

MEDIA STATEMENT BY BENCH MARKS FOUNDATION

Community monitors share experiences and resources

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For immediate release

For the past three years, mining communities have been building a bank of blogs and Facebook sites, which have chronicled their experiences in the communities in which they live. These communities are ones that have felt amongst others, the negative effects of mining for coal, platinum, gold and steel production.

Now however, thanks to the Bench Marks Foundation, they have access to a consolidated website: www.communitymonitors.net. The website is part of the Bench Marks Foundation's Community Monitors Project. This project was set up to support local communities to take action to stop the destruction of the environment and community life caused by private corporations and omissions of government.

"The Community Monitors Action Network website is a space for community activists to share information, resources and experiences," says John Capel, Executive Director of the Bench Marks Foundation at the launch of the website today (25 July 2012). "Our research has shown that the only way to empower communities is to involve them in matters that directly impact on them. Too often they are not consulted."

Capel says that the aim of the Community Monitors Project is to train and develop community member's skills in information gathering, writing, and communications using local media and the internet. They are then able to use the knowledge gained to speak out about what is happening to their communities. They learn how to organise action using different strategies and tactics to take concrete actions to improve their lives and hopefully change corporate behaviour.

The 2012 programme of the Community Monitors School includes 25 community groups in South Africa with a total of 85 participants, with groups in Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana.

While the action groups participating on this site are largely centered in Southern Africa, the network of relationships extends to groups who share the same goals and values across the globe.

In addition, the website includes community publications as well as videos and photographs taken by the monitors. The organisation has also included various resources for community monitors such as the handy resource booklet guiding them on how to record what they see, how to use mapping, information on basic interviewing techniques, tips for taking good photographs and using the information to understand what is happening and what actions to take to address the problem.

Says Capel: "Knowledge is power and we feel it is essential to provide our communities with access to information and an outlet in which to not only voice their objections to what is happening to them, but to highlight issues affecting their health, livelihood and environment.

The website and resources document was launched at an event held at the organisation's office in Marshalltown, Johannesburg on 25 July 2012.

ENDS

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.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu launched the Foundation in 2001 and the Rt Rev Dr Jo Seoka chairs the organisation.

Issued by Quo Vadis Communications on behalf of the Bench Marks Foundation

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