

Bench Marks criticise Copperbelt standards

The Bench Marks Foundation (BMF) has released a report that says some mining companies on the Zambian Copperbelt are operating with lower standards compared to their parent companies in developed countries.

The Bench Marks Foundation is an independent organisation monitoring corporate performance in the field of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

And Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries including Zambia have been urged to unify mining legislation to avoid some countries becoming pollution havens for unscrupulous mining corporations.

A BMF research report on corporate social responsibility in the Zambian mining industry said there were a number of companies that operated with much lower standards in terms of health, safety and environmental protection than their parent companies were doing in more developed countries.

The report urged companies to apply the same standards of health, safety and pollution prevention as elsewhere in the world. It also said that there were serious concerns about the legislative environments within which mining corporations operate throughout SADC region. Furthermore, the report said in the divide and rule rush for mineral investments some African countries could fall pray to abuse and exploitation.

It further suggested that SADC Governments must develop the capacity to have control of mineral resources in processing, manufacturing and marketing the minerals that were currently being undertaken beyond national borders.

The report however said Zambia's mining legislative framework was well structured, comprehensive and thorough, but lacked implementation due to inadequate manpower to enforce various pieces of legislation and to realise the objectives of various departments.

According to BMF, the implementation and monitoring of policies were problematic as a result, serious environmental and social problems existed through out the country.

The report indicated health, safety and labour issues as major threats to the mining environment and presented huge challenges to the industry. "For the industry to be successful in the long term, it needs to obtain the support of the communities in which it operates," the report read in part.

The report indicated that sound relationships and cooperation between the different stakeholders including mining companies, civil society, Government and communities were essential for the sustainability of the mining sector in Zambia.

The research on corporate social responsibility and the extractive industry in southern Africa is a research project of the BMF in collaboration with the Peace, Principles and Participation Network covering Zambia, Angola, DRC, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa.

There is more on the foundation here: <http://www.bench-marks.org.za/>