



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

Mines challenged to create sustainable jobs through sisal, aloe vera

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Modern mining operators in Sekhukhuneland should revive the market for biodegradable bags and ropes made of sisal. This could also result in sustainable job creation under community ownership and management, as well as being environmentally sustainable.

This is one of the recommendations of the Bench Marks Foundation in its latest Policy Gap study, published today. The report is a study of the community of Magobading, a rural village in the Limpopo Province, and the effects of its relocation in 2002 as a result of mining activity by Anglo Platinum.

The study, called “Life before and during mining”, reports that the landscape of the area is characterised by semi-arid plains and open valleys between the chains of hills and mountains running parallel to the escarpment.

“The area near the Steelpoort River was in the past intensely farmed with sisal from which bags and ropes were made prior to the arrival of plastic substitutes.”

Noting that COP21 in Paris agreed to rapidly move away from fossil fuels to new green energies and products, Bench Marks recommends that mining corporations invest in community-based projects to make products from sisal, which is in abundance in Sekhukhuneland, the report says.

The report also recommends that another naturally-occurring plant, Aloe Vera, be harvested and processed by community-based projects in order for Aloe Vera products to be made. This should be initiated by mining corporations through their corporate social responsibility programmes and the Department of Trade and Industry.

A further recommendation is that research should be undertaken into indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) and their potential application in pharmaceuticals, and community-based projects around the growing, harvesting, processing and production of such medicines be established.

The rural population of Sekhukhune is highly reliant on wild plant biodiversity that provides resources to them such as traditional medicines, grazing, browsing, food, fuel and building materials for housing.

“Relocating a community from an area where they had free access to wild plants and the variety of uses from those plants to a ‘township’-like urban setting has separated the people from a critical natural resource that was freely available to them,” the report says.

The report’s research team spent two days with traditional healers in GaNchabeleng, a community that has not been moved for mining, scouring the veld for medicinal plants, learning about their uses and locating water sources where the special water for making medicines are found.

“In Magobading, the community no longer has access to either land or that which can be harvested from the veld. Those with the knowledge of traditional medicinal plants are now losing that knowledge, a loss not only to them, but to the entire country.”

It was also noted that in Magobading, one of the traditional healers is now housebound.

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.

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

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