



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

The Bench Marks
Foundation





The Bench Marks Foundation is a non-profit organisation that promotes corporate accountability, with a particular focus on South Africa's mining and extractives sector. The Foundation combines evidence-based research, community engagement and advocacy to advance social and environmental justice.

The Bench Marks Foundation is guided by the *Principles for Global Corporate Responsibility: Bench Marks for Measuring Business Performance*, an ethical framework developed by a global network of faith-based organisations, including the Bench Marks Foundation. The *Principles* provide a benchmarking tool for assessing responsible corporate conduct across social, economic and environmental dimensions.

VISION

A just and sustainable people-centred world that reflects the restoration of human dignity, freedom, and self-determination for all.

MISSION

To support the agency of communities through research, advocacy, media, collaboration, and capacity building—empowering them to hold government and corporations accountable for upholding human rights, environmental sustainability, and sustainable livelihoods.

VALUES

Accountability

Integrity

Ethical Behaviour

Tolerance

Solidarity

Equality

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David van Wyk



Olebogeng Motene

CONTEXT

The global energy transition is reshaping the mining industry, with rising demand for critical minerals. Africa holds around 30% of the world's resources required for low-carbon technologies, including significant shares of cobalt, manganese, and platinum group metals. While this presents opportunity, it also risks reinforcing the continent's role as a raw material supplier, with limited value addition. The intensifying "critical minerals race" has heightened geopolitical tensions and raised concerns about a new scramble for Africa, with limited benefits for local communities.

In South Africa, slow economic growth continues to constrain progress. Unemployment, inequality, and poverty remain entrenched, alongside persistent challenges of corruption, crime, and infrastructure underinvestment. Although load shedding has eased, energy insecurity persists, particularly for rural and low-income communities.

These conditions disproportionately affect women, youth, and marginalised groups. Many households depend on social grants, reflecting deep socio-economic vulnerability. Gender-based violence and femicide remain at crisis levels, underscoring systemic inequality.

Environmental injustice remains a defining feature of mining-affected communities. Rooted in historical inequities, pollution and environmental degradation continue to disproportionately impact black, rural, and township populations.

Globally, shifting geopolitical dynamics have added uncertainty. Changes in United States trade policy and reduced development funding have strained relations and created funding gaps for civil society. At the same time, South Africa's hosting of the G20 in 2025 provided a platform for engagement on development, though outcomes largely reflected established government positions.

Mining remains central to South Africa's economy and socio-political landscape. The growth of artisanal

and small-scale mining, including informal activities, reflects both regulatory gaps and deepening poverty. Policy uncertainty persists, although recent legislative developments have created opportunities for civil society engagement, including submissions by Bench Marks Foundation through sector coalitions.

Corporate restructuring within the mining sector has raised concerns about accountability and community impact. In response, civil society has mobilised advocacy initiatives to strengthen oversight and engagement.

Against this backdrop, the Bench Marks Foundation (BMF) continues to apply a bottom-up approach grounded in the principle that "the economy begins with the community". Its work focuses on research, community monitoring and training, advocacy, media engagement, and network strengthening. In 2025, this included extensive media engagement, ongoing community capacity building, and targeted research on mining impacts and vulnerable groups in post-mining communities.



PROGRAMMES

In 2025, the Bench Marks Foundation made significant progress across its programme areas, deepening its work with communities while strengthening its research, advocacy and solidarity initiatives.

Our programme approach is grounded in the understanding that the economy begins with the community. This means that the lived experiences, priorities and agency of communities remain central to how we frame, implement and advance our work.

During the year, our interventions focused on four key areas:

1. Research
2. Community monitoring and engagement
3. Media and advocacy
4. Regional and international solidarity



1. RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Research was central to the Bench Marks Foundation's work in 2025, informing advocacy, community engagement and evidence-based action. It deepened understanding of mining-affected communities, strengthened corporate accountability efforts and supported community-led claims for justice.



Policy Gap 14

A key research output during the year was the release of *Policy Gap 14*, which examines Sibanye-Stillwater's environmental, labour and community practices, with a particular focus on the experiences of the Wonderkop community. The report forms part of the Foundation's long-standing *Policy Gap* series, which investigates the conduct of mining companies and the impacts of extractive industries on communities living alongside mining operations.

Drawing on personal testimonies, community engagement and careful investigation, the report highlights the complex and often neglected realities faced by Wonderkop residents. For many years, community members have reported that their voices, concerns and living conditions have been ignored by external stakeholders. The report documents persistent socio-economic hardship, including unemployment, inadequate housing, poor service delivery, environmental degradation, health concerns and declining living standards linked to the proximity of mining activities.

Despite these challenges, the research also highlights the resilience of the Wonderkop community and its continued call for improved engagement, sustainable development and recognition of community rights. The report calls on Sibanye-Stillwater, the local state and other stakeholders to strengthen transparency, responsibility and meaningful dialogue with affected communities.

Policy Gap 14 was widely disseminated, attracted media attention and provided important support for the formal complaint lodged by the Wonderkop community, supported by the Bench Marks Foundation, with the German Federal Office for Economic Affairs and Export Control (BAFA) against BASF and Sibanye-Stillwater. The complaint was officially accepted by BAFA during the reporting period, marking an important step in the community's pursuit of accountability.



Snake Park Research

The Foundation also advanced research into the long-term health and social impacts of mining legacies in Snake Park, Soweto. The study, titled *The Challenges of Caregivers Caring for Children Living with Disabilities and Cerebral Palsy in South Africa's Post-Mining Communities*, examined the socio-economic impacts of historic gold mining, particularly the exposure of communities to mine tailings.

The study highlights the growing health burden in Snake Park, where regular exposure to mine tailings has been associated with health concerns, including disabilities, cerebral palsy and respiratory problems. It focused specifically on the experiences of caregivers of children living with disabilities and cerebral palsy.

A community-based study reached 201 households, supported by focus groups and interviews with caregivers. Most respondents were women, unemployed, and close relatives of children with disabilities.

The research found that caregivers face significant challenges, including limited access to healthcare services, severe financial pressures, stigma, emotional stress, social isolation and difficulties accessing basic services and educational facilities for their children. Although disability grants provide some support, many caregivers remain trapped in a cycle of poverty.

The study calls for comprehensive policy measures to reduce health and social risks, improve access to services, and protect caregivers and impoverished households affected by mine tailings and mining activities more broadly. It also informed the Foundation's engagement with government on the legacy impacts of mining in affected communities.

Other Research Projects

The Foundation continued research and narrative-building on artisanal and small-scale mining, contributing to national debates following the Stilfontein crisis. This work supported a more nuanced understanding of informal mining, moving beyond criminalisation to consider the structural, economic and policy failures that shape the sector.

During the reporting period, the Foundation engaged with academic institutions and researchers, strengthening knowledge exchange and contributing to local and global discussions on mining, accountability and community impacts. These issues were further amplified through an opinion piece published in *Amandla! Magazine*, extending the reach of the Foundation's research and advocacy.

BMF's research and narrative-building on artisanal and small-scale mining encourages a more nuanced understanding of informal mining, moving beyond criminalisation to consider the structural, economic and policy failures shaping the sector.

2. COMMUNITY MONITORING AND ENGAGEMENT



Community Monitoring School

The Community Monitoring School (CMS) remained a central platform for building community-based research, advocacy, and monitoring capacity across mining-affected areas in 2025.

The programme was launched with a five-day facilitators' training in May, bringing together 16 facilitators from six provinces. The training covered research methods, community mapping, targeted investigations, advocacy, media engagement, and ethical facilitation, with a strong emphasis on storytelling and inclusive participation.

This was followed by eight local trainings in June, reaching 55 participants and initiating community-led targeted investigations. Facilitators continued to lead research in their respective areas, culminating in validated reports to support local advocacy.

Overall, CMS reached 59 participants from 19 organisations across six provinces, working in 33 locations within 17 municipalities, coordinated by 16 facilitators. Women constituted approximately 41% of participants, while youth participation stood at around 37%.

Capacity-building continued throughout the year through a combination of in-person and online engagements, including:

- Workshops on gold tailings and environmental justice across the Free State, North West, and Gauteng, with follow-up sessions on mapping,

Key community-led campaigns in 2025

Communities across South Africa are leading the way in defending our environment, livelihoods and dignity.



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community narratives, and monitoring tools

- Online trainings on tailings management standards, artisanal mining, environmental law, and the intersection of gender, mining, and climate change
- Targeted support to community structures such as the Snake Park Cerebral Palsy Forum
- Participation by key community members in partner initiatives, including Khanya College's Winter School and the Jozi Book Fair.

In total, 33 training sessions were conducted, reaching 707 participants, with over 52% women. These engagements supported community-led awareness initiatives, particularly on climate change and environmental justice.

CMS also contributed to broader platforms, including a training session at the Alternative Mining Indaba, where participants developed community profiles on mining and energy issues, some of which were published in Action Voices. The programme further supported knowledge exchange through participation in the African Business and Human Rights Forum.

Several campaigns led to concrete outcomes. In Mokopane, sewage spillage prompted engagement with the South African Human Rights Commission. In Snake Park, advocacy on tailings resulted in dialogue with Pan African Resources and municipal authorities, although the Cerebral Palsy Forum continues to face obstacles in establishing a centre.

CMS participants also received external recognition, including the Youth Justice Award presented to John Mthembu by Black Sash in November. The programme concluded with a virtual certification ceremony, where participants affirmed their ongoing commitment to community-led monitoring and advocacy.

Overall, CMS strengthened local capacity to document lived experiences, challenge dominant narratives, and advance environmental and social justice through evidence-based, community-led action.

Climate and Environmental Justice

The Bench Marks Foundation works with a network of community monitors from partner organisations to support local action on climate and environmental justice. In 2025, initiatives led by the Vukani Environmental Movement (VEM) used creative, arts-based approaches to raise awareness of environmental issues.

As a long-standing BMF partner, VEM also contributed to the Deadly Air campaign, which has led to legal action seeking remedies for communities affected by air pollution in Mpumalanga—a province heavily impacted by coal mining and coal-fired power generation. These efforts have reinforced Mpumalanga's status as a priority area for air quality and climate interventions.

Further legal processes are underway in collaboration with the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) and a human rights lawyer, on behalf of workers affected by coal mine dust lung disease.

While the impact of these initiatives remains largely localised, they are contributing to a growing movement through the Community Monitoring School, strengthening community awareness, mobilisation, and action on environmental justice.



John Mthembu, a community activist, receives the Youth Justice Award

3. MEDIA AND ADVOCACY

Media Engagement

In 2025, the Bench Marks Foundation featured 94 times across local and international media platforms, engaging on a range of mining-related issues and helping to shape public discourse and advocacy responses.

Much of this media engagement focused on the Stilfontein artisanal and small-scale mining crisis. BMF helped reframe the public narrative around artisanal miners, moving beyond the language of “illegal mining” to highlight the harsh socio-economic conditions, syndicate exploitation and structural failures that shape the sector. Commentary also drew attention to how commodities from illegal mining can enter formal markets undetected.

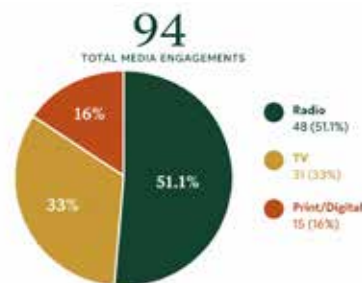
BMF further highlighted the absence of an effective regulatory framework for artisanal and small-scale mining, which enables criminality while penalising those at the lowest end of the supply chain who are trying to earn a living. This advocacy contributed to the South African Human Rights Commission initiating an enquiry into the “Vala Umgodu” policy following the Stilfontein crisis, in which 78 miners died. BMF has been approached to make a submission, with a formal request still pending.

The Foundation’s *Policy Gap 14* report on Sibanye-Stillwater in Wonderkop also received extensive coverage, particularly in relation to worker pay and conditions. BMF called for renewed debate on global pay standards for mineworkers in relation to commodity performance. This issue was taken forward at the BMF 2025 Annual Conference, where the Minerals Council of South Africa expressed willingness to engage further.

The Bench Marks Foundation also sustained media attention on tailings-related risks, including the 2022 Jagersfontein tailings failure. Following BMF’s documentation of the disaster, commemorations and continued public engagement have helped keep pressure on responsible authorities. BMF’s 2023 report recommended

that the National Prosecuting Authority initiate legal proceedings against those responsible.

The Bench Marks Foundation maintained a strong media presence across local and international platforms during the reporting period, with 94 media engagements across radio, television, and print/digital media.



Coverage focused on key issues including the Stilfontein crisis, the Alternative Mining Indaba, artisanal and small-scale mining, tailings and environmental impacts, and developments in communities such as Jagersfontein and Marikana.

BMF representatives featured across 54 media outlets, including major South African platforms and international media such as CNN, BBC, and publications in Europe and Latin America. Mr David van Wyk served as the primary spokesperson, supported by Ms Busi Thabane, Mr Eric Mokuoa, Mrs Ntebo Phakisi, and Community Monitoring School facilitators.

An opinion piece developed with the Tshwane University of Technology’s Institute for Economic Research on Innovation critically examined the Stilfontein crisis. It was published in *Amandla! Magazine*, with a Spanish version appearing in *Resumen Latin America*.

Selected media contributions included interviews and commentary by Mr David van Wyk, Ms Busi Thabane, Mr Makhotla Sefuli, Ms Thokozile Mntambo, Ms Rebecca Selomo and Community Monitoring School

facilitators. These engagements took place across platforms including SABC Radio, Capricorn FM, BBC, Radio Islam International, Radio 786, Eyewitness News, Newzroom Afrika, *The Citizen*, 702, SAFM, Africa in Business and eNCA.

Early-year coverage focused mainly on the Stilfontein crisis, Marikana, Snake Park, the Sibanye Kloof 7 incident, the MPRDA Bill, and gold mining impacts in Soweto. From July to August, engagement centred on artisanal mining and the release of Policy Gap 14, with particular attention to labour and living conditions in Marikana. From September to December, coverage shifted to major industry developments, including the Anglo American–TECK merger, Anglo’s restructuring, coal exports, and illegal mining hotspots such as Bapong in the North West.

Across these engagements, BMF contributed to public debate on mining policy, labour conditions, environmental harm, community safety, policing and enforcement challenges, and the socio-economic drivers of illegal mining.

Advocacy and Stakeholder Engagement

Throughout 2025, the Bench Marks Foundation engaged communities, government, corporations and civil society on mining, climate and environmental justice issues.

- **Community training and monitoring:** BMF facilitated workshops with the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, training community monitors and artisanal miners.

Through the CMS, participants conducted investigations, validated findings and supported advocacy on local environmental, social and gender justice issues.

- **Shareholder activism:** BMF attended the AGMs of Sibanye-Stillwater, Anglo American and BASF, submitting questions on environmental, human rights and governance concerns, including Anglo American’s merger with Teck Resources. BMF also contributed to MACUA’s 100-Year Debt Campaign, highlighting mining-related community debt and injustice.
- **Regional and faith-based engagements:** BMF participated in the SADC summit in Madagascar through the Southern Africa People’s Solidarity Network to discuss regional mining impacts. As an Associate Member of the South African Council of Churches, BMF also provides updates on artisanal and small-scale mining crises.
- **Climate and environmental justice:** BMF supported initiatives addressing pollution, extractivism and climate risks. These included Vukani Environmental Movement’s waste-awareness campaigns, energy democracy workshops and *Clearing the Air: One Breath at a Time*, a play on mining-related health impacts. BMF also hosted the Act Ubumbano toxic tour in October. At a global level, Lead Researcher David van Wyk joined the People’s Assembly outside COP, working with the Thematic Social Forum and People’s Dialogue to challenge corporate-driven climate solutions and advance anti-extractivist policies.



“Clearing the Air: One Breath at a Time”, a play by community members about mining-related health impacts

Community Engagement

BMF further strengthened accountability by facilitating community participation in four Annual General Meetings of three mining companies. These engagements enabled community representatives to present concerns directly to shareholders and company leadership, prompting responses from companies including Sibanye-Stillwater and Anglo American.

Overall, these interventions enhanced transparency, elevated community voices, and sustained pressure for more accountable and equitable mining practices.

Government and Corporations Engagement

During the reporting period, the BMF advanced corporate accountability and community rights through sustained engagement with mining companies, government actors, and global standard-setting bodies.

Key engagements focused on Sibanye-Stillwater and BASF, where BMF supported the Wonderkop/Marikana community in raising concerns related to environmental pollution, housing, and access to remedy. This included international dialogue, shareholder activism at company AGMs, and the successful lodging of a complaint under Germany's

Supply Chain Act, now under review. Ongoing engagements with Sibanye-Stillwater sought to address unresolved community grievances.

BMF also worked closely with communities affected by Anglo American (now Valterra Platinum) in Limpopo, supporting concerns around relocation, land access, tailings management, and inadequate consultation. An official complaint was lodged with the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA), and community participation in accountability processes, including audits and AGMs, was strengthened.

Engagements with Pan African Resources supported the Snake Park community in addressing environmental and consultation concerns linked to tailings re-mining.

At a global level, BMF engaged with IRMA and the Consolidated Mining Standard Initiative (CMSI) to advocate for stronger community inclusion, transparency, and accountability in mining standards and audits.

Through the "Right to Say No" campaign, BMF supported communities such as Xolobeni and Entembeni in asserting their rights to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in relation to proposed mining developments.

BMF also played a key role in shaping discourse



Lead Researcher, David van Wyk, at a toxic tour.



GBV march in Sekhukhune, supported by the Bench Marks Foundation

GBV and Gender Programme

Gender-based violence remains pervasive in South Africa, particularly in mining-affected communities where poverty, patriarchal norms and limited access to rights and services heighten women's vulnerability. Women remain central to BMF's work.

In 2025, female participation reached 56%, with women making up 40.7% of monitors and facilitators, and young people 37%. Young women are also increasingly taking on activist roles, which reflects sustained investment in gender training, counselling workshops and community empowerment.

Six areas now run regular gender dialogue campaigns independently, while partners and CMS activists implemented 14 gender-focused activities, with 68% female participation. These activities included empowerment and skills training, organisational development, and dialogues on GBV and victim support. They also strengthened women-led initiatives and encouraged men to engage on gender roles and shared responsibility in addressing GBV.

on artisanal and small-scale mining, particularly in response to the Stilfontein crisis. This included field visits, advocacy, support for Human Rights Commission processes, and contributions to public and policy debates.

Advocacy

In 2025, BMF's advocacy focused on multiple community and systemic issues, including:

- **Community complaints:** environmental risks and tailings facilities in Wonderkop and Snake Park; contested IRMA audits and planned relocations in Mogalakwena; Riverlea Community's court action against the Minister of Mineral Resources; the artisanal and small-scale mining crisis; and interventions under the Minerals and Petroleum Resources Act (MPRDA).
- **Coalitions and networks:** Collaborated with 10 coalitions, five historic coalitions, 18 NGOs, one faith-based organisation, 10 networks, and 24 community-based organisations, reaching a total of 53 organisations. CMS activists participated in G20 summit activities.
- **Company engagement:** Directly engaged five companies, Anglo American, BASF, Sibanye-

Stillwater, Pan African Resources, and Valterra Platinum, including participation in four AGMs. Key interventions included:

- o *Anglo American/Mogalakwena*: Pressured the company on relocation of 1,000 households, school relocation, and contested IRMA audits; engagement led to commitments for further community consultations.
- o *Sibanye-Stillwater/Wonderkop*: Addressed environmental pollution (tailings, smelter emissions, sewage), resulting in site visits and movement from verbal to practical responses.
- o *BASF*: Complaints raised under the German Supply Chain Act in collaboration with the Wonderkop community and Plough Back the Fruit campaign, successfully registered and pending further process.
- **Legal interventions:**
 - o *Riverlea Mining Forum* applied to court to intervene in a contempt case against the Minister, reinforcing accountability under the 2021 court order.
 - o *Jagersfontein tailings collapse*: NPA criminally charged responsible parties following BMF advocacy and prior reports (2022–2023).
 - o *Stilfontein illegal mining crisis*: South African Human Rights Commission initiated a national enquiry after advocacy by BMF and civil society.
- **Global standards engagement:**
 - o *IRMA*: Four engagements on audit shortcomings, community involvement, and independence issues in Anglo Mogalakwena, involving Earthworks, IndustriALL, and CNV International.
 - o *CMSI*: Raised concerns about watered-down FPIC principles and duplication in the new standard, contributing to consultations on standard development.

Key Interventions

During the reporting period, BMF and its partners implemented a range of dialogues, workshops, and awareness activities across KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, North West, and Gauteng to address gender-based violence and promote gender equality.

Key interventions focused on community dialogues that engaged both men and women on the drivers of GBV, the importance of male involvement, and the need for collective, community-led responses. These engagements also created space to share findings from targeted investigations and strengthen local advocacy.

Capacity-building workshops supported women's empowerment, organisational development, and governance, including work with community-based groups such as the Snake Park Cerebral Palsy Forum. Skills development initiatives and discussions on intersectionality further highlighted the challenges faced by women, particularly those with disabilities and those in rural contexts.

Awareness and mobilisation activities formed a critical component of the programme, with participation in national and regional campaigns, public events, and solidarity actions. These included community marches, summits, and commemorative events aligned with Women's Month and broader GBV advocacy efforts.

Overall, the programme strengthened community engagement, built local capacity, and contributed to ongoing efforts to address GBV through inclusive dialogue, research, and coordinated action.



Beadwork and gender dialogue, KwaZulu-Natal

4. REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Coalitions and Campaigns

In 2025, the Bench Marks Foundation collaborated with 11 coalitions and 54 organisations (18 NGOs, 1 faith-based organisation, 11 networks, and 24 community-based organisations) on community-driven campaigns. Key focus areas included the Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Amendment Bill, legal actions, and advocacy around mining impacts, with many Community Monitoring School activists participating in G20 summit activities.

BMF applied coordinated pressure on five multinational companies (three mining companies and one chemical company, BASF) and engaged two global standards bodies, IRMA and CMSI, addressing overlaps between industry operations, community impacts, and auditing practices. IRMA acknowledged shortcomings in the Mogalakwena audit process and committed to improving transparency and community communication.

Shareholder activism included participation in AGMs of Anglo American, Sibanye-Stillwater, and BASF, often in collaboration with London Mining Network, MACUA, Plough Back the Fruits, and the Association of Ethical Shareholders in Germany. Critical issues raised included community relocations, tailings management gaps, and engagement with

representative bodies like the Mapela Executive Committee. These interventions led to follow-up meetings with Anglo Platinum and Sibanye-Stillwater, strengthening community engagement.

BMF also supported ongoing campaigns such as:

- “Right to Say No”: Advocating for Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) in mining legislation, supporting initiatives like the Entembeni crisis forum environmental objection.
- MPRDA Coalition: Submissions to the Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Act reform, advocacy around the Anglo American–Teck Resources merger (the 100-Year Debt campaign), and media engagement.

Additional collaborations included:

- South African Council of Churches (SACC): Advisory and committee participation.
- NCA-Tanzania and NCA: Sharing counter-mapping and community monitoring tools at the Africa Business and Human Rights Forum and within the Human Rights Community of Practice.
- Mabola Coalition: Working with seven organisations to protect Mabola’s environment from mining activities.

Alternative Mining Indaba 2025

The 2025 Alternative Mining Indaba (AMI) was held in Cape Town from 3–6 February under the theme “Energy Transition for Who? The Critical Question of Our Time?”. The event brought together over



Norwegian Church Aid visit, 2025



Alternative Mining Indaba, 2025

600 participants from across Africa, with strong representation from mining-affected communities. Activities included a public march to the CTICC and the handover of a memorandum to the organisers of the Investing in African Mining Indaba.

As AMI Chair (2024–2025), the Bench Marks Foundation played a leading role in organising the Indaba, including resource mobilisation, content curation, and overall programme oversight. BMF supported the participation of 13 Community Monitoring School activists, facilitated community monitors' presentations, and hosted a workshop, with outcomes captured in the Tunatazama publication of targeted investigations.

A key milestone was the inaugural AMI General Assembly, which established a more democratic governance structure with strengthened community representation. The Assembly adopted Guiding Principles and initiated processes to improve electoral mechanisms and accountability within the network.

BMF also provided ongoing strategic and operational support to the Environmental Justice Network (EJN) in Cape Town. This new role required substantial support, with BMF convening regular planning engagements (including over 10 meetings) to establish systems, clarify reporting lines, and prioritise key deliverables.

Despite early challenges—such as contract

adjustments, reporting gaps, limited secretariat capacity, equipment shortages—progress has been made in strengthening governance, logistics planning, and coordination for AMI 2026.

Key activities included:

- Ongoing Steering Committee engagement and planning for AMI 2026
- Development and refinement of governance documents, including the Guiding Principles
- A July webinar advancing General Assembly resolutions, with 30 participants contributing input
- Coordination on venue planning and programme priorities during July and August

While systems and workflows are progressively stabilising, structural and organisational challenges remain, posing risks to the long-term sustainability of the AMI and requiring continued attention to accountability, resourcing, and institutional alignment.

Annual Conference: (Un)just transitions: Rethinking mining

The Bench Marks Foundation's 2025 Annual Conference was held from 30 September to 1 October 2025 at the Riverlea Community Empowerment Centre under the theme "(Un)just transitions: Rethinking mining". Bringing together communities, partners, activists, researchers and changemakers, the conference created a space for dialogue, reflection and collective action on the contradictions of mining in a world increasingly shaped by climate change, energy transition debates and the demand for critical minerals.

The conference challenged dominant narratives about the "just transition" by asking who defines justice, who benefits from transition, and who continues to carry the social, economic and environmental costs of extraction. Across the two days, participants reflected on the long and continuing legacy of mining in South Africa and across the continent, including abandoned and poorly rehabilitated mines, mine dumps situated close to communities, environmental contamination, unsafe artisanal mining, unemployment and the failure of mining wealth to translate into broad-

based development.

Opening the conference, the Chairperson of the Bench Marks Foundation, Mr Zithulele Cindi, emphasised that any rethinking of mining must begin with an honest acknowledgement of mining's legacy of harm. He called for the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent to be fully and unconditionally embraced, and stressed that communities must remain central to decisions affecting their land, livelihoods and futures.

In his conference overview, Executive Director Moses Cloete located the discussions in the lived realities of mining-affected communities, particularly in areas such as Riverlea, Soweto, Snake Park and Rustenburg, where the impacts of tailings, abandoned mines and inadequate mine closure continue to be felt. He noted that mining justice must go beyond extraction and include restoration, accountability, responsibility and respect for the communities who live with the consequences of mining long after companies have moved on.

Keynote speaker Duma Gqubule situated mining within South Africa's broader economic crisis, arguing that unemployment, inequality and the

failure of economic policy cannot be separated from the question of who owns, controls and benefits from the country's mineral wealth. He called for a people-centred approach that includes stronger public services, a universal basic income, job guarantees, greater domestic ownership of mining assets, a sovereign wealth fund, formalisation of artisanal mining and stronger regulation of employment, royalties, ownership and environmental standards.

The conference reaffirmed the Bench Marks Foundation's commitment to amplifying community voices, exposing corporate and state failures, and advocating for a transition that is genuinely just. It underscored that South Africa's minerals must serve the people, and that any future for mining must be rooted in dignity, accountability, environmental repair and community agency.



Bench Marks Annual Conference, 2025

LEARNINGS

Community Dynamics and Programme Adaptation

In 2025, our work reinforced the complexity of community engagement. Socioeconomic conditions, high unemployment, and crime shape community responses to our programs. Lean staffing remains a risk in navigating these dynamics.

The Community Monitoring School, which combines engagement, capacity building, and company advocacy, has been central to our learning. With 67% of activists unemployed, sustaining their participation requires tangible benefits. To address this, we have integrated skills development into programme activities, such as research fieldwork with training in data collection, certificates of attendance, and testimonials, ensuring activists gain capacity while holding companies accountable.

Security Considerations

Closer engagement with communities has heightened security risks. For instance, hosting the Bench Marks Foundation Annual Conference in Riverlea required a detailed security plan, highlighting the need to work with trusted local organisations, including churches, to safeguard activists and events like toxic tours.

Legal Advocacy

Legal processes are long and can demobilise communities. Limited legal knowledge and fragmented engagement with lawyers can undermine ongoing cases. Effective strategies include sustained communication, signature petitions, and coordinated campaigns linking communities, coalitions, and legal teams to maintain momentum.



Gender, Youth, and Inclusion

Our programme achieved 56% female participation and 35% youth involvement. While progress has been made, further efforts are needed to integrate women and youth fully. Gender-based violence remains pervasive, making these interventions critical stepping stones for 2026.

Alternative Mining Indaba (AMI)

Serving as the AMI chair revealed lessons in governance, coordination, and network building. Challenges included conflicts, weak structures, limited accountability, and the resignation of the AMI Coordinator. The experience underlined the need for a functional, agile, and accountable structure to ensure network sustainability.

Advocacy and Regional Influence

Our campaigns, from the MPRDA coalition to community complaints such as Wonderkop's environmental pollution, show that local issues can be escalated nationally and internationally. Engagements included the South African Human Rights Commission, national tailings working groups, media coverage, and the German government's due diligence mechanisms. Regional platforms, including the People's Dialogue and SADC civil society networks, reinforced our advocacy reach.

Capacity Building and Socioeconomic Context

The youth and women in our programs face high unemployment (46.1%), requiring that programs provide skills development alongside activism. Our approach prioritises enabling communities to become agents of their own development.

Risks, Challenges, and Mitigation

Financial sustainability and staffing remain key risks. In 2025, role redistribution due to contract endings and upcoming staff departures, including the Lead Researcher in 2026, highlighted the importance of knowledge retention and succession planning.

Additional challenges include delays in Snake Park project implementation due to municipal interference, weaknesses in the AMI Secretariat, and ongoing community divisions. Progress has been made in financial administration, procurement, and unified filing systems to mitigate institutional risk.

Overall, 2025 reinforced the importance of capacity building, local partnerships, gender inclusion, structured advocacy, and resilient organisational systems to navigate complex community and programmatic realities.



Group mapping exercise, 2025

ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

BENCH MARKS FOUNDATION NPC

(Registration Number 2002/026620/08)

Annual Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2025

INDEPENDENT AUDITOR'S REPORT

B.N. Jooste & Co.
Practice No. 345002

Chartered Accountants (SA)
Registered Auditors

Jeffrey Olive Pierce CA(SA) RA

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To the Directors of BENCH MARKS FOUNDATION NPC

Opinion

We have audited the annual financial statements of BENCH MARKS FOUNDATION NPC (the company) set out on pages 8 to 17, which comprise the statement of financial position as at 31 December 2025, statement of comprehensive income, statement of changes in reserves and statement of cash flows for the year then ended, and the notes to the annual financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies.

In our opinion, the annual financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of BENCH MARKS FOUNDATION NPC as at 31 December 2025, and its financial performance and cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with the International Financial Reporting Standard for Small and Medium-sized Entities and the requirements of the Companies Act of South Africa.

Basis for Opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Annual Financial Statements section of our report. We are independent of the company in accordance with the Independent Regulatory Board for Auditors' Code of Professional Conduct for Registered Auditors (IRBA Code) and other independence requirements applicable to performing audits of annual financial statements in South Africa. We have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with the IRBA Code and in accordance with other ethical requirements applicable to performing

audits in South Africa. The IRBA Code is consistent with the corresponding sections of the International Ethics Standards Board for Accountants' International Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (including International Independence Standards). We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Other Information

The directors are responsible for the other information. The other information comprises the information included in the document titled "BENCH MARKS FOUNDATION NPC annual financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2025", which includes the Directors' Report as required by the Companies Act of South Africa and the supplementary information as set out on pages 18 to 19, which we obtained prior to the date of this report, and the Annual Report, which is expected to be made available to us after that date. The other information does not include the annual financial statements and our auditor's report thereon.

Our opinion on the annual financial statements does not cover the other information and we do not and will not express an audit opinion or any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the annual financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the annual financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit, or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If, based on the work we have performed on the other information obtained prior to the date of this auditor's

report, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact. We have nothing to report in this regard.

Responsibilities of the Directors for the Annual Financial Statements

The directors are responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of the annual financial statements in accordance with the International Financial Reporting Standard for Small and Medium-sized Entities and the requirements of the Companies Act of South Africa, and for such internal control as the directors determine is necessary to enable the preparation of annual financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the annual financial statements, the directors are responsible for assessing the company's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the directors either intend to liquidate the company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Annual Financial Statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the annual financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with International Standards on Auditing will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these annual financial statements.

As part of an audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing, we exercise professional judgement and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. We also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the annual financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion,

forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control.

- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the company's internal control.
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the directors.
- Conclude on the appropriateness of the directors' use of the going concern basis of accounting and based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the company's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the annual financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the company to cease to continue as a going concern.
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the annual financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the annual financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation.

We communicate with the directors regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

B N Jooste & Co

B N Jooste & Co
J C Pierce
Partner
Chartered Accountants (SA)
Registered Auditor
Practice No. 916900

13 March 2026
Randburg

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	Note	2025 R	2024 R
Assets			
Non-Current Assets			
Property, plant and equipment	2	59 120	90 478
Deposits		40 164	40 164
		99 284	130 642
Current Assets			
Prepayments		150 000	-
Account receivable	3	21 789	103 057
Accrued income	4	-	319 096
Cash and cash equivalents	5	6 349 460	1 325 003
		6 521 249	1 747 156
Total Assets		6 620 533	1 877 798
Reserves and Liabilities			
Reserves			
Fixed asset reserve		59 120	90 478
Sustainability fund		566 350	566 350
Operating reserve		492 463	298 382
		1 117 933	955 210
Liabilities			
Current Liabilities			
Accounts payable	6	252 725	135 103
Provisions	7	38 264	47 157
Deferred income	8	5 210 611	740 328
Funds held on behalf of COMEC	9	1 000	-
		5 502 600	922 588
Total Reserves and Liabilities		6 620 533	1 877 798

DETAILED INCOME STATEMENT

	Note	2025 (R)	2024 (R)
Revenue			
Grants	10	<u>9 016 330</u>	<u>9 874 640</u>
Other income			
Fiscal agency fees		2 500	-
Insurance proceeds		8 499	-
Interest received	12	<u>174 527</u>	<u>187 084</u>
		<u>185 526</u>	<u>187 084</u>
Direct project expenses			
Africa round table		174 827	288 308
Community monitoring and media		580 428	675 818
PSS / Capacity fund		34 421	160 654
Programmes' human resources		2 136 633	2 027 656
SADC mining research and advocacy		168 327	320 093
Tailings project		1 197 751	568 432
Voice power		760 719	1 694 289
Total direct project expenses		<u>5 053 106</u>	<u>5 735 250</u>
Administration expenses			
Annual duty and tax services		8 408	11 393
Audit fees		172 413	186 525
Bank charges		25 525	22 914
Cleaning and offices costs		107 337	114 623
Communications		63 550	63 360
Consulting fees		335 400	320 677
Courier services		2 575	6 531
Data system management		56 874	107 504
Depreciation		89 879	66 317
Directors' meetings		22 891	26 083
Employee costs		2 162 870	1 916 292
Equipment hire		159 314	139 257
Fines and penalties		-	11 510
Insurance		29 804	39 422
Grants reduced		-	637 677
Lease rentals on operating lease		393 736	353 928
Organisational development		152 652	950 847
Printing, photocopying, stationery and literature		149 732	92 964
Recruitment costs		-	39 020
Subscriptions		39 495	14 583
Travel		13 572	16 156
Total administration expenses		<u>3 986 027</u>	<u>5 137 583</u>
Total expenses		<u>9 039 133</u>	<u>10 872 833</u>
Surplus (deficit) for the year		<u>162 723</u>	<u>(811 109)</u>

Bench Marks Foundation

Registration number 200/026620/08

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