Journal Comment

The papers in this issue of the *Journal* are selected from the Mining, Environment and Society Conference, held at Mintek on 12 and 13 May 2015. The two keynote addresses, 14 presentations, and two panel discussions highlighted the increasing relevance of environmental and social issues to the mining sector and its sustainability.

In his opening keynote address Rohitesh Dhawan, then Global Mining Leader for Climate Change and Sustainability at KPMG, stated that businesses could not succeed in societies that failed and hence earning and maintaining the social license to operate is crucial. This is still ranked as one of the top risks facing the mining and metals industry (according to the EY 2016-2017 *Business Risks facing Mining and Metals* report). Maintaining the social license to operate is, in part, facilitated by community relations practitioners. The paper by Coulson *et al.* shares the experiences of these practitioners in building resilient company-community relations, focusing on the drivers for, and factors hindering, healthy relations. In the South African context, Social and Labour Plans are the main legislative mechanism designed to ensure local benefits from mining, contributing to improved relations.

A second keynote at the conference was given by Professor Lochner Marais from the Centre for Development Support at the University of the Free State. He presented his research in the Free State goldfields and the consequences of poor closure management. Underpinning some of these social and economic impacts are issues around environmental sustainability and land stewardship. The experiences of Richards Bay Minerals, as presented in Theresia Ott's paper, highlight the need for a systemic approach to land use planning to cater for livelihoods through responsible land stewardship and biodiversity conservation during mining and at closure. Louis Snyman also comments on the importance of spatial planning to address the tensions between rapid economic growth and environmental sustainability. He reviews South Africa's planning tool, the Environmental Management Framework, and suggests that it needs considerable refinement. Another management tool addressing environmental issues is that of Ecological Footprint Analysis (EFA). EFA is increasingly being used by organizations as an indicator of environmental performance and sustainability of products. In their paper, Limpitlaw *et al.* present the benefits and challenges of undertaking an EFA for mining companies.

The focus is often on large-scale mining, yet artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) is widespread in Africa and impacts both positively and negatively on society and the environment. Two papers in this issue look at this in more detail. Steven Rupprecht proposes the introduction of small-scale mechanization, along with labour-intensive hand mining, in Central Africa to address the issues of low productivity and poor recoveries often associated with ASM. Pontsho Ledwaba's paper focuses on ASM in South Africa, which has been recognized since 1994 as a vehicle for social and economic development. She tracks the progress of various initiatives implemented since then, making recommendations to ensure that these benefits are realized.



Major issue areas for mining and the SDGs (http://unsdsn.org/resources/publications/mapping-mining-to-the-sustainable-development-goals-an-atlas/)

A critical aspect of sustainability is health and safety. Although not presented at the conference the papers by Morissette *et al.*, Bonsu *et al.* and Tobór-Osadnik look at various aspect of this.

2015 was an important year for sustainability, with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' was adopted by 193 UN member states in September 2015. The SDGs is a successor framework for the Millennium Development Goals and represent the world's plan of action for equitable, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable economic development. As illustrated by the papers in this issue, and documented in work led by the Colombia Center on Sustainable Investment, the mining industry has the opportunity and potential to positively contribute to all 17 goals, and should consider how their activities can impact and contribute to achieving the SDGs.

The conference was small, with 53 practitioners from a range of disciplines attending. This allowed for deep engagement on some of the critical topics presented. Delegate feedback indicated this as one of the positive aspects of the conference. It was also great to see colleagues from the region attending.

A big thank you to the sponsors, De Beers and Advanced Economic Development, and to Mintek for hosting the conference. The conference would not have been possible without the work of the SAIMM secretariat and the organizing committee – thank you.

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