

## **Health and safety in Namibia's mining sector – The global impact of COVID-19**

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### **Abstract**

The divergence between the mining industry's business-case decisions and stakeholder expectations is complex and it is becoming more evident with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mining is a central pillar of Namibia's economy and its future development. In Namibia, the pandemic resulted in retrenchments, supply chain disruptions and production losses and an increase in employee fatigue cases. Skills importation was affected by the lockdown and this was a wakeup call for Namibia to develop her requisite mineral skills base. The pandemic also highlighted the gaps in the mining industry with regards to dealing with mental health and related stress factors of the employees and their families. With eighty nine workers having tested positive for COVID-19 in four mines, COVID-19 has not been just a physical health issue, but has also placed immense stress on the mental wellbeing of families. While these are uncharted waters for everyone, the industry has put in place a robust mental health awareness and support programme to strengthen mental resilience and the wellbeing of its employees. The mining industry places the safety and well-being of its workforce as the highest priority and it has implemented several measures including social distancing and remote working, modified shift arrangements, suspension of mining in confined underground space, suspension of alcohol testing and the biometric clock-in system, temperature screening, hygiene and cleanliness, having contingency plans for potential disruptions, and setting up onsite isolation and quarantine camps. All non-essential mine visits, alcohol and drug tests were suspended and only carried out in cases of a safety incident. The industry is continually updating its plan and response measures to manage and respond to the pandemic risks and ensuring the safety of the sector's employees, business partners, and surrounding communities. The pandemic saw the mining industry demonstrating good corporate citizenry through cash donations, equipment and setting up COVID-19 testing laboratories.