



Media statement by Bench Marks Southern Africa for Corporate Social Responsibility

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Broken promises hit communities

A magnitude of broken promises made by the mines to the communities were unearthed in a study done on the corporate social responsibility programmes of the platinum mining corporations in the North West Province of South Africa,

The study, done by the Bench Marks Foundation for Southern Africa for Corporate Social responsibility, which is part of an international body, noted that safety and health issues were not being addressed to the extent that the mines have been reporting.

“Communities surrounding the mines and the mine workers have been hoodwinked into believing that what is being done for them by the mines is sufficient,” says Right Reverend Dr Jo Seoka, Chairman of the Bench Marks Foundation.

The research, the main document of which runs to 200 pages, included well known mining houses - Anglo Platinum, Implats, Lonplats, and Xstrata – and was conducted over a period of eight months in 2006.

An audit done by the department of minerals and energy in 1999 on Anglo Platinum mine’s health and safety sectors, found that various corrective measures that would ensure predetermined safety objectives were in fact not being enforced or coordinated adequately. Moreover, safety information to ensure the implementation of preventive safety measures was not provided effectively. The Bench Marks Foundation study shows that these measures have still not been met.

“These pre-conditions partly explain the intolerably high mortality rate amongst mine workers,” says Seoka “The recent suspension of Anglo platinum’s largest mine, The Rustenburg Platinum Mine - reported last week - due to their bad safety records where 17 people have died in the first six months of 2007 as opposed to 19 people for the whole of 2006, proves Bench Mark’s research is not unfounded and underlines the urgency required for not only the mining houses, but also the authorities, to remedy the situation without delay.”

All mines have social responsibility programmes, but these do not address the impact of mining on communities. The report says these are designed for media consumption – “corporate propaganda”. Most mines also have social plans as required by the Mining Charter. However these are not readily available to the public and many are not the product of consultation with communities.

“There is in fact a general lack of transparency, a fact supported by our consultation with communities,’ says Seoka.

The lack of awareness regarding their basic rights and limited access to necessary information results in an immense imbalance of power, wealth and knowledge that favours the big corporations. Most communities are unaware of the long-term impact on the environment, geology and the hydrology of the areas in which they live, and this is never explained to them.

The present relationship between mining corporations and affected communities is determined by historical conditions. Established top-down paternalistic management and lack of community engagement prevents corporations from adopting a necessary bottom-up approach in their interactions with communities.

Seoka adds: “The study offers a number of potential community projects that would turn the challenges from mining into entrepreneurial opportunities for marginalised communities and would empower them and suggests ways of addressing the issues raised by the research”.

The Bench Marks Foundation’s report strongly recommends that local and provincial government, non-governmental organisations and faith based organisations play a significant role in assisting communities in overcoming the imbalance of power, to ensure that safety measures are upheld and that mining companies should discuss in a transparent and open way, the long-term potential impact of mining to the environment and to communities.

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The full report together with all the recommendations and photographs can be found on: www.bench-marks.org.

Bench Marks Foundation Southern Africa (BeFSA) is part of an international NGO and Faith Based coalition that also has partners in Australia, Hong Kong, Canada, the USA, Colombia and the United Kingdom. Its partners in South Africa are the SA Council of Churches, the Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation (ESSET), Industrial Mission of South Africa, and the Justice and Peace Department of the South African Catholic Bishops Conference. The Bench Marks Foundation is committed to providing leadership and advocacy on issues regarding benchmarking of good corporate governance, ethical and socially responsible investment as well as linking people and institutions committed to these ideals.

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