

Journal Comment

Diamonds still Sparkling Conference 2016

What an apt name for this conference, given the current turmoil in the mining industry as a whole and particularly here in southern Africa. While the rest of the industry battles through its routine commodity cycle, diamonds seem able to maintain a certain sparkle. That is not to say that diamonds do not experience their own cycles, but rather that diamonds have always stood apart from other minerals commodities and seem to have that little bit extra. With the De Beers's 'Diamonds are Forever' catchline and 'Diamonds are a girl's best friend' slogan keeping the allure of diamonds up there apart from the other commodities.

In southern Africa, the impact of diamonds and diamond mining has been immense, from the humble beginnings in the mid-1860s in Kimberley, which led to the industrialization of the subcontinent, to the empowerment of important leaders of their generations who, although somewhat controversial, made a significant impact – Barney Barnato and Cecil John Rhodes, and the long-lasting Oppenheimer legacy, spanning four generation to the creation of the mining giant De Beers – through to the discovery of diamonds in Botswana, which underpinned the successful and sustainable growth of this country, to the more recent, probably less sustainable Marowa/Marange fields in Zimbabwe.

Diamonds and diamond mining have also been at the forefront of mining industry for many decades, leading the way with mechanization and innovation. In addition to this, the discovery of large, 'magical' diamonds really adds another dimension to their 'sparkling nature'. Never more so than in recent years, with a number of these finds that have really added some sparkle, the likes of the Lesotho Promise, from Letseng, the Cullinan Heritage, and most recently the 1111 carat Lesedi La Rona recovered at Karowe in Botswana.

The challenges that face the diamond industry in the next few decades are complex and cover a broad spectrum. Some of these are:

- Lower availability of high-grade, massive orebodies
- The technical challenges of profitably extracting diamonds from greater depths

- The ever-increasing limits on natural resources, water and power in particular
- An ever-increasing and complicated social and political environment, putting additional pressure on the industry
- The conflict between the inherent drive to mechanize *versus* the backdrop of ever-increasing unemployment
- The rapidly increasing capacity of technology and its ability to communicate in real time
- The threat that conflict and/or synthetic diamonds poses to the real diamond sparkle.

These challenges make for an exciting future, one that will require the kind of leadership, innovation, and belief in the 'big picture' that have sustained this industry for its first 150 years, to ensure that these challenges are overcome and that the diamond industry sparkles, shines, and lives up to its name for the next 150 years.

This conference was successful through the participation of all those who attended. That success will continue to drive us, encouraging us to take future challenges head-on, so that we can all leave our mark on the industry so it continues to sparkle.

On behalf of the Diamonds Conference Organizing Committee, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the presenters and speakers who so graciously share their knowledge with all of us; the sponsors who made the event possible; the organizing committee for its hard work and effort to create the conference; and lastly I would like to thank all delegates for their attendance and support

I trust that this special issue of the *SAIMM Journal* will benefit your own operations and, ultimately, our industry as a whole, and that you will be fired up to sparkle.

H. Marsden
Conference Convener