

# Annual Report 2019



الشبكة العالمية  
للحقوق الاقتصادية  
والاجتماعية والثقافية



ESCR-Net  
Red-DESC  
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We write this letter from the isolation of our homes, with many of our communities in lockdown, facing overlapping crises. The COVID-19 pandemic has again exposed and intensified the conditions of impoverishment and dispossession amid plenty, deepening inequalities, corporate capture of government institutions and decision-making bodies, the climate crisis and growing repression, articulated in ESCR-Net's movement-led Common Charter for Collective Struggle (November 2016). Yet members across 75 countries—social movements, Indigenous Peoples, human rights and environmental organizations, women human rights defenders and academics—have also recognized the important opening to advance a just, equitable and sustainable transition, centering care, climate justice and community-driven alternatives to dominant economic and political models. Many of these members are already modeling alternatives—driven by necessity and informed by values of inclusion and mutual care—developing social and solidarity economies, community kitchens and care networks, peoples' budgets demonstrating the feasibility of using public resources to realize human rights and climate justice. Growing demands of communities in every region for well-being, dignity and participation are reinforcing human rights obligations to use maximum available resources and provide international assistance and cooperation to respect, protect and fulfill rights.

The groundwork for confronting current crises was laid over the past few years. In 2019, ESCR-Net became central to the coordination of the Women's Global Strike, with multiple members serving as regional and national coordinators. Members of the Corporate Capture Project developed a series of resources to support campaigning at the national level while integrating

demands into international advocacy. Collective principles on data and ESCR provided a strong basis to advocate for inclusive, representative and accessible data, while collective amicus interventions were informed by strategic litigation workshops aimed at strengthening movement lawyering and assessing the role of litigation in advancing structural change. With a strong advisory group of members, the System of Solidarity expanded its proactive advocacy, initiated analysis of the political economy of violence and continued to take up the wider human rights demands of defenders. Growing cross-working group and Network-wide efforts, for instance advancing climate justice and human rights, drew on the fuller strength of members around the world. Members took important steps to further operationalize a feminist intersectional analysis, holding related workshops, rethinking governance structures, and facilitating and learning from intergenerational and cross-regional exchanges of grassroots women leaders from diverse struggles.

The pandemic and overlapping crises have reinforced the importance of our model of work and core principles – centering the analysis and leadership of movements and resisting communities, building horizontal spaces based on regional and gender balance and integrating a feminist intersectional analysis.

Solidarity and cross-regional relationships of mutual learning and strategic support provide a basis for deepening shared systemic analysis and ultimately for member-led collective action to make human rights and social justice a reality for all.

**In solidarity,  
ESCR-Net Board**



**Fernanda Hopenhaym, Chair**  
Project on Organizing, Development, Education, and Research (Mexico)



**Ryan Schlieff, Treasurer**  
International Accountability Project (USA)



**Priyanthi Fernando, Secretary**  
International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (Malaysia)



**Binota Moy Dhamai**  
Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (Thailand)



**Irene Escorihuela Blasco**  
Observatori DESC (Spain)



**Maha Abdallah Al-Haq** (Palestine)



**S'bu Zikode**  
Abahlali baseMjondolo (South Africa)



**Chris Grove**  
ESCR-Net (ex-officio)

## • WHAT WE DO

The origins of ESCR-Net can be traced to a small group of social movements, human rights NGOs and advocates who came together in shared recognition that many of the injustices they were confronting were increasingly global in nature and rooted in common structural causes. Established in 2003, the Network emerged as a space for members to connect their struggles across regions to address these often systemic challenges. Reflecting an understanding of human rights as grounded in, and realized through peoples' lived experiences and struggles, members defined the centrality of social movements, an intersectional approach foregrounding gender analysis, along with regional and gender balance, as core guiding principles for ESCR-Net. Over the past 15 years, these core principles have been the pillars of our member-led model of work, informing four primary strategies central to ESCR-Net's theory of change:

■ **Solidarity**, grounded in a recognition that “your struggle is my struggle,” manifests in collective mobilizations via ESCR-Net's System of Solidarity to defend members facing threat or attack, taking up their broader human rights demands, countering the political economy of violence, and facilitating member-to-member strategic support.

■ **Mutual learning** via cross-regional sharing of experiences, strategies and lessons is facilitated through grassroots leaders' exchanges, strategic litigation workshops and our Caselaw Database, security and protection workshops, and multilingual webinars. Solidarity and mutual learning nurture relationships of trust and foster movement-building, which are foundational to the other two elements of our theory of change.

■ **Shared analysis** of the global conditions and historical trajectories undermining human rights that is guided by resisting communities is integral to defining issues, strategies, and inclusive demands for systemic change, as captured in our Common Charter for Collective Struggle.

■ **Collective action** – drawing on the power of over 280 diverse members across 75 countries to make human rights and social justice a reality for all – involves advocating for effective regulation and remedy, shifting global economic policy, intervening in key legal cases, confronting corporate capture, mobilizing for climate justice, and centering the visions of people's movements in all collective efforts.



Our seven-person Board is elected every three years from, and by members based on our core principles. ESCR-Net working groups, a primary vehicle through which members operationalize shared objectives, currently include: **Women and ESCR** (WESCR WG), **Corporate Accountability** (CAWG), **Economic Policy** (EPWG), **Monitoring of ESCR** (MWG), **Strategic Litigation** (SLWG), **Social Movements and Grassroots Groups** (SMWG).

Members have increasingly prioritized utilizing the diverse and collective strength of the Network to address the complexity of interconnected challenges and crises. Many initiatives are now cross-working group, including struggles to secure human rights related to land, housing and natural resources; confront corporate capture of government institutions and decision-making; and advance ESCR in situations of conflict. In January 2019, ESCR-Net formally launched a **Network-wide Project on Environment and ESCR**, focused on climate justice.

The point of departure for all collective work is the lived experience, analysis and leadership of those disproportionately affected by and resisting inequality, impoverishment, and injustice – particularly women and girls. This baseline informs all Network processes and policies – from the development of political positions to the formation of governance structures to planning for strategy meetings and workshops.

## ● IMPACTS

Led by grassroots women leaders and social movements, members elevated “red-line” issues – a gender-responsive approach, Indigenous Peoples’ rights, corporate capture, conflict, human rights defenders – ensuring that negotiations for the UN Human Rights Council treaty on business and human rights addressed the rights of affected communities and their demands for justice. Several States ultimately referenced specific points from ESCR-Net’s collective position (October 2019).



Fortifying a human rights-based approach to data, the Monitoring Working Group developed draft principles of ‘good’ data focused on issues of representativeness, participation, accessibility, security and privacy, and relevance to ESCR. Collective advocacy amplified these principles with UN treaty bodies and the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, elevating the experience, analysis, and participation of affected communities in decision-making processes.

Advocacy actions and workshops – co-organized with the Endorois Welfare Council and fellow members over several years – have supported the growing leadership of Endorois women in advancing implementation of the African Commission decision calling for land restitution. In May 2019, three Endorois women were elected to the Board of the Endorois Welfare Council, demonstrating how women’s participation in land struggles can strengthen substantive equality, transforming the movement itself.



ESCR-Net members around the world mobilized in solidarity with fellow human rights defenders and allies, including in Sierra Leone (January 2019), Brazil (March 2019), and Colombia (June 2019), carrying out advocacy actions and sending collective letters to denounce repression, violence, and impunity rooted in corporate abuses and capture of governmental decision-making and institutions.

Building on the depth and diversity of many members’ advocacy at the intersection of human rights and climate change, ESCR-Net officially launched a Network-wide project on ESCR and the environment, prioritizing climate justice (January 2019). Members centered climate issues in diverse cross-Network initiatives and played a key role on the task force for the ‘Peoples’ Summit on Climate, Rights and Human Survival’ in New York City (September 2019).



Organized women workers and grassroots groups mobilized an online May Day campaign, utilizing a mass Twitter action, collective statement, and related advocacy actions to amplify their calls for States to adopt, ratify, and implement the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention to eliminate violence and harassment in the world of work. ILO Convention 190 and Recommendation 206 were adopted in June 2019.

At an economic policy workshop in Chiapas (February 2019), ESCR-Net members – half of whom were social movements – **advanced shared analysis of systemic injustices**, including climate change and corporate capture, that is propelling advocacy for alternatives to the dominant model of development and informing popular political education grounded in movement-led analysis and human rights.



Grassroots labor leaders used a security and protection workshop at the Women and Work strategy meeting in Mexico (February 2019) to **advance community-led strategies for preventing threats and addressing attacks specific to women human rights defenders in the context of work.**



Members submitted a collective amicus brief before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR) in an indigenous rights case in Argentina (Lhaka Honhat vs. Argentina), focusing on **free, prior and informed consent, as well as the rights to water, food, cultural identity, and a healthy environment** (April 2019), contributing to a precedent-setting decision recognizing these rights (April 2020).

**Women from different regions and land struggles built a collective position on land, corporate capture, and climate change** at an intergenerational exchange for grassroots women leaders in Chiang Mai (July 2019). Leaders presented this analysis at the Day of General Discussion on the UN Committee on ESCR draft General Comment on land, where it resonated powerfully (October 2019).

**Litigators, advocates, campaigners and movement leaders joined forces** at a strategic litigation workshop in Mongolia, **strengthening argumentation in individual cases focused on the environment and corporate actors**, situating litigation in wider advocacy strategies for structural change, and cultivating member-to-member collaborations (July 2019).



## WHAT OUR MEMBERS SAY



Solidarity with other ESCR-Net members validates our struggle and makes it more visible and also pushes us to keep moving forward...The Network has really helped me to speak out against the injustices that take place in my country, mainly impacting Indigenous Peoples, as well as to share what is happening in our struggle with other members. I hope to continue contributing to efforts to build a global Network seeking to end corporate abuses against Indigenous communities.

*Juana Toledo, Consejo de Pueblos Wuxhtaj.*



*Reflecting on advances within the Women and ESCR Working Group related to Women and Work and the Women's Global Strike: Building this work and this strategic vision has been so important. With this strategic vision, we have been able to collectivize our efforts, which has led to concrete initiatives that we have been able to adapt to, and utilize in our local contexts.*

*Claudia Lazzaro, Sindicato de Curtidores en la Corriente Federal y Fundación Promoción Humana.*



*Explaining a key focus of the new Network-wide project on environment and ESCR: Corporate capture is a key cause of climate change. Corporations prioritize making maximum profits, and this happens through exploitation of natural resources which in turn accelerates climate change...We have to be able to influence the State for structural change, but we cannot because the State is controlled by the corporates. We have to strongly campaign against corporate capture to prevent climate change and demand strong standards and policies to eliminate this practice.*

*Prafulla Samantara, Lok Shakti Abhiyan.*



*Our collective work has enabled us to share experiences, learn about the struggles of other women and their organizations, and understand that despite living in different countries and even continents, women everywhere have fewer opportunities than men to invest in ourselves and grow and to make our contributions to our communities and/or countries visible. However, we are making breakthroughs; as we learn from each other and deepen our relationships, we are advancing.*

*Zenayda Serrano, Movimiento Unificado Francisco Sánchez 1932.*



*We cannot do this work alone. We need to learn about other struggles, form alliances, be in the same spaces as other struggles, be able to see each other's faces, listen to other struggles. We need to do more to highlight the work women are doing, women's struggles. It is women, particularly young women, leading these struggles. This is positive in the sense that we also have to think about the sustainability of these struggles.*

*Aurelia Arzú, Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña.*



*Explaining the rationale for the new Network-wide project on environment and ESCR: Issues of human rights and issues related to climate are intrinsically connected. We clearly need to address climate change to protect ESCR. But we also need to advance ESCR to effectively address climate change.*

*Alfred Brownell, Green Advocates.*



*Building shared analysis opens our eyes. Some things are sometimes natural to us, but I have learned how many issues are the result of systemic injustices, and how this is affecting poor women in particular, in so many places worldwide.*

*Ida Le Blanc, NUDE.*



I am proud to be a member of the Network. I feel we are truly at the center of activities carried out by the Network. Saying we are part of ESCR-Net in Thailand, gives us added credibility and protection.

*Emilie Pradichit, Manushya Foundation.*



Being part of the Network, I felt like I had all the tools needed to prepare me to engage for the first time in the [UN] open-ended intergovernmental working group session in October 2019. I also felt supported in all the material that was provided early on and the calls with the Network.

*Santiago Sánchez, Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales.*



At the UN, we've really, with the African collective, appreciated the support from ESCR-Net. I think in terms of being visible and also trying to reach more African States, the Network has really been helpful in that sense.

*Akhona Mehlo, Centre for Applied Legal Studies.*



Building shared analysis is really critical; this is what drives movements and grassroots struggles. I am very happy that we are thinking about how we make this accessible, that we are considering popular education, because this analysis needs to be accessible at the grassroots level. For me, the central question is always, how do we connect the work with grassroots groups? How do we connect with local work? I am very happy that we as a Network are starting to be able to name our shared analysis and then thinking about how to make this accessible. I think there is always more that we can do to connect – given the barriers that exist – but I also think that ESCR-Net really puts in the work.

*Mela Chiponda, individual member.*



The structure of the Network is a point of strength in terms of the number and diversity of members; it allows us to pressure different stakeholders better...I am following up on what's happening in the MENA region, but, for me, Latin America is not understood enough. There is an opportunity to know about other struggles better and understand the challenges and opportunities everywhere.

*Wael Tarabieh, Al Marsad – Arab Human Rights Centre in Golan Heights.*



I wish to applaud the work of ESCR-Net for what they've been doing, especially on social movements in having us – grassroots women leaders – being part of a global Network. I'm from the Endorois community, I work for the Endorois umbrella organization called the Endorois Welfare Council and, all along, I've been made to be one of the key people in women's leadership, in realizing women's land rights. I wish to applaud the work of ESCR-Net in putting us on board, especially related to intersectionality, people with different abilities being on board in the global movement... they've given us the opportunity to shape the discussion at an international level.

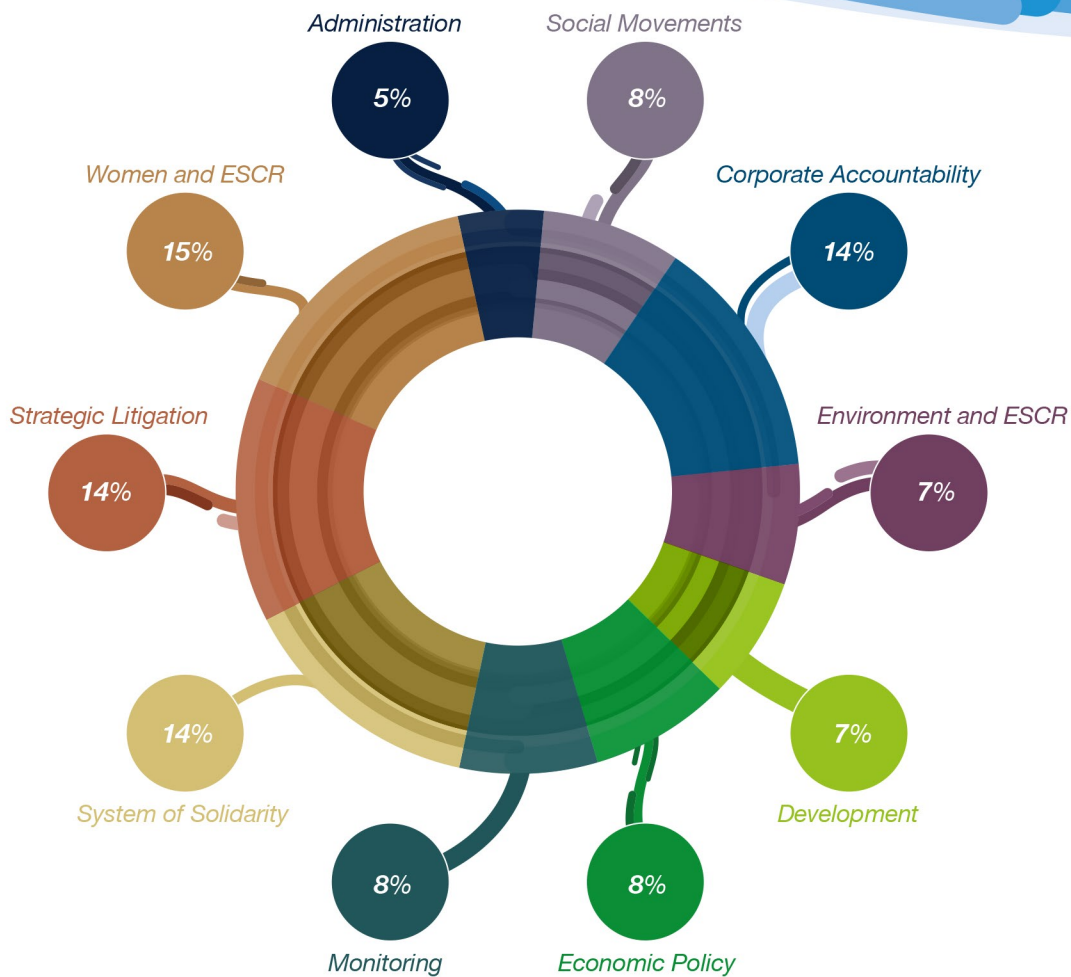
*Christine Kandie, Endorois Welfare Council.*



ESCR-Net has connected us to a wider set of organizations and helped us to ground our analysis in the lived realities of grassroots groups. We are part of many working groups and I have learned so much in each of them, as well as seeing the potential for collaboration between working groups, which I hope that we continue to pursue.

*Magali Brosio, formerly CWGL/now individual member.*

● FISCAL YEAR 2019



Total Income: \$1,267,414 / Total Expense: \$1,767,747

By mobilizing in solidarity actions, engaging in mutual learning, deepening shared analysis and common demands, and, ultimately, advancing collective action, ESCR-Net members have made important advances towards a reality of human rights and social justice for all. ESCR-Net thanks the many members and allies who dedicated immense time and effort to collective work in 2019, as well as those who shared financial resources to help advance ESCR-Net's work, including:



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