



# Supporting Communities to Speak Truth to Power

ANNUAL REPORT 2022

# An organized community is a strong community.

We have seen it time and again, from Haiti to Mongolia, Nepal to Uganda, Myanmar to Tanzania: the collective power of organized communities to push back against institutions and systems of oppression and extractivism that undermine human and environmental flourishing. **This year, we saw incredible examples of communities speaking truth to power, overcoming immense barriers, and having their voices heard.**

Ugandan communities continued to resist forced eviction and demand fair compensation. Indigenous communities in Nepal shared their stories with the UN, and won support, after their own government violated and ignored their rights. Haitian farmers finally received new, replacement land, in remedy of forced displacement, after years of tireless advocacy. Their experiences each informed, and combined to catalyze, a myriad of policy changes in pursuit of a more just financial system. Of course, power does not shift easily. All of this progress is hard-fought and hard-won. Worldwide, communities are facing violent retaliation for standing up for their rights, against the background of overlapping climate, health, and geopolitical crises.

We are proud of the work we do to support these brave activists and communities and, even more importantly, we are proud of the way we do it. Our advocates do not speak for communities; communities speak for themselves. They are the experts in their situation, their needs, and their interests. We are there – not out in front of communities, but alongside and behind them – to share our expertise on tools they can utilize, to leverage our power and privilege to amplify their voices and ensure that they reach the decision-makers that need to hear them, and to connect their experiences with broader movements for systemic change. Alongside our substantive support, we are building out critical initiatives to support partner security, undertaking “solidarity fundraising” for our partners and other grassroots organizations on the front lines of the fight for environmental and social justice, and interrogating our own ways of working to ensure that we reflect the changes that we want to see in the world. We have also welcomed new advocates in Asia and Africa, deepening our support for accountability ecosystems in those regions.

For the latter part of this year, we have had to do this critical work in the absence of our founder and Executive Director, Natalie Bridgeman Fields, who is on an extended medical leave as she battles long COVID. We are so grateful to so many of you who have extended support, encouragement, and partnership throughout this period and beyond. While Natalie is deeply missed by our team, our mission and work seeking justice and accountability in international finance continues unabated. The communities we serve – who are bravely speaking truth to power – deserve nothing less.



In solidarity,  
**Lani Inverarity**  
Interim Executive Director

## OUR MISSION

Accountability Counsel amplifies the voices of communities around the world to protect their human rights and environment. We work to center communities in the decisions that impact their rights, livelihoods, land, ecosystems, and our climate. As advocates for people harmed by internationally financed projects, we employ community driven and policy level strategies to access justice.



## OUR APPROACH

Accountability Counsel is the only organization specializing in the accountability offices tied to international financial institutions – a little known but highly effective tool for communities to make their voices heard at the highest levels of power. These institutions funnel trillions of dollars every year into projects like dams, mines, oil pipelines, and more.

Their projects are notorious for environmental and human rights abuses, such as forced displacement of Indigenous Peoples, contamination of rivers used for drinking water, and sexual abuse of women and girls. To equip communities to defend their rights against these harmful impacts, Accountability Counsel offers:

**In-depth case support from the beginning of a complaint strategy through to the delivery of tangible remedy;**

**Knowledge sharing to ensure communities have the information they need to make informed decisions about their land, lives, and livelihoods;**

**Data-driven research to better understand the system we are trying to change; and**

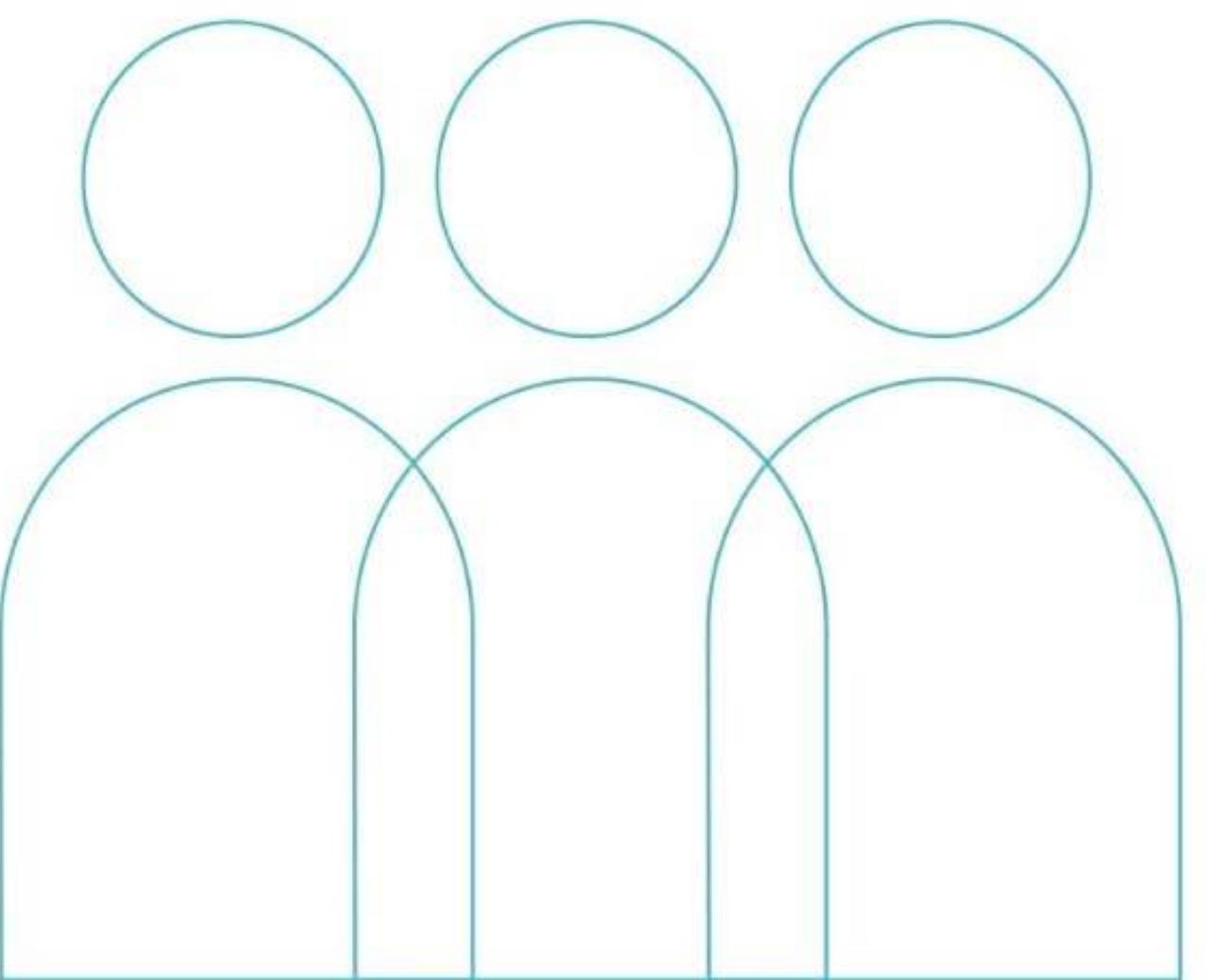
**Policy advocacy to shift global financial systems and build channels for communities to speak truth to power.**

We measure our success against the goals set by our community partners, and equip them to advocate for their own rights – we do not speak on behalf of our community clients, but instead act as advisors to communities as they make their own voices heard.



## OUR TEAM

Our global team of twenty-two advocates based in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and North America works to strengthen global accountability ecosystems in deep partnership with communities around the world. We benefit from the leadership of our Board of Directors, guidance from our Advisors, and support of our fellows and interns. [Meet our team! >](#)



# COMMUNITY ADVOCACY

Communities are the experts in what justice means for them, so Accountability Counsel works exclusively at the request of communities in support of their goals. Our expertise in accountability office strategies adds value to locally-led approaches in pursuit of human rights and environmental justice.

Learn more about our community partners and their advocacy. [>](#)



**In Uganda**, we support communities to defend their homes from a World Bank-funded drainage channel.

**In Haiti**, we support farmers to demand remedy for livelihoods lost in a land grab by the Inter-American Development Bank and USAID.

**In Nepal**, we support Indigenous communities to uphold their rights against a proposed transmission line which will destroy their forests and farmland.



## **In Uganda, we support communities to defend their homes from a World Bank-funded**

**drainage channel.** In Kawaala, in the capital city of Kampala, more than 80 families faced eviction to make room for the infrastructure project: threatening a loss of their homes and their livelihoods in the midst of the COVID pandemic. When residents were awoken by bulldozers destroying buildings one winter morning in December 2020, our local partner Witness Radio jumped into action, filing a lawsuit to temporarily halt the construction.

Members of Accountability Counsel's Kenya-based team began traveling to Kawaala regularly to advise the community as they began to organize and demand change. In June 2021, the Kawaala community filed a complaint to the World Bank's Accountability Mechanism, naming clear requests for remedy including meaningful consultation, fair compensation, and dignified resettlement away from the project's impact. The complaint was accepted, and in October 2021, the community entered the first ever mediation process in the World Bank's new Dispute Resolution Service: itself the product of years of advocacy by our Policy team.

So far, Kawaala residents have organized themselves effectively and bravely shared their experiences face-to-face with Bank and government executives, secured a non-retaliation agreement signed by the Minister of Finance amidst a recent history of violence, and demanded a revaluation of their land. Constricted on three sides by internationally-financed projects, and amidst overlapping challenges of COVID, shrinking civic space, and violence against community members, the Kawaala community is equipped with information and tools to demand their rights and ensure their voices are heard.





**In Haiti, we support farmers to demand remedy for livelihoods lost in a land grab by the Inter-American Development Bank and USAID.** In 2010, as part of a misinformed post-earthquake restoration effort, plans for an industrial park in northern Haiti's most fertile agricultural region were fast-tracked, and farmers' fields were quickly blocked off and paved over. Hundreds of farmers and their families, who had counted on their crops for food and income, suddenly lost their ability to pay for their children's education and struggled with food insecurity.

The displaced families formed the Kolektif Peyizan Victim Tè Chabè, and after awaiting long-promised replacement land that never came, they filed a complaint to the Inter-American Development Bank's accountability office in 2017. After two years of negotiations with the bank and the Haitian government, the farmers reached an agreement outlining a multi-part remedy package including replacement land for displaced families, farming equipment, employment, environmental monitoring, and more.

Despite this ground-breaking achievement, the journey to remedy was not over – Accountability Counsel has continued advocating alongside these communities to translate commitments on paper into remedy in practice. This year, twenty-nine families have received new land, with more families expected to receive theirs imminently, and nearly 90 families have received wells and modern irrigation equipment: crucial steps toward restoring sustainable livelihoods. However, this victory is a hard-fought one, and remains rare in our field. As one of our longest-running cases, Accountability Counsel celebrates the tenacity and resilience of the Kolektif and its members, calls on the bank to urgently fulfill its commitments, and advocates with renewed commitment for accessible, meaningful remedy across international finance.

**In Nepal, we support Indigenous communities to uphold their rights as a proposed transmission line threatens to destroy their forests and farmland.** The transmission line project, funded by the European Investment Bank (EIB), was designed and implemented without the consent of those living under the power line – in violation of the international legal norm of free, prior, and informed consent. Following an historic investigation report published by the EIB’s Complaints Mechanism in Spring 2021, affirming that action needed to be taken to protect Indigenous rights, our community partners have been disappointed by the ongoing lack of respect for their rights – and alarmed by a rise in both threatened and experienced violent retaliation against protesters.

We are supporting our partners to bring international attention to these violations and build pressure for change. In a series of letters recently made public, United Nations human rights experts call on the Nepalese government and the EIB to recognize and uphold these communities’ right to free and informed consent, prior to the development of the project and to safely speak out against it. The letters vindicate communities’ experiences and echo their demands that the Bank and government join them in a dialogue to find a solution.



## RESEARCH

Accountability Counsel's researchers deepen our analysis of cases and policy issues, and contextualize it within global complaint data, to illuminate barriers to accountability and remedy and to catalyze systemic change.

**Learn more about our Research team's data-driven approach.** 

Through conversation with affected communities, combined with data-driven insights, we uncovered barriers to accountability in the Middle East and North Africa.



We are also investigating whether complaint processes – globally – are translating to meaningful remedy for communities.



**Through conversation with affected communities, combined with data-driven insights, we uncovered barriers to accountability in the Middle East and North Africa.** Last year, we shared the 'accountability dark spots' our team had identified – regions where international investment goes in, but communities do not file complaints at the same rate as other regions, and the few complaints that are filed are less likely to result in outcomes such as reports, agreements, or remedy. This phenomenon was most evident in the Middle East and North Africa.

To find out why, our team partnered with Arab Watch Coalition to interrogate over 20 years of complaint data and interview almost a dozen communities and advocates from seven countries across the region who had filed complaints to accountability offices. Interviewees shared details about their experiences, including the danger of speaking out against projects, the burden of drawn-out advocacy efforts without financial support, and the challenges of demanding justice in shrinking civic space. These compounding factors and others result in the gap in accountability in the region.

Now, Accountability Counsel is ensuring these communities' voices are being heard. Based on their experiences, we assembled six actionable recommendations and have already presented them to financial institutions at meetings in Morocco, Lebanon, and Tunisia and on a multilingual webinar. In response, the World Bank Group's International Finance Corporation, one of the largest and most influential development institutions, has committed to create a new role focused on responding to reports of retaliation against communities filing complaints – a huge step forward for making accountability offices a safe, accessible avenue for justice. Our work continues to ensure that major recommendations, including better financial support for advocates and reduced barriers to access complaint offices, are realized.

**We are also investigating whether complaint processes – globally – are translating to meaningful remedy for communities.** Our database, the Accountability Console, tracks the number of complaints that reach an ‘output’ stage, such as a report assessing an institution’s compliance (or lack thereof) with its own social and environmental safeguards, or an agreement reached between a community and an institution through a dialogue process. Complaints that reach these outputs are often considered “successful,” but we are looking beyond the data to hear directly from communities: did those reports and agreements actually result in meaningful remedy and long-term change?

Our researchers are analyzing every complaint in our database, expanding our field of vision beyond the communities we have directly worked with to every complaint ever filed. What were the communities experiences of filing complaints, and what lessons do they have to share with institutions regarding accountability and remedy for the harm inflicted by international finance? Preliminary conversations with communities in Morocco and Turkey indicate that promising reports and agreements have not resulted in meaningful remedy, but rather in insincere fulfillments of required action. This research affirms the need for institutions to truly grapple with remedy as part of their accountability frameworks, and explicitly commit to facilitating and funding corrective actions.

By analyzing qualitative community experiences alongside the quantitative data from our database, our team will assemble actionable recommendations for institutions to improve accountability offices, secure concrete commitments to remedy, and shift power to communities. Follow along for our findings in 2023!

# POLICY

Accountability Counsel's Policy advocates combine lessons from our case experience with our researchers' insights to drive institutional change, disrupting the systems that cause harm.

**Learn more about our work to amplify community voices at powerful institutions.** 

Where money is flowing without accountability, we advocate to create new channels for communities to make their voices heard.

We also urge institutions to strengthen their existing accountability systems and make them more responsive to community voices.

As the climate crisis draws billions in international finance, we support communities to remind powerful investors that well-intended spending still requires accountability.



**Where money is flowing without accountability, we advocate to create new channels**

**for communities to make their voices heard.** This summer, years of sensitive work culminated in China's new Green Finance Guidelines, which require Chinese banks and insurers to establish accountability offices so affected communities can speak up and investors can better address knowable risks. Chinese overseas finance has long been one of the largest financial flows without a channel for communities to raise grievances, but with these new guidelines, more than \$3 trillion impacting communities worldwide are on a path to greater accountability. As banks and insurers consider how to implement the guidelines' requirements, Accountability Counsel will advocate to make the new offices effective tools for communities to speak out when they anticipate or experience harm.

Our team is also advising on the development of new accountability offices at the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the US International Development Finance Corporation, FinDev Canada, Germany's International Climate Initiative, Australia and New Zealand's ANZ bank, the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), European sustainable business association Amfori, and the Dutch bank ABN AMRO, as well as a myriad of sustainable investing standards which are moving to require their signatories to create grievance mechanisms. Through technical recommendations and strategic advocacy, we push investors to create effective, transparent, and accessible channels for communities to raise their concerns.

**We urge institutions to strengthen their existing accountability systems and make them more responsive to community voices.** This year, Accountability Counsel pushed for stronger accountability policy at development banks in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe. After three decades of collective advocacy, nearly all multilateral development finance institutions have accountability offices, but Accountability Counsel and our civil society partners are pushing further: listening to communities and acknowledging harm is a crucial first step, but institutions must follow through by financing remedy when it is needed. Alongside partners, we are driving key institutions to create strong examples of remedy frameworks that explicitly commit the investors themselves – alongside their clients – to ensure that remedy is delivered to affected communities. Preliminary drafts from the World Bank Group's International Finance Corporation are set to be opened for public comment in early 2023 – stay tuned!

Our policy recommendations are embedded in the lessons we learn alongside communities in our casework – and the two often go hand in hand. In previous years, our Policy team pushed the World Bank to expand its options for recourse to include dispute resolution, a powerful tool communities can use to demand remedy through mediated dialogue. Our advocacy was successful and this year, our community partners in Uganda are the first to use the new tool. Now, our teams are working together to push the Bank to adopt best practices for this and future cases.

**As the climate crisis draws billions in international finance, we support communities to remind powerful investors that well-intended spending still requires accountability.**

Accountability Counsel has supported communities to file complaints about: a biofuel project in Liberia leading perversely to deforestation and a more environmentally intensive dependence on charcoal; a hydropower project in Mexico threatening Indigenous villages with deforestation and environmental destruction of a fragile freshwater ecosystem; and a conservation project in Myanmar that risks displacing Indigenous people from the mangrove and forest lands they have stewarded for generations, only to increase risks of illegal logging. When investments go wrong, communities are the first to know, and Accountability Counsel is working to strengthen the systems impact investors have to ensure their voices are heard.

For example, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) is both an investor and an accreditor of institutions seeking recognition for sustainability. Accountability Counsel pushed the fund to create its accountability office, the Independent Redress Mechanism, and now advocates for the enforcement of strong standards for more than 100 accredited institutions that receive GCF funds. As a result of our advocacy, the GCF requires its accredited members to have accountability offices so communities affected by their investments can make their voices heard. Now it's up to the investors to listen.

## VALUES

In all our work, as conveners, advisors, partners, and leaders, Accountability Counsel is rooted in our values:

**Accountable | Community Driven | Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committed | Knowledge Sharing | Remedy Oriented | Respect Based | Sustainability Focused | Transparent**

## SOLIDARITY

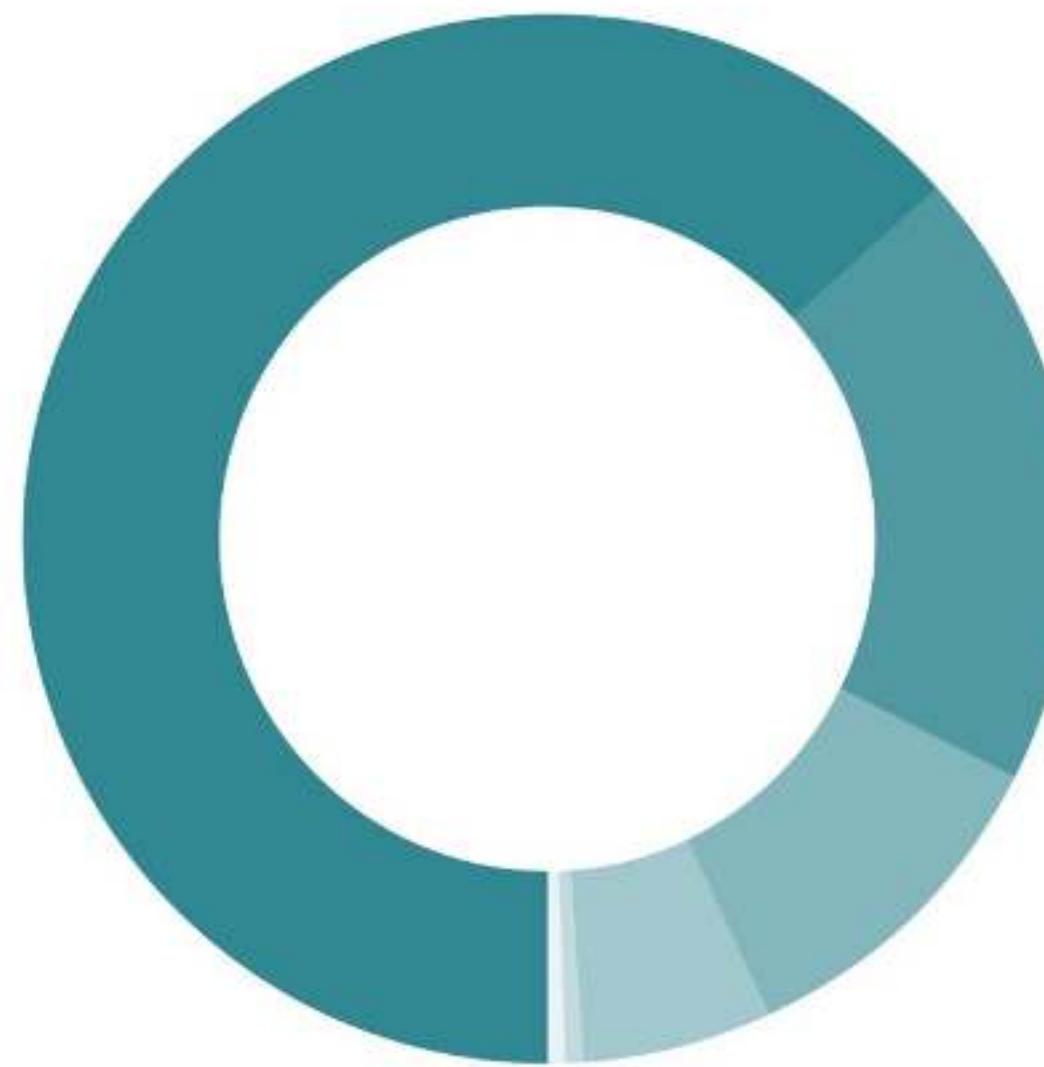
**As part of our work to disrupt unequal power structures in international finance, Accountability Counsel challenges traditional fundraising models and channels funding to our grassroots partners.**

At the core of our model, Accountability Counsel bolsters existing community networks and capacity, usually through knowledge sharing and close partnership. This year, we expanded that work beyond substantive advice to include fundraising support for our local partners, who are best placed to organize community movements and articulate the realities of an investment's impacts. In partnership with aligned funders, we have connected partners in Uganda, Mongolia, Senegal, Haiti, Kenya, Nepal, Zimbabwe, Thailand, and elsewhere with grants totaling nearly \$300,000 to support urgent advocacy and security needs. We will continue to push funders and philanthropists to decolonize their giving – at Accountability Counsel, even our development team are advocates.

# FINANCIALS

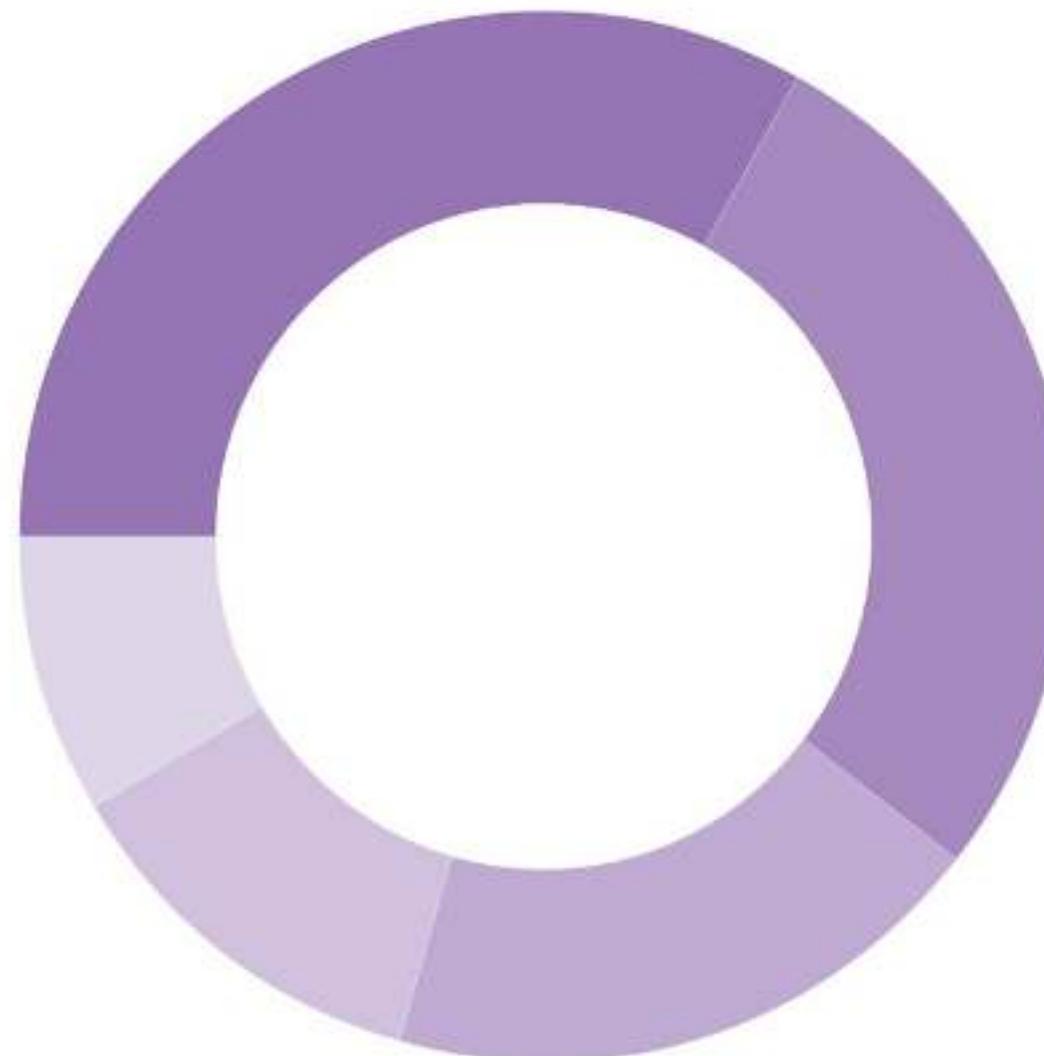
## Revenue

|                                    |             |       |
|------------------------------------|-------------|-------|
| Foundation Grants                  | \$1,569,114 | 63.5% |
| Individual Donations               | \$468,621   | 19.0% |
| Covid Relief                       | \$263,936   | 10.7% |
| Pro Bono & In Kind Support         | \$143,875   | 5.8%  |
| Earned, Investment, & Other Income | \$17,143    | 0.7%  |
| Corporate Matching Gifts           | \$9,802     | 0.4%  |



## Expenses

|                |           |       |
|----------------|-----------|-------|
| Communities    | \$934,807 | 33.1% |
| Policy         | \$781,378 | 27.7% |
| Research       | \$530,920 | 18.8% |
| Fundraising    | \$333,020 | 11.8% |
| Administration | \$242,866 | 8.6%  |



# SUPPORT

## Foundations

11th Hour Project

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Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

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Environmental Defenders  
Collaborative

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Impact Giving

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Social & Environmental Entrepreneurs  
(SEE)

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Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati  
Foundation

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Anonymous (1)

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The Christensen Fund

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Ford Foundation

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Luminate Foundation

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Stichting Foundation for International  
Law for the Environment

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Woodcock Foundation

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The Burkehaven Family Foundation

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David & Anita Keller Foundation

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Global Greengrants Fund

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Open Society Institute

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Wallace Global Fund

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## Individuals

Eduardo Abbott

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Chris Avery

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Belsky Family Foundation

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Tess Bridgeman & Beth George

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Christy Chin

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Stephen Diamond

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Maya Dunne

---

Jonathan Fox

---

Julia & John Griffin

---

Cynthia Hunter Lang

---

Sujatha Jesudason

---

Daniel Keller

Amanda Brittan & Kwadwo Amoako

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Joanne Bauer

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**Lauren & Josh Benjamin**

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Edith Brown Weiss

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Sandy Coliver

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Andrew Dickson

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Lisa & David B. Fields

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Bryce Gee & Jennifer Cheng

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Jason Haggins

---

Christine Jacobson & Jason Stephens

---

Susan Kane

---

**George Kenny & Chris Moore**

Elisa Armstrong

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Anne Bellows

---

Daniel Bradlow

---

Emily & Matt Burks

---

Carolyn & Paul Daniel

---

David & Natasha Dolby Fund

---

Mary Fields

---

Erica Gould & Timothy Bei

---

Margaret Bowman & David Hunter

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Richard Jaffe

---

Michael Kaufman

---

Alaina Kipps

Marty Krasney

---

Hillary Margolis

---

Yvonne Moore

---

JaMel and Tom Perkins Family  
Foundation Fund at The Chicago  
Community Foundation

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Brendan Ray

---

Julia Shepardson

---

Sydney Speizman

---

Joe Timko

---

David & Suzanne Warner

---

**Sara Zion & Tushar Shah**

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Meissa Lee

---

Micheline Markey

---

Doug Norlen

---

Victor Jacob & Angelo Presicci

---

Ellen & Steve Rosenblum

---

Marco Simons

---

Kim Smacniak & Tarun Theogaraj

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**Beth Van Schaack & Brent Lang**

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Dawn Yokoe & Andy Forrest

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Hon. D. Lloyd Macdonald

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Selma Meyerowitz

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Anne & Jamie O'Connell

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Nancy Quinn & Tom Driscoll

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Kaitlyn & Ian Shannon

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Faith Horowitz & Richard Speizman

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Eric Thiermann

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William Walter

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Harriet Young

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**Giving Circle members**

## Corporate Matching

BlackRock

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T. Rowe Price

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Genentech, Inc.

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Wells Fargo Bank

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Netflix

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## Pro Bono & In Kind

Case Western Reserve Law School

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Morrison & Foerster LLP

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Healy & Associates

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Stanford Law School

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Interlaced

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Yale Law School

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## COVID Relief

California Office of the Small Business Advocate (CalOSBA)

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Small Business Administration via Community Reinvestment Fund, USA

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## CONCLUSION

**This year, we shifted unjust systems and supported communities to speak truth to power.**

We pushed cases in nine countries toward justice; shared knowledge with dozens of communities looking to use accountability offices to defend their rights; delved into community complaint data to reveal trends across regions and sectors; and translated community experiences into policy change at the institution level. There is still work to be done, but we are thrilled to take this moment to celebrate the power, knowledge, and resilience of our community partners, our peers and fellow advocates, our team, and our community as we recognize our collective impact. We are so grateful for your support and solidarity as we work together to shift global financial systems toward greater justice.



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