



Celebrating the long collaboration between Professor Freek Cronje and the Bench Marks Foundation

The Bench Marks Foundation (BMF) is a community oriented, research-based, organisation that monitors ethical investment in Southern Africa. The organisation is affiliated to the South African Council of Churches. The BMF came into being after the Rio de Janeiro, Earth Summit in June 1992. It launched in 2001 and established its office in 2003.

The Bench Marks Foundation monitors the investment and Corporate Social Responsibility activities of corporations investing in South Africa and of South African Corporations investing in the rest of Africa.

The first major study done by the Bench Marks Foundation, focussed on Mining in and around Rustenburg looking at Anglo Platinum, Impala Platinum, Xtrata and Lonmin. While doing the literature review for the research process that culminated in the Policy Gap report, we at the Bench Marks Foundation came across an excellent study done by a team of researchers from the North West University on Lonmin. What impressed us about this report was the fact that even though it was paid for by Lonmin, it was highly critical of the company's performance with regard to its corporate social responsibility. Prominent in that report was the name of Professor Freek Cronje (Cronje, Chenga, & Naude, 2005). We decided to set up a working relationship with Professor Cronje towards ensuring the academic credibility of our research and to assist with peer reviews.

The Bench Marks Foundation approached Ms Anne Timms, a community development activist in Potchefstroom, who David van Wyk, lead researcher for the Bench Marks Foundation, had met while working for the North West Provincial Government. The BMF requested that she approaches Professor Freek Cronje and set up a meeting between the organisation and Cronje. Freek as we all came to know him proved to be invaluable for our work, he brought structure and focus and led by example in terms of productivity and output.

By July 2007, the first Policy Gap report was ready. Freek played a central role in editing and tightening up the report which in its original state was some 400 odd pages long. He managed to narrow it down to 188 pages. Freek was a calm and relaxed person, who always saw the funny side of any situation. We never saw him angry and he never complained about anything. His contribution and that of his office to Policy Gap: A review of the Corporate Social Responsibility Programmes of the Platinum Mining Industry in the North West Province (Bench Marks Foundation, 2007) helped make this study the success that it was, its impact was enormous (NICOLSON, 15 AUG 2012) and it began shifting the discourse on corporate behaviour in South Africa and Africa (Cronje & Reyneke, 24 Dec 2015).

We soon realised that Freek was not just Freek, but that he was a team. That team was comprised of Suzanne Reyneke, Dr Charity Chenga and at that stage, Master's student Johan van Wyk. Like Freek, these are all very likeable, friendly but efficient people.

After the impact of Policy Gap, the collaborative research reports, with Freek's participation, came thick and fast. Freek, Johan and Suzanne dashed off to Zambia to do Policy Gap 3 (Bench Marks Foundation, 2008), David van Wyk worked on Policy Gap 2, Review of Corporate Social Responsibility Programmes of the Platinum, Coal, Gold and Uranium Mining Sectors in South Africa (Bench Marks Foundation, 2008) and worked on a report on Paladin's proposed Kayelekera mine in Karonga Malawi. Followed by policy Gap 4, Corporate Social Responsibility in the Diamond Mining Industry on the West Coast of South Africa in which Freek and David, collaborated on diamond mining on the West Coast of South Africa, spending time during the long drives to Honnekliip Bay, the Richtersveld and Alexander Bay discussing mining, music, rugby, social theory and philosophy, African politics, good times, the environment and what not. We stayed at the Hondehokke, drank beer with illegal diamond divers, with smugglers and mine workers and visited the operations of among others, Alexkor and De Beers (Foundation, 2009).

In December 2008 David van Wyk went underground in Botswana to do Policy Gap 5, Corporate Responsibility in the Diamond Mining Industry in Botswana, De Beers, Botswana and the Control of a Country. It is illegal to do research in Botswana without the permission of the President and sign off from each ministry. Our opinion as the Bench Marks Foundation, constitutes this as a breach of academic freedom. Freek assisted with the methodology and with the final editing (Bench Marks Foundation, 2009). The report ruffled the feathers of the mining corporation under review and of the Botswana Government. The mining corporation lodged a complaint with the North West University. Freek and David took a break on the West Coast when Freek was called back to Potchefstroom, to please explain. Our respect for Freek jumped in leaps and bounds because he defended the report. The report had a seismic impact on Botswana's politics and society, and became one of the most Googled reports ever published by the Bench Marks Foundation (Freedom House, 2011, p. 99). In 2009 Freek conducted the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) for the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) of the mining operations of Ashanti Goldfields Kilo (AGK) in the exploration of Concession 40 in the north eastern region of Ituri in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), May 2009.

Freek and David conducted the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) for Bread for All (Switzerland) of the mining operations of the Swiss mining company, Glencore in the Katanga Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), October 2010 and February 2011. On one of the field work visits, Freek had to wait at OR Tambo airport for the DRC military to clear the airport in Lubumbashi of armed rebels before his plane could take off.

John Capel, Executive Director for Bench Marks and Freek began discussing a number of ideas during this period. One such idea was the creation of a Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility at the North West University. This Centre would teach Masters and Doctoral Students, publish articles and conduct CSR research from a pro-poor and pro-community perspective. BMF also felt the need to change gear with regard to the Policy Gap research reports

and methodology. We started working on Policy Gap 6, *Communities in the Platinum Minefields, A Review of Platinum Mining in the Bojanala District of the North West Province: A Participatory Action research Approach* (2012). The objective of the research was to stop doing research on communities affected by mines, to doing research with communities affected by mines and to use the research report as a platform for supporting and strengthening community organisations and developing community monitors. The second objective was to assess whether there was any improvement in the corporate social responsibility activities of mines since the first Policy Gap report five years previously. The report was published on 14 August 2012, two days before the Marikana Massacre (Bench Marks Foundation, 2012). It warned that things on the Platinum mine fields had not improved and was about to explode. The launch took place at the office of the South African Human Rights Commission. The report was followed by communities beginning to set up their own activism and advocacy structures in the Rustenburg area. Bua Mining Communities (BuaMC) arose representing some 17 villages. Soon after this, mine-affected communities set up Mine Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA).

The work of the BMF saw change not only in the discourse about Corporate Social Responsibility in Mining, but also saw a proliferation of civil society interest in mining impacts on communities.

Freek, together with Johann van Wyk was also centrally involved, on top of a very busy academic program at the Centre, in assisting with the updating of Bench Marks Foundation's founding document, "The Principles for Global Corporate Responsibility: Bench Marks for Measuring Business Performance" (Bench Marks). He actively participated in the discussions on the intended Community Grievance Mechanism, the planned BMF Community Ratings Agency and the creation of an Independent Community Fund that communities could draw on to source their own expertise in their engagement with corporations and in defence of their human and environmental rights.

Freek was a polymath in the classical sense, professor, and lecturer, Chairperson of the South African Sociological Association, father, activist, sportsman, and friend. He excelled in everything he tried his hand at. Always friendly, always accommodating, always challenging. We have lost a friend and a colleague. A gap has opened which will be difficult to fill.

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