

Strategic Plan, 2025-2029



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Executive Summary

EarthRights International is proud to present its strategic plan for 2025–2029, charting an ambitious course for advancing justice, corporate accountability, environmental protection, and climate resilience worldwide. This plan builds on three decades of impactful legal and advocacy work that has addressed the most pressing challenges of our time: the climate crisis, corporate and institutional impunity for harms, and rising threats against defenders of justice.

With a unified global team and strong partnerships across the United States, Mekong region, Latin America, and beyond, EarthRights combines the power of law and the power of people to defend human rights and the environment. This strategic vision draws on the deep expertise of our staff, allies, and partners, to offer a clear framework for transformative impact.

We currently stand at a critical juncture in the future of our earth and our communities. The accelerated rollback of environmental protections, erosion of democratic norms, and the rise in nationalist policies, especially in the U.S., have made our mission more urgent than ever. This strategic plan is a call to action to center the power of the most affected communities, harness the strength of local-to-global advocacy tools, and foster a more just and sustainable future.

Harnessing 30 Years of Impact

Since 1995, EarthRights International has been advancing human rights, environmental protection, and corporate accountability globally through precedent-setting cases and campaigns, and by training generations of civil society leaders and legal advocates in the most remote regions in the Mekong and the Amazon. Here are some examples of our impact:

- **We hold powerful actors to account.** We hold the largest and most powerful corporations, institutions, and governments accountable to the individuals and communities they have harmed. For example: We challenged and continue to challenge the complicity of companies enabling the Myanmar junta's crimes, including by advocating for targeted sanctions on key industries that fuel the military regime. We set a global precedent in *Doe v. Unocal*, one of the first cases to hold a corporation accountable in U.S. courts for complicity in human rights abuses - including forced labor, rape, and killings - linked to a gas pipeline project in Myanmar. The case was pioneering in establishing the potential of the Alien Tort Statute (ATS) as a tool for addressing transnational corporate misconduct. Despite evolving limitations in the application of the ATS in the U.S., we reinforced that corporations can still face legal repercussions for their actions abroad through our more recent jury victory in *Doe v. Chiquita* on behalf of survivors and relatives of victims of paramilitary violence in Colombia. We also secured a groundbreaking decision in *Jam v. International Finance Corporation*, where the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that international financial institutions like the IFC are not immune from lawsuits in U.S. courts, opening pathways for communities to seek redress against powerful financial institutions for environmental and human rights abuses - in this case the displacement, pollution, and illness caused by a coal-fired power plant in India - resulting from their projects.



Photo by Rosa Luz Arista Zerga



Photo by Marcela Rico/Brújula



Photo by Chalefun Dithudee



Photo by Diane Angel/Chloe Jackman Photography

- **We amplify and invigorate movements for justice, community rights, and environmental protection.**

Through transformative education initiatives, we have trained over 700 grassroots activists through intensive programs, and grown networks of community leaders. Programs such as the EarthRights School in the Mekong, Seminario in the Amazon, and École du Fleuve Congo in the Democratic Republic of the Congo equip advocates with the skills, knowledge, and support systems to address human rights violations, environmental harms, and climate impacts in their communities. Alumni go on to lead grassroots movements and organizations, document abuses, and hold powerful actors accountable in their respective regions. Our school and training initiatives harness local power, strengthen transnational solidarity, and create lasting, community-driven change.

- **We protect and stand beside environmental defenders.**

EarthRights has stood in solidarity with and fought for the safety of environmental defenders worldwide – offering critical legal counsel and defense, creating trusted regional and international networks of support, and advocating for stronger local and global norms to safeguard their work. By amplifying the messages of Indigenous leaders and local advocates and providing legal representation, we also ensure their efforts to protect lands and rights are recognized, addressed, and protected.

Challenges We Face

In the U.S. and around the world, democratic governance is facing increasing challenges amid rising authoritarianism, with a growing number of governments undermining democratic institutions, restricting civil liberties, and consolidating power – even as pro-democracy movements persist and adapt in response. Within this context, human rights and environmental abuses continue globally, leaving many communities, especially those traditionally marginalized and underrepresented, with few effective means to assert their rights and access remedies for widespread harms.

These trends have led to a troubling rise in threats and attacks against community advocates, journalists, activists, lawyers, and whistleblowers who carry out work that is vital for advancing justice and accountability. These challenges play out differently everywhere we work:

- **The United States** faces an existential threat to the democratic institutions upon which the rights of individuals and communities depend. Within this context, significant challenges, including climate change, pollution, the erosion of environmental regulations, and attacks on the right to protest compound the risks and barriers faced by communities. Indigenous and marginalized communities, particularly Black and Brown communities, bear the brunt of these systemic failures, often living in sacrifice zones with disproportionate exposure to pollution.
- **In the Mekong region**, communities grapple with the destructive impacts of extractive industries, deforestation, and climate change within a closed and repressive political environment. Indigenous and frontline communities are frequently marginalized and dispossessed by powerful interests, facing threats to their livelihoods, land, and cultural heritage. The authoritarian nature of regimes in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, and beyond, complicates and intensifies the risk in pursuing accountability, making actions taken by environmental defenders and communities ever more challenging.
- **In Latin America**, oil and gas development, mineral mining, and agribusiness are leading to deforestation and toxic legacies. Indigenous communities, particularly in the Amazon, are at the forefront of resistance against these destructive forces, but face serious challenges particularly due to economic and political models that favor corporations and other powerful interests over environmental protection.
- **Globally**, environmental defenders face increasing threats, such as criminalization, harassment, and violence, as they strive to protect their communities and the planet.

Strategic Goals for 2025-2029

Against this backdrop of systemic challenges, EarthRights has crafted a bold plan to build on 30 years of impact.

To confront the intersecting crises of climate change, corporate impunity, and rising attacks on defenders, our integrated regional strategies aim to collectively create transformative impact. Our efforts will focus on fostering four foundational conditions essential for lasting change:



Photo by Chalefun Ditphudee

- **Communities have the power**, agency and resources to decide the futures of their territories, secure remedy for injustices, and assert control over decisions that affect their lives and environments.
- **Corporations and institutions are consistently held accountable** for their human rights, environmental, and climate abuses. They recognize their legal and moral liability, provide redress for harms, and adopt measures to prevent recurring harms.
- **Human rights and environmental defenders are free to exercise their rights** to organize, advocate, and protest without fear of retaliation or violence, ensuring their vital work can continue unabated.
- **Strong, enforceable legal and regulatory frameworks safeguard** human rights and environmental integrity, and prevent future harms.

These interconnected conditions form the cornerstone of our vision: a world where every community has the power to seek justice, defend their rights, and hold corporations, financial institutions, and governments accountable; where people live with dignity and self-determination, and where the environments that sustain us are fiercely protected and restored.

To achieve this vision and address the multi-faceted challenges we face, we have articulated four ambitious goal areas that will guide our efforts across all our geographies over the next five years. **These four goal areas are:**

GOAL 1: JUSTICE FOR AND WITH COMMUNITIES.

We strive to advance the justice goals of partner communities in relation to human rights, environmental, and climate harms perpetrated by government and corporate entities in our priority geographies.

GOAL 2: HOLDING CORPORATIONS AND FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS ACCOUNTABLE FOR HARMS.

We strive to hold corporations and financial institutions accountable by exposing, challenging, and remedying their complicity in human rights and climate abuses and environmental destruction.

GOAL 3: PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS.

We strive to ensure that human rights and environmental defenders can operate without fear by strengthening protections within the law and in practice that guarantee the right to organize, protest free from retaliation.

GOAL 4: SHAPING POLICY AND LEGAL SYSTEMS.

We strive to shape legal and regulatory frameworks that establish strong, enforceable safeguards for human rights and environmental protections, and to prevent future harms.

Together, these goals represent a comprehensive framework for action. By centering communities, confronting abusive actors, and reshaping the structures that perpetuate harm, we are laying the groundwork for our vision of the future.

Photo by Cayla Nimmo

Our Approach to Climate Change

Our five-year strategic plan includes a major effort to align our corporate accountability and community justice goals with the broader objectives of the global climate movement – recognizing that the climate crisis is a justice issue that disproportionately affects Indigenous, Black, Brown, immigrant, and working-class communities that have historically faced greater corporate exploitation and state neglect.

Our core climate interventions include:

- **Corporate Climate Accountability:** We work to ensure that fossil fuel companies take responsibility for their role in the climate crisis. In Colorado, we represent local governments in a case seeking to recover a fair share of the costs associated with climate adaptation and mitigation from Exxon Mobil and Suncor. At the same time, we are broadening our focus to examine how oil and gas operations are shifting environmental and financial burdens onto communities, especially using legal and campaign strategies to promote stronger government oversight and ensure that the true costs of environmental harm are not unfairly placed on the public.
- **Community Resilience and Environmental Justice in the U.S.:** We launched the Climate Resilience and Environmental Justice Project to support communities in the U.S. that are on the frontlines of climate change and environmental harm. Our work is guided by local leadership, rooted in the needs and priorities of our community partners, and driven by the need to build resilience in the face of rising displacement, toxic pollution, and environmental degradation. Through legal support, advocacy, and movement-building, we are helping our partners navigate and challenge the systemic forces fueling these harms.



Photo by Cayla Nimmo

- **Confronting False Climate Solutions in the Global South:** In Cambodia, carbon credit projects tied to voluntary global markets are displacing Indigenous communities from forests they have stewarded for generations, often without meaningful consultation or consent. In Myanmar, rare earth mining—used in the production of electric vehicles and wind turbines—has caused widespread environmental damage through the use of hazardous chemicals, threatening biodiversity and human health. EarthRights works with affected communities in these regions to document harms, map land use, and demand accountability from both local actors and international stakeholders involved in supply chains and oversight. We also collaborate with Indigenous communities and networks across Latin America to uphold territorial stewardship, defend their rights to self-determination, and demand meaningful state action. Their deep-rooted knowledge and sustainable governance of forests and ecosystems are essential to both climate mitigation and adaptation – making their leadership critical to global climate resilience.

While contributing to global efforts to reduce emissions, our climate work is also about building power in communities, exposing and transforming unjust systems, and creating a future where environmental rights are real and enforceable for all.

Enduring Commitment to our Local-to-Global Model

Community collaboration is at the core of our strategy. Our work is only strong and effective when we foster understanding of community realities, build trust, and align strategies with those we represent and partner with. Whether we are supporting efforts to end corporate impunity, secure justice, or drive systemic change to protect land and rights, we remain committed to long-term trust-based partnerships. By working with communities, centering local agency, sharing knowledge, and holding power to account, we aim to build a just and sustainable future for all.

A key element of our work is the use of local-to-global strategies. We work at local, regional, and international levels to address issues rooted in community struggle, ensuring that solutions reflect local realities while achieving broader impact. This approach connects grassroots efforts with global advocacy, creating momentum for structural change, and reinforcing the idea that transformative solutions must be grounded in the leadership and experiences of frontline communities.

With this strategic vision for 2025-2029, EarthRights renews its pledge to defend human rights and the environment through bold, impactful, and community-centered action. Together, with our partners, supporters, and the communities we serve, we will continue to fight for a world where justice and accountability prevail.



Photo by Cayla Nimmo

Strengthening Core Operations

EarthRights will strengthen its core operations in the areas of fundraising, communications, human resources, finance, and other areas of operational efficiency, to better support our strategic goals across all regions.

EarthRights will invest in a more robust communications strategy, that will enhance the clarity of our messaging, the strength of our digital presence, and the sophistication of our strategic media and public relations efforts. While these aren't new activities for EarthRights, we intend to invest in them more deeply, amplifying our impacts, shedding light on vital issues, and gaining more support for our cases.

EarthRights will streamline operations and improve efficiency, by investing in technology, new project management tools, and new hardware to automate processes and improve data management. The organization will also enhance financial controls, streamline human resources processes, including for recruitment and hiring, and prioritize staff development and training. Within Latin America specifically, EarthRights will invest in core functions of operations, human resources, monitoring and evaluation, and fundraising to match its growth in program capacity and drive meaningful impact.

EarthRights will maximize programmatic impact, by growing and strengthening our training and campaign teams. We will provide our teams with necessary resources while maintaining the strength of our legal teams and ensuring the continued flow of interns, fellows, and junior staff. We will also focus on building strong partnerships with other organizations to leverage collective programmatic impact.

To resource these ambitious goals, EarthRights will grow its budget from \$9.2 million in 2024 to \$15.3 million by 2029 and increase our number of positions from 76 in 2024, to 93 in 2029. This will require diversifying funding sources through expanded foundation and government support, and through increased and recurring major and planned giving initiatives. We will also maintain our credibility in the field as a vibrant and caring workplace where the most dedicated, creative, strategic, and bold advocates want to work.



Photo by Cayla Nimmo

Introduction

EarthRights is a human rights and environmental non-profit organization working in the U.S., the Mekong region, Latin America, and with partners working on critical accountability issues in strategic jurisdictions across the globe. We are committed to supporting communities in their pursuit of justice and accountability, and take action in the following ways:

- We take legal action against perpetrators of human rights, environmental, and climate abuses;
- We train activists and community leaders through our EarthRights school and other education initiatives;
- We advocate with communities and civil society actors to demand meaningful and lasting change;

Our Institutional Identity

Mission

EarthRights combines the power of law and the power of people to defend human rights and the environment.

Vision

We envision a world where every community has the power to seek justice, defend their rights, and hold corporations, financial institutions, and governments accountable; a world where people live with dignity and self-determination, and where the environments that sustain us are fiercely protected and restored. In the face of the climate crisis, we see a future built on resilience, equity, and the unwavering defense of human rights and the planet.

Values

1. *Integrity:* We act with honesty, transparency, and a strong sense of responsibility in everything we do. Our commitment to integrity helps us stand firm in our fight for justice.
2. *Mutual Respect, Trust, and Care:* We foster respect, trust, and care for one another, our partners, and clients. Everyone is valued for who they are and the work they do, leading to inclusive, safe, culturally-aware, and empathetic partnerships and work environments.
3. *Pioneering Solutions:* We are committed to finding solutions for the most difficult challenges. Through creativity and persistence, we break through barriers and establish legal precedent that creates new avenues for communities to pursue justice and accountability.
4. *Community Impact:* We center sustained community impact in all our work, from the local level to global. We strive to ensure the communities with whom we partner hold the decision making power, and we support solutions that are responsive to their lived experiences.
5. *Commitment to Excellence:* We are dedicated to excellence in all that we do. Our credibility and legitimacy with our clients, colleagues, partners, and the broader public result from our high standards and commitment to impactful and meaningful work.



Photo by Jimena Celis

How We Shaped Our Strategic Vision

Our strategic ambition is propelled by our rich track record of advancing corporate accountability and equipping activists with the tools to advocate effectively for justice. Over the past 30 years, our landmark legal victories, successful campaigns, and deep and expansive training programs have enabled communities to challenge harmful practices and protect their rights. These successes have not only shaped our identity but have also deepened our understanding of the power of long-term and trust-based relationships. The enduring partnerships we've built with communities have guided our priorities and reinforced our commitment to sustained, collaborative work. This informs our vision for the future as we move into the next phase of our work from 2025 to 2029, and contribute to global movements for human rights, corporate accountability, and climate justice.

This strategic plan is the result of an inclusive and collaborative process. Over the course of a year, our teams consulted partners and developed localized theories of change, impact plans, and financial targets that have come together to form this unified organizational strategy.

This strategic process enabled us to define who we are – articulated through our mission, vision, and values – and to unify around a shared set of goals.

The following accomplishments from the past three decades help define who we are, and – alongside a close examination of current issues and the state of movements – will guide our priorities over the next five years. Since 1995, EarthRights has contributed to the impacts of the global movement for rights, justice, and accountability in the following ways:

- **Shaped Corporate Accountability:** We've set critical legal precedents in national courts and regional bodies; held multinational corporations, governments, and international financial institutions accountable for human rights abuses; dismantled the absolute immunity of international organizations for the benefit of communities affected by their activities; and set environmental rights and public participation standards in repressive contexts.



Photo by Diane Angel/Chloe Jackman Photography

Photo by ASOU'WA

- **Invigorated Movements for Justice:** Through transformative programs like the EarthRights School in the Mekong, Seminario in Latin America, and the Congo River School, we have trained over 600 civil society activists to lead impactful movements against human rights and environmental harms.
- **Led Advocacy Efforts with Burmese Communities:** Since 1995, we have fought corporate complicity in Myanmar, by holding companies accountable and advocating for U.S. laws and policies in support of human rights in the country — all while supporting local movements for justice. We have played a pivotal role in exposing corporate complicity in human rights and environmental abuses in Myanmar, and through this work, have helped advance the global corporate accountability movement.

- **Protected and Uplifted Environmental Defenders:** We have provided security and safety training for hundreds of defenders, successful legal defense for defenders who have been wrongly charged with crimes, and helped create and strengthen trusted regional and international networks that defenders can turn to in moments of crisis. We have also led efforts to shape U.S. policy and global norms that influence how governments and businesses treat defenders, resulting in stronger international standards.

Between 2025 and 2029, we will continue to fight for justice, hold corporations and financial institutions accountable, protect and train environmental defenders, and shape policy and legal systems. With clearer climate goals and working alongside partner communities, defenders, and allies, we aim to create a world where human rights and environmental protection are non-negotiable and never sacrificed for profit.



Photo courtesy Bobbie Sta. Maria

Current Challenges

Human rights and environmental abuses persist globally and impacted communities have few effective remedies for serious and widespread harms caused by corporations, governments, and powerful financial interests. This impunity arises from a combination of systemic, political, legal, and economic factors, which the worsening climate crisis is exacerbating as countries face the destabilizing impacts of devastating, human-caused crises. To shape our future priorities, we must develop a shared analysis of the most pressing challenges we face. Only then will we be able to create a clear action plan and a path forward.

I. A Worsening Climate Crisis That Is Compounding Inequalities

The climate crisis is a profound human rights and environmental crisis that is intensifying global inequalities. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report warns that, without urgent action, the world is on track to exceed the 1.5 degree Celsius warming threshold by 2030. Global emissions must be reduced by 43% from 2019 levels to stay within this limit. However, current international political commitments – if they are even implemented – are only sufficient to achieve an 8% reduction. This underscores the urgent need for effective climate action, particularly for communities already facing systemic inequalities due to racial discrimination, income disparity, gender inequality, and lack of access to food and water, among others. It is also a reminder that we need to prepare for a world where disastrous climate impacts become increasingly severe and frequent.

Effective action has been taken by frontline and Indigenous communities, resulting in advancements toward tackling climate-induced inequalities, and the movement to organize and mobilize around climate issues continues to grow worldwide. Policies focused on climate resilience are being developed in a few jurisdictions, and communities are bringing lawsuits to address climate-related harms. Support for renewable energy projects is expanding, and efforts to disincentivize coal and natural gas-power generation have increased fossil fuel production costs for companies. However, the lack of progress in upholding human rights and environmental justice, coupled with the pre-existing conditions for inequality that already impact many communities affected by the climate crisis, make these measures insufficient to tackle the climate problem. We risk repeating the same harms to people and communities that were caused by the fossil fuel economy.



Photo by Cayla Nimmo

Ongoing Challenges

- 1. Emissions Inequality:** Historically, wealthier nations and corporations have been the primary drivers of carbon emissions. Today, the wealthiest 10% of the global population are responsible for nearly half of all emissions, while the poorest 50% contribute less than 10%. Countries like the U.S. are increasing fossil fuel development even when fossil fuels begin to decrease as an overall percentage of U.S. energy production (over the past decade, the U.S. has increased its natural gas production by over 56%). The current U.S. energy policy emphasizes maximizing domestic fossil fuel production, facilitating extraction by reducing environmental regulations, and expediting permits for projects like pipelines and power plants. Meanwhile, communities living in the Global South disproportionately suffer from environmental pollution and degradation caused by extractive industries that aim to meet the demands of wealthier consumers and nations. For example, Indigenous communities in the Amazon face ongoing threats to their lands from oil drilling, and low-lying island nations are severely threatened by sea level rise, stronger storms, and coral reef loss.
- 2. Environmental Racism:** Racial discrimination compounds climate inequalities globally. Marginalized communities (particularly communities of color, Indigenous groups, and ethnic minorities), often live in mineral-rich, pollution-exposed areas and face heightened risks from climate-related disasters. In many regions, these communities disproportionately bear the brunt of environmental hazards intensified by climate change, leading to significant health and socioeconomic impacts. This systemic inequality manifests in multiple forms, such as limited access to clean air and water, increased vulnerability to extreme weather events, and inadequate disaster response measures, highlighting the urgent need for equitable climate action.

- 3. Vulnerable Populations That Face Heightened Climate Risks:** The escalating climate crisis leads to more frequent and severe natural disasters, particularly affecting marginalized populations. The World Bank estimates that climate change could push 132 million people into extreme poverty by 2030, especially in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) threatened by rising sea levels. Additionally, regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia face worsening food and water insecurity, reducing agricultural productivity and access to fresh water. Climate-related displacement is also increasing, with approximately 21.5 million people displaced annually by floods and droughts, often lacking access to international protections from rights abuses.
- 4. The Unequal Impact of Climate Solutions:** The green energy transition can exacerbate inequalities and drive human rights and environmental abuses through the exploitative extraction of materials. Mining for materials like cobalt, lithium, and rare earth elements like terbium and dysprosium have been linked to conflict, labor abuses, and toxic conditions. For instance, heavy rare earth mining in Kachin State, Myanmar, for the development of permanent magnets used in electric vehicles and wind turbines has caused significant environmental and health crises for local communities already facing the impacts of conflict. We have also seen that programs promoted as climate solutions, like carbon offsetting, rarely lead to an overall reduction in emissions in practice, and have led to land grabs and the displacement of Indigenous populations. We also continue to see internationally-backed large hydropower dams threaten widespread devastation to communities and their environments, displacing populations and destroying ecosystems while having questionable climate benefits.

Photo by Cayla Nimmo

II. Corporate and Institutional Impunity for Serious and Widespread Harms

Corporate and institutional impunity continues to drive the continuation of environmental and human rights harms around the world. While there has been notable progress in challenging impunity, particularly through policy reforms in the E.U. and legal developments in Brazil, Europe, and the U.S., communities harmed by corporate activities still face limited and difficult paths to justice.

Since the early days of the modern movement for corporate accountability, governments and businesses have largely resisted binding legal obligations, favoring non-binding, voluntary initiatives to address human rights and environmental abuses linked to commercial activities. These voluntary measures often allow for selective compliance, inconsistent standards, and weak oversight – failing to prevent systemic abuse and highlighting the urgent need for binding regulations and robust enforcement mechanisms.

There has been meaningful progress in Europe in adopting binding, enforceable standards that cover multinational business activities. Despite corporate pushback, landmark legislation such as France's Duty of Vigilance Law, Germany's Supply Chain Due Diligence Act, and the E.U. Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence, are creating new pathways for accountability.

Building off the groundbreaking work of civil society organizations including EarthRights, recent judicial developments have expanded corporate liability, including our victories in *Doe v. Chiquita*, which set new precedents for corporate accountability in U.S. courts for abuses abroad; *Jam v. IFC*, which established that international finance institutions are not immune from suit in U.S. courts; and *Doe v. IFC*, which was the first time any multilateral development bank agreed to a settlement to end a lawsuit brought by an injured community.

Similar judicial developments in other jurisdictions, such as the UK Supreme Court's ruling in the *Vedanta* case and the Dutch court's verdict in the *Shell Nigeria* case, have further paved the way for holding parent companies accountable for their foreign subsidiaries' actions. In Brazil, legal action following the Samarco dam disaster has led to billions in compensation, underscoring that corporate actors can be held accountable for severe environmental crimes.

Beyond courts and legislation, companies are also facing growing pressure from investors and consumers. Many have adopted Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks, with those that fall short facing reputational and financial risks. Investors are increasingly willing to leverage their influence to drive corporate change. Despite the challenges that remain, this measure of progress should be celebrated and built upon as part of the broader struggle for justice, accountability, and sustainable, rights-respecting business practices.

Ongoing Challenges

Despite advances, corporate impunity persists because of non-existent laws, weak governance, lax enforcement, and compromised judicial systems. Key challenges include:

- 1. Weak Enforcement Mechanisms:** Although new laws and legal precedents are promising, enforcement is inconsistent. Regulatory agencies are often underfunded, lack political will, or face intense pressure from corporate interests, leading to weak or selective enforcement. Even when legal victories are achieved, corporations can exploit loopholes, shift operations across jurisdictions, or use lengthy appeals processes to delay accountability. As a result, communities harmed by corporate abuse frequently struggle to obtain meaningful remedies, and systemic change remains difficult to achieve.
- 2. Limited Scope of Accountability:** Current legal frameworks often apply only to large corporations, leaving smaller companies and extensive portions of global supply chains unregulated. This creates loopholes, particularly for "enablers" like commercial banks, law firms, and security firms that facilitate projects violating human rights. Additionally, holding corporations accountable for actions taken by foreign subsidiaries remains problematic, despite some progress in court decisions.



Photo by Cayla Nimmo

- 3. Corporate Pushback and Lobbying:** Corporations wield significant influence to weaken or block binding human rights and environmental regulations. For instance, industries facing potential impacts have driven efforts to dilute the E.U. Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence. Corporate capture extends to international climate negotiations, where fossil fuel representatives often have greater access to decision-makers than civil society organizations, hindering global climate progress.
- 4. Limits of U.S. Courts for International Accountability:** While U.S. courts can be powerful venues for corporate accountability, the Supreme Court's decision in *Jesner v. Arab Bank* limited the scope of the Alien Tort Statute (ATS), reducing (but not eliminating, as EarthRights demonstrated through the successful *Doe v. Chiquita* case) avenues for foreign victims to hold corporations accountable in U.S. courts. The U.S. also lacks clear legal mechanisms to address transnational corporate human rights abuses outside narrowly defined areas like labor violations, leaving many victims without recourse.
- 5. Inaccessible Accountability Processes:** Corporations often have legal and environmental obligations in communities and territories where they operate, but methods of accessing accountability can be intentionally opaque and complex. They can also require familiarity with administrative or environmental codes, or access to foreign court proceedings and jurisdictions. Given their exclusionary nature, communities combatting harms in isolation are often unable to participate meaningfully in processes and initiatives that would otherwise generate accountability.

III. Rising Threats and Attacks Against Advocates

As the climate crisis becomes increasingly urgent, some of the most important efforts to save the planet for future generations are happening at the local level. Environmental and human rights defenders are local leaders on the frontlines of the climate crisis, risking their lives, protecting their communities from deforestation, pollution, biodiversity loss, and environmental crimes associated with the reckless exploitation of natural resources.

Environmental and human rights defenders often find themselves challenging corrupt or politically powerful interests who are willing to use violence and coercive tactics to silence their critics. Many are members of Indigenous or traditionally marginalized communities that rely heavily on the surrounding ecosystems for their livelihoods.

Each year, hundreds of defenders are assassinated, and thousands more are criminalized, threatened, and harassed. These attacks can be physical (such as assassinations or death threats), legal (such as criminalization or judicial harassment), or reputational (such as smear campaigns).

In recent years, global awareness of violence against environmental and human rights defenders has grown thanks to the efforts of civil society organizations. Reports documenting attacks on defenders have garnered widespread attention, leading to increased recognition of the issue. In some regions, modest progress has been made in enacting legal protections for defenders. For instance, a few jurisdictions have implemented laws against Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) to curb legal harassment of activists. Public pressure and international advocacy have also created spaces where messages of defenders are amplified on the global stage.



Photo by Cayla Nimmo

Ongoing Challenges

- 1. High Levels of Violence:** Environmental and human rights defenders face severe risks, with hundreds murdered each year and thousands more experiencing harassment and threats to their safety. For example, the Business and Human Rights Resource Center documented over 5,300 attacks against human rights defenders between 2015 and 2023, 78% of which targeted people advocating on environmental, land, and Indigenous issues. Many attacks are linked to advocacy against irresponsible business activities like mining and agribusiness, where companies exploit weak governance and rights safeguards. Most incidents occur in remote areas with weak rule of law, leaving defenders vulnerable. Law enforcement often fails to investigate or prosecute perpetrators due to lack of resources or influence from powerful actors.
- 2. Criminalization of Environmental and Human Rights Defenders:** According to available data, criminalization accounts for more than half of all attacks on environmental and human rights defenders. Unscrupulous corporations and powerful interests weaponize legal systems to arrest defenders on arbitrary charges, extend pretrial detentions, and prolong criminal proceedings to silence activists. National security laws are often misused to arbitrarily surveil and prosecute peaceful environmental defenders as domestic terrorists. SLAPPs, invasive third-party subpoenas, cease and desist letters, and related lawfare tactics are also common ways to harass and intimidate defenders into silence. Few jurisdictions recognize these as human rights abuse, and legal remedies are scarce.
- 3. Public Smear Campaigns:** Perpetrators frequently use public smear campaigns, employing traditional media and social media trolling operations to portray defenders as threats to national security or public order or to discredit them in other ways. These narratives fuel public hostility and further justify violence against activists. Racial, ethnic, and gender discrimination exacerbate this situation, particularly for Indigenous defenders, who are disproportionately targeted and face higher levels of impunity.

- 4. Persistent Impunity:** Impunity remains a pervasive challenge, as governments rarely hold attackers accountable, emboldening perpetrators and leaving defenders without justice or protection. Many defenders, knowing the system will not protect them, opt not to report attacks and intimidation, deepening the cycle of violence. Increased accountability for threats and attacks, and legislated solutions could help reduce violence against defenders and curb the rise of criminalization. If perpetrators face a higher likelihood of legal, economic, political, or reputational costs for attacking defenders, they are less likely to engage in these attacks.
- 5. Chilling Effect on Advocacy:** The constant threat of violence, criminalization, and smear campaigns creates a chilling effect on advocacy efforts. Many environmental and human rights defenders are forced to limit their activities, censor their speech, or abandon their work altogether out of fear for their safety and the safety of their families. This suppression not only silences individual voices but also weakens broader movements for environmental justice, Indigenous rights, and corporate accountability. Over time, the fear generated by these attacks erodes civic space, discourages public participation, and undermines the defense of fundamental rights.



Photo by Cayla Nimmo

Our Response

Our 2025-2029 High Level Theory of Change

IN THIS CURRENT CONTEXT

Corporate and Institutional Impunity for Persistent Rights Abuses

Worsening Climate Crisis and Deepening Inequalities

Rising Threats and Attacks Against Advocates

WE UTILIZE THREE STRATEGIES



Legal Strategies



Campaign and Policy Advocacy



Training and Network Building

OUR VALUES

INTEGRITY MUTUAL RESPECT, TRUST AND CARE PIONEERING SOLUTIONS
COMMUNITY IMPACT COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

OUR MISSION

EarthRights combines the power of law and the power of people to defend human rights and the environment

THE CHANGE WE WANT TO SEE

Our Vision: A world where communities can always pursue justice and accountability, especially in the face of the climate crisis; where people live with power and dignity; and where corporations, financial institutions, and governments uphold human rights and protect the environments on which these communities depend

TO ACHIEVE...

THESE GOALS

Advance partner communities' justice goals

Hold corporations and financial institutions accountable for harms

Protect environmental defenders

Shape systems to prevent future harm

GOALS

LOCAL TO GLOBAL

AND CREATE THESE CONDITIONS



Communities have the power to decide the future of their territory and community

Binding legal and regulatory frameworks safeguard human rights and environment protection



Defenders are freely able to exercise their rights without retaliation and the fear of retaliation

Corporations and institutions are consistently held accountable for their human rights environmental and climate abuse



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Photo by Chalefun Dithphudee

To confront the intersecting crises of climate change, corporate impunity, and rising attacks on defenders, our integrated regional strategies aim to collectively create transformative impact. Our efforts focus on fostering four foundational conditions essential for lasting change:

- Communities have the power, agency and resources to decide the futures of their territories, secure remedy for injustices, and assert control over decisions that affect their lives and environments.
- Corporations and institutions are consistently held accountable for their human rights, environmental, and climate abuses. They recognize their legal and moral liability, provide redress for harms, and adopt measures to prevent recurring harms.
- Human rights and environmental defenders are free to exercise their rights to organize, advocate, and protest without fear of retaliation or violence, ensuring their vital work can continue unabated.
- Strong, enforceable legal and regulatory frameworks safeguard human rights and environmental integrity, and prevent future harms.

These interconnected conditions form the cornerstone of our vision: a world where communities can always pursue justice and accountability, especially in the face of the climate crisis; where people live with power and dignity; and where corporations, financial institutions, and governments uphold human rights and protect the environments that sustain these communities.

To achieve this vision and address the multi-faceted challenges we face, we have articulated four ambitious goal areas that will guide our efforts across all our geographies over the next five years:

- 1. Justice for and with communities:** Advance justice goals of partner communities in relation to human rights, environmental, and climate harms perpetrated by government and corporate entities in our priority geographies.
- 2. Holding corporations and financial institutions accountable for harms:** Hold corporations and financial institutions accountable by exposing, challenging, and remedying their complicity in human rights and climate abuses, and environmental destruction.

3. Protecting human rights and environmental defenders: Ensure that human rights and environmental defenders can operate without fear by strengthening protections within the law and in practice that ensure the right to organize, protest, and be free from retaliation.

4. Shaping policy and legal systems: Shape legal and regulatory frameworks that establish strong, enforceable safeguards for human rights and environmental protections, and that prevent future harms.

Together, these goals represent a comprehensive framework for action. By centering communities, confronting abusive actors, and reshaping the structures that perpetuate harm, we are laying the groundwork for our vision of the future.

EarthRights partners with organizations and communities in deploying this theory of change. Past victories have taught us that when prepared and engaged communities are leading and contributing to strategic initiatives for accountability and justice, both remedy and systemic change are possible.

In partnership with communities, EarthRights engages multiple stakeholders including civil society organizations, human rights and environmental defenders, media outlets, governments, donors, and other international bodies working to protect human rights and the environment.

Our Approach to Climate

Our five-year strategic plan includes a major effort to align our corporate accountability and community justice goals with the broader objectives of the global climate movement.

We begin with the understanding that the climate crisis is not just an environmental issue; it is fundamentally a justice issue. It is deepening long-standing social, economic, and political inequities, particularly for Indigenous, Black, Brown, immigrant, and working-class communities in the United States and around the world. These communities are already disproportionately affected by the combined impacts of corporate exploitation and state neglect, which together erode basic environmental rights, endanger Indigenous cultural survival, and undermine collective well-being.

Globally, this injustice is especially evident in the Global South. In countries like Cambodia and Myanmar, communities have long borne the environmental and social costs of industries driving the climate crisis. Now, many are also facing new harms from market-driven, false solutions exported by the Global North. Carbon credit schemes implemented in Cambodia, for instance, have displaced Indigenous communities from ancestral forests without their consent. In Kachin State, Myanmar, rare earth mining – linked to the production of technologies considered key to the green transition – is contaminating land and water, while endangering ecosystems and human health in a conflict setting.

Underlying these harms is a systemic failure of accountability. Corporations continue to profit from activities that contribute to climate change, while externalizing the associated costs of their operations, leaving frontline communities to bear the burden. Ensuring corporate accountability is essential – not just for justice, but for the credibility and effectiveness of climate action as a whole.

Our core climate interventions

Corporate Climate Accountability: We work to ensure that fossil fuel companies take responsibility for their role in the climate crisis. In Colorado, we represent local governments in a case seeking to recover a fair share of the costs associated with climate adaptation and mitigation from Exxon Mobil and Suncor. Following a significant legal development in 2024, we are preparing for the next phases of litigation. At the same time, we are broadening our focus to examine how oil and gas operations are shifting environmental and financial burdens onto communities. In 2025, we will continue to advance our upstream fossil fuel accountability efforts, using legal strategies to promote stronger government oversight and ensure that the true costs of environmental harm are not unfairly placed on the public.

Community Resilience and Environmental Justice in the U.S.: We launched the Climate Resilience and Environmental Justice Project to support communities in the U.S. that are on the frontlines of climate change and environmental harm. Our work is guided by local leadership, rooted in the needs and priorities of our community partners, and driven by the need to build resilience in the face of rising displacement, toxic pollution, and environmental degradation. Through legal support, advocacy, and movement-building, we are helping our partners navigate and challenge the systemic forces fueling these harms. We support our partners on a variety of issues, including climate displacement, access to clean water, and mitigating the harmful impacts of toxic air and water pollution.

Confronting False Climate Solutions in the Global South: In Cambodia, carbon credit projects tied to voluntary global markets are displacing Indigenous communities from forests they have stewarded for generations, often without meaningful consultation or consent. In Myanmar's Kachin State, the mining of heavy rare earths

— used in the production of electric vehicles and wind turbines — has caused widespread environmental damage through the use of hazardous chemicals, threatening biodiversity and human health. In the DRC, the state of extraction and conflict reflect the deep global inequalities at the heart of the climate crisis. Although it contributes minimally to global emissions, the DRC bears outsized environmental and human rights costs from both climate change and the global push for green energy. As a major source of cobalt and other critical minerals used in electric vehicle batteries and renewable technologies, the country faces intensified extractive pressures that often result in labor exploitation, environmental degradation, and displacement of communities. These dynamics reflect a broader pattern of environmental injustice, where the Global South and particularly vulnerable populations within it, pay the price for the consumption and climate agendas of wealthier nations. EarthRights works with affected communities in these regions to document harms, train activists, test water and soil, map land use, and demand accountability from both local actors and international stakeholders involved in supply chains and oversight.

Together, these interventions form a comprehensive strategy grounded in justice, partnership, and structural change. While contributing to global efforts to reduce emissions, our climate work is also about building power in communities, exposing and transforming unjust systems, and creating a future where environmental rights are real and enforceable for all.

How We Achieve Our Goals

EarthRights utilizes a three-pronged approach to achieve our goals

- 1. Training:** We train defenders, lawyers, and community leaders and supporting their networks;
- 2. Legal:** We partner with communities and those harmed by corporate activities to develop precedent-setting litigation and advance novel legal strategies;
- 3. Campaigns:** We build and implement advocacy activities and campaigns at local, regional, and global levels.



Photo by Chalefun Dithudee

Our Commitment to Community Impact

Community impact is at the heart of our strategy. Our work, from the local to the global level, is driven by a commitment to deep and long-term partnership with the communities we support.

This partnership can take many forms, such as partnering with communities to respond directly to rights violations; providing legal and advocacy training and technical assistance, proactively creating safe legal and policy pathways that allow communities to hold powerful actors accountable, or facilitating the safe participation of affected communities in policy discussions at local, national, and global levels.

EarthRights knows from experience that this safe and strategic participation not only addresses individual instances of rights violations, but also shifts power away from powerful companies and institutions, enabling justice and accountability to grow over time.

Training and Building Networks

EarthRights uses training and network building to strengthen local systems for rights defense and power building. We strengthen the capacity of individuals to achieve community impact. We also leverage the power of network building to drive meaningful and structural change for affected communities around the world.

EarthRights equips the next generation of human rights and environmental defenders with the necessary skills, knowledge, and networks to protect their rights and sustain their movements. EarthRights partners with lawyers, civil society organizations, and emerging leaders from frontline communities and provides an intensive participatory learning environment and alumni network support through both longer-term programs such as the EarthRights School in the Mekong region and the Seminario Program in Latin America. EarthRights also provides shorter training programs tailored to community and civil society needs, such as the Mekong Legal Advocacy Institute.

EarthRights recognizes that we are one small part of a larger human rights and environmental movement, and that working with a larger movement is critical to correcting power imbalances. Our training initiatives contribute to the consolidation of this larger movement in many ways, including through active participation in local, regional, and global networks. EarthRights is strategic and intentional in our contributions and level of engagement in the networks we are a part of based on our unique expertise and theory of change. We also identify situations where we should take the lead in building new networks that are essential to achieving our goals.

Legal Strategies

Since our founding, EarthRights has made legal strategies a core part of our approach. Our programs leverage both judicial and non-judicial mechanisms to hold institutions and companies accountable for their actions, obtain remedy, and protect human rights defenders and communities from abuses. We also work toward systems change by strengthening legal and regulatory frameworks that safeguard human rights and environmental protections.

Our approach includes community-driven legal strategies that advance the articulated justice goals of partner communities and actively prevent significant environmental harms. Our approach also prioritizes precedent-setting litigation that opens new legal pathways for a broader movement to hold responsible corporations and financial institutions liable for human rights violations and climate, environmental, social, and economic harms.

Campaigns and Advocacy

EarthRights makes every effort to shift power to frontline communities to be the ambassadors of change on behalf of their own environments and communities rather than speak on their behalf.

Our campaigns and advocacy program collaborates with communities, advocates, civil society organizations, and lawyers to challenge corporations, financial institutions, and governments that cause environmental harms and commit human rights abuses. We document and expose abuses, alert key stakeholders and decision-makers about the impacts of corporate policies, build collective power through coalitions, and amplify local voices. We push companies and financial institutions to address community concerns and prevent abuses through responsible practices and adherence to international human rights, environmental, and governance standards.

EarthRights advocates for policy change that will strengthen protections for defenders, ensure a just transition away from fossil fuels in response to climate change, and create opportunities for communities to systemically hold institutions and companies accountable for the prevention and rectification of abuses of power and environmental degradation.



Photo by Cayla Nimmo

Core Mission Support

To pursue the goal areas in this strategic plan, EarthRights must strengthen its central support functions across geographies. More specifically, we will:

1. Build the Foundation for Strategic Communications: EarthRights will more effectively advance its programmatic goals and enhance its global credibility through a new, robust strategic communications strategy. This strategy will pave the way for clearer messaging and positioning on issues and an enhanced organizational identity. We will also increase our staffing and revamp our digital and web presence.

2. Deepen and Expand Fundraising and Development Approaches to Enable Organizational Effectiveness: EarthRights will promote expanded fundraising efforts by consolidating existing fundraising strategies (government and foundation opportunities) while expanding development support to all offices. We will introduce new strategies, including an expanded culture of philanthropic ambassadorship and growth of a major giving program.

3. Further Strengthen Operational Foundations for Smoother, More Efficient Organizational Functioning: EarthRights will continue to enhance controls, develop and promote key policies, build new tools and structures, enhance digital security, standardize IT investments, and improve knowledge management to enable smoother, more efficient organizational functioning. These efforts will support staff from across finance, operations, and people and culture teams. EarthRights will build a more robust regional operations team in Latin America, including support for MEL, operations, human resources, and fundraising. Additionally, we will ensure the staffing structure of the organization is aligned with our strategic plan goals.

4. Enhance Our Culture of Collaboration, Curiosity, and Learning: EarthRights will enhance its pursuit of impact by building and promoting MEL practices rooted in learning, reflection, and equity. We will also promote cross-strategy and cross-team collaboration toward specific systemic change goals. Finally, we will create intentional spaces for collaboration across strategies and geographies on a regular basis.

5. Increased Institutional Capacity for Training and Campaigns: EarthRights will ensure that training and campaigns teams have the resources they need to fully realize their programmatic impact and activities. This includes staffing across geographies, travel and workshop costs, and professional development funding for institutional leaders.



Photo by Pablo Lasansk

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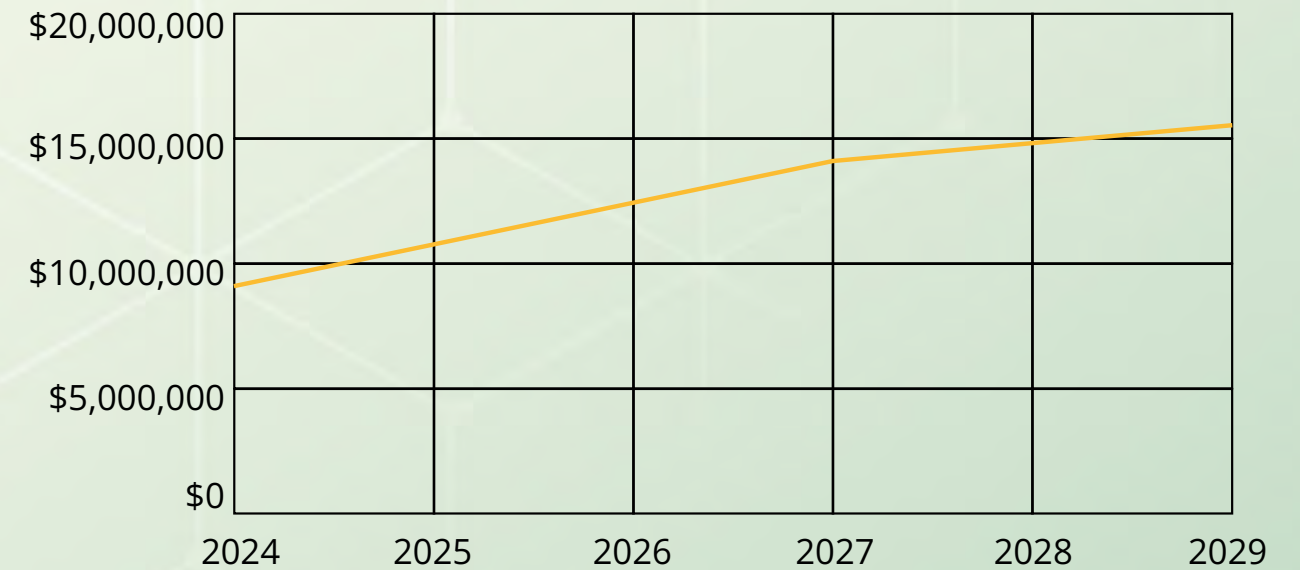
Resource Planning

To resource this strategic plan, EarthRights must grow its annual budget from approximately \$9.2 million to \$15.3 million. The majority of this increase will happen during years one, two, and three of the strategic plan, leveling out during years four and five.



Photo by Chalefun Ditphudee

Total Organizational Growth Projection



To meet these financial projections, EarthRights will consolidate existing and successful fundraising strategies – primarily government and foundation opportunities – while investing in newer strategies such as major giving and building an expanded culture of philanthropic ambassadorship across the organization. To do so, we must align our strategy and goals with trusted peers to leverage strengths and multiply outcomes, bringing funders along on our shared strategic journey. We will also ensure the strength and longevity of our flagship programs, by consistently demonstrating their impact, and being adaptable to a fast changing funding landscape while staying focused on the organizational model that has taken us three decades to build. In numbers, we will:

1. Maintain a yearly grant renewal rate of 85% through 2029.
2. By 2029, identify and secure \$10 million in new funding from new prospects and current donors.
3. Expand our major giving program by 50%.
4. Support our leaders across the organization to actively participate in fundraising activities including for prospecting, cultivation, and stewardship.



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