

Basic rights for communities surrounding Sishen Mine are lacking

3 June 2015

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Neither the rights of the environment, nor the human rights of individuals, are protected by mining legislation around Sishen mine in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa, says the Bench Marks Foundation in its latest report released in Johannesburg this morning.

Although current legislation requires that mining operations be located a minimum of 500 metres away from community housing, research conducted by the organisation shows that this distance is still too close. Housing that is within this distance clearly affects the health and wellbeing of residents.

Bench Marks Foundation and the Bench Marks Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) at the North-West University's report, entitled 'Floating or Sinking' Social Licence to Operate (SLO): Kumba Iron Ore Limited, investigates the strengths and weaknesses in Anglo American's Kumba Iron Ore mining company's policies in its efforts to gain and maintain a Social Licence to Operate

Community members interviewed during the research reported that, apart from being unsightly, regular blasts from mining operations create problems from the shock waves that follow, and dust-related health problems.

Although the mine has installed a dust-monitor which indicates that the dust isn't harmful, the community is convinced that the dust levels are too high as they are consistently ill. Residents would also like the mine to install a siren which must be activated prior to blasting procedures.

In addition, in terms of natural resources, community members

report severe adverse impacts from mining operations to the trees, water and wildlife in the area.

Researchers noted that the trees close to communities surrounding the mining operations had developed a reddish tint, but the same trees further away from the mining operations have retained their natural green tint.

Farmers in the area complained that the water levels have dropped consistently since mining and that the river in Debeng last carried surface water 30 years ago. A farmer interviewed reported having to receive up to R200,000 per annum from the mining company for the loss of access to reed used as cattle fodder due to a drop in water level.

“We find it unacceptable that the mines do not value the loss of livelihood of the black and coloured population whose land they occupy, by compensating them accordingly too,” says Professor Freek Cronjé, Director of the Bench Marks Centre.

“We also found that the townships where the blacks and coloureds live often lack water supply and in the area of a newly self-established camp where most migrant workers and work-seekers and their families live, toilet and water facilities do not exist”.

Cronjé said that researchers found that mining operations have disturbed the wildlife in the area and communities are being plagued by snakes and baboons and their natural habitat has been invaded by the mining operations.

“Certain other basic rights such as decent living conditions, a potable water supply, toilet facilities, and the upkeep of facilities are lacking.

“We call on Kumba to take account of health insurance for both its employees as well as local community members in view of the mine operations’ impact on the health of the surrounding community members.

“Most inhabitants near to the mines do not have medical aid and the health service infrastructure in the area is inadequate.

Says Cronjé: “We also call on the South African Human Rights Commission to investigate what we believe is a denial or abuse of water rights in the Debeng area. As far as the Bench Marks Foundation is concerned, water rights are a human rights issue.

“The proximity to mines as well as the housing and living out allowances should be addressed by the South African Human Rights Commission as it contributes to the impoverishment of the community”.

The report commends Kumba for its commitment to invest in the local communities and notes that the company’s Social and Labour Plans and Policies were mainly built around the stipulations and demands of the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act and the Mining Charter.

This accounts for the gaps in obtaining all stakeholders’ consent and approval which will also have an effect on the company achieving a Social Licence to Operate.

The report is the tenth edition of the Bench Marks Foundation’s Policy Gap series. For more information on the Bench Marks Foundation, or to view the reports and other information the organisation has regarding the Kumba research, go to www.bench-marks.org.za.

Amongst others, the Bench Marks Foundation calls for a new relationship between corporations, communities and ecosystems; equal participation of stakeholders and those most affected by the activities of corporations in the decision-making processes of companies; preservation and protection of the environment for present and future generations, and respect for the dignity of every person and human rights policies based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

