

Little has changed at Marikana, says John Capel

The executive director of the Bench Marks Foundation, John Capel, says very little has changed for the mineworkers and those living in Marikana a year after the massacre that took the lives of more than 40 people and injured scores more on 16 August 2012.



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

Capel says the instability and tension that gave rise to the Marikana massacre a year ago, is still palpable and will remain so until the socio-economic conditions that gave rise to the events in the first place are addressed. Lonmin, along with the other platinum producing companies in the area, bear responsibility for the negative impacts of mining on the lives of people in the Bojanala district.

Negative impacts

The Marikana tragedy cannot be understood without looking at the negative economic, social and environmental impacts of platinum mining for both workers and local communities in the area. Living conditions for workers in the platinum mines are unacceptable, as many workers live in shacks and informal settlements.

"We continue to walk on a knife's edge in Marikana. Deaths are still occurring, the mines have still not addressed many of their CSR promises and we have still not come to the bottom of what actually happened on that fateful day," Capel says. The lack of funding to hire legal representation for the Farlam Commission for the families of the miners who were killed that day as well as for the mineworkers who were wounded and arrested, as opposed to the apparent surplus of financial support to the various government bodies, is further compounding the mistrust the community has toward the government, police and mines. It is also fueling the friction and hostility in the area.

Government is not serious

They have submitted a paper to the Farlam Commission on how they bear the negative impacts of mining. This cannot be minimised nor ignored. The Foundation notes that the big platinum mining houses like Amplats, have gone on the offensive, closing shafts and retrenching workers. It must be noted that already over 30,000 sub-contracted workers have lost their jobs between 2007 and 2011. "It is unacceptable that financial support has only been extended to a select few and that a year later, those who were actually involved and present when the shooting occurred have still not had the opportunity to tell their side of the story. Instead, we continue to have hearsay evidence at the Farlam Commission."

Capel said that this haphazard approach is a clear indication that the government is not taking the proceedings or the volatility of the area as seriously as it should. "There is a massive need to not only accelerate the Farlam Commission's proceedings, but to address pertinent public interest issues such as the role of the police, the policing of protests in South Africa, and the culpability of the police and government in relation to this. But most importantly to address the socio economic issues plaguing mining communities and workers.

"Not to mention the need to investigate the lack of impartiality of the government toward the mines in South Africa and the mines' continued exploitation of workers and the environment," Capel concludes.

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