



International Network for Economic,
Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net)
Corporate Accountability Working Group

The 'Access to Accountability' (A2A) Initiative

2012

Context

In recent years the development of the Guiding Principles on Business & Human Rights has been the preeminent international focus in the business and human rights field, and ESCR Net's Corporate Accountability Working Group (CAWG) has been primarily focussed on influencing their development. With the release of these Principles, the CAWG acknowledges the qualified success of this long-running process, but is now in the process of re-evaluating its recent progress against the mandate provided to it at the ESCR Net 2008 General Assembly. In particular, a primary conclusion from the 2008 Working Session on Corporate Accountability at the General Assembly was the "need for practical support and tools for local struggles, capacity-building, exchange of best practices and monitoring strategies". While much has been achieved in some areas, other aspects of the mandate, such as that above, have received less attention.

The **Access to Accountability Initiative ('A2A Initiative')** is the approach the CAWG will be taking to more actively pursue the aforementioned objectives reached in the 2008 General Assembly. The A2A Initiative will increase the capacity of ESCR Net members and partners to access corporate accountability mechanisms that most appropriately suit their needs. The overall goal of the Initiative is to **leverage the Network's unique reservoir of international, national and grassroots experts with corporate accountability knowledge to assist groups to bring about the greatest degree of accountability possible in their cases.**

How is the A2A Initiative distinct from what other newer networks are offering?

ESCR Net carries out a mandate it receives from a membership of almost 230 civil society groups and ESC rights experts from all around the world. This foundation characterises how the CAWG's A2A Initiative is distinct from the services and mandates of any other international corporate accountability networks currently in place. Our many years of previous involvement in the corporate accountability area have brought into sharp focus the limited progress made to bridge shortfalls in resources and capacity for grassroots campaigners and community representatives fighting corporate abuse on a daily basis.

Throughout the years of the development of the Framework and Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the primary focus of the CAWG of ESCR Net was involvement in standard setting. ESCR Net remains engaged in international policy dialogue and furthering

home state legislative agendas, especially bringing the voices of our broad membership into these international fora. This approach to change can spur 'trickle down' effects into other corporate accountability discussions and approaches, however, the priority of where this work fits in a broader range of activities of the CAWG is shifting in light of the current needs of our membership and the international context.

Many of our members are striving for accountability in the face of regular corporate abuse. The primary added value of ESCR Net is the capacity to leverage a unique reservoir of expertise from within the global corporate accountability movement, to bring about direct assistance to fellow partner and members organisations. The Secretariat of the Network is able to identify natural linkages across the membership, while also offering strategic advice. These strengths are key elements required to address the critical resource and capacity shortfall described above.

Substantive Elements of the A2A Initiative

1. Strategic Case Support / Mechanism Identification

1.1. Explanation / Objective

Whether it is extractive industry projects in India or hydroelectric dams in Mexico, ESCR Net members and partners frequently approach the Network, through various Working Groups, seeking strategic input and assistance in the cases of human rights abuse. A high proportion of these cases have a corporate dimension to them and often the corporate accountability perspectives of these cases have not been fully explored, or have only been explored in one of potentially several means. Strategic case support and corporate accountability mechanism identification is something the ESCR Net CAWG is ideally placed to provide to these groups.

In substance, this kind of assistance will mean:

- Engaging with members and partners seeking assistance to evaluate how the specific objectives of the grassroots organizations / affected communities match with a corporate accountability approach to their case;
- Based on the grassroots organizations / affected communities stated objectives and desired approach, identify which of the many and varied potential corporate accountability mechanisms best fulfill these objectives;
- Based on the most suitable corporate accountability mechanisms identified, connection is made to the members of the CAWG that have the closest degree of expertise and experience in pursuing these mechanisms, to understand their potential pitfalls, and learning how best to gain the most from them.
- Formally approaching CAWG members who have the capacity and a clear demonstrable wealth of knowledge and expertise with a specific mechanism to seek to initiate an active partnership with the group requesting assistance.
- Where expertise and capacity exists to do so, the ESCR Net Secretariat will offer direct assistance to the group in question to help them access the most appropriate mechanism.

1.2 Strategic Case Support / Mechanism Identification: 2012 Activities

In 2012, the CAWG will provide substantive assistance as mentioned above in 1.1 to at least three cases of corporate abuse of ESC rights faced by ESCR Net members and partners.

1.3 Resources Required

Financial support for this area of the Initiative would be primarily be directed towards undertaking field missions to affected areas where communities are combating corporate abuse. These trips are used to:

- Dialogue and strategise with community representatives on how to advance their cases, according to community objectives,
- Bring experienced CAWG members to share knowledge on how to pursue corporate accountability mechanisms that community representatives wish to utilise,
- Generate case studies to document cases for an international audience,
- Cultivate stronger partnerships at the national and local level.
- Provide ongoing support to ensure the case reaches an appropriate outcome from the targeted mechanism, and receives international, regional and/or national attention.

In addition, some resources would be required to support affected communities to attend the proceedings of accountability mechanisms when it is strategically important to have their voices heard.

Without resources the Secretariat is still able to provide remote support to link members to key resource people via email, provide resources to further their cases, undertake background research on companies for use in campaign strategy development, etc.

2. Field Training

2.1 Explanation/Objective

Increasingly there are useful resources available to groups affected by corporate abuse that could assist them to pursue corporate accountability mechanisms. However, the resources alone do not ensure groups are able to use them effectively. With the wealth of knowledge on conducting corporate accountability campaigns within the CAWG membership, the Group can periodically provide trainings on various key corporate accountability campaign techniques such as how to undertake corporate profiling, pursue various accountability mechanisms, develop media strategies, undertake community level human rights impact assessments, etc. In this way, periodic field training in different regions will breathe life into the existing corporate accountability tools available. In particular field training will be delivered to:

- Provide detailed hands-on guidance in many important areas of corporate accountability campaigning, research and advocacy (i.e. deliver 'how-to' trainings on activities such as undertake corporate profiling, pursue various accountability mechanisms, develop media strategies, undertake community level human rights impact assessments, etc)

- Support grassroots groups and their partners to identify which corporate accountability mechanisms are most appropriate for their objectives,
- Provide guidance on *how* groups can engage these mechanisms,
- Assist groups to prepare an advocacy strategy targeting these mechanisms.

2.2 Field Training: 2012 Activities

In 2012, with strategic guidance from the CAWG, the Secretariat of ESCR Net will draw on experience within the CAWG Steering Committee, as well as aggregate the existing resources available on how to pursue corporate accountability mechanisms, to tailor a specific program of support for at least two ESCR Net members or partners.

2.3 Resources Required

Holding regional (Africa, Asia, Latin America, etc) and national level training on accessing corporate accountability mechanisms requires financial resources to bring groups together to participate in these skill-building events. Without financial support for this work, ESCR Net Secretariat can still provide resources to members or partners, but additional capacity to actually work with them to help groups effectively pursue these mechanisms is very limited.

3. Information Dissemination and Solidarity Building

3.1 Explanation/Objective

In 2011, ESCR Net, together with the Centre for Human Rights & Global Justice, launched the Business and Human Rights Documentation Project (B-HRD, pronounced 'Be Heard') in New York and Bogota. This unique resource blends awareness through in-depth research into real cases of business violations of human rights, together with a database of human rights based research reports that has a strict human rights based approach to documentation. B-HRD has quickly gained a reputation as a key space in the sector for groups working on the ground to have their cases heard on a global platform.

3.2 Information Dissemination and Solidarity Building: 2012 Activities

In 2012, with strategic guidance from the CAWG, the Secretariat of ESCR Net will be maintaining B-HRD, and undertake a first phase of rejuvenation, to ensure B-HRD continues to meet the needs of the grassroots-centered business and human rights sector.

In 2012, the ESCR Net Secretariat will also contribute the following piece of strategic research for the corporate accountability field:¹

¹ The subject matter of these papers is strategically relevant to the current environment in the CA sector and will be developed with a view to informing the development of parts of the capacity building toolkit.

1. Corporate Accountability Advocacy in the East Asian Setting – Identifying Ways Over the Wall

3.3 Resources Required

Resources for B-HRD will be needed to fully pursue the second phase of redevelopment. The key developments in this phase include:

- Translations for all site material into Chinese, Arabic and Russian to enable the resource to reach a much broader global audience,
- Development of tools such as a corporate profiling, documentation and fact-finding toolkit,
- Development of more video forum contributions from grassroots corporate accountability campaigners from within the Network.

Without additional resources, B-HRD, will be maintained, including input of information to keep the database current and updates to the In Focus section.

4. Standards Setting

4.1 Explanation/Objective

While the A2A Initiative recalibrates the focus of corporate accountability work to be more attentive to the needs of local grassroots groups, it would be strategically remiss to not keep some attention on the evolving international debates, and engage in a way that maintains a priority focus on the needs of affected people in any standard setting discussions.

In this sense the CAWG will stay engaged strategically with international and regional standard setting initiatives and maintain a place in emerging dialogues within international civil society around hard law norm development.

4.2. Standards Setting: 2012 Activities

In 2012 the CAWG will participate in dialogue with international civil society organizations that are contemplating developing campaigns and research around new opportunities for hard law and quasi-legal norm development.

4.3. Resources Required

On strategically important occasions it may be necessary for ESCR Net to attend gatherings of international fora to put forward the views of our CAWG members when their voices would otherwise not be heard. In these rare cases financial support would be needed to attend such events.
