



Marampa's best-quality African ore

Sierra Leone's capital Freetown has witnessed the first export of over-65% iron content from ore by Marampa Mines Limited (MML). The shipment, which is bound for Chinese steel mills, follows the resolution of a long-standing dispute between SL Mining/Gerald Group and the Sierra Leone Government. The latter has been resolved out-of-court and described as win-win by both parties.

By Michael Schwartz*

MML is a strategic asset of Gerald Group, the Anglo-American metals trading house founded in 1962, and the world's oldest and largest independent, employee-owned global metals merchant. Marampa was previously under care and maintenance, with around 700kt of MML's Marampa Blue™ product stockpiled. As this stockpile is depleted over the next few months to make room for new production, MML is reactivating equipment, mobilising contractors, effecting repairs, and bringing people back to work; 1,400 jobs are expected to be created this year of which the target is at least a 90% Sierra Leonean workforce. Recommissioning is set for December 2021.

The first ocean-going vessel (OGV) arrived in early July and left Sierra Leone

with 61.4kt of Marampa Blue iron ore. The material was loaded by coasters at the company's own (private) port, Thofeyim River Terminal on the Port Loko river, and carried to the port of Freetown, where loading of around 60kt of iron ore onto the next OGV has started. The destination is China's steel mills. China is the largest consumer of iron ore in the world.

MML takes its name from the two Marampa resources in Sierra Leone: Marampa South, which offers 1 billion tonnes of iron ore and Marampa North, which offers another 700Mt. The increased area is earmarked by MML for further exploration. Following the signing of a binding MoU between the Government of Sierra Leone and Gerald Group, a new company, Marampa Mines Limited, was

formed where Gerald owns 90% of MML and the Government owns the remaining 10%; 2.0-3.25 Mt/yr of ore is the near-term target and Gerald has committed to materially expand production at Marampa.

MML is particularly proud of the quality of its iron ore, which is one of the highest quality grades exported out of Africa. As Shan Radstone, Gerald's head of iron ore, stated to STI regarding quality, "We are currently exporting concentrate with iron content above 65%, which we believe to be among the highest quality grade on the Continent."

Why is the ore called Marampa Blue?

MML has chosen the term Marampa Blue as a reference to product quality and also to mark a clear departure from what had been



previously produced, namely an iron content well below 65% and with high impurities. Radstone continues: "Branding the product Marampa Blue reflects the physical characteristics of the ore and clearly differentiates this new high-grade material under MML's operations from the lower grade materials produced by previous operators. This focus on quality is a core principle of our strategic approach to the evolving market demand."

Through its connections as part of the Gerald Group, MML will have access to experienced teams in China and Europe. These latter will provide support for defining and implementing a marketing strategy to achieve the best possible outcome. Consequently, MML will incorporate feedback from the market in order to change plant parameters and to optimise product specifications. It is MML's plan that Marampa Blue will have buyers in China and Europe.

Are there CSR obligations?

MML informed STI that community obligations are always an important element of any mining project and the company states that its, "initiatives are aimed at embracing the challenges relating to climate change, gender diversity, sustainable farming and education through development of sustainable projects that make a difference to communities. Apart from direct initiatives, the company will also contribute to a community development fund, which will become more important over the life of the project as production increases."

Past corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives by Gerald in 2018-2019 include distributing 100 tonnes of rice to outlying communities in the major Lunsar township, materials for school children, contributions to religious festivals, training local men and women to start their own businesses, and building 14 wells in the townships around the mine.

MML's project is the largest in Sierra Leone, and is in addition making a substantial socio-economic impact in areas brutally hit both by the previous near-collapse of the mining sector and by the Ebola epidemic. ■