



# DEFENDING LAND, WATER AND CLIMATE JUSTICE

## THE CHALLENGES

Around the world, rural and Indigenous communities are fighting for their rights to live with safety, justice and dignity—and often their very survival—in a rapidly changing world.

The aggressive drive to develop land, build mega-dams, mine for minerals, harvest rivers and oceans and log the earth's remaining forests is unjustly pushing millions of Indigenous people and small farmers out of the homes where they've lived for generations. These communities are not consulted, respected, or at times even acknowledged as their lands and waters are plundered for profits that will not be shared.

Further, our global dependence on carbon-emitting fossil fuels and large-scale industrial agriculture are deepening the climate crisis. But these dangers are not experienced equally by all people. The rights of rural and Indigenous communities to live how they choose—sustainably and independently—are unjustly stripped.

## HOW WE MAKE CHANGE

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 support a constellation of grassroots organizations and determined advocates as they shape powerful

### WE'RE BUILDING A WORLD WHERE:

- The rights to land, water and other natural resources are guaranteed for all people, especially Indigenous people, the rural poor, women and other marginalized communities.
- People and the planet are living in mutual interdependence, with a just distribution of resources to support human life and healthy ecosystems.
- Rural and Indigenous communities have achieved food sovereignty—the ability to produce diverse, sustainable crops to earn a living and feed themselves.

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.



To celebrate World Water Day, activists from AJWS grantee Unidad Ecológica Salvadoreña (UNES) marched with allies from across the country to protect the right to water for all Salvadorans. Photo by Alfredo Carías

## OUR IMPACT AROUND THE WORLD

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 **Liberia** in 2021, the Fessibu community became the first Indigenous group in the country to obtain legal ownership of the land that they have farmed for more than 400 years. As this community worked to secure the deed to their land, AJWS grantee **Sustainable Development Institute (SDI)** stood by them every step of the way. Their triumph was made possible by SDI's years of advocacy, which led to the passage of the 2018 Land Rights Act—a historic law acknowledging the right of Indigenous communities to own their ancestral lands.



Members of Liberia's Fessibu community mark the borders of their territory after gaining title to their land—achieved with support from AJWS grantee Sustainable Development Institute. *Photo courtesy of SDI*

In 2021, AJWS invested \$4.3 million in 132 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.

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

- In May of 2021, the **Dominican Republic** served as the host country for the UN Climate Change's Regional Climate Week for Latin America and the Caribbean. Leaders and grassroots activists discussed the imperative to reduce emissions and address social inequalities, especially as it pertains to the regional COVID-19 recovery effort. Grantee partner **Asociación Cultural La Negreta** enriched the summit by leading sessions centering the voices of Dominicans of African descent, who emphasized how crucial it is to include their community in conversations about climate change, as their voices are too often excluded due to racial discrimination.
- In **Mexico** in late 2021, AJWS grantee **Flor y Canto** achieved a historic win for Indigenous people and the planet. Since 2006, the Mexican government has allowed industrial farms, mines, and tourist hotels to use up water in the drought-prone Central Valley, leaving very little water — and at an exorbitant cost — for the Indigenous people who have managed this natural resource for thousands of years. After 16 years of advocacy, Flor y Canto successfully persuaded the Mexican government to give full control of water management to 16 Indigenous communities, allowing them to resume their traditional practices.

Updated January 2022

American Jewish World Service  
45 West 36<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10018

📞 212.792.2900  
800.889.7146  
✉ [ajws@ajws.org](mailto:ajws@ajws.org)

🌐 [ajws.org](http://ajws.org)  
f [/americanjewishworldservice](https://www.facebook.com/americanjewishworldservice)  
t [@ajws](https://twitter.com/ajws)  
i [/americanjewishworldservice](https://www.instagram.com/americanjewishworldservice)

