

Professor Freek Cronje, ten years later.

By David van Wyk, Jaques Rothman, Suzanne Reyneke

On the morning of 1 April 2016, I received a call from Suzanne Reyneke.

“Freek Passed away...” she announced tearfully.

“You must be joking!” I responded. It was 1 April after all and Freek loved to tease and joke. He had a tremendous sense of humour!”

“No, I am not. He went to play squash this morning, stepped off the court and he sat down on the step at the entrance of the court and died”

Freek was a keen sportsman, playing squash several times a week, jogging, and participating in marathons. The circumstances of his passing almost reinforced my disbelief; that this was April Fool's joke. But it was not,. Freek chose the date and the circumstance of his passing, or perhaps fate or God chose the date and time. Freek would not have had it any other way. ”

Freek most often travelled to meetings of the Bench Marks on one of his two super bikes, both BMWs, but his favourite one being “Wit Piet”. After the meetings we would go to Campus Square where we would review the work emanating from the meeting at Bench Marks, consume a lot of beer, plan the way forward, consume a lot of beer and share jokes and reminiscences of the past and aspirations for the future.

Bench Marks is currently living that future with a strong contingent of community monitors that evolved from the recommendations of early Policy Gap Reports, it is the preferred source of reference for many institutions, the diplomatic community or academia on matters of corporate social responsibility, immunity and environmental impact of mining the South Africa. It is the foundation of the annual Alternative Mining Indaba, and of recourse for afflicted communities, it is where they turn for assistance in resolving the grievances caused by the negative impact of their corporate neighbours.

His sudden passing led to an enormous gap in Bench Marks and in my personal life.

Getting down to brass tacks I draw on the joint obituary that Jaques Rothman, Suzanne Reyneke and myself wrote in 2016. Freek was born in Lichtenburg on 25 August 1962. He matriculated from Hoërskool Lichtenburg in 1980 and first registered at the then Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (PU for CHE) in 1981. He received his Bachelor's degree in Sociology and Biblical Studies in 1983, followed by his Honours in 1984, Master's in 1985 and PhD in Sociology in 1991. He was appointed as permanent lecturer in 1991 at the PU for CHE and received his associate professorship in 2008. Freek's indelible and undeniably judicious contributions to Sociological research reached its ultimate (and much anticipated) pinnacle with his promotion to full professor in 2016. Never one to boast about his achievements, Freek regarded this moment in his usual nonchalant and humble way, although those of us close to him, knew that he considered this as one of his proudest moments. In addition to this achievement, he was named as one of the top ten researchers of the North-West University in 2014 and 2015, and was cited as the third best faculty performer in 2015. In writing this obituary, one is again reminded of how this former vice-president (period of 2009-2011) and president of The South African Sociological Association (SASA) (period of 2011 to 2013) contributed to academia in general, and Sociology in particular, and how his work will continue to enjoy national and international recognition in years to come.

Notwithstanding Freek's role as lecturer for both undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as his postgraduate supervision (thirteen Master's and nine PhD-students from the early 2000s), his passion was most evident in the research arena, comprising contributions in the form of multiple publications in accredited academic journals and books, serving as expert advisor as well as council member on various boards and contributing to critically needed recommendations in, amongst others, the mining sector through his initiation and collaboration in a number of research projects in South Africa and abroad. During his career, Freek authored and co-authored an impressive array of academic articles for journals including *The South African Review of Sociology*, *Development Southern Africa*, *Alternation: Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of the Arts and Humanities in Southern Africa*, *South African Journal of Labour Relations*, *The Journal of The Southern African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy*, *Jàmbá: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies* and the *Journal of Global Responsibility*, amongst others. In addition, over the last five years alone, book chapters appeared entitled "Mental Health Concerns in the South African Mining Sector: What about Corporate Social Responsibility?" (Cronjé and Van Wyk 2010) in *Society in Focus – Change, Challenge and Resistance: Reflections from South Africa and Beyond*, "The Global Position of South Africa as BRICS Country" (Cronjé 2015) in *Social, Political and Cultural Challenges of the BRICS*, "Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the South African Mining Sector: Functional or Dysfunctional?" (Cronjé and Reyneke 2015) in *Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development in Emerging Economies* as well as an upcoming chapter in the book *Green, Brown and Rainbow: African Environmental and Natural Resource Questions Revisited* entitled "Corporations, Communities and Impact: The Case of Coal" (Cronjé 2016). Freek shared much of his expertise in his niche areas of Social Development and Corporate Social Responsibility at annual academic conferences in South Africa and abroad. In 2015 alone he presented at nine national conferences in South Africa and eight international ones, including three plenary addresses in Brazil and India.

He also served as specialist reviewer for Corporate Social Responsibility Programmes, books, academic journals and conferences. In an advisory capacity, he directed mining companies with regard to the Social and Labour Plan as required by the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act of 2004 between 2004 and 2014, conducted the Social Impact Assessments (SIA) for the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) of the mining operations of Ashanti Goldfields Kilo (AGK) in 2009 as well as for Bread for All (Switzerland) of the mining operations of the Swiss mining company, Glencore in the Katanga Province in 2010 and 2011, respectively. Both of these SIAs took place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Other advisory roles included that of Independent Specialist Consultant/Researcher for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) on CSR practices of Glencore and his appointment as Member of the Premier's Mining

Supply and Stakeholder Coordination Committee in the North West Province in 2014. His advisory roles were also closely related to a number of research projects he either initiated or participated in.

Research reports resulting from his work included a focus on community development needs, perceptions and satisfaction concerning as well as stakeholder perceptions, needs and expectations for Lonmin Platinum from 2005. The most recent joint project (with the Bench Marks Foundation, Stockholm School of Economics, Sweden, University of Mumbai and Delhi, India, and other national, African and international collaborators) centred on developmental issues in mining communities in the developing world and BRICS, including migration, generational collaboration and acculturation, corporate social responsibility (CSR), corporate social investment (CSI), social entrepreneurship and sustainable development (SD). In keeping with this example, one of the

central foci of Freek's career was his work as part of The Bench Marks Foundation (BMF). This is a community-oriented, research-based, organisation that monitors ethical investment in Southern Africa. The organisation is affiliated to the South African Council of Churches. The first major study done by the Bench Marks Foundation, focused on Mining in and around Rustenburg, with a primary emphasis on the Anglo Platinum, Impala Platinum, Xtrata and Lonmin mines. While doing the literature review for the research process that culminated in the Policy Gap report, representatives of the Bench Marks Foundation, came across an excellent study (noted above) done by a team of researchers from the North West University on Lonmin. What impressed them about this report was the fact that even though it was funded by Lonmin, it was highly critical of the company's performance with regard to its corporate social responsibility. Prominent in that report was the name of Professor Freek Cronjé (Cronje, Chenga, & Naude, 2005). Members of the BMF decided to set up a working relationship with Professor Cronjé towards ensuring the academic credibility of their research and to assist with peer reviews of the same. Freek proved to be invaluable for this work since he provided structure and focus and led by example in terms of productivity and output.

The Bench Marks Foundation approached Ms. Anne Timms, a community development activist in Potchefstroom and requested that she approach Professor Cronje and set up a meeting. By July 2007, the first Policy Gap was ready. Freek played a central role in editing the report. His contribution and that of his office to "Policy Gap:

A review of the Corporate Social Responsibility Programmes of the Platinum Mining Industry in the North West Province" (Bench Marks Foundation, 2007) helped make this study the success that it was. The impact of this report was enormous (Nicholson 2012) insofar as it began shifting the discourse on corporate behaviour in South Africa and Africa (Cronjé and Reyneke 2015). Evident from his work was that Freek was not just Freek, but that he was a team. That team was comprised of David van Wyk, Suzanne Reyneke, Dr Charity Chenga and at that stage Master's student Johan van Wyk.

After the impact of the Policy Gap, further collaborative research reports resulted in Freek's participation. These included "Policy Gap 3" (Bench Marks Foundation, 2008), "Policy Gap 2, Review of Corporate Social Responsibility Programmes of the Platinum, Coal, Gold and Uranium Mining Sectors in South Africa" (Bench Marks Foundation, 2008) and work on a report on Paladin's proposed Kayelekera mine in Karonga Malawi. This was followed by "Policy Gap 4, Corporate Social Responsibility in the Diamond Mining Industry on the West Coast of South Africa" (Cronje and Van Wyk 2009), in which Freek and David van Wyk collaborated on diamond mining on the West Coast of South Africa. During this period, Van Wyk recalls spending time during the long drives to Honnekliip Bay, the Richtersveld and Alexander Bay discussing mining, music, rugby, social theory and philosophy, African politics, good times, the environment and what not. The final report on "Policy Gap 5" was published in 2009, entitled "Corporate Social Responsibility in the Diamond Mining Industry in Botswana: De Beers, Botswana and the control of a country" (Van Wyk and Cronje 2009). Never one to shy away from his academic responsibility, Freek was called upon to defend the findings from this report after the mining corporation lodged a complaint with the North West University. Van Wyk recalls how his respect for Freek only deepened in his defence of the report. The report had a seismic impact on Botswana's politics and society, and became one of the most "Googled" reports ever published by the Bench Marks Foundation (Freedom House 2011: 99). Additional research projects included those undertaken on behalf of the Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa (NIZA) (including Cronje, Chenga, Van Wyk and Modjadji Trading 2008) as well as the noted collaborations with the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), Le Cadre de Concertation (CdC) (Goodland, Cronje and Tshombe 2010), Standard Bank

South Africa (Cronje, Van Wyk, Rothmann and Reyneke 2009) and the BMF, amongst others.

During this time John Capel (Chairperson of the BMF) and Freek began discussing several ideas. One was the creation of a Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility at the North West University which would focus on teaching Master's and Doctoral Students. In addition, those affiliated with such a Centre would also publish articles and would conduct CSR research from a pro-poor and pro-community perspective. They also felt the need to add to (and potentially change) the nature of the Policy Gap research reports and methodology. They started working on "Policy Gap 6, Communities in the Platinum Minefields, A Review of Platinum Mining in the Bojanala District of the North West Province: A Participatory Action research Approach" (Van Wyk and Cronje 2012).

The objective of the research was to start doing research with communities affected by mines and to use the research report as a platform for supporting and strengthening community organisations and developing community monitors. The second objective was to assess whether there was any improvement in the corporate social responsibility activities of mines since the first Policy Gap report five years previously. The report was published on 14 August 2012, two days before the Marikana Massacre (Van Wyk and Cronjé 2012). It warned that things on the Platinum mine fields had not improved and was about to erupt in potential chaos. The launch took place at the office of the South African Human Rights Commission. The report was followed by communities beginning to set up their own activist and advocacy structures in the Rustenburg area followed by mine affected communities setting up Mine Affected Communities United in Action (MACUA). The work of the BMF saw change not only in the discourse about Corporate Social Responsibility in Mining but also saw a proliferation of civil society's interest in mining impacts on communities – an outcome due in large to Freek's invaluable contributions. During this time, Freek, together with Johann van Wyk, was also centrally involved in assisting with the updating Bench Marks Foundation's founding document. He actively participated in the discussions on the intended Community Grievance Mechanism, the planned BMF Community Ratings Agency and the creation of an Independent Community Fund that communities could draw on to source their own expertise in their engagement with corporations and in defence of their human and environmental rights.

Freek was a calm and relaxed person, who always saw the humour in any situation. We never saw him angry and he never complained about anything. He was a polymath in the classical sense, professor, and lecturer, mentor, academic leader, father, husband, activist, sportsman, and friend. He excelled in everything he engaged in and exemplified the importance of mentorship through continuous support, empowerment, and guidance to colleagues and students alike. Through his humility, he may have thought himself invisible to others – but this made him even more visible and respected. Always friendly, accommodating and always challenging. We have lost a friend and a colleague. A gap has opened which will be difficult to fill. We will miss you "out Freek..."