

## ***The Effects of Illegal Mining on Socioeconomic Development of the North West Province, South Africa***

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The mining of mineral resources in the North West province of South Africa has remained the cornerstone of the socioeconomic development of not only the province but the entire country. The economy of North West is driven by mining, which generates more than 50 percent of the province's gross domestic product and provides employment for a quarter of its workforce. This may have informed the conclusion that proceeds from mining in the province were used to establish the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) in 1887. Indeed, the province is blessed with mineral resources, but the same can hardly be said about the level of development in the province. Expectedly, with this trend, North West should have been highly socioeconomically developed, with lawful and controlled gold mining. This is because the province is endowed with gold, chrome, and other natural resources that, if properly managed, could have been not only a source of wealth but a hub of industrialization. However, the activities of illegal miners have worsened socioeconomic conditions in the province, especially with the massive influx of unlicensed miners and criminals that terrorize the peace and security of the region. The case in point is the daily activities of illegal miners at Scott Shaft in Stilfontein, Klerksdorp, Batlhako, and Ruighoek mines in Witrantjies, a village outside Rustenburg. In addition to massive illegal extraction of unwrought gold in Stilfontein, illegal mining of chrome at an industrial scale in Ruighoek mines takes place on a daily basis in North West. Although illegal mining has negative effects on the socioeconomic development of the province, evidence has also shown that illegal mining is mostly driven by poverty and high unemployment rates in the region. Illegal mining of gold is most pronounced in poor, remote areas and abandoned mine shafts in the province. Illegal gold panning has been noted as one of the most critical challenges within North West. The upsurge in illegal mining was mainly triggered by poverty in communal areas of the province.

Despite the combined efforts of the municipalities, the province, and the central government, law enforcement has not been deterrent enough to control illegal gold mining in the province. This has socioeconomic implications such as insecurity, pollution, environmental degradation, damage to vegetation, armed robbery, or theft, among others. Economically, the province is steadily impoverished as proceeds and revenue that could have been generated by the province are being stolen through illegal mining. In this light, the study will primarily focus on how to mitigate the budding problem of illegal mining in North West and the connected socioeconomic crisis of illegal mining within and beyond the province. Specifically, the study will investigate how the expanding outlook of poverty, unemployment, and hunger within the province has provoked the rising trend of illegal gold mining in North West. It will seek to connect the increase in insecurity, pollution, and damage to vegetation and biodiversity as well as poor social-service delivery in North West to the expanding activities of illegal miners in the province. Essentially, the study will explore feasible mitigation strategies as panaceas for illegal mining of gold and other resources in North West, such as promoting socioeconomic conditions and adequate social-service delivery, improved citizen welfare and healthcare facilities, job creation, and adequate security.