

Walking together for change

Bench Marks Foundation
Outcome Harvesting Process
2022



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Overview of the work of the Bench Marks Foundation

The broad objective of the work of the Bench Marks Foundation is to hold corporations and government accountable in the fight for human rights and social justice and in that way to contribute to bettering the lives of mining affected communities. The Bench Mark Foundation specifically seeks to address the lack of accountability and corporate impunity and the weak regulatory environment in defending the human rights of communities living adjacent to mines.

The Bench Marks Foundations focus is on empowering communities to conduct investigations, to engage with power holders, and to build community strength and organizational strength in communities. The empowerment process is aimed at enabling communities to engage the industry on a level footing to address the impact mining has on their health, livelihood and their natural resources and to fight for social and economic justice for women and men in their communities.

The underlying assumption of the approach of the Bench Marks Foundation is that constant community pressure and engagement of power holders, combined with solid research outputs, an engagement of provincial and national level stakeholders and building alliances with other civil society actors in South Africa and on the continent, will contain the omission of human rights violations by corporations and allow for a continued striving for social and economic justice.

In 2022 the Bench Marks Foundation has been working with 60 community monitors and 10 community facilitators. The gender split is 50 / 50. The majority of monitors are based in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West provinces. The remaining monitors are in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal. The monitors and facilitators work in 38 communities and represent 30 organisations.



In 2022, Bench Marks also continued its work with 160 rights holders in different communities such as Mokopane, Skimming Leruleng, Mogalakwena Mining Communities, Riverlea, Snakepark, Madithlokwa, Marikana, Bapitseng, Bagkatla ba Kgafela, and with Communities against Mining on the Westrand and in Geluksdal on the Eastrand.

The Outcome Harvesting Process

In 2022, the Bench Marks Foundation decided to try out an Outcome Harvesting Process, to learn from programme implementers in communities, to be able to document the changes that their programme participation created for themselves and to identify the changes they were able to create in their communities as a result of their work in Bench Marks programmes. A number of interviews were conducted with monitors and facilitators and people that received support from the research team or through the problem-solving approach.

The interviews are documented in this publication. Before the individual voices are presented an overview of changes created at individual level and in communities are presented. At the end some programmatic learnings made on the basis of the interviews are presented.

In the narratives community activists often refer to Bench Marks which stands for the Bench Marks Foundation.

Overview of changes created on:

A personal level for monitors and facilitators



In communities where monitors and facilitators are active



Promise Mabilo

Monitor in: Emalahleni,
Mpumalanga

Monitor since: 2014

Activities I engaged in:

- Writing of alerts and educating my community.
- We are looking for issues and stories as monitors that are critical, that we want to be addressed. Sometimes we find that there are limited spaces to go forward, maybe to approach the government or to take them to court if nothing is happening.
- During the pandemic, I was facilitating dialogues around GBV with children.

"Being part of the monitoring school really opened my eyes. It added value to me as an activist."

"The Bench Marks Foundation is doing great work with communities. The writing of stories creates a very clear picture of what is happening. Even if you are not around the area, by reading you see. And the stories take you to communities where you have never been."

The posts are giving monitors strength to say, "We are writing but what I'm writing will at the end of the day bring justice to my community."

Some people said: "We see your stories on the Tunatazama website. We want to follow that story. Can you bring us more people who are suffering from that?"



Changes that the participation in the community monitoring school created for me:

- I'm grateful for being part of this monitoring school. There are a lot of skills that I've learned. I learned not to write full pages but to be detailed on every important point that you want people to hear and know. And I learnt documenting - making sure that we document every detail of what was happening - it helped a lot and it is very important. I learnt to look at things closely and assess them, even little things that people don't really notice. I now quickly pick up hotspots in my community. The three questions that I learned are core: What is the problem? Why is it happening? Who is causing that problem? If you apply those questions you will get to the core of each problem.
- For me as an individual and a leader in my community a lot has changed. The writing of stories, giving pamphlets or booklets back into our communities, it helped a lot, especially regarding the air pollution and health issues. Having the stories publicly on a website created big change.
- All the stories support what we are fighting for as an organisation in a high priority area, declared as such in 2007, with very high air pollution.

Changes I created through my engagement with the community monitoring school:

- We were having engagements with different departments and industries around our grievances. We wanted proper air monitoring systems. We felt this would show how they were destroying what we as people living close to mines and coal fired power stations have. Our dialogue was taking long. There was no change. We had one meeting, two meetings, three meetings but it was still the same.
- The posting of our stories has led to more journalists being interested in those stories. They came in numbers. We were having a lot of interviews. In the end there were a lot of stories. Not only stories told by Promise but stories from different people affected by air pollution in the area.
- We ended up going to court with the deadly air case and we won the case. We are happy that we won the case and there is change, but the happiness is limited because we don't think that the judgment was harsh enough, considering the suffering people already experienced. As we move towards the just transition, we as communities want to be part of the change; we don't want it to be one sided. We need a fair change.
- We were listening and providing space for young people to express themselves, to speak up on how they experience GBV in their schools, communities and households. With Bench Marks support, we documented their stories in a publication and they made an audio that explains how they see GBV and why we are having GBV in our spaces and communities.

Mark Kayter and Carol Kara

Organisation: Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson of the Riverlea Mining Forum, Gauteng.

Working with Bench Marks since:

Mark got in touch with Bench Marks via the SACC 8 years ago. Carol joined the Riverlea Mining Forum in 2017.

Challenges our community faces:

People getting sick from the mining dust and the toxics contained in the dust:

- Cancer is a big problem in this community and we now understand that it is related to the mine dust.
- We have a lot of people with respiratory conditions and children with cerebral palsy.

Activities we have been engaged in:

- Got a mandate from the community (2000 signatures).
- Weekly radio shows raising awareness on mining issues.
- Weekly meetings with Bench Marks.

"If it wasn't for Bench Marks, I don't think we would have achieved what we achieved so far."

"Bench Marks have helped us by asking the right questions and by guiding us."

"Without this knowledge the mining companies would have run circles around us, because of the technicalities they use in their reports."

"If another company would come in tomorrow, we would know exactly what to look for and which questions to ask."

Changes that our engagement with Bench Marks has created for us:

- People know more; people are aware. The community feels empowered and more connected through the Bench Marks support.
- The provision of information through Bench Marks and the linkage to other communities like Marikana and Xolobeni have been very meaningful. Bench Marks even created connections with communities that share similar problems on the continent and even as far as in Latin America.
- One thing that we have learnt from Bench Marks is that, not everybody is going to agree with you. Bench Marks prepared us that mining companies make promises around jobs to get community buy-in, but actually most of the time they come with their own work force. Now people have learnt: don't trust the mining companies. They don't deliver on what they promised.

Changes that we created through our engagement with Bench Marks in our community:

- Bench Marks has given us sound advice all along, but the final decision of how we approach things lies with us. We weigh up which one is the better option for the community.
- Bench Marks gave us knowledge of technical documents and around Social and Labour plans. When we had our first meeting with DRD Gold, the report they gave to us was so technical. Bench Marks broke it down for us in layman's terms so that we can understand it and how it will affect us. They also explained to us the background of mining operations, which information to source and how to bring all together. They encouraged us to get all documents in black and white so that we can hold mining companies to account and where necessary contest their operations. About a month ago, Bench Marks helped us to contest a water use license granted to a company that was silting in areas where our people live.
- We formed Sehlahla 68 to empower and employ! We don't want the mining companies to come with their own contractors and people from the community stand outside and look on. Whenever we talk to the mining companies we ask what are the opportunities for the communities to be involved. Recently the boundary wall closed to the mine site collapsed. We confronted the mining company and were eventually able to provide a job opportunity for a small start-up company from the community, through our cooperative Sehlahla 68, to fix the boundary wall.



"We are very grateful, appreciative and fortunate to have received Bench Marks support."



Charles van der Merwe and Cedrick Orttel



"I was just a normal person, walking in the dust, inhaling the dust, swimming in the dam, just covering my eyes - until I met with Bench Marks."

"I have become a community leader and I enjoy it."

"Because of what I am doing, the people of Riverlea call me the Mayor of Riverlea. They are very open to talk to me." Bench Marks made me a better person. I think I even became a better husband.

"The constitution states that everyone has the right to live in a clean and healthy environment that is not harmful to their health. This is what Bench Marks is standing for. The government is failing us but it's like Bench Marks fell in love with the constitution. They came with all those changes and empowered us. I'm grateful that we have an opportunity today to say thank you."

Organisation: Riverlea Mining Forum and Sehlahla 68.

Working with Bench Marks since:

Charles since 2017 through the Waiting to Inhale Study; Cedrick since 2020.

Challenges our community faces:

- The amount of toxic waste in the water and the air.
- Zama Zamas who are digging under our homes, breaking the structures, and they come into the community, buy liquor and increase prostitution.
- Struggles with mining companies.
- Unemployment.

Activities I have been engaged in:

- The Riverlea Mining Forum branched off from the Riverlea Community Forum.
- We support Bench Marks analysis work like water testing or soil testing.
- We collect information on the number of people suffering from cancer and other illnesses.
- I serve, aid and give back to my community even though I have not actually taken much.
- I speak to school children about environmental issues, strengthen their general knowledge, motivate them and give them different exposure.

Changes that the engagement with Bench Marks has created for us:

- For me it all started with my attendance of the Alternative Mining Indaba in Cape Town. Through Bench Marks I got exposure to training workshops and learnt a lot about environmental issues
- Bench Marks connected us and set us up. I have met people from Limpopo and Mpumalanga. This is what I value the most.
- Bench Marks saw something in me that I never saw I had. They pushed me to achieve. I was introduced to the Gauteng Water Caucus. I am now one of two representatives. I know now how to test water properly and we were able to contest the testing done by the city.

Changed that we created through our engagement with Bench Marks in our community:

- We created awareness in our community around toxins around us.
- Through our work we got rid of the finger pointing in our community and strengthened the community spirit. There is also more openness now amongst community members towards foreigners selling in the community.
- The changes we have created are visible. For example, fewer people die because we now have oxygen to provide to them in times of need, and the water and the dust levels are tested regularly.
- The school we are supporting also understands our work now.

"I am a floor worker and I am an activist."

"I serve, aid and give back to my community even though I have not actually taken much. And I am not afraid to educate."

"The Bench Marks Foundation actually deserves even more credit than what communities are giving them now."



Mpho Tjale, Margaret Molomo and

Monitors in: Mokopane, Limpopo

Monitors since: Mpho since 2018,; Margaret since 2015, Rebecca since 2022

Organisations we represent:

- Mogalakwena Concerned and Affected Communities (MCAC) (Legal support and administration) and Mokopane Task Team (Spokesperson), Mokopane Development Resource Forum (instilling good ethical values in communities, helping them to remember their own value to counteract social ills.

"I am a social and political activist."

"Bench Marks has helped us in so many ways. Even now in 2022 we are still working with them a lot, with litigation cases, money for transport when communities are protesting or when we want to network with other communities far from Mokopane."



"I am crying for the land! Some of our cattle are dying. Our donkeys our sheep. It's a mess. Where there is a mine there is hell. This is what sometimes doesn't let me sleep. We now take our animals up to the mountains but it is not safe for me to go there. I am afraid we are fighting a losing battle."

"There is too much waste. If we do not attend to the waste management problem there is a serious threat to the future of Mogalakwena as the population is even growing bigger. There is rubbish in every corner. Our streets are just toilets."

Challenges our community faces:

- Compliance from the mining companies and poor services from the municipality.
- The river is contaminated with sewage. The small streams leading into this river all carry sewage. And there is no proper sewage system in this area. Where the sewage system still exists, the pipes are not well maintained.
- There is also a general problem around management of household waste around all areas of Mogalakwena. The existing system does not extend beyond the township and town. There was a project to address this. Then there was corruption and it got stopped. The municipality and the mine now agreed that the solid waste management infrastructure project will continue. The concern now is whether it will accommodate everyone. The settlements have grown so much since then. We have at least four new extensions.
- The mining operations also decrease the level of our source water. If you want to drill a borehole today you can drill down 150m and you will still not find water. And the water is not clean. You find white particles in it.
- My burning issue is the land. We are having a big problem with our traditional leaders who are selling the land to the mines because they are getting paid by the mine, and then we have to fight them and the mine. As we speak we have just lost our ploughing fields to the mine. Other ploughing fields have already been lost to a housing development project. Combined with climate change, the farming that we grew up with is no longer a possibility to sustain livelihoods. Therefore, people today are now reluctant to go back to farming.
- Our police also don't really know how to open cases on these issues. They ask you a lot of questions and some are getting bribes from the mines.
- Another big challenge is waste management. We had weeks and weeks and weeks of no waste removal from the municipality.
- On the mountain there is a very big open pit where sand is collected every day to maintain the road. The problem is that no one is rehabilitating the land. The municipality says they have an order from DMRE to rehabilitate the land but there is someone now that has the mining rights for this land and the mine now bought the farm land around. The pit is not far from residential areas. In 2020 it rained hard, it was the rainy period, the whole pit filled with water. And our kids went to swim in the muddy water and one child drowned. Someone must take responsibility and rehabilitate that land so it can be used for recreation by locals.

Rebecca Selomo

Activities we have been engaged in:

- We regularly write alerts and submit recommendations of how these issues could be resolved. Our wish is to get the identified issues solved.
- We are five monitors and one facilitator in Mokopane. We do meet regularly. Normally we meet three times in a month. If we are too busy we will meet twice a month.
- I have written a couple of letters to the municipality since 2019 around the sewage problem and have made follow up but they have still not been responded to.
- We plan campaigns like with the sewage. We wanted to go with a small group of people and pour out a few buckets of sewage in front of the municipality building entrance or gate. But our planned protest coincided with a statement from the municipality that 400 plus workers from the municipality were to be retrenched because they were illegally appointed. We did not want to be labeled as a group that is somehow anti other groups. We just said let this pass and once the dust has settled and the new Municipal Mayor has been appointed, we will inform him of the issue and our correspondence since 2019 and give him some days to respond. And if there is no response then we will carry on with our campaign. It's a militant one; we will just stay for a minute or two, but we do also want them to experience the smell people smell all the time.
- We have written to the minister around the water license for the Ivanplaats mine and said if this not sorted we will take them to court. We feel taking people to court is the pressure we need to put once we have engaged everyone and if there is no response. We really need to use the legal route if things don't move.
- We also want the rivers to be rehabilitated. If there is no action on this and the sewage, then we will consider taking them to court to protect the community.

Changes that the participation in the community monitoring school has created for us:

- Since I joined the monitoring school I discovered that South African communities are sort of the same. We all face similar challenges.
- My reporting has strengthened that I know how to decode the core of the issue I am reporting on.
- There is a little bit of hope when we take power holders to court. The Bench Marks Foundation is there to support us.
- Since joining Bench Marks, I don't feel alone as an activist anymore. I can feel the collective support of the monitors.
- Having the monthly newsletters and booklets helps a lot to recruit communities and to get them involved to resolve the problems in solidarity. The newsletters also help us to show that it is not Mpho's or Margaret's problem but that it is a communal issue, and that we are not here to get tenders.
- People understood development differently. In the beginning, people were looking at us and were saying that we are the ones that don't want development because we fight the tribal council and the municipality. Now we are the heroes as environmental activists. We are known worldwide now.

Changes that we created through our engagement with the community monitoring school:

- Our community is starting to be more conscious and aware of the issues that are affecting them. If you raise an issue as a monitor now, they are responsive. Before people used to maybe see an issue but felt that there is nothing they can do about it. Now people understand that there are platforms to challenge those issues.

"The mine is doing whatever they want to do. There are a lot of issues here."

"Eish, there is a lot that is happening and that I could be documenting, but I am challenged at the moment because I have not had a smart phone for the past three months."

"If we don't widen peoples' horizons, they will continue to feel that the conditions they live in are just normal."

"I would like to be capacitated even further on the legality of mining issues and around the land questions. It gives us strength to know that we can approach the issues for the better of the communities."

Elton Thobejane and Katlego Malesa

Monitor in: Sekhukhune Combined Mining Affected Communities (SCMAC), Sekhukhune, Limpopo.

Monitor since: Elton 2014; Katlego 2015.

Challenges our community faces:

- There are too many! Like water, non-adherence to the Social and Labor Plans by the mines, unemployment, the management and administration of community trusts.

Activities I engaged in:

- Writing of alerts. Action voices was the platform that brought us as activists from different communities together. When we are together at meetings we exchange how we handle our identified challenges – this is where we share about our approaches.
- Holding the mine to account: creating jobs, investing in renewable energy and fulfilling their SLP obligation even during a time when they were under care and maintenance.
- We worked with Amnesty International on a research report around water and SLPs. Through that cooperation, Amnesty International was able to raise the issues contained in the report at the Anglo American AGM in London, to make them aware what is happening.
- We said we are not going to rely on Amnesty and decided to also organise and picket. We picketed in a number of mines, captured those moments and sent them to the AGM via the London Mining Network.
- We also protested more broadly and got support from Bench Marks. About 5000 people participated in the protest march. We even organized a motorcade from SCMAC offices to the shaft. We also took the protest to the Anglo American office in Polokwane.
- We were told that as a result of the picketing and the march the shares of Anglo American went down by 32%.
- The work is challenging. Sometimes Elton and I, we are in big trouble. We have challenges of security again and again. In those situations, we need to go as far away from our homes as possible. We actually would need security ourselves and wanted to do additional security training to deal with surveillance to protect monitors.

“We reached a point where we had learnt what we needed to learn and decided to see what else we could do.” “There is a lot of trust between us and the community.”



Changes that the participation in the community monitoring school created for us:

- At the beginning we did not know anything about activism. Through the Bench Marks monitoring school, we learnt that whenever you see something that is wrong you have to stop and capture it. We now know how to identify issues in the communities, capturing the evidence how to bring them out and keep the information up to date.
- But we also realised that reporting is not enough. Something needed to follow to create change. The question was: How do you solve the problems that you find? The Bench Marks IPSS training has really assisted us as community activists with knowledge and skills around identifying and solving of problems. We know now who to involve for addressing them.
- In the past, whenever we reported an issue, we expected Bench Marks to come and support us in sorting it and link us to lawyers. We then took on that responsibility ourselves. We as communities wanted to create change ourselves.
- In 2018 we started SCMAC, based on the learnings we made at Bench Marks, and we moved to focus on the work of SCMAC exclusively. It was time for growth and for taking things into our own hands. The monitoring school had given us the skills to move on and grow our organisation. We formed our own monitoring group with Bench Marks support. We now meet once a month and the group also focuses on organizing. This year we even doubled the number of monitors to 40. We are aiming for monitors across the whole platinum belt who are not only supporting one organisation. We are engaging different organisations around this bigger vision of movement building on the Belt.

Changes that we created through our engagement with the community monitoring school:

- In the past we used to report issues to power holders like lodge a complaint at the mine, and followed up and nothing happened but now we are being heard. Now when we raise an issue it is attended to. It doesn't guarantee a positive outcome but they have realised the need to respond because of the consequence of not addressing our concerns.

Katlego Malesa

Organisation: Sekhukhune Combined Mining Affected Communities (SCMAC), Sekhukhune, Limpopo

Focus on GBV since:

We started focusing on GBV as SCMAC in 2020 after a man in the area killed his 4 children. It was not the first incidence. A boyfriend had killed his girlfriend in the same area before.

Challenges our community faces:

- We live in rural areas and people here do not understand gender-based violence and sexual harassment. Many women still think it is alright for anyone to touch them wherever they want.
- We still have cultures and norms in the villages where a lady would be abused without noticing that she is being abused. Or if a woman is married and if there were family negotiations involved she feels she just has to keep quiet and accept because she is married.
- We also have situations where a husband is forcing himself on a woman just because he is a husband.
- We even encounter situations where children as young as four years old have been sexually abused by their father.
- LGBTQI is also an issue. People are afraid to come out because of societal perceptions.
- Women in mining are still being harassed at work and underground. They are often scared to apply for certain posts as someone from Management or HR will say, to get this promotion I need you to sleep with me.

Activities I have been engaged in:

- We decided to start working with the women whose children got killed to understand what happened.
- We then went on to speak to other women to see if they are experiencing similar things. We found a lot of abusive situations and step by step more and more women opened up to speak about their experiences. People opened up and asked, Can I come to you for us to be able to talk?
- As an organisation, we got support from social workers and Home Based Care workers and created safe spaces for these conversations.
- Home Based Care workers were also able to identify women affected by GBV.
- We also speak to schools and tribal authorities and teach about GBV.
- We also run support groups at SCMAC. Women used to come to us once a month but we then realised that the traveling is too expensive for them. We actually need to develop a schedule and have village-based training and support groups.

Are women affected differently by mining than man?

- Yes, for example around the issue of water. Women need water for cooking, washing, bathing. Accessing water is very difficult for us. Before mining came we relied on nearby rivers and dams, but since mining came all of them are dried up. The next stream that provides us with water is 13 kms away. On the way, they encounter challenges of rape and harassment and it takes much more time to get water.
- Unrehabilitated mines also pose a challenge as women have to make sure every time that their children don't go near the pits. You have to watch your kids closely every time to make sure your kids are safe.



Changes that your engagement has created:

- When we teach people about gender-based violence and sexual harassment, they are opening up and gain the confidence to talk. We are creating a space where people don't feel alone with their experiences.
- People are giving us feedback and want more engagement.

"People were not coming out of the darkness. They were just holding back with issues that were hurting them in their own space and in their work place, but since we went to them and made them aware that if this and this is happening you are being abused or harassed, we are seeing changes."

I now get calls: "When are you coming to the clinic to teach people about gender-based violence?" If you get this kind of feedback, you know that change is happening. This also encourages me as a person and us as an organisation.

Mmabore Mogashoa

Monitor in: GaMogashoa, Limpopo.

Monitor since: 2018.

Challenges my community faces:

- Access to water
- The status of our roads
- Unemployment
- Being under traditional leadership is still a challenge in terms of creating change.

Activities I have been engaged in:

- I work together with two other monitors in the area.
- We meet on zoom and exchange.
- Once a quarter we meet in person.
- I organise events or go to community meetings to raise awareness around mining.
- I share the newsletters and they always get finished.
- I am also involved in capacity building for artists.
- Currently I am translating the vernacular text from a targeted investigation another monitor has undertaken.

"I got enlightened, I was not aware of the challenges mining can create."

"Today I am empowered and brave enough to challenge people in positions of power."



Changes that the participation in the community monitoring school has created for me:

- A lot has changed. Everything I do now, started with Bench Marks. It created exposure to other platforms for me. I got enlightened, I was not aware of the challenges mining can create.
- Today I am empowered and brave to challenge people in positions of power.
- I have become a respected speaker and I get regular invitations as a motivational speaker.
- I published a book "Bohwa Bja Rena" meaning our heritage, with 24 chapters. I teach people about our language, attire, stones and food. It's like a campaign. I also focus on climate change and mining. Without my work as a monitor I would not have been able to do that. It has created a focus for me and taught me to look deeper into problems I see.
- It helps me when we as monitors exchange with one another and that we understand each other.
- Through posts from other monitors we realise that certain things are also happening in our area, but before we never thought that they were a problem.

Changes that I created through my engagement with the community monitoring school:

- People trust me here and I share what I have learnt with others, for example, as a motivational speaker at schools.
- People in my area didn't know what the dangers of living next to a mine are. When we went to meetings, where the prospective mine is discussed, I used to be the only one who was against the mine because I understand the dangers and I raise awareness around it. We know some people are going to benefit when the mine comes. Through my awareness raising more and more people understand the danger of mining activities to our health and heritage now. I have encouraged others to speak up.

Francina Nkosi

Facilitator in: Lephalale, Limpopo.

Monitor since: 2015. I was first part of the monitors in Sekhukhune and then began my work in Lephalale through Waterberg Women Advocacy Organisation (WWAO)

Challenges my community faces:

- GBV, sewage spills, ash from the mines and shortage of water: the big mining projects consume a lot of water, while communities are really struggling to access water.

Activities I have been engaged in:

- I have 4 monitors working with me. I have mentored and trained them on how to write impactful reports.
- We have regular telephonic conversations. I invest in building strong relationships with them, even if we do not meet that often because we live far apart.
- During Covid I started a group on GBV, because the rate of GBV at that time was very high. I was working with 10 young girls. They wrote poems, did posters and we played. I was teaching them while playing with them. I learnt that if you level with the young ones they will open up. I also learnt not to be harsh but to try and bring them into conversations slowly. My group was featured at the cover of the Bench Marks GBV monitors booklet that was printed at that time.

"If you have a constituency or organisation backing you, you will have a stronger voice to speak up than when you are just an individual."

"I'm part of WWAO. I give back to it. I don't own it. I want to leave a legacy. I want WWAO to be cherished and recognised for many years to come. I want people to take it forward from here. I will be happy knowing that I have changed someone's life for the better."

"We have women and girls being raped every day. For us it is not so much about toyi toying but about creating change in their lives by addressing the education and health questions."

"As WWAO we also fought for a community clinic. We wrote letters, sat with the district, negotiated with Eskom, and against all adversity we managed to make it happen."

"And we want to decrease dependency by advocating for backyard gardens. We want every woman to have a backyard garden. If they do not have seeds we will provide them with seeds. If we have land and our hands we should not go hungry."

Changes that the participation in the community monitoring school has created for me:

- It has changed a lot for me. I learnt how to write a story. I had and still have passion for telling people about what is happening in my community.
- It strengthened me as a leader and helped me to build up other community leaders. Being a facilitator has been a real growth for me. I didn't even know before that editing is important. Being a facilitator also strengthened my work as an activist.
- Another thing I have learnt is to give yourself time to understand the issues you are investigating properly. "It is like putting a puzzle together. When you have 100 pieces it is difficult to get an idea. It's about choosing 10, looking at them in detail, explaining them well and in simple terms, and then putting them all together again."

Changes that I created through my engagement with the community monitoring school:

- I created unity, togetherness and solidarity, a sense of working together for a better community. People away from doing things in silos.
- The change I can see is having passionate activists, journalists and researchers in my community.
- We had one girl in our GBV group, 14 years old. She started drinking and going out with boys. We tried to show her and let her know that she was missing out from quality time with the group, and that she still had time to be a grown up. We managed to get her back. She is herself again. Collectively we saved one soul.
- I am happy that the sewage spill issue has been resolved, even though the Municipality Manager didn't acknowledge our letters and didn't want to meet us. At least there are no more sewage spillages or blockages in people's homes. But we are not stopping here. We still want to have a proper sewage plant. We want the municipality to understand that they are harming many people, even from neighbouring countries, by polluting Limpopo river. We want to save the river in the long run.
- We are also fighting for women representation in meetings. If women are given a chance to lead, they can lead very well. But before you are given a chance as a woman they will make you smaller. We also stand up for women not being a playground and we are trying to direct the monitors to focus their writing on how women are affected.
- We asked the South African Human Rights Commission in Limpopo to facilitate a dialogue with the Local and District Municipality, SASSA, Departments for Social Development, Water and Sanitation, Labour, Health and Education and SAPS to present our project proposal on taking sewage and turning it into biogas. All saw value in our proposal and suggested a follow-up meeting with managers from the municipality.



Manare Monene

Monitor in: Abbotspoort, Lephalale, Limpopo.

Monitor since: 2022.

Challenges my community faces:

- Water Issues
- Electricity Cuts off
- Waste Disposal.

Activities I have been engaged in:

- I regularly write alerts.
- I work with four monitors under Francina our facilitator.
- Francina is a good leader. She takes time to guide us and strengthen our writing.
- I enjoy interviewing people from the community to support and deepen my alerts.
- Sometimes when another monitor writes an alert that I find interesting, and if my community faces a similar challenge, then I communicate with the other monitor and go to interview people in my community about those issues, to see if they share similar views and to deepen the story.
- We meet once a month and try to meet on zoom in between
- I have been attending community meetings focusing on GBV and how to deal with unemployment

"In this short period of time, the Bench Marks Community Monitoring School has taught me that writing is a skill. Before I would just write for the sake of writing but now I write with understanding and excitement knowing that I'm sharing what is affecting my community with a lot of people".

"The Community Monitoring School opened my eyes. I didn't know which channels to follow to speak up about issues affecting our community but now I know that our local municipality has to be involved."



Changes that the participation in the community monitoring school has created for me:

- I have not seen many changes as I am still very new to the programme, but some things have changed already since I joined the Community Monitoring School. I can feel and see that a lot can be done when we work together, and that the best is yet to come.
- I have learnt that writing stories is very exciting. It builds you as a person.
- The type of writing I learnt from Community Monitoring School is quite different, and I gained the knowledge of mastering that writing style.
- I have learnt that pollution and waste dumps can affect us human beings: like coughing due to air pollution from the mines, and loss of livestock if they choke from swallowing waste such as diapers while grazing.
- I am now able to address issues with community members. They respond back by showing interest in my work, by asking questions, and by sharing how they feel about their surroundings and what concerns them.
- I have also learnt a lot about climate change which I actually had an interest in while I was still at school. Now I'm learning more about it and got even more interested.

Changes that I created through my engagement with the community monitoring school:

- Livestock owners addressed waste disposal with the municipality and the community and shared how the waste dumping affects their livestock. The local municipality has provided containers for dumping but community people were not really using them before, because they didn't know the impact their dumping has. Now the provided containers are used and they get collected every week (Garbage Removal). This has resulted in clean streets.
- There is another change in my community which is not really linked to my work with the community monitoring school, but for us it is significant. There is an internet café now. It is only one but at least there is one. I really wish that small business owners can be supported financially so that they can run more internet cafés and bigger ones to assist even school kids with doing their research and school work, and the community at large for whatever information they require.

Lolo Malatji

Monitor in: Lephalale, Limpopo.

Monitor since: 2021.

Challenges my community faces:

- Waste disposal
- Teenage pregnancy
- Our people lack the skills and resources to establish their business.

Activities I have been engaged in:

- I normally go to our tribal authority every Wednesday to find out what the challenges are, or I take and report issues to them for discussion.
- I also regularly attend our community forum where we discuss challenges that we face as a community, and I get assistance from them in the research and campaigns I do
- The other day we were doing a village clean-up campaign. We also engaged with our municipality. But sometimes even if the municipality agrees they are failing us. After we cleaned up and it's time for the rubbish trucks to come, they will say we didn't have drivers to drive the trucks.
- People do listen to the concerns I raise and they understand the challenges.

"It would be great if we could have more Bench Marks material, like banners to show that we have an organisational backing when we go and do campaigns. And information brochures and pamphlets on specific issues – that would be very helpful for our work."

"It's good if we have a mix of new and follow-up topics for our alerts."



Changes that the participation in the community monitoring school has created for me:

- When I started writing the articles, my English was very poor and my writing skills were very weak, but now I feel I can master the language and the art of writing. I would say it takes four months to become a good writer if you are really motivated.
- The other day I posted about the people that are fishing. That article was recommended for publication. It made me happy because I helped someone who got exposure and follow up interest through my article. I felt I helped him to set up a business.
- Creating changes in other people's lives is a good thing and makes me happy.

Changes that I created through my engagement with the community monitoring school:

- In our village we have a wetland around our households. In our awareness campaigns, we advised people not to litter, because it does not only affect our areas, but through the stream system other areas as well. This behaviour has changed now. There are only a few people left that still litter. We even raised the awareness of the people working for the Community Works Programme. They support the clean-up of the wetlands and pass on the message of no littering.

Moshabi Selowa

Monitor in: Monametse Village, Sekhukhune, Limpopo.

Monitor since: 2012.

Challenges my community faces:

- **Water Issues:** We are getting water from a borehole that was drilled by the mine, but sometimes there is no water, or not enough water for everyone from the location. We all have been allocated 5000 litres of water from jojo tanks for 42 families that were relocated in 2007. The toilets often do not have enough pressure from the borehole water for flushing.
- The road is also a challenge. It is still gravel and constructed by the rubble from the mine shaft, which is affecting the people in their houses because it is very dusty and noisy. In terms of safety, it is also a challenge as there is no platform to cross over the road and the traffic is heavy. Two children were even hit by a mining truck and we are scared that this would happen again.
- Illegal mining is also a big issue. It is happening right in front of the mountain (see picture).
- There is also a lot of community politics and division that is created by the mine. The mine often starts to mobilise those that don't understand what is going on, when they are challenged by activists. There are a lot of people that still don't know that they have a right to



"I am saying thanks to Bench Marks. Let them keep up the good work."

"I gained a lot of skills through the monitoring school, like writing and stakeholder engagement, and Bench Marks is coaching me in the work I do."

"I can manage a case on my own terms now, like writing a letter or an email or facilitating an engagement, but not knowing how to link the matter with the right Act or the law. I would still like to get more legal training."



Activities I have been engaged in:

- We were doing a lot of things: I started to focus on information sharing and then moved to teaching on how to write stories and then we plan campaigns.

Changes that the participation in the community monitoring school has created for me:

- Personally, I have gained a lot. I know how to write a super report now.
- I have done a targeted investigation recently around the open cast mine, its impact, and the lacking compensation for the local farmers and community.
- I push a lot of things even though sometimes I have not enough skills.

Changes that I created through my engagement with the community monitoring school:

- Our houses were seriously cracked. We managed to engage the mine. They were taking us from pillar to post. Through the alerts, other people heard about our story and linked us to a lawyer. Eventually, with his help, we achieved that the damaged houses of the relocated families were rebuilt. It took three years from engaging a lawyer to change actually taking place.
- We have seen some changes, even though we are still continuing to fight with the mine to resolve other grievances, like relocating the graves and compensating us for the land that used to belong to us.



Victoria Makgoo

Monitor in: Sekhukhune, Limpopo.

Monitor since: 2017.

Challenges my community faces:

- People are dumping waste; especially at the rivers there are so many dirty things.
- Unemployment is a problem.

Activities I have been engaged in:

- We are two monitors in the area; we communicate via WhatsApp and we meet once a month.
- I regularly write alerts, for example, about the waste, and the idea is to approach the municipality on the basis of the alerts.
- We focus on environmental issues and created awareness around climate change. I also participated in water testing.
- I engaged the municipality around the road that needs fixing. Then they told me to go and talk to the mine.
- I participated in a strike by the community around the reopening of the mine, which closed in 2016 and is currently under maintenance. There are different proposals of how the mine could contribute to creating jobs and generating renewable energy. Even as an environmental NGO, we support the reopening because we believe it can be done in a responsible way.

"The dumpsite is very dangerous. I can't even go there on my own. They dump lots of things there, for example diapers and tiles."

"We don't want money. We want a future and something better for our community. We don't need money from them."

"Sometimes it is still difficult to get the whole community involved. They will discover things after they happened."



Changes that the participation in the community monitoring school has created for me:

- I have received three certificates from Bench Marks since I started as a monitor. One for being a monitor, one for photo journalism and one for general programme participation.
- Bench Marks has given me a chance to engage with a lot of different people, stakeholders and the community.
- Some other environmental issues I was not aware about but learnt about them through my engagement.

Changes that I created through my engagement with the community monitoring school:

- In 2021 we did a targeted investigation into waste in Sekhukhune. Bench Marks turned this into a publication. The director of our NGO, Sekhukhune Environmental Justice Network, managed to source extra funding from Act Ubumbano to start implementing the action plan we developed as part of the targeted investigation. As a result, we had a meeting with the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism two weeks ago, and next month we are going to run an environmental day. They will be with us on that day. We will be cleaning the streets next to our office that is leading to the mine. The department has acknowledged the importance of our work and committed to supporting our work. In the solution, we are proposing the idea is to get youngsters involved in the clean up and create longer-term employment opportunities for them, through a cooperation between the mine and government. The Department now also often calls us to check whether this or this is considered the right approach from a community perspective.

France Styles Moseo

Monitor in: Shongwane,
Lephalale, Limpopo.

Monitor since: 2022.

Challenges my community faces:

- Unemployment
- Service delivery issues
- No primary school access for the 700 households of my village. The kids all travel 12 km to school every day.



Activities I have been engaged in:

- I write regular alerts and we exchange as monitors in Lephalale.
- I participated in a campaign around GBV in our village, organised by Waterberg Women Association and other local leaders.

Changes that the participation in the community monitoring school has created for me:

- I learnt a lot of things already. I can stand up for my community now. I am reporting and then I wait for the report back. I am enjoying my work around the village.

Changes that I created through my engagement with the community monitoring school:

- We had a problem with water in our community. I reported on it and now it is fixed and we are all enjoying water again.
- There was another unfinished road project in our village. After I reported on it, our municipality came to look at it and we discussed the problems and there is now progress.
- After writing the alerts I usually consult with the municipality. The alerts really create pressure for them and they engage, and after reporting I do follow ups.

Christina Magobye

Monitor in: Sefikile Village,
North West.

Monitor since: 2019.

Challenges my community faces:

- Unemployment, High crime rate and bad roads are issues that my community face daily.

Activities I have been engaged in:

- I have been writing regular alerts
- During the pandemic, I focused on Gender Based Violence. I worked with young school kids to understand the impact GBV has on them and on society, and formed a GBV team
- I also assisted community members with seeds for planting their own vegetable gardens at home
- I attended a workshop around applying a gender lens to our work.

Changes that the participation in the community monitoring school has created for me:

- Since I joined the school I have gained confidence and I have high self-esteem.

Changes that I created through my engagement with the community monitoring school:

- I have noticed changes amongst other activists. They have developed and are now focused on a problem-solving approach when faced with challenges.
- Community members now recognise that there is someone looking out for their best interest at heart, which is rare in rural communities.
- "Local tuckshop owners didn't contribute when we have funerals in our section or when we asked for donations to develop kids in sports. Now they are contributing. This as a result of our work involving them in addressing problems, especially during the strict restrictions Covid-19.
- "Members of the GBV team first didn't know how to send a message, how to speak out, how to be the voice of the voiceless, but through the campaign we did there was a great development.

"As a GBV survivor the work done as a community monitor helped me on my healing journey. The writing tools helped me when I only had my emotions and could not explain or express myself. I learnt that I was able to help others who have gone through the same to understand that it is not their fault. I also learnt that the mining industry, through their male domination, has an impact on how people behave around their spouses."



Learnings from the Outcome Harvesting Process on strengthening the work of the Bench Marks Foundation

- Written info material and publications on specific issues can strengthen the advocacy work of monitors. Also, a publication on what are the downsides, negative consequences of mine operations would be helpful from the perspective of monitors. They feel that if things are written up by the Bench Marks Foundation, this will increase the monitors' voice and give them more credibility.
- Strengthening information sharing on how mines operate and what the challenges are around their operations. It would strengthen the voice of monitors. So that it is not just me talking as a person. There are some other community members that would like to join us but they don't know enough and we don't have enough of an organisational representation and exchange with other structures.
- More publicity material for the Bench Marks Foundation was also considered being meaningful e.g. small foldable banners that monitors can take with to events where they are representing the Bench Marks Foundation.
- A deeper analysis is needed at community level about the different challenges faced and the stakeholders responsible to see how the monitor could best be assisted. Learning tools, like stakeholder / power holder analysis, to see what can be done and where legal, research expertise or other support outside the realm of the monitor is necessary, would be helpful.
- It would be good if the Bench Marks Foundation can support us in making the issue big and visible. And for us not take writing just as writing, but to ensure that we come up with solutions and ways on how we can get into resolution.
- In some communities, functioning operational structures exist in the form of traditional authorities and community forums, but they are very few. Where they do exist, creating change as a monitor is much easier.
- We need to make sure that we have a proper engagement on the issues we raise. Let's fight, let's picket, let's march because it's a critical issue. I wish that the Bench Marks Foundation can get funds to support people in what they are writing and in their approaches to move towards resolution. In that way we can make sure that we are writing to have justice at the end of the day.
- We also learned that it is important to have clear and direct requirements when identifying monitors and facilitators, to avoid poor performance that may impact on the image of the organisation. Facilitators assisting monitors to understand and deepen their knowledge of how their lives are impacted should be a major role of the programme.
- The Bench Marks Foundation must also consider having systems that make reporting and requesting support for community building or transport costs a bit easier.
- We also need to ensure that the programme is genuinely centred around building communities' confidence to address issues themselves and not be too dependent.

