



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

African Mining Vision 2050: part of the solution or part of the problem?

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Although the Africa Mining Vision (AMV) is the first attempt in recent times by African Leaders to take stock of the mineral resources on the continent, there are critical weaknesses that must be addressed.

This consensus emerged from a plenary discussion on the subject at the Bench Marks Foundation's annual meeting in Johannesburg this week.

Questions on weaknesses such as whether the AMV represents a truly alternative path for development for the continent and how corporations will be made to account for their actions were debated by delegates from Africa.

Professor Freek Cronje, Director of the Bench Marks Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North West University, said that the objective of the AMV is for transparent, equitable and optimal exploitation of mineral resources to underpin broad-based sustainable growth and development.

"But although the AMV has been documented, its implementation is problematic," said Cronje. "It talks about transparency, but how much access does the general public really have to the operations of both public and private institutions? How transparent will it ever be?"

"In respect of human rights issues, what exactly are the plans for adopting the UN Guiding principles on human rights and businesses?"

"Is the AMV part of the solution for the continent or just a problem?"

Rev Susane Matale, the Chairperson of the Federation of Christian Council of South Africa (FOCCISA) and an ordained minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, said that although the AMV is trying to achieve a win-win situation, the devil was in the detail.

She said that in order to achieve the aims of the AMV, the first issue to be resolved was that of good governance. In her opinion, Africa needed leadership that was capable and visionary. She blamed leaders of government for playing to the tune of investors and responding to their demands thereby ignoring the needs of its people.

According to the Bench Marks Foundation and delegates, corporations make profits from African mining and extractives and freely export the production and profits out of the continent. There is no political will from the governments or elected politicians and parliaments to consolidate African monitoring institutions which will ensure that corporations working in Africa, play by the rules and are accountable to the people of Africa.

The organisation asked delegates whether the AMV presents a strategic opportunity for African social movements to work together to monitor the vision as well as to unite all actions, movements and resources against those exploiting the continent. In addition, it asked what the role of churches is with regard to the AMV.

Dr Charles Kitima, a Catholic priest from Tanzania and based at the St Augustine University of Tanzania, said his Church's position was based on the brief received from the Pope's encyclical which calls for respect for creation. The Pope ascribed the behaviours of humans as greedy and only concerned with profit-making, exploiting creation for their selfish desires.

Kitima said that the Catholic Church believed that people should have power over their natural resources and that the church had the duty to educate, encourage and change mindsets. He strongly agreed with Bench Marks that organisations and churches should work together to push the agenda with regard to some sort of minimum programme with the AMV.

During the discussions, the issue of the patriarchal nature of mining and the AMV was brought up by Dr Salimah Valiani, Research Lead for WoMin- Africa Gender and Extractives Alliance.

She said that population displacement is one of the social ills of the mining sector and that the AMV did not deal with this issue sufficiently. It tried to provide a solution by compensating those displaced but ignored the fact that only 5% of women have title to land in sub Saharan Africa.

She added that the AMV therefore primarily gives compensation to men and traditional rulers in control of land.

“Although the Africa Mining Vision states that it is holistic and thinks outside of the ‘mining box’, the majority of institutions we deal with and that are here tend to disagree and feel it’s part of the problem in the continent,” said David van Wyk, Lead Researcher for the Bench Marks Foundation.

“Workers and communities must see real and tangible benefits from mining. Women’s rights must be taken into consideration and environmental and health issues dealt with effectively and hastily.”

The Africa Mining Vision was adopted in February 2009 by Heads of State during the African Union meeting. It came into being following a meeting in October 2008 of African Ministers responsible for Mineral Resources Development. It is meant to be Africa’s response to tackling the paradox of great mineral wealth existing side by side with pervasive poverty.

The Bench Marks Foundation monitors multinational corporations operation in Southern Africa and the rest of the African continent to ensure that they meet minimum social, environmental and economic standards and promotes an ethical and critical voice on what constitutes corporate social responsibility.

For more information on the Bench Marks Foundation and to access to all research reports, go to www.bench-marks.org.za.

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About Bench Marks Foundation:

Bench Marks Foundation is an independent non-governmental organisation mandated by churches to monitor the practices of multi-national corporations to

- ensure they respect human rights;
- protect the environment;
- ensure that profit-making is not done at the expense of other interest groups; and
- ensure that those most negatively impacted upon are heard, protected and accommodated within the business plans of the corporations.

The Foundation was launched by the Rt Rev Dr Jo Seoka who chairs the organisation and by member churches of the SACC in 2001.

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