

# Digging for Diamonds

## CLARIFY

subsistence  
unregulated  
diamond reserves  
corruption

It's a blazing hot and humid day, but the diamond diggers – standing calf-deep in a brown river, eyes glued to the gravel before them – don't seem to notice the heat. A few dozen of them crowd this alluvial diamond mine in the West African country of Sierra Leone. Alluvial diamonds are those that have been transported by water from their kimberlite sources over millions of years, ending up in riverbeds and on shorelines or ocean floors. The men who spend countless hours sifting through gravel with simple sieves and pans are called “artisanal” miners or diggers, meaning

they do their business on a subsistence level, with simple tools. Artisanal diggers are usually unlicensed and unregulated by the larger mining industry. It's estimated that there are more than a million such diggers in Africa.

## ISSUES

What issues are raised by the use of child labour in diamond mines?

**Artisanal miners lead hard, dangerous and unhealthy lives, usually earning no more than a dollar a day for the few gems they find and sell to diamond dealers.**

The artisanal mining industry has no health and safety regulations, no laws to protect the environment and no rules to prevent child labour in the mines. Children often work alongside their fathers, knee-deep in water and mud.

## INFERENCE

What inferences can you make about why artisanal miners usually earn no more than a dollar a day for their work?

### SOCIAL ACTION

Boycotting diamonds that are mined using child labour could have negative and positive effects for mining families. What do you think these effects might be?

Effects of boycotting diamonds mined using child labour

Positive Effects? Negative Effects?

Unregulated alluvial mines can be found across West Africa, but Sierra Leone is particularly well known for its mines – and for the damage they have caused the nation. A small country with a scorching hot and jungle-humid climate, wedged between Guinea and Liberia, Sierra Leone consistently places last in the United Nation's Human Development Index. The index ranks countries according to their health, knowledge and standards of living. Before civil war erupted in 1991, plastering the nation's name on newspapers around the world, little was known about Sierra Leone except that it had large diamond reserves and a government plagued by corruption and political unrest.

### AUTHOR PURPOSE

Why do you think the author used the present tense in the description of artisanal mining?

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no health and safety regulations...  
no laws to protect the environment... no rules to prevent child labour