

fastFT DE Beers Group

De Beers to pilot digital programme in Sierra Leone to sell ethically sourced diamonds

Henry Sanderson APRIL 19, 2018

De Beers, the world's largest diamond producer, will start to sell "ethically-sourced" diamonds from small-scale miners in Sierra Leone under a pilot programme that uses digital tracking.

De Beers will give small miners an app and dedicated tablet as well as a diamond "toolkit" that enables the digital tracking of diamonds throughout the supply chain. The technology uses GPS locations and QR-codes to "bag and tag" diamonds, it said.

The De Beers pilot is the latest initiative to clean-up global mineral supply chains and better trace material from so-called artisanal miners, who dig by hand. Companies using blockchain and other technologies are also looking at securing the cobalt supply chain in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Better traceability could help eradicate problems associated with small-scale mining, such as child labour. It could also open up a potentially large source of minerals.

"The ASM [artisanal] sector represents a critical income source for many poverty-affected communities," Bruce Cleaver, chief executive at De Beers, said. "However, due to parts of the sector being largely informal and unregulated, it lacks access to established international markets and the ability to derive fair value for participants."

The programme, called GemFair, will be run with the Diamond Development Initiative, a non-government organisation that has been working to formalise so-called artisanal mining in Africa.

Miners will have to be certified by the Diamond Development Initiative as well as by GemFair, De Beers said.

The software works both online and offline, allowing miners to use it in different locations. The diamond toolkit can also be powered by solar chargers, it said.

If successful, the GemFair technology will be integrated on to a new blockchain platform De Beers is developing, it said.

"By providing a secure route to market, offering fair prices and helping to raise standards, we hope to play a role in enhancing the prospects for those working in the sector, while also potentially opening up a new source of supply for De Beers over the longer term," Mr Cleaver said.

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2018. All rights reserved.

Comments have not been enabled for this article.

Latest on DE Beers Group