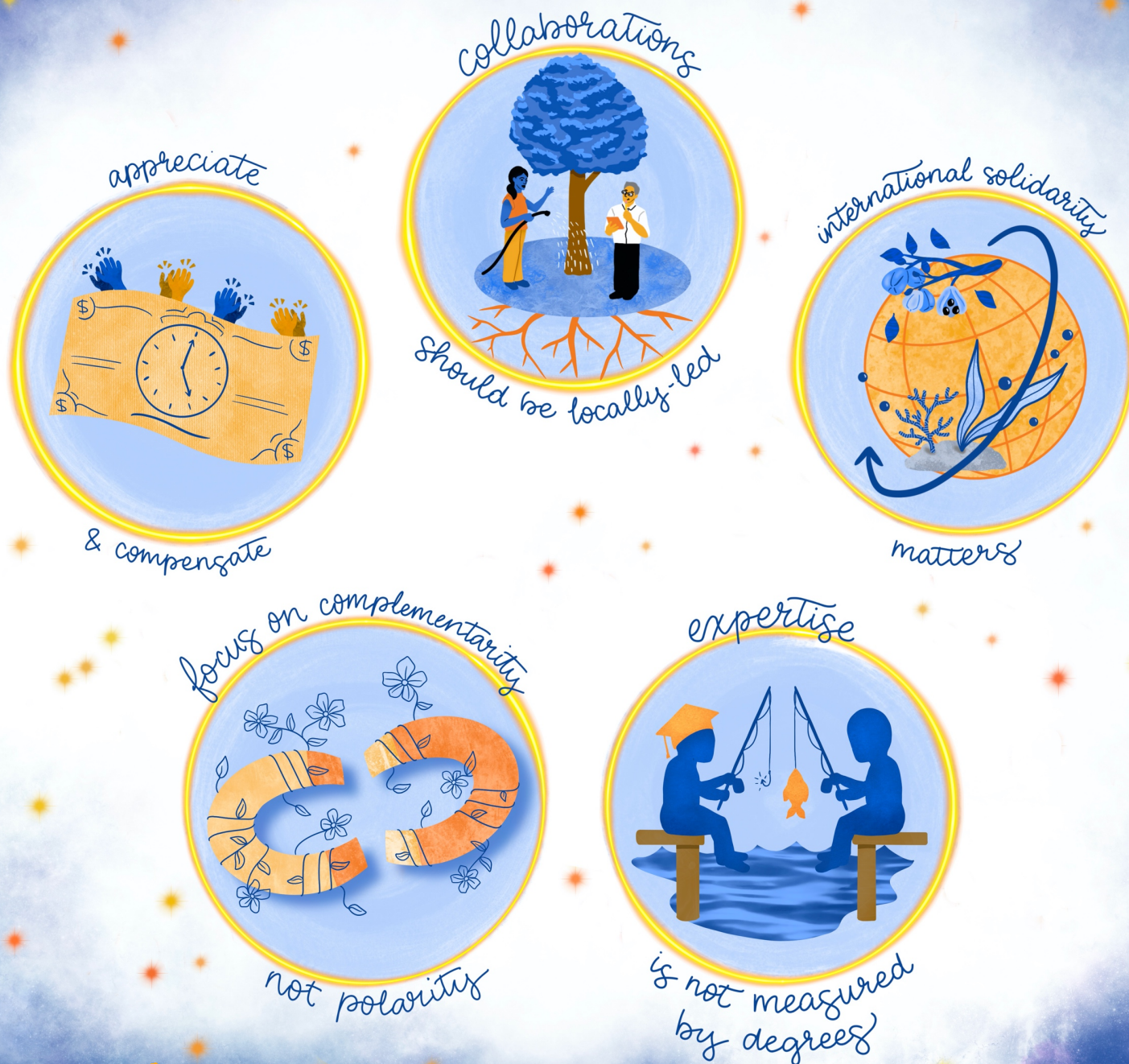


# RE-ENVISIONING TECHNICAL SUPPORT AND WHAT CONSTITUTES "EXPERTISE"

## A TRUE COSTS INITIATIVE REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2021



The mission of the True Costs Initiative is to increase corporate accountability and to strengthen legal systems in the Global South by driving collaboration among communities, funders, and creative leaders in an effort to tip the balance so corporations are held accountable for and internalize the **true** environmental and human costs of their actions.

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## **ASOCIACIÓN INTERAMERICANA PARA LA DEFENSA DEL AMBIENTE (AIDA)**

Anna Cederstav and Astrid Puentes Riaño

## **CULTURAL SURVIVAL**

Galina Angarova

## **ENVIRONMENTAL LAW ALLIANCE WORLDWIDE (ELAW)**

Bern Johnson and Heidi Weiskel

## **GREENWATCH UGANDA**

Samantha Atukunda

## **INTERNATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT (IAP)**

Jocelyn Medallo and Tom Weerachat

## **JAMAICA ENVIRONMENT TRUST (JET)**

Diana McCaulay

## **RED DE LAS MUJERES INDIGENAS SOBRE BIODIVERSIDAD DE AMERICA LATINA Y EL CARIBE (RMIB-LAC)**

Yolanda Teran Maigua

Finally, we would like to thank our consultant [Gillian Caldwell](#) for her thoughtful and collaborative approach in the development of this report and our infographic designer [@lizar\\_tistry](#) for her unique and powerful artistry. We would also like to thank Denisse Leatxe and Joseph Stanford from [Txiki Txoko](#) for their elegant design and layout and thorough copy editing.



# CONTEXT

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Over the last several years, we at [True Costs Initiative](#) (TCI) have steadily increased the number and size of the technical support grants we offer. These grants ensure our partners have the broad range of expertise necessary to advance human and environmental rights.<sup>1</sup> We have also deepened our commitment to supporting Indigenous and other traditionally marginalized communities. In the process, we formed a hypothesis that the definition of “technical expertise” in the NGO and donor communities is often too narrow—too scientifically focused, and too Global North in its orientation. We surmised that this narrow definition could lead to underfunding as well as an underappreciation of other critically necessary and complementary forms of expertise. To explore these observations and concerns, we recently engaged an independent consultant. She was tasked with analyzing data regarding technical support needs and offerings from our partners’ grant proposals and reports in 2019 and 2020. She also conducted a series of follow up interviews with a representative sample of TCI partners globally to deepen our insight into what constitutes “technical expertise.”

Our goals in commissioning this report were threefold:

1. to share our findings on technical expertise and how best to deploy it;
2. to hear directly from our partners, especially the underrepresented voices in this space, and amplify their voices; and
3. to motivate other funders to rethink what constitutes “technical expertise” and fund, support, and value an expanded range of insights and experience.

We have emerged from this process with an even clearer understanding of why it is important to support less academically recognized forms of knowledge and expertise. As part of our ongoing commitment to ensuring customized and appropriate technical support for our partners, we will continue to fund less academically recognized forms of knowledge alongside the critically important scientific and legal support.

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<sup>1</sup> We are using the term “partner” to refer to our grantees throughout this report because we understand them as partners first and foremost.

# METHODOLOGY

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We laid the groundwork for this report in several steps over the last three years.

## PHASE 1 (2019-2020)

### **Obtaining information on technical support from partner proposals and reports**

In reaction to the growing importance of technical expertise in our partner portfolio, TCI decided to integrate an optional technical support section in our 2019 and 2020 grant applications. This consisted of four questions, and we made it clear to the applicants that their responses (or lack thereof) would not influence our consideration of their application. The questions were as follows:

1. Have you seen any technical support gaps within the communities you serve or in your advocacy on their behalf? If yes, please provide one specific example for each technical support gap that you identify. If no, skip the rest of this section.
2. How is your organization filling these technical support gaps? Please explain succinctly and provide one specific example for each technical support gap that you identify.
3. What are the technical support gaps that your organization is not currently able to meet? Please explain succinctly and provide one specific example for each technical support gap that you identify. If none, please indicate "NONE."
4. How can funders support you or affected communities in closing these technical support gaps? If you answered "NONE" in the previous question, please indicate "N/A."

In 2019, TCI recommended 51 grants to 42 partners. However, six of those grants did not require a standard grant application and thus those partners were not asked the four questions on technical support. Additionally, some of our partners received more than one grant from us in any given year. Therefore, we received information from approximately 35 different partners in response to these queries.

In 2020, TCI recommended grants to 47 partners. Eleven of these grants did not require a standard grant application and thus 11 grant applicants were not asked the four questions.

Of those who did not respond to our technical support questions in 2019-2020, a limited few saw no relevance to either their work or that specific grant proposal. Others did not respond because the very proposal they submitted was aimed to address technical expertise capacity gaps and answering the questions would have been a redundant effort.

Nonetheless, we received responses to our questions on technical support from a significant majority of our partners in 2019-2020, and this formed the basis for some important observations, as reflected below.

## PHASE 2 (2021)

### **Retaining an independent consultant to analyze the reporting data and interview selected partners**

In the spring of 2021, we retained an independent consultant to analyze the data in our 2019-2020 partner proposals and reports, conduct a series of interviews, and prepare this report. During this phase, our consultant interviewed seven partners based across Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia.

Ahead of our conversations, the consultant sent our partners a proposed definition of “technical support.”

We view **technical support** as including scientific, legal, research, communications, media, cultural, and traditional expertise, as well as any other expertise that grantee partners believe is essential in supporting their fight to protect communities and the environment.

In the consultant’s interviews, she asked the partners if this definition resonated with them and whether they would suggest any amendments. She also explored how TCI can ensure we have a definition of technical expertise and support that is inclusive of conventionally unrecognized forms of knowledge but yet not so broad that it would lose meaning. She sought to deepen the understanding she gleaned from the proposals and the reports as to the kinds of technical support our partners provided and rely upon. Throughout the interview process, she also gathered stories about the impacts generated by providing technical support. Finally, she asked them what messages they would most like us to

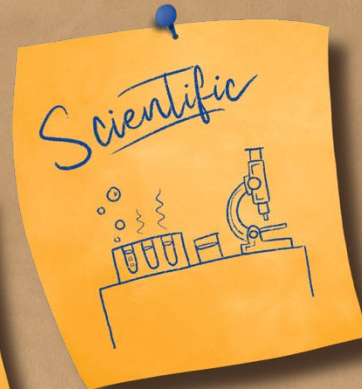
convey to the donor community and the wider NGO sector. This report reflects the learnings she gleaned through this process.

“I too believe that the current definition of what counts as ‘technical expertise’ in the NGO and donor terrain is too narrow, and could lead to underfunding and/or underappreciation of critically necessary expertise, especially for organizations in the Global South and Indigenous-led organizations which are both in the Global North and South. This is particularly true when addressing issues like climate change, biodiversity conservation, and ecological restoration, where the traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples is essential to find adequate solutions to these problems.”

— Galina Angarova, Cultural Survival



# AN OVERVIEW OF TECHNICAL SUPPORT NEEDS



In their 2019-2020 responses to TCI's questions, our partners highlighted a broad range of technical support needs, which are summarized in the following pages.



Financial & Corporate



Legal



Community-Led Research



Advocacy, Communications & Organizing



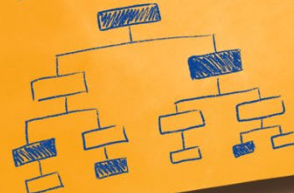
Negotiations

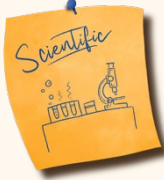


Security



Organizational Development





## SCIENTIFIC

Scientific knowledge is in increasing demand to support studies on climate, air, water, and soil and to determine the environmental and human health consequences of planned or ongoing development projects. For example, in many Latin American countries, there is a lack of “hard-science” professionals who can conduct this research or who have access to the instruments and laboratories required for the analysis. Advocacy groups also struggle to prove direct causal links between investment projects and the impacts that communities experience, such as deterioration of water quality and availability, pollution, and habitat destruction. Many organizations meet these needs by partnering with universities in the Global North. However, groups we spoke to in the Global South would like to see more environmental education in their own countries and regions to ensure ready access. This will allow them to identify and sustain important local knowledge and insight. Partners also note that many local scientists hesitate to speak out against government or private interests for fear of losing their jobs—and even their careers.



## INTERDISCIPLINARY

Our partners point out that it is often important to combine scientific information with data from other disciplines such as civil

engineering, and they told us they struggle to find people with such interdisciplinary skillsets.



## ECONOMIC

Our partners are increasingly seeking economic analyses to assess a project’s financial impacts on Indigenous Peoples and local communities and/or to stress test or rebut claims regarding the economic benefits and job-creation of a given project. They may also need economic expertise to fashion the “business case” for respecting Indigenous Peoples and local communities and their right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).



## FINANCIAL AND CORPORATE

Corporate and financial structures are increasingly complex and opaque, requiring specialized expertise and access to paid databases to identify the companies and investors behind a given project, as well as other key information needed for use in advocacy, litigation, etc.



## LEGAL

A wide variety of legal expertise is required for many aspects of our partners’ work, including informing community members of their rights; identifying the appropriate jurisdiction for claims; supporting them



to file lawsuits for remedies when their rights are violated; and defending them when retaliatory criminal charges or civil claims are filed against them. Such legal support and interventions often require complementary scientific and technical support of the kinds described above.



## **MAPPING AND GIS**

Many communities lack accurate and accessible maps of community land.

Additionally, the lack of formal land tenure systems in many areas in the Global South means that Indigenous Peoples and local communities need technical support to map customary lands using the Global Positioning System (GPS) and geographic information system (GIS) mapping, as well as satellite imagery to show changes in land use and forest cover over time.



## **COMMUNITY-LED RESEARCH**

This is a process through which the community relies on its own local knowledge to identify an issue, think deeply about it, engage in dialogue with other community members, and propose solutions. This participatory research methodology is rooted in the recognition of communities' agency and expertise and is often complementary to other more traditionally and academically recognized forms of expertise. Our partners encourage us to ensure that traditional scientific and similar forms of

expertise not be substituted for, but rather be deployed in tandem with, community-led research.



## **NEGOTIATIONS**

Communities often need support in preparing for negotiations with companies or governments that are skilled in advancing their own interests.



## **ADVOCACY, COMMUNICATIONS, AND ORGANIZING**

Many groups are seeking training in strategic communications and advocacy strategy, support with outreach to the media, and training in community organizing.



## **TECHNOLOGY SKILLS AND EQUIPMENT**

Many local organizations lack basic access to technology and the internet as well as training in how to use standard computer programs. Others lack access to electricity, which renders many technologies useless.



## **SECURITY**

Organizations and activists globally are facing a growing range of threats—some of which are deadly—and are in desperate need of support in the areas of digital, legal, and physical security.





## ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Partners cite pervasive needs within local communities for support in various areas of organizational development such as fundraising, financial and organizational management, and planning. Challenges in these areas often prevent organizations from receiving grants, which further perpetuates the problem of weak organizational infrastructure

and the ongoing inequality of access to resources.



## LANGUAGES AND TRANSLATION

Many partners need support with translation to and from English, as well as support in communicating in Indigenous languages in remote areas facing incursion.



In reality, funders are interested in funding groups with strong organizational capacity, yet they are not willing to fund their organizational development.

While this list is certainly not exhaustive, it highlights the range of expertise that our partners provide and rely upon in advancing their work.

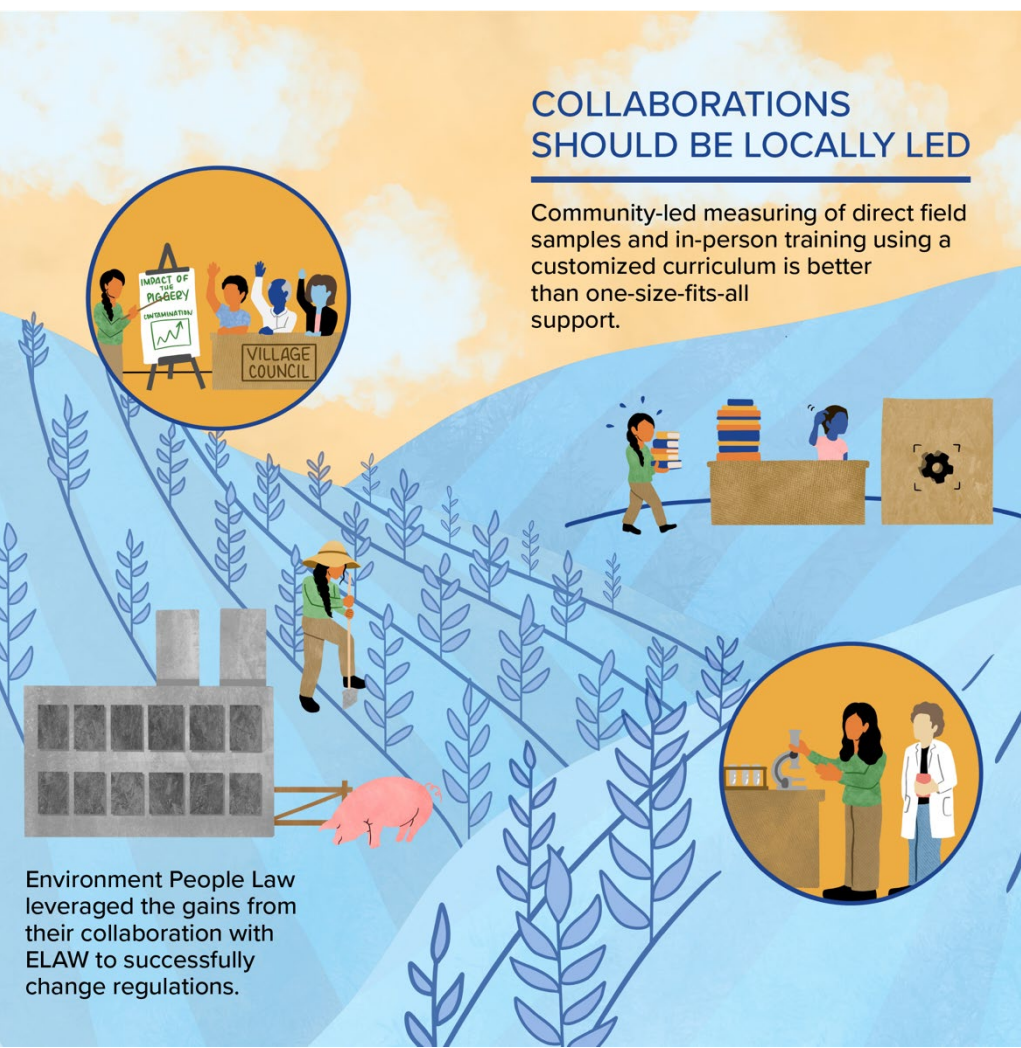
In what follows, we offer a series of themes, recommendations, and vignettes drawn from the very rich conversations our consultant had with our partners as we expanded our understanding of the kinds of technical support required to advance environmental justice and human rights.

# COLLABORATIONS SHOULD BE LOCALLY LED

The best and most sustainable results are generated by locally led collaborations in which any needed technical expertise is paired with and **guided by** the needs of the local organization. Our partners at [Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide](#) (ELAW) emphasized the fact that the support they provide is highly demand-driven and customized. They focus on meeting local and national organizations around the world where they are, and they find ways to address their needs through referrals, even if they extend beyond ELAW's on-staff expertise in the areas of environmental law and scientific analysis.

"It's good to have a broad definition of technical support. That opens the door to working with each organization on a case-by-case basis, to identify what that organization needs and provide that support."

— Heidi Weiskel, ELAW



## CLOSING A TOXIC PIGGERY IN UKRAINE

ELAW Executive Director Bern Johnson and Staff Scientist Heidi Weiskel cited a recent victory in Ukraine with their partners at [Environment People Law](#), in which they worked together to shut down an abusive piggery. One of ELAW's staff scientists helped the community measure ammonia levels and greenhouse gas emissions from the farm. Ammonia levels were so high that they were contaminating neighboring fields and groundwater sources. The local partners at Environment People Law were able to leverage that data to convince the village council to shut down not just the abusive pig farm but also to ban all polluting facilities within the Byliky village area.

ELAW notes that they have recently experienced growth in the volume of requests for direct sampling from the field as local organizations are becoming increasingly targeted and strategic in their efforts to target polluting industries. The challenge is that ELAW cannot efficiently meet all the demand for their services via one-to-one video-based instruction. It is also challenging to cover such highly technical issues remotely. ELAW are hoping to raise additional resources to expand their in-person group trainings covering topics such as soil and water sampling and preserving the chain of custody for evidentiary purposes.

## ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

At the same time, in-person trainings need to be carefully considered and customized. Our partners at the [Jamaica Environment Trust](#) (JET) told us a story about a time when another organization offered to train them on testing air quality with high-end machines

that had to be returned at the end of the testing. The local community members struggled with the complex instructions and instruments. In a further complication, the community had been asked to return the equipment at the end of the engagement, but no airline would agree to transport it because it was powered by lithium batteries. This example highlights the need to take a highly customized, locally led approach to shaping any community-based support and interventions.

"We would have been better off having community members keep a log and take a picture with their phone. Getting them to test air quality with these complicated machines was a bridge too far."

— Diana McCaulay,  
Jamaica Environment Trust



# INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY MATTERS

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While our partners need the legal and scientific expertise provided via our technical support grants—and have benefitted tremendously from it—what has been equally important for them is the sense that they have a strong ally internationally whom they can rely on. This often gives local organizations the courage they need to challenge the powerful and sometimes dangerous vested interests threatening their communities. Our partners are also clear that solidarity means respecting the insight that local communities have and standing behind them rather than out in front in a way that overshadows them.

“Organizations like ELAW provide technical support that makes it much better for us to do the work. We are afraid or intimidated by the big dogs because they have a lot of resources. When they support us, we don't feel alone. We know there is a network of scientists and lawyers that are helping us to support our facts.”

— Samantha Atakunda,  
Greenwatch Uganda

## THE BATTLE FOR PEAR TREE BOTTOM IN JAMAICA

Founder Diana McCaulay and her colleagues at JET had tried everything in their efforts to block ecologically damaging “development” projects in Jamaica—educating local communities about the risks, writing letters to the regulatory authorities, and organizing protests—but none of it seemed to work. Then, while obtaining a master’s degree in the United States, Diana learned about the field of environmental law and began to think about the potential of deploying environmental law practices back home in Jamaica. Coincidentally, ELAW approached them at around the same time about collaborating on a lawsuit. In a similar vein to Samantha’s comment on her work in Uganda, Diana said, “They gave me the courage to do it and made me think it was possible.” Importantly, and reinforcing our theme that collaborations should be locally led, ELAW was deliberately standing behind JET, letting the local partner lead and serve as the face of the campaign, while filling in the gaps where needed.

In this way, JET and ELAW collaborated to file JET’s first lawsuit, which challenged plans to develop a mega hotel in the ecologically pristine Pear Tree Bottom area on the north coast of Jamaica. Pear Tree Bottom had been slated for protection since the early

1990s, and the lawsuit, which JET and many other partners filed with ELAW's support in 2005,<sup>2</sup> challenged the public process and the integrity of the Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) prepared regarding the Pear Tree Bottom hotel development project.

In an exciting victory, the court ruled in their favor and quashed the permits for construction. Although the hotel development company ultimately prevailed with an appeal on the grounds that they were an aggrieved respondent, in its decision the appeals court strengthened the lower court's declarations about the problems with the permitting process and the EIAs. Importantly, the investments made in legal support for the Pear Tree Bottom case changed the public consultation process for **all such cases** in Jamaica moving forward. Previously, hearings were held at inconvenient times and places, but now the terms of references for EIAs in Jamaica have to be made publicly available before an EIA is commissioned or produced. The hearings on EIAs in Jamaica must now also be publicly accessible. This story highlights the potential of legal expertise to help drive changes in policy and practice at a systemic level, as well as the potential for international solidarity to embolden local actors and drive impact.



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<sup>2</sup> See [here](#) a complete list of partners and the complaint

## PROTECTING THE CABO PULMO REEF IN MEXICO

Given the natural beauty of the Cabo Pulmo Reef, developers have repeatedly sought permission to build tourist resorts near the reef, featuring golf courses, hotels, airports, and sports clubs. But coral reefs are extremely vulnerable to the damage such developments can cause. Sewage and wastewater runoff stimulate algae growth that causes reefs to bleach and die. Fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides contaminate ocean currents and upset the ecological balance. And boating, fishing, and diving can cause serious physical damage to reefs.<sup>3</sup>

Astrid Puentes Riaño, the co-executive director of Interamerican [Asociación Interamericana para la Defensa del Ambiente](#) (AIDA), told us how AIDA worked with local and national partners in Mexico and around the world to protect Cabo Pulmo—a national park she described as “a 20,000-year-old aquarium of the planet,” which hosts many of the 800 species in the Sea of Cortez. She also pointed out that this initial victory needs to be sustained and protected as investors continue to apply to develop the area.

AIDA uses the law and science to protect the environment and communities suffering from environmental harm, primarily in Latin America. They bring pivotal regional and international expertise and connections to the table. They were approached by a range of Mexican organizations to strengthen the work that they were doing to protect the Cabo Pulmo Reef. Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental (CEMDA), Greenpeace Mexico, Wildcoast, and many other local, national, and international organizations were implementing legal, advocacy, and campaign efforts related to preserving Cabo Pulmo. Meanwhile, AIDA was charged with leading the international campaign, ensuring that it was closely coordinated with the national strategy.<sup>4</sup> The EIA that had been prepared for the project was assessed by AIDA scientists who identified where it fell short of international standards and conventions. AIDA also worked in collaboration with partners to strengthen the international law arguments in the legal briefs being submitted to the Mexican government. Additionally, they led on the submission of the Ramsar-UNESCO petition, which prompted a historic mission to Mexico in which the authorities met with government and investors and produced a report urging Mexico not to develop the Cabo Pulmo project. In a clear demonstration of the importance of international solidarity in local campaigns, someone close to the president of Mexico

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<sup>3</sup> [“Protecting the rich marine life of Cabo Pulmo Reef,”](#) AIDA

<sup>4</sup> The coalition was called Cabo Pulmo Vivo and included Amigos Para la Conservación de Cabo Pulmo, Niparajá, Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental (CEMDA), WILDCOAST/COSTASALVAJE, Asociación Interamericana para la Defensa del Ambiente (AIDA) and Greenpeace México.



told AIDA that when he received the report he decided to halt the project because of the international pressure he would face if he advanced it.



## EXPERTISE IS NOT DEFINED BY DEGREES

"I come from the ecological sciences, and in those disciplines I have noticed the increased incorporation of traditional knowledge into research, with active recognition of other voices as experts."

— Heidi Weiskel, ELAW

Just as organizations can benefit from scientific instruments and specialized training, there is often no substitute for the experience of a community that has lived on and with the land for generations. The most powerful collaborations we have seen include ones where local expertise was paired with scientific or legal expertise in a complementary fashion.

## BLOCKING A PROPOSED HARBOR PROJECT IN SRI LANKA

[International Accountability Project](#) (IAP) is an advocacy organization that “fights to ensure that community-led expertise and experience are at the center of how development is designed, funded and implemented.”<sup>5</sup> While IAP often supports local organizations in campaigns to highlight the human rights and environmental implications of large-scale development projects, they started our conversation by saying they do not see themselves as experts, but rather as an organization interested in “exchanging knowledge” with other organizations. As IAP’s Asia Pacific Coordinator Tom Weerachat said, “the ethos is to see this as an exchange, with people on equal footing, and with communities having agency and expertise to do the work.”

Tom and IAP’s Deputy Director Jocelyn Medallo told us a story of a success in Sri Lanka that exemplifies the complexity of the power dynamics and biases inherent in the fight for environmental and human rights. In this case, local communities learned through the [Early Warning System](#) about the [Northern Province Sustainable Fisheries Development Project](#) proposed by the Asian Development Bank. They soon discovered that the project proposed could decimate the traditional fishing economy.

In early 2018, the communities started to mobilize and invited a local organization, Sri Lanka Nature Group (SLNG), to work with IAP and the [Accountability Counsel](#) to conduct a community training in Jaffna. The training covered ways to ensure the Asian Development Bank was held accountable to its commitments to safeguard the environment and community well-being, and it explored how communities could utilize the bank’s independent accountability mechanism.

In preparing their response to the proposed development, a group of 20, including SLNG staff and other local community members, conducted over 400 interviews with local residents about the design and planned implementation of the project. This research found that the Asian Development Bank had failed to comply with their own Public Communications Policy as well as their Safeguard Policy Statement; 99% of respondents said that they were not consulted during project planning, and 94% of respondents reported that they did not have the information needed to be able to provide informed opinions about the project’s plans.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Learn more about [IAP's advocacy efforts](#).

<sup>6</sup> “[Information delayed is information denied — Fisherfolk Communities in Northern Sri Lanka Independently Investigate Impacts of Proposed Harbor Project](#),” IAP



ஆசிய அபிவிருத்தி வங்கியும் இலங்கை அரசாங்கமும் தீர்மானம் எடுக்கும் நடவடிக்கைகளில் மக்களின் பாதுகாப்பு மற்றும் அர்த்தமுள்ள பங்களிப்பை முழுமையாக செலுத்துவதற்காக பாதுகாப்பான இடத்தை உறுதியளிக்க வேண்டும். இந்த இடம் எந்த விதத்திலும் அச்சுறுத்தல்களுக்கோ அல்லது நிர்ப்பந்தங்களுக்கோ அப்பாற்பட்டதாக இருக்க வேண்டும்.

## சமூக பங்களிப்பு மற்றும் ஆலோசனைகள்

99%

பதிலளித்தவர்களை திட்ட தீட்டியில் ஆலோசனைகளில் பங்குபடுத்தப்படவில்லை.

91%

திட்டத்தால் பாதிப்பிற்குள்ளாகுகின்ற காணி, வீடுகள் மற்றும் வளங்கல் தொடர்பாக பெறுமதி ஆவணத்தை அளவிடுவதில் திட்ட முதலீட்டாளர் அல்லது செயற்படுத்தும் முகவரால் மேற்கொள்ளப்பட்ட எந்த நடவடிக்கைகளிலும் தான் பங்குபற்றவில்லை என தெரிவித்தனர்.

97%

அவர்களின் சமூகத்திற்கான குறிப்பிட்ட அபிவிருத்தி திட்டத்தில் தங்களது கருத்துக்களை முன்மொழிவதற்கான எந்தவொரு சந்தர்ப்பமும் வழங்கப்படவில்லை.



அந்த சந்தர்ப்பங்களில், ஒரேயொரு மிதிவாதி மட்டும் அவர்களின் கருத்து திட்ட தீட்டியில் ஒதுக்கிக்கொடுக்கப்பட்டுள்ளதாக குறிப்பிட்டுள்ளனர்.



52%

சகல திட்டம் தொடர்பாக ஒத்துக்கொள்ளவில்லை எனவும் திட்ட தீட்டியில் மாற்றங்களை முன்மொழிய வேண்டுமெனவும் தெரிவிக்கின்றனர்.



24%

ஒட்டு மொத்த திட்டத்தை ஏற்றுக்கொள்வதாகவும், ஆனால் திட்ட தீட்டியில் மாற்றங்களை முன்மொழிய வேண்டுமென தெரிவிக்கின்றனர்.

## சுற்றாடல் மற்றும் சமூக சவால்கள்

திட்டம் சேவைகள் மற்றும் நடவடிக்கைகள் தொடர்பான முகாமைத்துவம் தொடர்பான கருத்துக்கள் சமூகத்தால் தெரிவிக்கப்பட்டுள்ளது. பொதுவாக தேகவல் பற்றாக்குறையின் காரணமாகவும் மற்றும் அவர்களின் மொழியில் தகவல்களை பெற்றுக்கொள்ள முடியாததாலும் சுற்றாடல் மற்றும் சமூக சவால்களை புரிந்து கொள்வது பாராதாரமாகியுள்ளது. இந்த அக்கறை மனைவர்கள் மற்றும் அவர்களின் குடும்பங்கள், வேளிவாரியான குழுக்கள் மற்றும் திட்டத்தில் முரண்பாடு ஏற்படுவதை சாத்தியமாக்குவதற்காக சமூகத்தை கட்டியெழுப்புகிறது.

95%

இந்த திட்டத்தின் விளைவாக அவர்களின் வாழ்வாதார வழிமுறைகள் அழிவடையும் என கருதுகின்றனர்.

91%

புலம்பெயர்வதன் விளைவாக தாங்களின் சேவைகள் பெற்றுக்கொள்வதை இழக்கலாம் என கருதுகின்றனர்.

95%

அரசாங்க அபிவிருத்தி ஆலோசனைகளுக்கும் பார்க்க அவர்களின் அபிவிருத்தி ஆலோசனைகள் வேறுபட்டது என தெரிவித்தனர்.



“We have to make the case that communities are experts and that when they decide to take over the narrative by doing their own research, that has merit—as much validity as a scientific study.”

— Tom Weerachat,  
International Accountability Project

When the community shared their community-led research data with the Sri Lankan government, the government responded by questioning the educational qualifications of the researchers as well as the criteria used for analysis and by posing a bevy of technical questions. Upon reviewing the government's response, the IAP asked the communities if they wanted to commission an independent review of their findings to strengthen their case with the government. The communities declined, saying they would handle it themselves.

Excerpt of an infographic in Tamil summarizing [research findings](#). See the [full infographic](#). (An English version of the infographic is also [available](#)).

Graphic: International Accountability Project.



The community researchers arranged a meeting with the government in which they said they would be happy to compare analyses if the government would prepare its own report of the projected impacts on communities. With their bluff having been called, the government backed down from its criticisms of the analysis the community had prepared. In a victory for the communities, the Asian Development Bank agreed first to delay its vote on the project and ultimately withdrew its support. The Sri Lankan case highlights the importance of recognizing the credibility and expertise of local organizations with deep roots in their community, even if they lack conventionally recognized qualifications.

“It is important to consider that, for example, an Indigenous woman in Guatemala has traditional knowledge. For us in AIDA, we consider that to be expertise.”

— Astrid Puentes, AIDA

## APPRECIATE AND COMPENSATE

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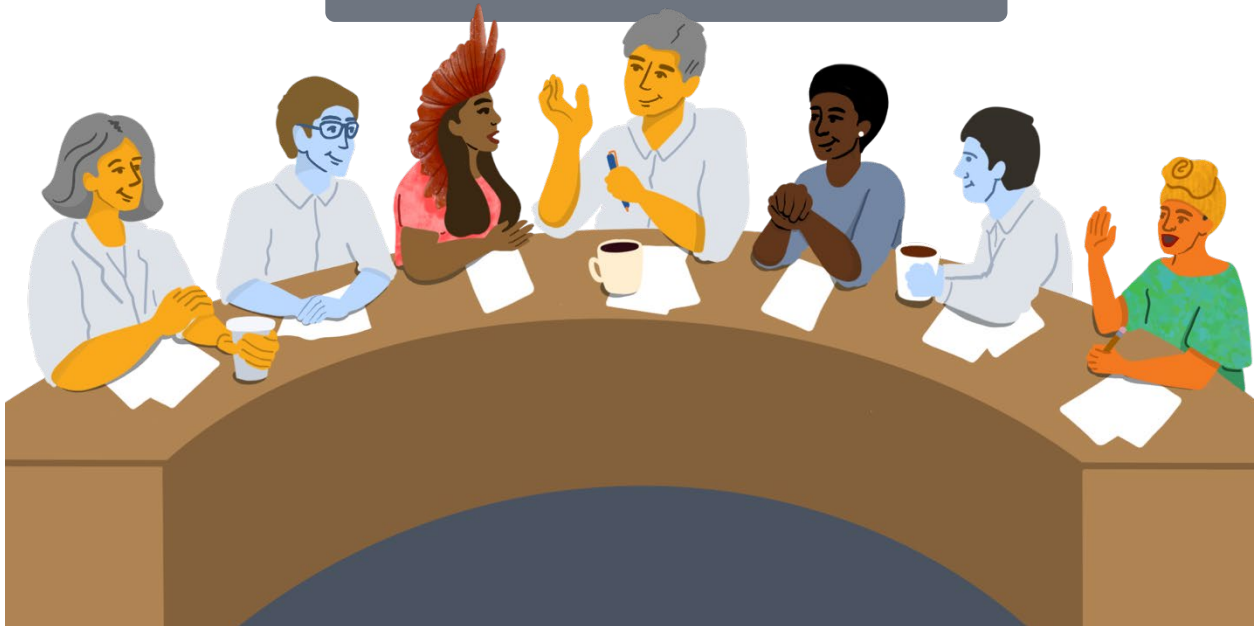
As the philanthropic community and wider society grapples with the need and growing demand to diversify voices, power, and access to resources, our partners in Indigenous and diverse organizations are struggling to respond to the onslaught of incoming requests. They know that they will not be able to advance their important work if they respond to every request for participation and yet, as Galina Angarova from [Cultural Survival](#) notes, “If we aren’t **at** the table, we are **on** the table!”

“The local traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples is one form of expertise that is being overlooked and unrecognized—although freely used and misused without any compensation.”

— Galina Angarova,  
Cultural Survival

“If we aren’t at the table,  
we are on the table.”

— Galina Angarova, Cultural Survival



The irony is that even as donors and others reach out to expand the range of voices at the table, the historic lack of reciprocity persists. For example, Indigenous expertise is still undervalued, as the expectation is that it should be freely given and uncompensated. Meanwhile, Indigenous organizations receive much less financial support than their white or Global North counterparts, so they are invariably too understaffed to engage in the ways they would like to. In 2014, for example, the Foundation Center estimated that funding for Indigenous Peoples constitutes less than 1.4% of all international grants. Moreover, it is not even clear all of that 1.4% is given directly to Indigenous organizations given the lack of specificity available from reporting mechanisms.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> “[Grantmakers Guide: Strengthening International Indigenous Philanthropy](#),” International Funders for Indigenous Peoples (IFIP)

Our partners encourage donors to value and pay for Indigenous time and expertise. In one example of an opportunity to do so, AIDA is keen to start a new program for bilateral exchange between AIDA and Indigenous and local communities, to strengthen capacity on both sides from a place of reciprocity and mutual respect.

“We have received so many invitations to talk about Indigenous issues—to students writing their theses, to people at conferences. We received 26 requests in one week alone! We need to establish the boundaries.”

— Galina Angarova, Cultural Survival

This is not to suggest that donors engage in transactional relationships with partners, but rather that appreciation and respect are conveyed to partners by recognizing that their time is precious, valuable, and should be remunerated. Of course, the same principle applies to a wider range of marginalized voices outside the Indigenous community.

Astrid at AIDA told us a story that is illustrative of the ongoing presumption that Indigenous voices are free and available for the taking. She recalled that a grassroots organization contacted AIDA recently in a panic saying that a Western European-based NGO had sent them a draft of four complicated petitions opposing plans for coal expansion in Colombia. The petitions were all in English and totaled over 50 pages, and the European NGO asked the local organization to provide input within a week. It was not possible for the local organization to respond in the timeframe requested. As Astrid said, “the conversations made it clear that it was an example of imperialism by another organization. They felt that they needed to rush and review something that was huge. We made it clear that what they were offering was valuable insight and they were undermining their own position by not asking to review the materials in their native language with more time.” Astrid and AIDA helped their local partner recognize their value and gave them the strength to state their conditions for engagement. That kind of support might not typically be recognized as “technical expertise,” and yet AIDA’s intervention was critical to ensuring the best outcome when it came to those petitions to stop the coal expansion. This story also exemplifies the earlier point about the importance of solidarity in strengthening organizations and outcomes.

Our partners at [Red De Las Mujeres Indígenas Sobre Biodiversidad de América Latina y el Caribe](#) (RMIB-LAC) pointed out that “We are working on a voluntary basis. We don’t have salary even though we are alive more than 20 years!” They also told us a story about the hard work they invested in shaping an Indigenous funding mechanism, only

to find out that Indigenous Peoples and local communities would not be the ones administering it. This has led to the creation of a grants process that does not work well for Indigenous Peoples and local communities, who struggle to get high enough scores on the assessed metrics to be successful in securing grants.

The patterns of discrimination our partners have observed extend even further, to differential treatment between men and women, and between organizations from the Global North and the Global South. Time and time again, TCI sees our partners overlooked for northern-based NGOs or for NGOs led by men as opposed to women—reiterating the centuries of colonialism and discrimination that brought us to the challenges we are facing today.

## FOCUS ON COMPLEMENTARITY, NOT POLARITY

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In providing funding for technical support, it is important to focus on complementarity rather than polarity; it is not “either/or” but “both/and.” Our partners urge us to value various kinds of expertise equally and to keep an open mind regarding what expertise could complement or supplement their own.

“We might have all the concerns in the world but we don't do a very good job of communicating them to the public. We tend to be framed as elitist—‘they care about ferns and crocodiles, not people’...it's negative messaging that we have struggled to counter.”

— Diana McCaulay,  
Jamaica Environment Trust

Additionally, many partners have a range of needs, some of which extend beyond the specifics of a particular campaign. For example, JET's needs for technical support extends well beyond law. They need help storing and managing their data so that the organization is not dependent on the memory of their founder or a few longstanding employees. They also need guidance in shaping effective communications, including thinking through how and where to deploy the voices and perspectives at their disposal. By listening and learning from our partners on the ground, we can get the fullest sense of the support they need to succeed.



## TACKLING AN INVASIVE WEED IN LAKE VICTORIA, UGANDA

[Greenwatch](#) in Uganda told us a story about a battle they won by drawing strength and technical support from ELAW. The government was proposing to use a toxic herbicidal poison known as 2,4-D to control the growth of the highly invasive water hyacinth plants that were spreading rapidly throughout Lake Victoria and threatening local fish populations and water travel. With ELAW's support, Greenwatch sourced scientific information about the negative impacts of 2,4-D to present at a public hearing discussing the government's plans, and they succeeded in using the data to mobilize community opposition to use of the chemical.

Greenwatch's success in organizing the community **combined with** the use of compelling, data-driven information ensured they were successful in convincing the government to use a safer combination of mechanical and insect controls to address the problem of the invasive water hyacinth threatening Lake Victoria.<sup>8</sup> This case demonstrates not just the potential of leveraging scientific expertise and data in opposing harmful projects but also the importance of complementary local expertise and power.

The Lake Victoria story also highlights once again the importance of international solidarity and support. Samantha from Greenwatch Uganda made it clear that it was not just the technical legal support that made the difference in enabling them to oppose the government's actions—harkening back to our earlier theme—it was the sense of palpable international solidarity that gave the local advocates the courage to oppose the use of the pesticides by powerful opponents.



Photo: Andrew Pacutho

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<sup>8</sup> ["Tackling an Invasive in Lake Victoria \(Uganda\),"](#) ELAW

# ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

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Thus far we have articulated five key recommendations that emerged in our conversations with our partners:

1. Collaborations Should be Locally Led
2. International Solidarity Matters
3. Expertise is Not Defined by Degrees
4. Appreciate and Compensate
5. Focus on Complementarity, Not Polarity

Partners also offered a range of other self-explanatory recommendations to consider—many of which reinforce the emerging trends in [Trust-Based Philanthropy Project](#).

## ASK QUESTIONS AND LISTEN CAREFULLY TO WHAT PARTNERS HAVE TO SAY

“Ask people involved what they really need. My answer to you today might be very different than it would have been ten years ago. Things are constantly changing.”

## BE FLEXIBLE IN YOUR MODEL AND PROCESS FOR GRANTMAKING

“The resources that the communities need often aren't a huge grant that they have no infrastructure to manage. They don't need log frames. They can bring their own story and their own data to determine their own future. Each community has their own way of doing that. If donors understand there is no standardized model, then they will understand you can't put that information in the box.”

## MAKE IT CLEAR THAT YOU ARE OPEN TO PROVIDING TECHNICAL SUPPORT

“I recommend that donors let the grantees know that if they need technical support, they can ask for it. Most of the time we are not even sure if it's OK to ask!”

## INVEST IN LONG-TERM CAPACITY

“It's all about building capacity. We invest over the long term and that can be a challenge with donors as priorities and staff shift. We stick with the partners, country, stories, and people. The long-term investment is really worth it, but it's a commitment...”

## RECOGNIZE THAT MEANINGFUL CHANGE TAKES TIME

“Donor expectations about speed are unreasonable. There is all this prep

work that is needed that is often unfunded. You are an outsider and you need to do a lot of listening. And of course, you have to work at a pace the community can manage; they may be close to survival, they may work at the companies that are giving them a hard time, and they may fear crime and being murdered for their opposition. Often grants are one year and you don't have enough time to really get into the community situation. That is not funded and that is why the results are not great."

## INVEST IN TECHNICAL EXPERTISE IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

"One aspect that makes a big difference between the needs and kinds of technical support, is the existent capacity in different regions in the world. We need donors to focus not only on the kind of technical support is needed, but also where and how to support it. As we know, today most of the strong technical support is in the Global North, while the need and demand are in the Global South."

## PARTING THOUGHTS

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As we deepen our understanding of the kinds of expertise and technical support our partners need, we are reminded that first and foremost we must meet our partners where they are—prepared to listen and learn with an open mind and heart. One partner may view a certain skill as rare and highly valued expertise, while another may consider that same skill or knowledge to be ordinary, and part of their everyday work. But that does not make any single form of expertise any more valuable than another. In fact, it is often the complementary nature of expertise and collaboration that makes a difference. What makes a specific form of expertise and technical support valuable is that it allows partners to achieve things they would not be able to without it. We need to be flexible in understanding what kind of support is required and do our best to ensure our partners can get the funding they need to access it.

We are also reminded again and again of the ongoing discrimination and bias our partners face in doing their work—especially those led by women, Indigenous Peoples, or other people of color. Their insight and experience are consistently overlooked—or, worse yet, openly devalued, discriminated against, or criticized.

As a small team dedicated to working with our partners to advance human rights and environmental justice, we commit to remaining ever vigilant to our own inherent biases and to ensuring we are in a constant state of evolution and growth to overcome them. The world is waiting and there is no time to spare. [Please join us.](#)



We welcome your thoughts and reactions to this brief report. We hope this is the beginning rather than the end of a conversation about how we can be the strongest allies possible to the many advocates fighting for human rights and environmental justice around the world.

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