



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

Health issues plague areas around Kumba Iron Ore, Northern Cape

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Community members continue to blame Kumba Iron Ore Limited's Sishen Mine in the Northern Cape of South Africa for their health problems despite the mine contributing towards the health infrastructure in the area, according to the Bench Marks Foundation in its latest report released in Johannesburg today.

Bench Marks Foundation and the Bench Marks Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) at the North-West University's report entitled 'Floating or Sinking' Social Licence to Operate (SLO): Kumba Iron Ore Limited, investigates some of the programmes Anglo American's subsidiary has embarked on with regard to CSR and highlights the gaps it has uncovered.

"The best health care facilities are located in the main town of Kathu," says Professor Freek Cronjé, Director at the Bench Marks Centre for CSR.

"There are clinics in the areas of Sishen, Mapoteng and Dingleton but community members report that they are unreliable and there are not enough to cater for the population. If one needs a proper hospital, one would need to travel far distances to Kathu and then it is too expensive.

"Surrounding communities of Sishen Mine feel that although the company provides health care to the community, the mine is the main cause of their illnesses and the company is not doing enough to prevent this.

"They feel that the health care infrastructure is inadequate and even though the mine donated the clinics and ambulances, there are serious issues regarding the upkeep on both as well as the distribution of the ambulances".

According to the surrounding communities, although 77 ambulances were sponsored by the mine in the Northern Cape, the host communities feel they are not benefiting. In addition, the one community that did receive an ambulance - Mapoteng - reports that the ambulance is not in working order due to the bad roads and lack of maintenance.

"It seems that whilst the mine is prepared to spend substantial amounts on donating health systems, it lacks the will to consult with municipalities regarding maintaining these structures," says Cronjé.

"This lack of consultation results in 'white elephants' once they are broken or require maintenance. It also affects how these items will be distributed and utilised".

The report states that although the donations are necessary and a positive investment by the company, it is not enough to alleviate the health problems created by the mining operations.

"Most of the ailments resulting from the mining operations are chronic," says Professor Cronjé. "And as such, community members expect the mining company to provide the appropriate health care services.

"By not providing appropriate service provisions within these communities we believe that the mining company is contributing to the underdevelopment of the communities.

“We strongly recommend that Kumba undertakes a more strategic and sustainable health infrastructure programme that moves beyond mining. We also feel that it should take account of health insurance for both its employees as well as local community members in view of its impact on the health of the communities due to its operations.

Cronjé adds: “The South African Human Rights Commission must also get involved by investigating the role and conduct of the local authorities in compromising the right to health for the communities as well as to investigate reports on racism in the provision of health services”.

The report is the tenth edition of the Bench Marks Foundation’s Policy Gap series. For more information on the Bench Marks Foundation, or to view the last nine reports by the organisation, as well as more information relating to the Kumba research, go to www.bench-marks.org.za.

Amongst others, the Bench Marks Foundation calls for a new relationship between corporations, communities and ecosystems; equal participation of stakeholders and those most affected by the activities of corporations in the decision-making processes of companies; preservation and protection of the environment for present and future generations, and respect for the dignity of every person and human rights policies based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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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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