

**CHAIRPERSON'S WELCOME ADDRESS**  
**BENCH MARKS FOUNDATION**  
**STUDY ON DE BEERS - DEBSWANA DIAMOND MINING COMPANY**  
**23<sup>rd</sup> September 2009**

We wish to welcome members of the press from South Africa and Botswana. We also welcome members of De Beers and Debswana, and appreciate their presence and participation at the launch of the study of De Beers and Diamond Mining in Botswana. We also recognize and welcome 18 African Church leaders from 13 countries of the continent of Africa in which South African corporations do business. Thanks you for taking time from your busy schedule to receive the Bench Marks Foundation report.

The Bench Marks Foundation is an independent church based Non Governmental Organisation monitoring corporate performance in the field of corporate social responsibility (CSR) with a focus on sustainable practices that address labour rights, community rights, gender concerns, HIV and AIDS, and a sustainable system of production. In this regard we promote evenly economic development in the African continent. We address these concerns through an internationally recognized and supported measuring tool, called "Principles for Global Corporate Responsibility; Bench Marks for Measuring Business Performance".

Our mandate as BMF is to examine the role of business in the new South Africa and also beyond our borders to realization of human rights and the promotion of human dignity and integrity of creation. Our main focus in the region is around natural resources, in particular mining, its impact on the lives of the people and the environment; women, HIV and AIDS, and in particular on communities close by to operations. We do this because we believe that the starting point of economic life is the community and the sustainable development of peoples not profit.

The Bench Marks Foundation believes that the gap between policy and corporate practice needs to be addressed and CSR integrated into the core of companies' decision-making processes in order to overcome poverty, growing inequalities and degraded environments.

We are transparent in all that we do. We, for instance, always ask Corporations concerned to comment on our findings before releasing the studies so that we can re-examine the findings if the company points out to us that we have made a mistake on facts which they prove otherwise. We followed the same protocol on this study and Debswana responded and their comments we welcomed. They pointed out to us the naming or placing of some government ministries/departments was incorrect. Now our electronic version of the study being launched today is corrected and can be read at [www.bench-marks.org.za](http://www.bench-marks.org.za). On the contrary De Beers did not respond until last week and four days before we released the study they made a public media statement without reference to me as the Chairperson of the Foundation. After this event the executive summary of De Beers Debswana response will be put on our website along with our final remarks.

However, we noted that on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2009, the Sunday Standard newspaper of Botswana, using the De Beers Debswana response, tried to demean the findings of the study. A personal attack on the integrity of our lead researcher and shoddy journalism rubbishing our report took place without even asking the Bench Marks Foundation for our comment. We must point out that we stand by our research findings and believe in the right of freedom of association and that the communist party is part of the ruling alliance in South Africa.

The Bench Marks Foundation's role as an independent monitoring agency is to critically examine the gap between policy and practice. We do this without fear of being prejudiced because we are fully independent in that we do not receive funding from Corporations and /or governments. So, whilst De Beers' family of companies has good written policies, we have found gaps when we examined their company's practice in Botswana.

We must point out that often the agenda of Corporate Social Responsibility is driven by reporting initiatives, signing of international protocols and policy statements by companies. While the signing of these of agreements and adopting principles are good they often remain on paper and do not reflect the actual reality on the ground, and this is where we came in. It is our role as an independent monitoring agency to point these out. We have completed many such studies in the mining industry that are more critical than this one. So far most of the Corporations and Mining Houses/companies we have studied have welcomed our input. De Beers (Debswana) on the other hand has decided to publicly attack the findings instead of engaging with us to find a way of improving their corporate performance in this field.

As already alluded above, our starting point is the community (people). Therefore whilst Debswana is concerned about corporate sustainability through profit, we are concerned about long term sustainability of communities and society at large. Our belief is that business does not operate in isolation but has a responsibility to consider the broader environment in which it operates. We are thus not apologetic about our mandate given by the Church, and therefore we wish to ensure responsible stewardship and sound business practices that balance the needs of the community with that of corporate business interests.

Today we are pleased to reporting on our main findings and recommendations concerning De Beers, Debswana operations and Government. The report focuses on the economic sustainability of De Beers operations in Botswana. It is looking at what Debswana say about themselves and our independent assessment of their practice. We also look at governance both from the perspective of the Corporation and the Botswana government where we raise some serious concerns. The report further looks at communities, and some of the key social impact questions that need addressing along with environmental stewardship, health issues, in particular HIV and AIDS. We conclude with a number of recommendations which we hope to discuss with the leadership of De Beers (family of companies). We make specific recommendations to the Botswana government and hope they also will seek guidance from us on how to close the gap which we have indentify between policy and practice in Debswana operations.

Our aim is not to seek confrontation but to raise corporate awareness, and to seek the best solutions that centre on people, their human dignity and potential development. Mostly we want to ensure a world that is just, business practices that are ethical and based on mutual respect.

We recognise that De Beers Debswana has responded to the report and thank them for taking the time to read it. Whilst we also recognise that they have not really dealt with the substantive issues we have raised, but have sought to rubbish the report, we can only hope that they will reread the report and engage with us on the findings.

Lastly there are low levels of accountability, transparency and commitment to all aspects related to sustainable development and Corporate Social Responsibility in the mining arena of the SADC region and for business in general. Multinational companies need to focus their Corporate Social Responsibility programmes on the real sustainable development of communities rather than as publicity exercises. De Beers need to think about people more than profit and to adhere to international good practice and/or standards and instruments guiding this.

We are aware that this study poses a challenge to De Beers- Debswana and the Botswana government to improve on their corporate responsibility programmes. We hope Corporations doing business in the region will be more ethical and that they find innovative ways to promote development at community level that addresses some of the negative impacts mining brings.

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Jo Seoka  
Chairperson Bench Marks Foundation