

Gross unfairness for South Africa's mining companies

 By [Paddy Hartdegen](#)

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The more I read about the horrors of the Lonmin sagas at Marikana the more angry I get because of the enormous injustices that have occurred in those mining village over the years.

And I'm not talking about the injustices to the communities who are supported by Lonmin - I'm talking about the injustices being faced by Lonmin itself.

Just because a company is mining platinum successfully, selling it on world markets and making annual profits to reinvest in its businesses doesn't mean that it must, forever more, be the torch-bearing saint that fixes all sorts of community woes because the government is too useless to do so itself.

This week a leaked report published in the *Mail & Guardian* outlined the "appalling living conditions" at Marikana. The report was originally compiled in 2006 and then updated several times.

The report is veiled with innuendo: it doesn't say that Lonmin is paying its workers so badly that they cannot make ends meet. Instead it says that in the poorest communities surrounding Marikana - those of Modderspruit, Majakaneng, Wonderkop and Segwaelane - more than 60% of the families live on less than R400 per household member per month.

How is that Lonmin's problem?

The researchers found that as many as 9,6% of households across all communities sometimes run out of food while 7,5% reported they lacked clean drinking water and 77,3% lived without a cash income either "sometimes" or "always".

Why is that Lonmin's problem?

Asked, during the research, what companies could do to assist families, community members responded by saying they wanted food parcels, access to water and sanitation and access to healthcare.

Why should Lonmin provide these?

And that's what makes me so cross: Lonmin is not the government; it is not the local authority or the provincial authority either. It is a taxpaying member of the business community and just because it is a mining company doesn't mean that it now becomes a social security service, a welfare dispensary, a free clinic or a provider of latrines.

And Lonmin should never be in that position, just as no other taxpayer in this country should. Take it to its ludicrous end and the next thing I know will be that I am expected to support some of the impoverished people who live on the borders of Sandton or Dainfern because I have a roof over my head?

Government provides the social benefits, the clean water, the food parcels and, most importantly, the economic framework to create jobs alongside Lonmin itself - something Lonmin and other mining companies have done very successfully for more than 100 years.

The same report pointed out that in Marikana, an illegal cemetery was located along the banks of the river where people collect water for domestic use. Well look at the operative word here: illegal. Do the researchers expect that Lonmin must assume the mantle of a local funeral parlour and police service, by moving the illegal graveyard while prosecuting those who buried there dead there?

It's unjustifiable nonsense.

The report goes on to say that Lonmin and other mining groups and companies in the area "have been found wanting when it comes to corporate social responsibility". These programmes are a gesture of goodwill: they are not a social mining taxation that impels international groups to take the money they make and give it to the community "just because".

The report then cites a multi-million rand hydroponics project - paid for by Lonmin - that was intended to provide food for the community and create 120 jobs. The project failed, not because of Lonmin, but because the sub-contractor employed to do the work had not done so resulting in a dispute between the two parties and the project being abandoned.

Who in that community stepped up and said: "We'll take it over. We'll complete the work. We'll invest our sweat and our effort in hydroponics?"

Lonmin just happens to support a school in the area but again the report - desperate to display Lonmin as an evil vampire - claims the classroom walls are built using asbestos. Moreover, it goes on to say that the 9 000 workers at Lonmin who had benefitted for years by living in company-owned houses lost their homes when they were dismissed by the mine last year.

So is Lonmin now an RDP housing provider as well, alongside the Department of Human Settlements? Must Lonmin donate these houses to the occupants?

What does the report recommend? That Lonmin fixes the sewerage system around Marikana; cleans up the bilharzia-infected river and revives commercial agriculture.

I wonder if the researchers have ever heard of "government responsibility"?

So here's the deal: stop taxing Lonmin and let it take the money it pays to SARS and put that into repairing the community. Otherwise stop confusing government failures with mining company successes.

Either have your cake or eat it.

ABOUT PADDY HARTDEGEN

Paddy Hartdegen has been working as a journalist and writer for the past 40 years since his first article was published in the *Sunday Tribune* when he was just 16-years-old. He has written 13 books, edited a plethora of business-to-business publications and written for most of the major newspapers in South Africa.
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