

Mining cannot be viewed in isolation from the community in which it is performed. There are several levels of community. The broad South African mining industry takes place in the broad South African community. As such, it is a vital part of the broad South African economy which is in turn linked to the world. What happens in the world influences South Africa and in turn our mining industry.

When we start breaking this concept into smaller chunks, we find that our coal mining industry is part of the energy community, the platinum mining industry is part of the automotive and a few other communities, etc.

This comes all the way down to the individual mine. An individual gold mine is part of the broader mining community and also inherently part of the local geographical community. The concept of sustainability in mining is by now well established, and due account is (hopefully) taken of the requirements to sustain community viability once the mine has closed down.

As a side issue, in this regard it is high time that the local communities' responsibility in ensuring sustainability receives attention. Why must all the responsibility have to come down on the mine? When will communities learn to recognize and develop the opportunities afforded by mining in their regions by themselves?

In November of last year, the Hon. Trevor Manual released the NPC's multi-faceted National Development Plan for South Africa. The document covers a wide spectrum of South African society, and the mining industry is not excluded from that. We are part of the society in which we operate.

The question is, how can we as a learned technical institute contribute to national development? Council will debate this issue in the near future and I am confident that there will be solid creative ideas coming out of the discussion. One of our long-time stalwart members, Robbie Robinson, initiated the discussion and has already made a contribution. There will be more, I am sure, once our more than 4 000 members apply their minds as well.

One of the first things that comes to mind is that we can continue to employ and even employ more people by doing and developing things to keep more mines open for longer, and improving resource utilization, mineral extraction efficiencies, etc. There will be more. It will require good solid research, and good communication to ensure implementation, but that will come because it has to. It must just come in time.

Beyond the collective effort, we should also remember that as individuals we are part of our communities. We are miners for certain hours of the day but citizens of our communities all the time. Acting responsibly to eradicate corruption and crime and improving things like road safety is part of our duty as citizens. For instance, if all 500 000 of us in the mining industry refuse to pay bribes and approach driving as carefully as we approach mining, we will already be making a contribution.

'No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee. – John Donne.'

J.N. van der Merwe

President, SAIMM