

# Becoming proactive about natural resources

It is time for Africans to insist on responsible use of their country's resources and on conditions to be set when licences are issued, says Professor Ben Turok. Turok was the keynote speaker at the Just World Conference hosted by the Bench Marks Foundation in collaboration with the Norwegian Church Aid in Kempton Park recently.

He has been commissioned by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa to lead a team of senior researchers on value addition in natural resources in ten countries in the continent,

He added: "The question of whose resources are being extracted is a moot point. In South Africa, we have a clause in the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act, 2002, that says all mineral and petroleum resources belong to the nation and the State is the custodian thereof.

"That means that the mineral wealth beneath the soil is the property of the people as a whole and the State is supposed to represent us all. The State needs to carefully protect the resources and not give licences to just anyone without conditions imposed".

## Governments should impose humane conditions

Turok said that citizens of South Africa and in the rest of Africa should insist that their governments impose conditions relating to humane labour and living conditions, sustainable community development and proper medical facilities.

In addition, he said that monetary and economic policies do not focus on people. A bottom-up approach is therefore needed. It's a bookkeeping exercise that does not talk to meeting people's basic needs.

He quoted the current prime minister of Ethiopia, who during a conference in Addis Ababa last week said that the country had changed its economic view and that it is now focusing on empowering the ordinary rural citizen.

"I'm afraid in South Africa we are bedazzled by monetary and economic policies but the very questions about people are a second thought. It is not at the centre of decision-making. This is where a lot of our problems are coming from.

"Supply and demand is supposed to balance things out, but we know we don't have a perfect market. South Africa is a highly monopolised economy, therefore imperfect. We therefore cannot expect the market to solve our problems. We have to look at different solutions.

"Let's look at the reality, the real economy. What is actually happening on the ground and who is benefitting? If we don't ask questions, we will live in a theoretical paradigm.

"We need to look at the value chain and see who benefits at each stage and see how we can change this to benefit those who are really in need."

## **Use of homegrown engineers**

Turok also said that South Africans forget how much technology and expertise they have in their country, and should be asking why mining companies bring in international engineers when the country's own universities have engineering departments focusing on mining.

"We should say that we'll give you the licence on condition that you domesticate the mine. The Angolans are doing it with the Chinese.

"Society needs to rise up and say enough is enough, use our resources responsibly".

The conference aims to explore the impacts of extractive industries on local communities, gender relations and the environment as well as the different models for ownership of natural resources, based on the experiences of a range of different countries.

To find out more about the conference, go to [www.justworldconference.blogspot.com](http://www.justworldconference.blogspot.com) or contact Bench Marks on +27 (0)82 870 8861 or email [justworldconference@gmail.com](mailto:justworldconference@gmail.com).

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