



## Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

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### Effective communication is required to stem mistrust in the mining sector

13 February 2015

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A lack of proper communication, disregard for human dignity and respect were some of the main topics discussed during the last day of the Mining Indaba in Cape Town on 12 February 2015.

Executive Director for the Bench Marks Foundation, John Capel, joined a panel consisting of representatives of Rio Tinto, AngloGold Ashanti, Edelman and the Commonwealth Science and Industrial Research Organisation. The topic of the discussion was 'the building blocks of trust - how do communities make sense of a company'.

"Companies tend to talk to the local chief or ward councillors and bypass communities. They get their licence to operate and then just arrive and start mining the land. This immediately causes problems," Capel told the audience.

"Communities feel isolated and excluded. They feel that companies will extract at any cost. They hear all the stories about the wonderful things that mining companies are doing in communities, but in reality, their experiences are often far from wonderful.

"During the Alternative Mining Indaba, which is running at the same time as this indaba, we have been hearing stories from communities about their situation that are very different to what is being said here. We need to address the real issues to build trust between communities and mining companies.

"We need to look at truly incorporating free prior and informed consent, access to information, to knowledge and to various linkages that will put them on the same footing as the corporates.

"Again we believe that companies should support the establishment of an independent fund that each corporation contributes towards and is run by a third party. This fund would assist communities in accessing information and linkages.

"At the same time we need to see that companies tell the truth about their activities. There is a huge need to explore procedural fairness and honesty. Promises are made, but they don't get done. Livelihoods are disrupted.

"When people lose their land and are forced to another environment, there are many factors that should be looked at. Consensus needs to be done to see what's best for the community. No short cuts should be taken. They shouldn't be worse off than they were before".

Capel said that companies' actions often divide communities. He said that more research into psychological impacts of relocation needs to be done, and of ancestral values, indigenous knowledge, customs and beliefs.

"Heritage sites should also be a no-go for mining. This should be protected as well as grave-sites. Companies need to be culturally sensitive. If companies paid heed to these issues, it would indicate respect for the community and would go a long way towards building trust.

"Another important step towards developing trust would be the demilitarisation of mine security. They should be trained in human rights issues, they should not be used to intimidate or harm communities.

"A new mindset is needed. No more short-term solutions. A longer-term vision is required. Companies must start asking what communities actually need. They shouldn't act on their perception of what's required.

“They should involve communities in disaster committees, social committees and any other committee. Include them in matters concerning their lives, environment and livelihoods. This will foster that trust that is so desperately lacking,” said Capel.

The mining representatives on the panel agreed that new thinking was required in the industry.

Dr Ven Pillay, Vice President, Sustainability: Community for AngloGold Ashanti said “trust is earned. Mining giants wield considerable power and the impoverished communities are overwhelmed by this. Companies come in with promises and contracts. They decide what happens. The community becomes dependent on the company which decides what is fair and equitable.

“The community puts the trust in the company and they hope for a positive outcome. When you add hope with little or no power this becomes problematic. We need to work towards earning trust”.

Dr Janina Gawler, Global Practice Leader Communications and Social Performance for Rio Tinto said “Actions are ultimately judged. If a company doesn’t show what it’s doing or communicate effectively, stakeholders will lose respect and trust.

“We forget that people have a long memory”.

“We need to listen. To respond. The issue of lack of engagement needs to be addressed. We need to work on our codes of conduct, transparency, integrity, standards and assurances.

“The whole business needs to change its ideas and communications. Partners want a joint future with joint expectations”.

In the earlier session titled ‘harnessing the transformative potential of the industry’, The Most Revd Albert Chama, Bishop of Zambia and Archbishop of Central Africa and Rev Dr Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, General Secretary of the Christian Council of Ghana, also said that the mode of communication needs to be worked on and that unless proper consultation is done with the right stakeholders, everyone will go in circles. They urged mines to be human and to dialogue and involve communities.

The Alternative Mining Indaba (AMI), in its sixth year, offers organisations and community members from all over the world, an opportunity to work together to strategise, share experiences, network and form relationships with an aim to strengthen efforts in making natural resources work for the people.

More than 60 organisations from around the world formed part of the 2015 AMI and over 300 people from 37 countries attended the indaba.

The event is convened by the Economic Justice Network of the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa, the Bench Marks Foundation, Norwegian Church Aid, Oxfam America, Open Society Foundation and the Southern Africa Resource Watch, among others.

For more information on the AMI, email [alternativeminingindaba2015@gmail.com](mailto:alternativeminingindaba2015@gmail.com).

For more information on the Bench Marks Foundation, go to [www.bench-marks.org.za](http://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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