



Media Statement by Bench Marks Foundation

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WATER UNDER THREAT FROM RAMPANT MINING INDUSTRY

Amid the success of its mining industry, Botswana needs to carefully consider how the rapid expansion of mining in the country will harm the provision of water and environmental security.

This warning is contained in a report released in Johannesburg today by the Bench Marks Foundation.

Presenting its latest study, *De Beers, Botswana and the Control of a Country*, the chief executive of the Foundation, John Capel, said that Botswana is severely water stressed. This situation was aggravated by mining, which is by far the dominant industry in the country.

“A former geologist at Debswana claimed that open cast mines require dewatering the surrounding areas to effect a drop in the water table that will allow the mining operation to operate in dry conditions. Diamond mines are run on a continuous basis and therefore any interruption jeopardises production and economic viability.

“It is exactly this obsession with continuous production that causes mining corporations to become slack regarding environmental issues. Nothing is said about this in Debswana’s report for 2007 about negative environmental incidents, whether such incidents impacted on production, or placed workers and residents of mining towns or neighbouring communities at risk.”

Capel said that the Boteti River provides a case in point. The river, which has its origins in the Okavango Delta, flowed all year round before pit mining started, after which decreasing flows led to seasonal desiccation in some river reaches. But now, said Capel, research by Bench Marks had found that it was possible that the Boteti had stopped flowing as a result of mining.

“The diversion of the river has left many residents without an adequate source of fresh water and they can no longer enjoy the fishing and other activities in the river. The river did not only suffer from the diversion of its water to the mining at Orapa and Lethlakane, but also from the dropping of the water table to ensure optimal working conditions in the pits at these diamond mines,” Capel says.

The comprehensive research study also recommends the enactment of strict legislation regarding prospecting and mining in national parks and conservation areas.

“Prospecting and mining minerals, including diamonds in national parks and conservation areas including parks, is simply unethical. Strict legislation must be in place in this regard and enforced by government.

“The threat posed to the Central Kalahari Game Reserve by prospecting and the potential threats to the Okavango Delta are matters of serious international concern,” according to the research findings.

Debswana is a joint venture between the government of Botswana and South African diamond mining corporation, De Beers. Each owns 50%.

The research on the diamond industry in Botswana is a continuation of the broader SADC research by the Bench Marks Foundation into the extractive industry. The main focus is CSR practice of mining companies regarding the three basic dimensions of sustainable development – economical, social and environmental – in the areas in which they operate.

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Issued by Quo Vadis Communications on behalf of Bench Marks Foundation

Bench Marks Foundation is an independent organisation monitoring corporate performance in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) with the focus on social sustainability and economic empowerment. The organisation encourages CSR that goes beyond reporting mechanisms and focuses on the gap between policy and practice, thereby assisting civil society groups and corporations to move beyond philanthropy to more strategic interventions that benefit both the corporations and society. Central to Bench Marks' agenda is how CSR is integrated into companies' operations and ensuring that it is at the core of every decision making process.

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