

## Who buys minerals from the Zama Zamas?

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Release Date: 19 June 2022

The so-called Zama Zamas work under dangerous conditions but the growth in illegal mining could be attributed to the combination of poverty, unemployment and a difficult socio-economic climate. They use mostly abandoned shafts in which they may spend up to a month looking for gold and diamonds mostly. The question is where are the Zama Zamas selling these minerals and to whom? Zama Zamas are not the ones who are processing these minerals. They sell these minerals to someone who has the machinery to process them. The Zama Zamas sell their finds at a low price.

The police conducted an operation in Krugersdorp which led to the arrest of 17 immigrants who are trying to make a living out of illegal mining. These activities can start xenophobic attacks. The Zama Zamas are people who are trying to make a living through these activities since there are no jobs and are exploited in the form of low wages and long working-hours.

In other instances, there are syndicates who are responsible for the operations that happen in the old mines. There are probably people who have the geological knowledge directing where and when to find minerals. These are the people who don't get attacked when there is violence. Some of Zama Zamas are people who have been trafficked from other countries to come and work in the mines in South Africa. These operations can involve well-known, corrupt politicians who make money through this informal mining activity. I believe there are individuals in official capacities that are creating an enabling environment for this economic criminality.

The Zama Zamas spend weeks if not months in the mining shafts looking for minerals. There are claims from local community members that the Zama Zamas are doing criminal activities. Most of the *Zama Zamas* spend most of their time underground, dealing with different people who are processing these minerals. The people on top who receive these minerals are not being mentioned in the popular narratives.

The police have to deal with people who are responsible for buying these minerals to crack the syndicate. These people are the ones who are supplying the Zama Zamas with guns. This is an example of how capitalists don't want the working class to be in solidarity.

The South African government does not want to regulate the Zama Zamas. In the North West, Rustenburg, there are artisanal miners who work like the Zama Zamas but their work is regulated by the government. They work together with community members who want to make a living through mining.

This activity is some of the ways people embark on to make a living. Illegal mining activities are the source of income to many families. This shows that the working-class needs to work together to build common understanding and solidarity in this industry. The land belongs to all who lives in it and the land should feed everyone who lives in it. These activities need the support of local communities and the law enforcement

agencies to work together to end criminal activities that are taking place in these abandoned mines.

*This article is an opinion piece submitted on 09 June 2022. The views expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect those of Karibu! Online or Khanya College. You may republish this article, so long as you credit the authors and Karibu! Online ([www.Karibu.org.za](http://www.Karibu.org.za)), and do not change the text. Please include a link back to the original article.*