

Annual Report
2021

POWER OF THE 99%

الشبكة العالمية
للحقوق الاقتصادية
والاجتماعية والثقافية



ESCR-Net
Red-DESC
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In 2021, members and their communities faced the grim realities of an ongoing pandemic, unfolding economic crises, and growing threats to democracy, amid the failing legitimacy of public institutions often rightly seen as captured by corporate/financial interests. Many experienced substantial losses. As a Network, we mourned the passing and celebrated the lives of important movement leaders, including Mohamed Ali Shah (Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum) and Aurelia Arzú Rochez (Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña - OFRANEH), among too many others. Many movement members were focused on survival in the absence of public provision and as they contended with growing unemployment and inflation, compounded by emerging or deepening debt crises and climate-related disasters. The State was often present only in the form of surveillance and repression. Yet these same movement and Indigenous members, together with resisting communities around the world, also intensified long-standing alternatives or developed new solutions centering care, solidarity and sustainability. These alternatives offer vital models and guiding principles for transformative change capable of realizing human rights for all.

Building on ESCR-Net's Global Call to Action in response to COVID-19 (1 May 2020), members deepened advocacy for public healthcare and equitable access to vaccines and treatment, for public interest and participation to counter corporate capture of government decision-making, and for debt justice and a new social pact on care. Confronting multiple dimensions of the climate crisis, members simultaneously intensified advocacy focused on climate justice, resisting false solutions and developing common positions on issues of climate-induced (economic and noneconomic) loss and damage already impacting communities around the world. As integral to ESCR-Net's core principles and model of work, this necessarily involves centering Indigenous Peoples and their right to self-determination, social movements, and independent unions, as well as grassroots women leaders within them, in building analysis, common demands, and strategies for change. This commitment was further realized in practice via our first community-led research project, in which five movement members examined the role of corporate capture in undermining women's rights to land, housing and natural resources. Responding to the priorities of movement members, we also took the first institutional steps towards building a secretariat team dedicated to supporting member-led campaigning and popular education.

Despite these significant steps forward, we again realized the importance of in-person spaces for political discussions, building shared strategy, and deepening relationships of trust and solidarity vital to collective action. While we drew on a long history of working remotely across regions, as a Board, we recognized the limits of always meeting across a 13-hour time difference, with varying access to quality internet and technology. Days of action, workshops, engagement in international processes, and related strategy meetings remained online, limiting their impact. Yet a substantial portion of members continued to show up despite the obstacles, even urging for more ESCR-Net spaces, convinced of the necessity and potential of global solidarity and cross-regional advocacy. At the secretariat, we were grateful to have a consistent team – spread across different regions – committed to member-led transformative change, while supporting one another through the daily challenges of this period. We also appreciated the consistent and flexible support of many longtime funding partners, allowing us to quickly and creatively respond to these challenges and emerging opportunities to advance social justice.

**In solidarity,
ESCR-Net Board**



Irene Escorihuela Blasco
Observatori DESC
(Spain)



Christina Saiti Iouwa
World Forum of Fisher Peoples
WFFP (Kenya)



Juana Toledo
Consejo de Pueblos Wuxhtaj
(Guatemala)



Ryan Schlieff
International Accountability
Project IAP (US)



Binota Moy Dhamai
Asia Indigenous Peoples
Pact (Thailand)



Maha Abdallah
(Palestine)



Chris Grove
ESCR-Net (ex-officio)



Mary Ann Manja Bayang
(Philippines)

ESCR-Net is its members: model of work, core principles, and theory of change

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. 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 racism, 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 and Global Call to Action in response to COVID-19.
- **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 responding to the fallout of the pandemic and imagining into being a ‘new normal’, 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: Corporate Accountability (CAWG), Economic Policy (EPWG), Environment and ESCR (ESCR WG), Monitoring of ESCR (MWG), Social Movements (SMWG), Strategic Litigation (SLWG), and Women and ESCR (WESCR WG). 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 and climate justice; confront corporate capture of government institutions and decision-making; and advance ESCR in situations of conflict.

The point of departure for all collective work is the lived experience, analysis, and leadership of those disproportionately affected by and resisting inequality, impoverishment, injustice, and environmental destruction – 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. Via this necessarily never-ending effort to live into our core principles and create this horizontal and radically democratic space dedicated to a common humanity and the dignity of all, ESCR-Net practices and models a prefigurative politics of the type of world we want to build and the polity that we want to become.



Impacts of Collective Work and Members' Insights

With the leadership of grassroots women leaders, social movements, and Indigenous Peoples, members developed a collective position on loss and damage foregrounding Indigenous and wider human rights. Grounded in these demands, members' advocacy at the Conference of the Parties (COP26) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (November 2021) contributed to making loss and damage a substantial political discussion for the first time.

Diverse groups of ESCR-Net members were granted leave to collectively intervene in both the first (Duarte Agostinho v. Portugal, April 2021) and second (KlimaSeniorinnen v Switzerland, September 2021) climate change cases before the European Court of Human Rights. These collective amici support progressive jurisprudence that - in combination with advocacy and campaigning - can challenge both the inaction and culpability of governments and private actors in relation to the climate crisis and its devastating human rights impacts.

Centering resisting communities and Global South actors, members continued to play a leadership role in the global civil society coalition driving the Right to a Healthy Environment (R2HE) Campaign. Despite significant pressure from the US, UK, Brazil, and Russia, the resolution ultimately passed by a vote of 43 to 0 at the 48th session of the UN Human Rights Council, constituting an important normative development for future advocacy (October 2021).

"We share the same sky, we share the same land, air and oceans. Our movements protect these, the rights of Indigenous Peoples and the rights of future generations. So, I really appreciate the opportunity to connect our movements' struggles with each other." Mehwish Laghari, Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum, Pakistan.



"Human rights are our cornerstone, that is where we start from and how we contribute. Another is our worldwide capacity of being in different places. The Network is a space that can bridge different sectors concerned about climate behind common goals, bridging struggles. We bridge specific struggles, feminist and climate movements." Rodrigo Echecopar, Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, USA.





The most recent text of the draft treaty to regulate corporate activity reflected demands in our collective position, including explicit references to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and climate change. Several States again pushed for progressive positions and language informed by members' analysis and advocacy (October 2021).



Members launched the first two editions of the comic series "The Power of the 99% to Stop Corporate Capture" and accompanying background notes, which tackle capture of the UN and healthcare. Allies and progressive media joined members in disseminating the comics widely, and these editions have been a key tool in popular political education efforts by movement members, a global rally for equitable vaccine access, and advocacy for regulation of corporate actors.

"I believe that our most important role has been to create a movement and influence public opinion/awareness, making visible the struggles, the injustices, and the demands of affected peoples and communities, generating pressure and bearing witness to the process of negotiations of the treaty, avoiding and exposing the ways and methods used by corporations – and the countries that represent them – to continue violating rights and legitimizing themselves through the treaty."
Nathalie Rengifo Alvarez, Corporate Accountability, Colombia.



In a collective open letter to the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), members advanced calls to cancel and restructure debt of low- and middle-income countries, prioritize human rights and social protection, and model democratic governance. These common demands were a foundation for advocacy during the World Bank-IMF Spring Meetings (April 2021), as well as a powerful parallel event on debt during the IMF Annual Meetings (October 2021).



"This comic is so very timely, it is so deeply relevant to not just the farmers' movement in India, but also to other peoples' movements which are challenging corporate abuse that we have been involved with. It is the 99%, it is we the people, who are rising up and resisting and persisting against the corporate might." Bobby Ramakant, Citizen News Service, India.



"The Common Charter is a bold vision, and we have to be bold. [...] It is not enough to cut poverty in half or make small changes. We have to ask for everything." Adam Barnes, Kairos Center, USA.

Insisting that feminist alternatives need to be at the center of recovery efforts and projects for transformative structural change, members amplified collective analysis and demands for a new global social pact on care. This rallying call united members and allies across regions for the second Women’s Global Strike (March 2021) and informed the intervention of a woman leader of member SOCRA, an Argentinean union, at the 69th session of the UN Committee on ESCR (February 2021).



“I wanted to highlight a positive matter that resulted from the Women’s Global Strike. Last March 8, 2021, this Global Strike constituted a surprise for several of the media outlets in Tunisia. When our video was promoted, several media, T.V. and radio stations, called specifically to talk about this Women’s Global Strike in detail. It was a surprise for them, how women can lead this strike! It left a great impact on society. I believe that highlighting a collective action on the same day for the same duration can have a great impact in terms of raising awareness and in advocacy to achieve results.” Najoua Baccar, Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates, Tunisia



ESCR-Net’s System of Solidarity (SOS) mobilized urgent action in solidarity with social movement members in South Africa and India, including collective letters to authorities to denounce ongoing attacks and criminalization while taking up the wider demands of the movements. The Network also issued a public statement in solidarity with member Al-Haq and five other human rights organizations designated as “terrorist organizations” (October 2021).

Members continued to prioritize efforts to strengthen member-to-member solidarity informed by the analysis and resistance of women human rights defenders (WHRDs), particularly grassroots women leaders. As one such initiative, the SOS Advisory Group collaborated with the Women and ESCR Working Group to survey 74 WHRDs among members and then hold a series of mutual learning exchanges, which were welcomed as unique and much-needed safe spaces by the WHRDSs who participated (June 2021, August 2021, September 2021).



“International solidarity is huge. We need spiritual strength.” Ivan Alberto Vergara, Movimiento Cimarron, Colombia

As key strengths of the community-led research project, members have highlighted both the power of defining their own research questions, designing methodologies, and gathering data, as well as the cultivation of horizontal spaces for exchange and learning that helped them to navigate challenges facing their projects and did not reproduce the top-down dynamics encountered in other research initiatives.

“So far, the [community-led research] project has been so amazing! This project is unique...because these community members are trained to document their own challenges that they are faced with. The women never gave up on this struggle...They are the ones leading, talking about their stories, telling their stories about what has happened in those communities.” Radiatu Shariff, Natural Resources Women Platform, Liberia



In bimonthly social movement dialogues, members are reassessing the evolving global conditions first identified in ESCR-Net’s Common Charter for Collective Struggle yet intensified by the current pandemic and related responses, refining its analysis of the political economy of violence, critically assessing existing strategies, and laying the foundation for new advocacy/campaign agendas towards transformative change.



“The only tool that the poor have is organizing to resist [...] and when I talk about organizing, I don’t just mean the Indigenous organizations joining forces. We have to unite with fisher people, miners, academics. That is to say, everybody. If we do not, we cannot resist.” Benito Calixto, Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indígenas, Peru.



Reinforcing its jurisprudence recognizing the justiciability of ESCER, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights issued a positive decision in the case *Guachalá Chimbó vs. Ecuador*, in which members had presented an amicus (December 2020), finding intersectional discrimination based on disability and class, as well as violations of the right to health (March 2021).

“If we are to make human rights and social justice a reality for everyone, it is important for us to build a global movement to resist these structural and systemic issues, a global movement that connects the struggles of social movements around the world and a global movement that is rooted in the demands of people for dignity, well-being, and participation. What I really value about being part of ESCR-Net[...]is that it has remained so true to its core principles. The modus operandi may change, but the Network continues to be fiercely committed to these principles, to being member- and social movement-led.” Priyanthi Fernando, International Women’s Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific, Malaysia.



**Collective Work Case Study:
Responding to COVID-19
and intersecting crises**

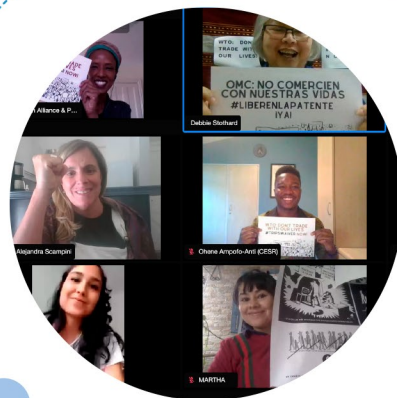


“The system is broken and we in the Global South have always known that. Access to vaccines is a human rights issue. It’s about whether people live or die, whether our kids are able to go to school, whether people are able to earn a decent living.” Allana Kembabazi, ISER, Uganda

As members outlined in ESCR-Net’s Global Call to Action in response to Covid-19, the intersecting public health, economic, and social crises exacerbated by the pandemic are rooted in dominant systems that prioritize profit over people and planet, as well as intertwined structures of oppression - colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, and systemic racism – that were firmly entrenched long before March 2020. For the past couple years, ESCR-Net members, like innumerable people around the world, have been forced to navigate the fallout from this systemic dysfunction, grappling with loss of lives and livelihoods, buckling healthcare systems, and then, vaccine and treatment apartheid both between and within countries at the behest of narrow corporate interests.



“[T]he inequitable access of vaccines has had racially disparate impacts on racial and ethnic minorities; Black people; Indigenous people; women in their diversity; LGBT populations; persons with disabilities and people at the intersections of the aforementioned grounds.” Ohene Ampofo-Anti, Center for Economic and Social Rights, USA.



Corporate capture of democratic institutions and processes is intrinsic to immense substantive inequalities, concentrating power, wealth, and even healthcare in the hands of the elite few. In the pandemic context, this has manifest as the success of corporate actors in maintaining ossified protections such as the WTO Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement to prevent the sharing of COVID-19 healthcare knowledge and technologies.

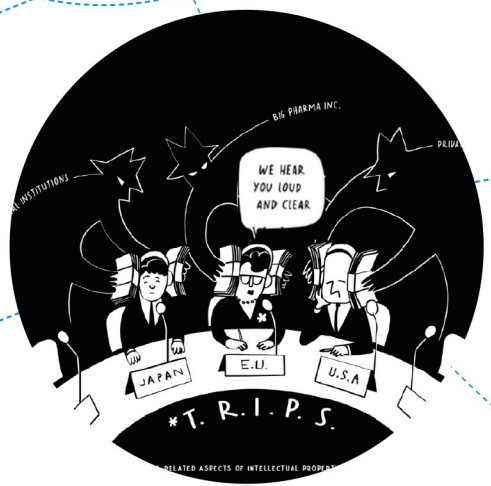
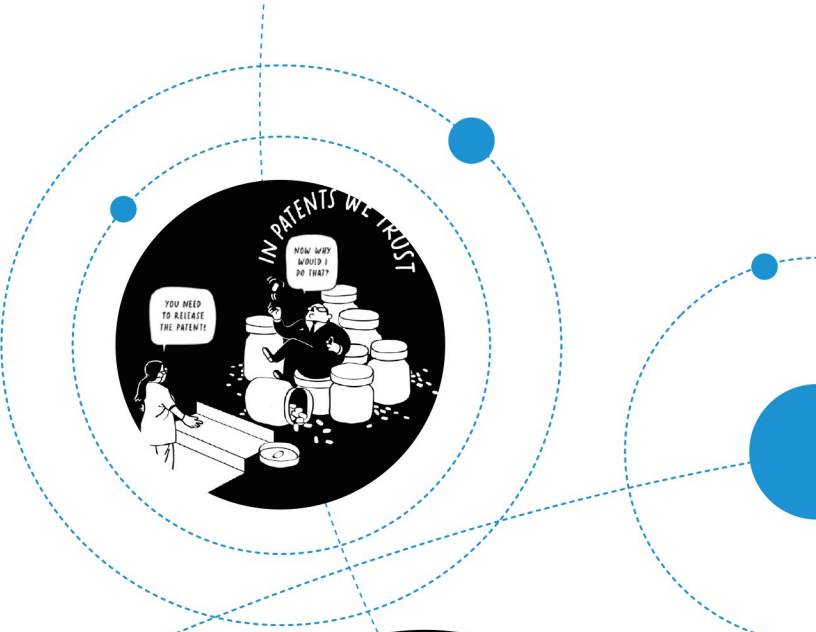


“Big pharma companies such as Pfizer have historically influenced government decision-making at the World Trade Organization. This influence has shaped our domestic economies and dominant global economic system. In pandemic times, we are witnessing the most dramatic face of this. The intellectual property rights that corporations aggressively lobbied for in the WTO 25 years ago are today impeding the equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines to billions of people. Likewise, the privatization of healthcare – as a result of corporate capture – is leading to the dismantling of public healthcare at the expense of health workers, who are disproportionately women, and ultimately turning right holders into customers.” Alejandra Scampini, Project for Organizing, Development, Education and Research, Mexico

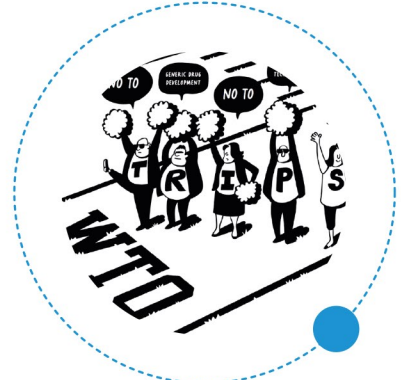
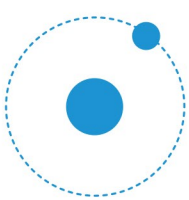
In response, members used multi-pronged strategies to mobilize for a TRIPS waiver as essential to ending vaccine and treatment apartheid and, consequently, the pandemic. However, they simultaneously challenged the structural drivers that led to multifold crises, seeding the transformative changes – related to debt, care, and public provision – that are our best strategy for preventing another catastrophic pandemic. In this sense, members’ focus on vaccine and treatment equity did not constitute a new area of work, but rather, an extension of their long history of advocacy and campaigning against corporate capture and for the role of the State in respecting, protecting, and fulfilling ESCR, including via their extraterritorial obligations. This foundation, in combination with the shared demands outlined in the Global Call, served as a blueprint for collective work – led by social movements and resisting communities – over the course of 2021.



Members launched the second comic in the series “The Power of the 99% to Stop Corporate Capture”, which tackles vaccines and healthcare, unpacking how corporate capture has dismantled public healthcare systems and access to essential vaccines and medicines across the world over the past few decades and into this pandemic with devastating impacts on our rights to health and life, among others (September 2021). Demonstrating the efficacy and reach of the comics as a political education tool across struggles and regions, several members have been using and disseminating the comics and the accompanying briefing note in their movements and communities. In advance of the WTO Ministerial Conference scheduled for November 2021,



members utilized the comic in a popular education workshop and rally involving over 200 members and allies, co-sponsored by allies Movement Law Lab, Médecins Sans Frontières, and The People’s Vaccine Alliance. In addition, regular litigation strategy calls, co-coordinated with Movement Law Lab, supported a series of targeted interventions. For example, an urgent appeal with extensive contributions from over 15 members from different regions pushed six UN Independent Experts and Special Rapporteurs to issue a statement in support of universal and equitable access to COVID vaccines and treatment (April 2021). This UN group subsequently sent 44 letters to States and corporations, which were then made public (October 2021), with Pfizer and several States



compelled to respond to allegations. In addition, the language of two UN Human Rights Council (HRC) resolutions – put forward by Portugal, as well as Ecuador and the Non-Aligned Movement – improved substantially at least in part due via interventions during the 46th session of the HRC and advocacy with these specific States (March 2021). Endorsed by nearly 100 organizations and individuals, our appeal to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (UN CERD) confronted structural racism within and between countries, targeting five countries on the grounds that they have failed to intervene in an inequitable and racially discriminatory rollout of the vaccine (October 2021). Members also launched or threatened litigation in key national jurisdictions resisting a TRIPS waiver to increase pressure and media attention. Along with substantial social media attention, mainstream media in different national and regional contexts have increasingly covered ongoing advocacy for vaccine equity. The urgent appeal and resulting statement of UN experts led to an extended South African Broadcasting Corporation television interview with the Initiative for Social and Economic Rights (ISER), a Ugandan member co-leading this work (June 2021).

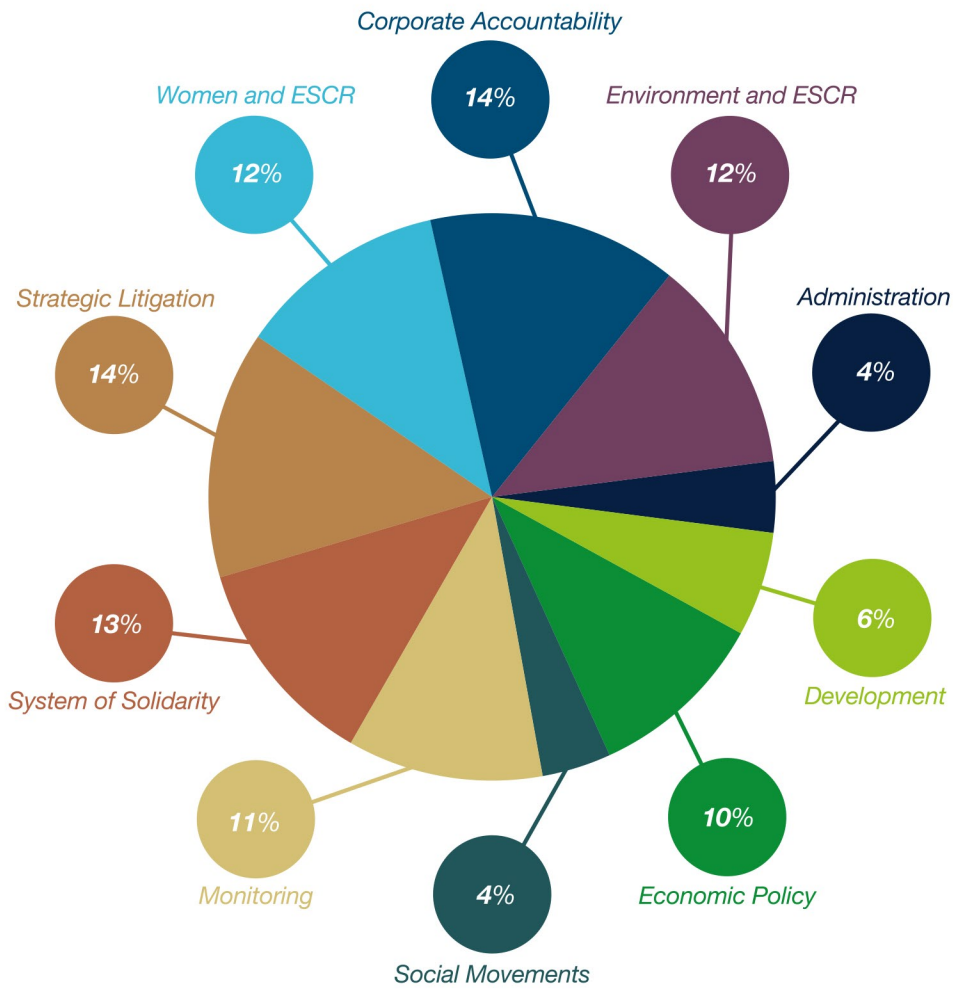


“Critical, transformative action is needed immediately if we are to substantively effect change and bring about just and equal access to the right to health.” Mandi Mudarikwa, Women’s Legal Centre, South Africa



Members’ insistence on accountability for private and public actors is integral to undoing disproportionate harm and any real recovery from the current pandemic. Simultaneously, their focus on the systemic root causes of vaccine, treatment, and public healthcare inequities serves as a foundation for a just and sustainable transition to a new normal centering care, substantive equality, and global public interest.

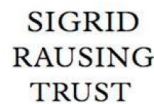




Total Income: \$2,183,012 / Total Expense: \$1,614,280

THANK YOU!

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 2021, as well as those who shared financial resources to help advance ESCR-Net's work, including:



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Contact us

info@escr-net.org



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