



Media statement by the Bench Marks Foundation

14 years on – and water is still a problem for rural village

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Access to water is a basic human right, but a community in the Limpopo Province, relocated 14 years ago to make way for a platinum mine, still does not enjoy adequate and reliable access to this vital commodity.

This is one of the findings of a report released this week, “Life before and during mining”, which is a study of the community of Magobading, a rural village in Sekhukhuneland in the Limpopo Province.

Published by the Bench Marks Foundation, it is one of its Policy Gap series that examines corporate social responsibility in the Southern African mining environment. The aim of the series is to change corporate behaviour towards responsible business conduct in a way that benefits communities and enhances the overall wellbeing of those most severely impacted by it.

Of all the negative consequences of the relocation that the Magobading community is having to deal with, inadequate access to land and water are the two most far-reaching and damaging.

The relocated villagers complain that although they have potable water from taps in every yard, the water supply is “intermittent and unreliable”.

The report concludes that it is doubtful that an environmental impact assessment for the relocation in 2002 was done, in spite of this being required by law. The company has also not produced a water licence in response to Bench Marks’ requests.

In the resettled area, there are no streams or fountains on the land and villagers say it is difficult to keep livestock such as cattle and goats.

The report says: “In the pre-mining villages, women fetched water and gathered around the local fountain to do the washing. As such, the fountain formed a place where women discussed the issues of the village and matters of particular concern to them without the interference of men. Fountain water was also an important ingredient of traditional medicines. On hot days, children could swim in the natural pools below the fountain.... Now they have neither fountain nor working taps.”

The report notes that villagers fondly remember the natural spring at Makobakobe from which they were relocated. Now, however, the spring is polluted with sewage water from the nearby single quarters which Anglo Platinum constructed on the hill above the place where Makobakobe was located.

Villagers took the Bench Marks team to observe mine water discharged daily into the Motse River through a constructed canal from Anglo Platinum’s Twickenham Mine. Villagers claim that the daily water discharge is polluted and is poisoning their livestock.

Magobading is also very poorly located and prone to flash floods.

“The houses constructed by Anglo Platinum were built on concrete slabs without proper foundations, and street drainage is non-existent. This has led to erosion around the slabs and cracking of houses,” the report claims.

The Bench Marks report is also highly critical of Anglo Platinum for its failure to produce the environmental impact assessment (EIA) for the Magobading relocation. This assessment is required by law for any new mining operations.

Bench Marks also asked the company to provide a copy of its water licence for the boreholes to supply water to Magobading. In reply, the company said that all proclamations, approvals and the actual township development were undertaken by a developer/contractor by the name of Mr Ping, who is now deceased.

The report adds: "There are strong suggestions that in sinking the boreholes to supply Magobading, the relocation exercise impacted on the water supply of existing villages adjacent to Magobading, causing the water table to drop and village wells and boreholes to dry up. This caused a conflict situation in which villagers from the adjacent villages allegedly repeatedly sabotaged the pumps to the bulk storage reservoir."

In its recommendations, Bench Marks says that Anglo Platinum should immediately resolve the "untenable water situation" at Magobading.

It also calls on the company to recognise the economic and cultural importance of fountains and streams for customary communities and at all costs avoid the pollution and destruction of these natural features.

Another appeal is made for Anglo Platinum to fill in the canal that leads from its Twickenham operation into the Motse River and stop the daily discharge of mine water into that river.

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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