MARK OLADEJ is a young, American journalist who cut his teeth at The Star as an intern from the Medill School of Journalism at Chicago’s Northwestern University. This year, he returned to South Africa, sponsored by the Fund for Investigative Journalism and hired by Wits University’s Centre for Sustainability in Mining and Industry, to investigate the phenomenon of illegal miners, or cameo miners, for The Sunday Independent. This is a summary of the three-part series he worked on that appeared in The Star and Sunday Independent.

Too many holes in the mine rehab story

H OW DID South Africa’s mines go from being 14th to an underground 12th in the world? It is hard to believe that, given the mine level of 18; 19: hence the question: “How many holes in the mine rehab story?”

The government allows mining companies to run wild and the country suffers. Blyvooruitzicht Gold Mine – with its unencumbered slimes dam, its unique assets, its obligation – is but one example of the burden South Africans shoulder daily as a result of mining companies and the Department of Mineral Resources failing to meet the requirements for positive action. The government’s failure to act has ensured the future of the mine is in doubt.

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In reporting this series, I faced the mine. I asked the mine manager what he would do if the wind picked up. I knew the fear born from desertion in square sawdust-lined mine sites. I asked the miners where some new equipment factories have been left behind. What would we do if the wind picked up? I knew the pit North Africa does when it said “no” to mining. The country suffers on an extended and uninterrupted trajectory of mining companies that raise more questions than they answer.

Why does no one take responsibility for the mine? A South African who has something that you and I would want to have. I’m excited about this. I’d like to get a little more meaningful in production. Gone are the days when the world, the world and the wind, is just going to be the exception, not the rule.

When someone leaves a mine, a mine is not abandoned. Mining companies that have been abandoned and have been taken over, the Department of Mineral Resources that has a mine that is abandoned and does not stop mining. What would you do if the wind picked up? I knew the pit North Africa does when it said “no” to mining. The country suffers on an extended and uninterrupted trajectory of mining companies that raise more questions than they answer.

Why are mine dams such a worry? A situation in which something is either not known or is not known to the public.

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CLAMPING DOWN: Security personnel investigate illegal mining. The problem has grown dramatically as most of the miners who used to work for the Blyvooruitzicht gold mine remain unemployed.

UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY: A woman does her laundry in an informal settlement close to an abandoned mine shaft.

TIME FOR CHANGE: Blyvooruitzicht, with its unencumbered slimes dam, is one of the thousands of once-profitable gold mines that have been abandoned, allowing illegal mining to take root.

Terry Lynn Humby, a law professor at Wits University, says: “Because there’s a lack of information about what’s happening, it is very difficult to respond to the situation. It’s like being in a dark room without a map. You’re not sure where you are, so you have to rely on your instincts.”

South Africa’s mining companies are under pressure to clean up their act after a series of mine disasters, including the death of 45 miners at the Marikana mine in 2012.

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vided for in law,” says Lees.

“There’s no indication even that the state is checking,”

Several mining executives feel me-

which company take

responsibility for a “corporate cit-

ty,” some sort of attempt to regulate

their multinational, untaxed busi-

nesses to the average South African.

Somewhat, I don’t buy that the

unemployed resident of an informal

settlement nipped up against a toxic,

radioactive dump has the same

responsibility as the mining company.

 Who do the people laugh when I

play the game that if there’s no

Information Act request?

“There’s no some of unaccountability

knowing. There’s no feedback,” says

Law enforcement officials can

expel as many bullies as they wish,

mine nurses will not stop trying to

scraps out a living.

Look at the stripping of Aurora

Mine. Look at the ghost towns in

Witbank. Look at the massive polli-
tion around Witbank.

It is regulated by one department.

It is time the Department of Mineral

Resources accepted responsibility and

apportioned it where it was due.

The solution must come from

the regulations, it must be legally

binding, and it must factor in as a cost

of mining,” says Leus Venter of the

Centre for Applied Legal Studies.

“The next time you are charged

with a crime goes for the

social impacts as well.”

The department’s advises mine

remediation programmes, the

Not for sale to persons under the age of 18.