

The future of Africa is not so dark



This month's *Journal* edition celebrates the impressive research achievements of some of the 2017 graduates in the mining and metallurgical sector. However, of the eight papers that were selected from the Student Colloquium in October last year, only four were submitted for the reviewing process. Two papers were subsequently accepted for publication and two are being reworked. This is a little disappointing because the *Journal* aims to profile, each year, a number of papers that are the outcomes of research presented by students at the well-established annual SAIMM Student Colloquium. The presentations are a reflection of the wide variety of research being conducted in various institutions of mining and metallurgy in Southern Africa, and showcase the magic that happens when students challenge the status quo in their fields. It is a missed opportunity not to have this work published. Through novel scientific fundamentals and unique combinations of knowledge, these young researchers produce surprising results and new discoveries that can create the foundation for many innovative opportunities and technologies in Africa. And Africa is in great need of innovative African-driven technologies to solve its problems.

Africa has long been known as the Dark Continent due to its slow rate of development. However, there are at least two treasures in which Africa trumps other continents; its natural resources, and its young and dynamic generation which can make up a strong human resource force. The sterling work by the mining and metallurgical graduates presented in this issue of the *Journal* gives us a glimpse into those riches that Africa holds in abundance. The riches that will make the continent a potential economic *tour de force* in the future. Africa, therefore, needs to convert its comparative advantage to a competitive edge. For this to happen, Africa as a continent must work as a whole to safeguard and intelligently invest in its mineral resources and development of human capital.

Mineral wealth can provide the African continent with a tremendous opportunity for economic development by providing the funding for investment and growth. In recent years, there has been a significant push by African countries to cooperatively develop policies, strategies, and programmes that strengthen the capabilities and capacities to fully develop and utilize mineral resources for effective socio-economic development of the continent. In 2009, for example, the African heads of state adopted the Africa Mining Vision (AMV), a holistic approach enabling the transparent, equitable, and optimal exploitation of mineral resources to underpin broad-based sustainable growth and socio-economic development in Africa. The AMV is meant to address the disparity that tends to exist between Africa's mineral wealth and the poor socio-economic conditions in most African countries, and one of the approaches to close this gap is to move away from being an exporter of cheap raw materials to a manufacturer and supplier of knowledge-based services. While discussing on the AMV initiative, a friend recently suggested that just as oil-producing countries have 'cartels' such as OPEC, which control the price of oil, Africa should also have its own cartels that will control the exploitation and utilization of its minerals. My response was that only a united, focused Africa with a vision can change its future. It's nearly ten years since the AMV initiative and commitment from the African states is essential to ensure that this does not remain only as a paper agreement.

The development of human capital through empowerment with the relevant skills and knowledge is also critical to the success of the African vision. The right people with the right skills across Africa can be an enabling tool that ensures the proper management and development of the mineral sector and other resources available on the continent for a sustainable economy. Africa contains an enormous pool of dynamic young people who can be trained to provide that critical mass. In 2015, sixteen of Africa's leading universities came together in Dakar to establish the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA). ARUA is intended to build capacity and develop local research excellence through a collaborative network. ARUA's vision reflects what Africa needs; making African researchers and institutions globally competitive while contributing to the generation of knowledge for socio-economic transformation.

The ARUA and AMV initiatives are but two examples showing that African countries are waking up to the fact that they need to work together to find solutions to development problems facing the continent. I am happy to say that the SAIMM is doing its part by bringing together different young researchers and professionals from Southern Africa, through events such as the Student Colloquium and many other conferences and workshops. Because it is only through uniting and working together that the African continent can shed its image as a resource-cursed Dark Continent.

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