

Women are still marginalised in mining

By [John Capel](#)

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Women are still a minority in the mining sector and particularly in the lower paid categories. This imbalance creates conditions for sexual harassment and exploitation, and very little has been done to change the macho culture operating within the closed environment of a mine.



Although a few mines have exceeded the target set by the Mining Charter - 10% of the workforce should be women - they still make up an insignificant minority and are usually deployed as supplementary rather than core labour.

Prior to International Women's Day, celebrated annually on 8 March, I acknowledge the progress that mines have made in employing women, but stress that I am still concerned about the conditions under which these women work, the inequality that exists in the mining sector, and the need for further sustainable change.

A lack of facilities for women

Even though we have highlighted these issues in our various research reports on the social, economic and environmental performances of mines, the first of which was released in 2007, we still receive reports of a lack of facilities for women in some mines.

We find that women are still subjected to sharing changing rooms where they often find themselves the objects of sexual ridicule and harassment. The lack of adequate underground toilets also continues to be an issue. Social justice is essential in this sector.

Gender equality in mining needs to be promoted more vigorously. The barriers that women face within the sector need to be removed and mining corporations should view this issue as more than just a compliance exercise that requires the achievement of a target number.

Corporations need to do an internal audit of the conditions for women regularly. They need to assess whether the right

facilities, policies and services are in place for them, whether there are mechanisms in place to provide women with social support, whether there are any salary disparities and what barriers are negatively affecting women's participation within the company.

Definition of sexual harassment must be clearly defined

It is also essential that the definition of sexual harassment be clearly defined, together with the complaint procedures and the consequences thereof. This should be continuously communicated to all within the mine.

In addition, the Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities, as well as the Department of Labour should regularly investigate the conditions for women at mines throughout the country.

Despite legislation relating to the increase of women in mining, enforcement of the legal requirements is scant. The patriarchal culture in mining persists and women continue to feel marginalised.

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Bench Marks Contact:

John Capel, Executive Director

011 832 1743

082 870 8861

jcapel@eject.co.za

ABOUT JOHN CAPEL

John Capel is executive director of the Bench Marks Foundation.
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