



# Executive directors report to Annual Conference and AGM of the Bench Marks Foundation 20<sup>th</sup> October 2020

## Introduction

It is with great pleasure that I address all of you today on the work and achievements of Bench Marks over the past year, 2020 and 2019. As we meet here today, we are faced with one of the **worse pandemics affecting our people** across the region and in South Africa, so it is only right that I begin with **how Bench Marks Foundation has been addressing this**; along with how we are **engaging power, not only on COVID 19**, but on **a host of other issues** as well.

As you are aware, we are in **the digital age** and Bench Marks has set up a **system of digital communication** that stretches from the **offices to communities**. This is fundamental to how we approach the era of pandemics, including climate catastrophe and resultant illnesses.

## COVID 19 -the era of pandemics

Facing this crisis, we have been working through our **Community Monitoring School network** to address how **poor and vulnerable communities** are dealing with this. Communities will speak after me and tell their stories. From the Bench Marks Foundation side in collaboration with communities, we have developed guidelines.

The first pamphlet deals with **what is the coronavirus**, touching on the seriousness of the illness; **how it enters to body**, the **effects on lungs, other organs**, and **pre-existing diseases** and what to do if you are infected. We talk about how the virus spreads, **it signs and symptoms**, and to prevent infection. Social distancing is explained, along with need for masks and how to wear a mask. Ending with **if you are infected, what to do** and other precautionary measures that can be taken.

Our **second brochure** covers people who may **get seriously ill** through being infected with the disease. It covers **older people, overweight and unfit people**, and people with **commodities** such as TB, hypertension, chronic kidney disease and heart problems; **precautionary measures** that people can take, along with health interventions and when to seek medical interventions. As the **economy begun opening**, we developed what we call **the A, B, C of Coronavirus**, also known as the **10 Commandments**, covering the dos and don'ts around the virus.

## Position paper and Recommendations to the Industry

Bench Marks also produced paper for the **mining industry**, called Bench Marks Foundation **Position and Recommendations to Mining Industry in Supporting Mining Affected Communities** within the Context of the Covid-19 Pandemic. We raised 5 issues of concern needing action. We looked at **Democratic practice**, not just the industry talking to **traditional authorities**, but the many community organisations who are never engaged with. We address the issue of **skewed power relations**, how to address this, along with clear **viable channels of communication**. Secondly, **Access to water**, where mining has had strongly negative impact on communities' access to water, **raising short term to long term interventions** that are needed with several recommendations. It is worth noting that this is probably the issue of most concern to many mining communities. Thirdly, the issue of **Food security**, backed by **short term interventions**, such as **food parcels**, to **longer term sustainable solutions** such as **communal food gardens**, to **small scale agricultural solutions**

## **Engaging Power**

When the **mines prematurely opened**, we warned in the media of the **consequences of premature opening of the mines** and the potential for the rapid spread of COVID. Our paper to the industry also covered, Covid-19 infections and **health care responsibility of the industry**. This covers in brief, **mine clinics** open to communities, **mass testing by the industry**, the role of **migrant labour** in spreading the disease in communities and what we believe the industry's response must be and their responsibility to go beyond the mine gate.

Our **Soweto Health study** released in 2016, has seen us working with a number of community organisations in walking along side them to deal with a **host of health issues**, especially on children, where we are also working with **NIOH on a scientific study on mine dust** impacts on affected communities.

Along with the **Riverlea Community Mining Forum**, we are **addressing mining rehabilitation** driven by communities for the benefit of communities. We are proud to say that we have an **agreement with DRD Gold, (Durban Rooderpoort Deep)** on how to go about **rehabilitation** that leads to not only cleaning up land, but looks at **solar panelling in houses**, addressing issues such as **livelihood developments**, **land** available for communities and **communities identifying and leading the process** of what can be done. We are also **working with DMRE**, and **City of Johannesburg on this**. The **DMRE is very interested in our approach to rehabilitation** and asked for this to include both the East Rand and West Rand. We agreed firstly to have a pilot rehabilitation process with DRD Gold and take our learnings forward to other areas.

We are **working in coalitions** to advance our stance on addressing the **climate catastrophe**, and **increasing levels of unemployment**, and the vast numbers of people who will never work. In this regard with **COPAC, Peoples Coalition at Wits University**, we are promoting the call for a **universal basic income grant**. **COVID-19 has laid bare the faults line** in our society and it is working in coalitions that will most advance our call for dignity for all. Bench Marks also in the **North West province is supporting BUA Mining Communities to clean up land for**

**development, food security and agricultural and cattle farming.** Slowly we are also developing a deeper focus on a **transition from coal to renewable energy within a just transition framework.**

## **Minerals Council of South Africa**

Bench Marks working in a **coalition of civil society organisation**, known as the **MPRDA coalition** has been struggling with the **Minerals Council** to have **communities recognised in the Mining Charter.** What we witness is a deep divide between the industry and communities.

It is time for a new way of thinking to close the trust deficit and bring social conscience to the fore to make SA mining a sustainable, long-term business in which marginalised people feel they have a stake.” Ultimately, we are pushing for **legislative changes** that recognise the **rights of communities to full participation in decision making** and to **be incorporated into the mining charter as equals** with equal voice and recognition.

## **Vatican meeting Rome on Mining and the common good May 3rd, 2019**

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> May a **leading mining CEO's of the biggest mining companies in the world** got together at the **Vatican** with church leaders for a reflection on what constitutes the common good and how mining contributes to this vision. Representatives from across the world attended, including South Africa. **Bench Marks was present** and mainly **countered messages** being given that were based on selective information by the industry.

**Pope Francis** who addressed the gathering saying, “The **precarious condition of our common home** has been the **result largely** of a **fallacious economic model** that has been followed too long. It is a **voracious model, profit orientated, short-sighted**, and based on the **misconception of unlimited economic growth.** This insatiable, unquenchable, and uncontrollable greedy model of the present economic system was challenged, calling on all to do something. “**Economic powers** continue to **justify the current global system** where priority tends to be given to the **pursuit of financial gain, which fail** to take the context into account the **effects on human dignity** and the **natural environment**”.

He went on to “We need a **paradigm shift in all our economic activities, including mining.** Mining like all **economic activities**, should be at the **service of the entire human community.**

## **Corporations and advocacy**

**Over this last period**, we achieved **some form of justice with Anglo American Platinum** using the **aspects** of our alternative dispute resolution process, called the **Independent Problem Solving Service.** Using **outside expertise** and **facilitated approach** much ground was gained with **each family compensated with R100 000.** **Land for cattle is being identified** and **water access** and **renovation of houses amongst many other issues.**

## **The Marikana massacre- Lonmin and their biggest buyer- BASF Germany**

This **advocacy work** led by the **chair of Bench Marks, Bishop Jo Seoka** continues with BASF at first reluctant to engage on their **supply chain responsibilities**, now a little bit more open. We have **two agendas** with them; one **international solidarity** and applying pressure on BASF to get Lonmin to pay **compensation to the victims**, apologise, and a **memorial centre with counselling services**, skills development, and meeting facilities. Secondly to get all the **mines across the platinum belt** to support the **IPSS-Interdependent Problem Solving Service** an **alternative dispute resolution** process backed by the ICF – **Independent Capacity building Fund**, to address **skewed power relations**. Equally important is putting in place now **alternative economies from below** led by communities.

The **IPSS is being reviewed** with **direct engagement** as the critical step whereby communities engage corporations on an equal footing to resolve problems directly. Here we are **making progress** and **communities** supported by Bench Marks are at the **forefront of this initiative**.

### **Artisanal mining**

Bench Marks is involved in promoting the **legality of these services**, along with giving input into several forums supporting the **legitimacy of Zama-Zama's** within a **regulatory framework**.

### **AMI- Alternative Mining Indaba and Investing in Mining Indaba Capetown**

Bench Marks continues to play **a leading role in both forums**. Over the last year Bench Marks has been chairmanship of the AMI, **and jointly develops the agenda of the Sustainability Day at the Mining Indaba**. This is very challenging as mining companies want to dominate the agenda and we face challenges going forward.

### **Women in Mining**

Over the last year and more Bench Marks has been **addressing gender issues and the impact of mining on women and children**. The **Community Monitoring School is led by women**, although the membership is 50/50 men and women. Today you will hear directly from them.

### **Community Monitoring School**

In South Africa we are in **47 mining communities** working with community people, mainly young, who record their stories, actions, and engagements with the industry. In **2019 the focus** was on **grievances communities** have with the industry and **trying to resolve these issues**. **2020**, as been on **COVID 19** and the responsibility of the industry. As mentioned under our focus on COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Build up to this Annual Conference and AGM**

We have had hosted **four webinars** on **Women in Mining; Alternative Economies; Artisanal mining;** and on **Life After Mining.**

### **Concluding Remarks**

Bench Marks has been at the **cutting edge of corporate accountability**, human rights and in practice busy with a sustainable development agenda. It **is breaking new ground, occupies space** and **speaks out loudly** in showing up the reality versus corporate spin. Bench marks has changed how mining is viewed and is both respected and feared but listened to.

It is **highly innovative, imaginative**, and **continually learning and adapting its approaches.** Fundamental to the Bench Marks Foundation is an **ethical driven approach** and **standing** with and for the **poor and working people centring our work on those most harmed.** Bench Marks's work is **deeply rooted in communities** and works **across the region**, in the DRC, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia.

**John Capel-Executive Director-Bench Marks Foundation 20<sup>th</sup> October 2020**