

Dying for Gold: Synopsis

Today gold miner communities across Southern Africa have nothing to show for the wealth they produced except extreme rural underdevelopment and the world's worst epidemic of TB and silicosis.

Coerced by colonial laws hundreds of thousands of men left their families and fields to feed the mines hunger for cheap labour. They came from villages in South Africa, Malawi, Lesotho, Mozambique, Botswana and Swaziland to dig for gold. South Africa was built on a system of modern slavery whereby the great mining houses of Anglo American, AngloGold Ashanti, Goldfields and others have knowingly made phenomenal profits at the cost of human lives.

Through the lives of miners and their families from Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique and South Africa and extensive use of contrasting archive materials ***Dying for Gold*** tells how we have arrived at this extraordinary situation.

Dying for Gold, comes in the wake of the biggest class action case South Africa has seen. South Africa's biggest gold mining companies have been accused of knowingly exposing miners to harmful dust causing the terminal disease, silicosis and makes them more susceptible to TB. The class action has been settled out of court – which means the real cost of gold will not be known. Dying for Gold exposes the century of deplorable practices by gold mines and ensure that miners and their families are justly compensated. The film also aims to promote discussion on mining – especially profit based harmful practices.

Dying for Gold juxtaposes personal stories of miners and their families with the archive of more than 120 years of gold mining showing how very little has changed. Carefully tracing how the sending communities (Communities which sent men to the gold mines), were under surveillance by the labour recruitment organisations, NRC, WNLA and TEBA. TEBA was constantly in search of cheap labour and used any opportunity to recruit labour in areas where there would be potential recruits. Any signs of drought, crop failure etc meant that it was more likely people

would sign contracts to work on the mines. TEBA was formed by the Chamber of Mines to prevent competition for labour by the various gold mining companies. This also ensured labour costs would be kept down. TEBA established vast recruiting networks all over Southern Africa. TEBA, started making propaganda recruitment films to entice men to come to work. The Chamber of Mines also used its vast power to influence government policy and laws were changed to ensure that men would be forced to become migrant labourers. Laws which took land away from communities, poll taxes were introduced and influx control laws which limited movement across Southern Africa. In combination with these acts of social manipulation, the Chamber of Mines knew that they were exposing miners to dust and TB which would slowly destroy their lungs and cause large scale deaths. The Chamber had to replace workers which they had sent home ill or dying.

Dying for Gold shows how through more than a century of this practice communities have been left devastated. Poverty is overwhelming. Men continue to seek work in South Africa as this has become their only choice. Decades of men not being part of their communities has ensured that communities are broken and unsustainable without their meagre salaries. When retrenched due to exposure to dust and/or TB, miners further burden their families as their health slowly deteriorates.

Dying for Gold's personal stories from participants across the sub-continent is visceral, intensely personal and devastating. Their lives as widows, miners, ex-miners allows the audience to connect with each one deeply.

Characters:

Miner, 26, Celmusa Nkonyane, son of Linda Nkonyane father died from Silicosis. Celmusa makes the choice to accept his father's job in Beatrix gold mine in Virginia, South Africa, knowing how his father died but also knowing that this is his only choice if he wants to support his family.

Ex-Miner, 57, Zwelindaba Mgidi and Noziqhamo, from the Eastern Cape, reveals a life of decades of working in the mines. Retrenched after becoming

too ill to work the pain of every breath he leaves the viewer with a visceral understanding of illness.

Widow, Amelia Mbombe, from Mozambique, narrates the experience of women left behind in the rural areas for periods of 18 months or more and the devastating effects of this on family and community.

Ex-miner, Albino Mgidi, Mozambique. Albino worked on the mines for more than 40 years. Juxtaposed with archive, Albino's gives us his personal experience of going to work on the gold mines and his journey to South Africa.

Miner's widow, Simangele Nkonyane, tells the story of looking after her husband as his health deteriorated.

Simangele lives in rural Swaziland and without any support cared for her infirm husband, having to carry him on her back when needed. As she narrates her experience she expresses her deep love for Linda and the trauma of poverty.

Ex-miner, Ramachkela Masenya and Mapiela Masenya. St Helena village, Lesotho. Ramachakela explains how the mines drew men into work regimes that damaged their health by exposure to dust.

Manyokole family, Diao Manyokole and his family live in Hatladi village in Lesotho. The Manyokole close-knit family spans many generations of men who went to work in South Africa. From the earliest memories of recruitment by the NRC (Native Recruitment Corporation) to Diao's very powerful experience of his first day of work underground.

Ex-miner, Bangumzi Balakisi. Eastern Cape, South Africa. Bangumzi has relates how miners are treated when living in the inhumane conditions on the mine compounds. He shares his experience of being stripped naked, examined by white doctors as they select the most able for working underground.

Ex-miner, Chabedi Moiketsi. In Welkom, gold mining country, Moiketsi, equates the mines to a prison. Moiketsi has 2nd degree silicosis and is in his early 50's. As his health deteriorates he is fighting to get the little compensation due to him, to help support his family when he is no longer around.