



## ALLUVIAL DIAMOND MINING FACT SHEET

### **What are alluvial diamonds?**

Alluvial diamonds is the term used to describe diamonds that have been removed from the primary source (Kimberlite) by natural erosive action over millions of years, and eventually deposited in a new environment such as a river bed, an ocean floor or a shoreline.

### **What is alluvial diamond mining?**

Alluvial diamond mining is the term used to describe the process through which diamonds are recovered from such deposits of sand, gravel and clay.

Large concentrations of alluvial diamond deposits are mined on an industrial basis. However, most alluvial diamond deposits are spread across huge geographic areas which cannot be easily isolated and therefore are not mined industrially. These deposits are mined informally, in a non regulated way. This is (commonly), known as artisanal or small scale-alluvial diamond digging.

Around 10% of the world's rough diamonds are sourced through industrial alluvial mining and 14% through artisanal or small-scale informal alluvial diamond digging.

### **Where are alluvial diamond deposits found?**

Alluvial diamond deposits are found on the Atlantic coast of South Africa and Namibia, as well as in some riverbeds in Angola, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Ghana, Liberia, Tanzania, Togo, Brazil, Venezuela, Guyana and South Africa.

### **How are alluvial diamonds mined?**

#### Formal/industrial alluvial diamond mining

Formal (also known as industrial) alluvial diamond mining is characterised by high investment, strict regulations, government investment and is conducted by formal mining companies. Formal alluvial mining requires a considerable amount of material (called the 'over-burden') to be removed first to get to the gravel bed underneath, where diamonds are found. When diamonds are found on the ocean shore or on riverbeds, the gravel is removed and then taken to a plant where it is washed and screened for diamonds. For diamonds that are found offshore, i.e. on the ocean bed, specially constructed ships suck the gravel from the ocean floor before it is transported to land and on to the plants for screening.

All the gravel and sand that is removed is specially treated and then reused in many different ways, such as replacing it to help rehabilitation in the area.

Formal alluvial diamond mining mainly takes place in Angola, Namibia and South Africa.

#### Small-scale informal alluvial diamond digging

Small-scale informal alluvial diamond digging (also known as artisanal diamond digging) is usually undertaken by individuals, families or groups using very basic equipment, such as sieves and pans, to search for the diamonds. This type of digging is very labour intensive as it entails first removing the sand on river banks and then extracting and washing the gravel in

order to find diamonds. The majority of small-scale alluvial diamond digging is defined as 'informal' because it is often undertaken on land which is neither licensed nor regulated for the mining activities taking place.

Prevalence of small-scale alluvial diamond digging is highest in Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) but also takes place, on a smaller scale, in the Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Togo. It is estimated that 1.3 million people in Africa work in this sector.

**What are the long-term solutions for small-scale informal alluvial diamond digging?**

There are a number of issues concerning the working conditions of small-scale informal diamond diggers. Among these are the unhealthy, unregulated and sometimes dangerous environments in which diggers work, together with the fact that the majority of diggers do not know the true value of rough diamonds and are therefore vulnerable to exploitation. The diamond industry is keen to help find solutions that generate wealth, build infrastructure and help redevelop countries that are home to small-scale informal alluvial diamond digging. It is currently working with three initiatives in order to achieve this:

1. Announced at the Clinton Global Initiative in New York in September 2006 the Diamond Development Initiative (DDI) aims to find sustainable methods of ensuring that diamonds are mined and distributed for the benefit of local communities and local governments. Its aim is to develop an understanding of the issues and implement pilot projects in local small-scale informal alluvial diamond digging communities to address concerns eg. working conditions, fair-pricing and formalisation. Members of the DDI include the Communities and Small Scale Mining Secretariat of the World Bank, De Beers Group, The Foundation for Environmental Security & Sustainability, Global Witness, the International Diamond Manufacturers Association, Partnership Africa Canada and the Rapaport Group.
2. The Peace Diamond Alliance (PDA), was formed in December 2002 by a coalition of NGOs, small-scale informal alluvial diamond diggers and diamond traders from the Kono district diamond mining region of Sierra Leone. The PDA aims to improve conditions for small-scale informal alluvial diamond diggers and ensure that revenue from Sierra Leone's diamond mines fosters local development. The PDA is organising small-scale informal alluvial diamond diggers into cooperatives, providing them with adequate capital to finance their mining activities and improving their working conditions. Additionally, the PDA is educating diggers on the value of the diamonds they find to ensure they are not exploited.
3. The Mwadui Community Diamond Partnership, formed by the Government of Tanzania, Williamsons Diamond Limited, local NGOs and the De Beers Group, is a pilot project recently established to generate practical solutions needed to alleviate poverty and protect human rights among small-scale informal alluvial diamond mining communities in Tanzania. It aims to provide informal alluvial diamond diggers with access to fair market-pricing and healthcare, in the hope of creating a workable model that can be used to help informal alluvial diamond diggers in other diamond-producing countries.

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**Additional sources of information**

Diamond Facts [www.diamondfacts.org](http://www.diamondfacts.org)

US Media Contact

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