economic transformation in post-apartheid SA demands that we question notions of legality and illegality that perpetuate exclusion.

As of April 12 2015 a Google search of "illegal mining in SA"

yields 2.7 million results in 0.36 seconds compared with 307 000 hits per 0.38 seconds for "artisanal mining in South Africa".

Therefore, coverage and characterisation is heavily tilted towards criminalisation, compared with Zimbabwe for example where the balance is 449 000 per 0.39 seconds to 160 000 per 0.39 seconds, or Zambia with 118 000 per 0.29 seconds to 270 000 per 0.36 seconds respectively.

Highlighting the phenomenon as dominated by foreigners and myths of disorder and chaos, policy apathy is perpetuated when

there is need for constructive engagement.

As early as 2004, estimates placed the number of people involved in artisanal and small-scale mining in SA at 34 000 and this no doubt has increased.

There is a great need to understand the economic and social significance of ASM and for a balanced conversation that deals with the challenges as well as opportunities. The African mining vision that SA is a strong proponent of seeks to promote ASM as a pro-poor economic alternative.

The problem presented by the

existing legal and policy norms is not only about material but institutional deprivation, for various reasons, among them the way it is designed, articulated and implemented.

Discussion is needed about the dominant policy and legal system to ensure it does not maintain barriers for the poor and marginalised to "legitimately" make a living and consequentially perpetuate the apartheid status quo of exclusivity.

This approach enables us to look at the rule of law in an inclusive way to create opportunities for the poor to access natural resources in a beneficial and sustainable way.

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Obliterating apartheid symbols naive and self-centred

A LIGHT of exuberance beams from Africa, a place that was once referred to as the Dark Continent.

The light shines precisely because political emancipation has been attained and a lot of economic and social development opportunities are certainly upon us.

In the political spheres of most African countries, ascendancy to leadership seems to be largely based on struggle credentials, which is not necessarily a deviant practice. The advantage of this criterion is the trusted patriotism of deployees given their selflessness in the trenches.

But the practice has turned out to sideline the new generation born in the post-struggle era.

Among this generation are a whole lot of young people who aspire to be in the political leadership, an

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aspiration that seems impossible especially without glamorised credentials.

In the absence of liberation struggles and in this peaceful democratic context, young people are looking for opportunities to prove themselves and acquire some accolades similar to those possessed by senior leaders from the trenches.

Every now and then, young people become militant, be it in institutions of learning, communities, organisations or workplaces. This militancy may lead to a myriad social and

political incidents of unrest in communities and the country at large, as it is currently with the protest action that led to the downing of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes at the University of Cape Town.

And there are other acts of vandalism and protests over other colonial and apartheid statues and symbols such as that of Queen Victoria in Port Elizabeth and Paul Kruger in Pretoria.

The major argument advanced by proponents of the protests is that the statues have no place in a democratic dispensation given the role played by Rhodes and others in the colonisation of Africa.

Surely, no person in their right mind can argue in favour of the colonisation of African states, especially in light of decades of excruciating pain suffered by

natives. It doesn't take any effort for anyone to see the scars that colonisation left.

Africa is now free. The majority of our people have lived experiences of what Africa was before it became so and as such do not need symbols to resuscitate those experiences.

But younger generations and generations to come will certainly want a picture of what Africa was and what it has been through.

Certainly, symbols such as that of Rhodes would go a long way in painting the picture. Demanding their obliteration from the face of history is nothing short of naivety and self-centredness.

The current generation

has an obligation to preserve history for future generations. Perhaps the argument should be that symbols such as that of Rhodes should by no means occupy centre space as masterpieces in our democratic institutions. Perhaps it is more fitting to put them in public art galleries and museums.

On the other hand, many people have benefited from the

Rhodes scholarship as well as the Mandela Rhodes Foundation and are now prominent persons not only in their communities or countries but in the African diaspora and the world. This could be viewed as an olive branch to Africans.

If Rhodes were still alive, these gestures would indeed be taken as a sign of remorse. As such, as Africans, we should embrace such initiatives and utilise them in constructing a new psyche of an African child that will contribute positively to building social cohesion.

Perhaps ascendancy to political leadership should begin to be based on initiatives of young people towards attaining social cohesion. This would encourage them to use their energies and vibrancy to build the nation.

Let us forget the words of Martin Luther King Jr: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." ● Ncube is a social work lecturer at the University of Johannesburg

“ We're obliged to preserve history for future generations ”