



Media Statement by Bench Marks Foundation

NOTE EMBARGOED: 11:30 on 23RD SEPTEMBER 2009

Call for Independent monitoring of Environmental Impact Assessment

The Bench Marks Foundation has described the cosy relationships between global corporations such as De Beers and global auditing firms as the “economics of innocent fraud”.

The Foundation, in its latest study, *De Beers, Botswana and the control of a country*, has warned that until these critical concerns that relate to environmental justice rather than to the commodified “greening of business”, concerns about the ecological impact of corporations such as Debswana will remain a matter of critical debate.

According to the report released in Johannesburg today, effective Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can only be done if mining companies embrace fully the interests of communities affected by their operations. The Bench Marks Foundation has called for the establishment of an independent monitoring fund by government or a specialised agency so that this can be done. Such an agency would conduct environmental monitoring and evaluation and capacitate the communities concerned.

“Assessment by third part ISO 14001 auditors do not really demonstrate environmental compliance where third party services are paid for by the corporation. There is a tendency for consultants, such as auditors and environmental consultants, to tell corporations what they want to hear.

“Independent environmental monitoring should be a function of government or a specialised agency that is not funded by the mining corporation along the lines of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the USA or the so called Green Scorpions in South Africa,” said John Capel, the Chief Executive of Bench Marks Foundation.

According to the study, CSR has often been done to improve the public face of a company. There have been areas, however, where the work done has been beneficial to the communities. The study implores mining companies to report on all aspects of its activities such as the impact on underground water and the lowering of the water table that directly impacts on communities, livelihoods and subsistence farmers. .

Capel noted that the claim by Debswana that it is concerned about the community water situation of surrounding communities at its Botswana operations is belied by the dehydration processes required by pit mining. He added that the concepts of environmental sustainability and environmental justice are often misunderstood.

“There is once more a clear conflict between the community based notion of environmental justice and the corporate notion of environmental sustainability.

“Environmental sustainability implies controlling the consumption and conservation of water so as to sustain production. Environmental justice, on the other hand, implies recognising the rights of surrounding communities to environmental security and rights of access to water and other natural resources,” Capel explained.

The research notes that Southern Africa is one of the most water stressed regions in the world and is currently faced with the choice of maximising profits from its mineral wealth in the short term or the destruction of its water sources and its atmosphere.

The Foundation’s research on the diamond industry in Botswana is a continuation of the broader SADC research initiative into the extractive industry. The main focus is CSR practice of mining companies regarding the three basic dimensions of sustainable development – economical, social and environmental – in the areas in which they operate.

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Issued by Quo Vadis Communications on behalf of Bench Marks Foundation

Bench Marks Foundation is an independent organisation monitoring corporate performance in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) with the focus on social sustainability and economic empowerment. The organisation encourages CSR that goes beyond reporting mechanisms and focuses on the gap between policy and practice, thereby assisting civil society groups and corporations to move beyond philanthropy to more strategic interventions that benefit both the corporations and society. Central to Bench Marks’ agenda is how CSR is integrated into companies’ operations and ensuring that it is at the core of every decision making process.

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