



# DEFENDING LAND, WATER AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

## THE PROBLEM

Many poor people in developing countries are struggling to survive in a rapidly changing world. The aggressive drive to develop land, build mega-dams, mine for minerals and log the earth's remaining forests is unjustly pushing millions of indigenous people and small farmers off the land they have lived on for generations. In many cases, this land holds spiritual and cultural significance and is central to the identities of its inhabitants. In their quest for power and profit, many corporations and governments are ignoring the voices of local communities to whom these lands and resources often belong.

Furthermore, our global dependence on carbon-emitting fossil fuels, large-scale industrial agriculture and unbridled economic development is hastening climate change. And sadly, people in poor rural communities who are dependent on the land for survival are bearing the brunt of global warming, as powerful storms, floods, droughts and heatwaves ravage their homes and small farms.

### WE ENVISION:

- A world in which the rights to land, water and other natural resources are guaranteed for all people, especially indigenous people, the rural poor, women and oppressed castes
- A world in which people and the planet are living in mutually caring interdependence, with a just distribution of resources to support life
- A future in which those who did the least to contribute to climate change, yet bear its biggest burden, have a voice in addressing the problem

## OUR SOLUTION

To counter these grave challenges, AJWS supports communities working to slow climate change, stop harmful development projects, and protect the land, water and natural resources that they depend on for survival. We



In Kenya, Wilson Memusi (right) and members of his indigenous Ogiek community are fighting evictions from their ancestral lands and replanting forests they depend on for survival, thanks to support from AJWS. *Photograph by Jonathan Torgovnik*

support a constellation of grassroots organizations and determined advocates, as they shape powerful social movements to ensure that land, water and natural resources are used equitably and sustainably.

In communities around the world, our grantees' efforts are resulting in critical progress for vulnerable rural people. Communities are fending off illegal land grabs and winning legal battles confirming that their land can't be used for development without their consent. They are preserving access to clean water, stopping the destruction of forests, and implementing innovative solutions to ward off threats posed by climate change.

## AJWS GRANTEES EFFECTING CHANGE

The activists, organizations and movements we support are making progress in their communities and around the globe:

- **In El Salvador**, a coalition supported by AJWS achieved a nationwide ban of metallic mining, a toxic practice that had poisoned the water supply. Twelve grassroots organizations funded by AJWS organized tens of thousands of local people over 11 years to pressure the government to intervene. Thanks to this advocacy, in 2017, El Salvador became the first country ever to ban metallic mining nationwide.

In 2019, AJWS invested \$4.2 million in 135 social change organizations in 13 countries to slow climate change and protect the land, water and natural resources that rural and indigenous people depend on for survival.

Burma • Cambodia • Democratic Republic of Congo • El Salvador • Guatemala • Haiti  
India • Kenya • Liberia • Mexico  
Sri Lanka • Thailand • Uganda



With AJWS by their side, activists in El Salvador won a historic mining ban in 2017. Photo courtesy of Mesa Nacional Frente a la Minería

- **In Kenya**, the indigenous Ogiek community, with support from AJWS and our grantee **Ogiek Peoples' Development Program (OPDP)**, won a landmark court case in 2017 to stop the government from evicting this forest-dwelling group from their land to make way for logging. The court upheld the Ogiek people's right to live in the forest and to seek reparations for their losses, and recognized their status as a distinct indigenous people—setting an important legal precedent for indigenous communities across the entire continent.
- **In Cambodia**, after years of grassroots advocacy and organizing by AJWS grantee **Highlanders Association (HA)**, in 2017, a Vietnamese rubber corporation known as Hoang Anh Gia Lai (HAGL) finally agreed to return large swathes of farmland, mountain areas, streams and burial grounds to the local indigenous communities. HA's success has encouraged other indigenous communities in the country to mount similar campaigns to defend their precious land from harmful exploitation.

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## ABOUT AJWS

**American Jewish World Service (AJWS)** is the leading Jewish organization working to fight poverty and pursue justice in the developing world. By supporting hundreds of social change organizations in 19 countries, we respond to the most pressing issues of our time—from disasters, genocide and hunger, to the persecution of women and minorities worldwide. With Jewish values and a global reach, AJWS is making a difference in millions of lives and bringing a more just and equitable world closer for all.



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