There must be coherent and complementary systems of national and international governance of corporate conduct that holds governments and corporations in full adherence with international human rights standards—particularly with regard to economic, social and cultural rights—including strong mechanisms for prevention and accountability. The Corporate Accountability Working Group (CAWG) seeks to fulfill this vision through advocating new mechanisms for justice, challenging corporate influence over government processes, collectively advancing cases that can benefit the whole corporate accountability movement, and amplifying local struggles. The CAWG also facilitates member-to-member capacity building and inputs into key debates on the development and implementation of standards.

Current Objectives

- Undertake significant research and advocacy to expose cases illustrating the links between (and ways to effectively address) corporate capture of state institutions and the direct link this has to human rights violations;
- Take a leading role in promoting civil society priorities for the design and operation of forthcoming international standards including the UN treaty to address corporate related human rights violations and the General Comment on ESC Rights and Corporate Actors from the Committee on ESC Rights, reflecting the collective views of CAWG Members, including particularly the perspectives of historically marginalized groups; and
- Tackle emblematic cases of corporate related human rights violations, and seek local and international accountability, by supporting skills-sharing across the membership to collectively address ongoing abuses.

Impacts 2013-2016

- In June 2014, following several months of coordinated advocacy efforts in over 20 capitals and Geneva by ESCR-Net members and partners, the UN Human Rights Council passed resolution 26/9 to establish an Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG) to develop a binding international treaty to address corporate-related human rights impacts.
- Sustained ESCR-Net member advocacy pushed POSCO, the world’s fourth largest steel manufacturer, to develop a Code of Conduct and Human Rights Management Guidelines. The advocacy efforts also lead several of POSCO’s investors to evaluate the company’s performance in light of their human rights performance, with two high profile investors withdrawing from POSCO over the past year. ESCR-Net support has also helped members in various countries advance their campaigns, including the campaign of Habi Center for Environmental Rights against cement companies.
- CAWG launched the Peoples’ Forum on Human Rights and Business (Thailand, 2013; Colombia, 2014; Kenya 2015) as a space for members and allies—social movements and other civil society organizations from all regions—to exchange advocacy lessons, analyze ongoing developments, and develop a shared strategic agenda.
- The Corporate Capture Project has generated growing attention regarding the human rights impacts of undue corporate influence on state institutions and decision-making processes, via
events at the Global Media Forum and UN Forum on Business and Human Rights, as well as promoting corporate capture as a prime concern for the Treaty Alliance.

Prioritized Activities for 2016

1. Corporate Capture Project: This project is designed to mobilise strong, effective and sustained civil society action to address the linkages between corporate capture of government decision-making processes and the consequent human rights impacts at national and sub-national level.

2. Treaty Initiative: Continuing the CAWG’s support for the creation of the UN Open-Ended Intergovernmental Working Group to formulate binding international standards to better prevent and remedy corporate-related human rights abuses, the CAWG will engage with the UN Working Group to ensure the final output is informed by and effective for affected communities, mobilizing regional coordination of advocacy for standards and facilitating strategic exchange to ensure that members can use this process to push for accountability at all levels.

3. Strategic Case Support: ESCR-Net members collectively provide support to each other to address emblematic cases of corporate related human rights violations, facilitating strategy development and collective action, including presently in India, Guatemala and the Philippines.

Membership

The CAWG presently has 70 members based across all regions, of which 15 are Social Movements. The Steering Committee is made up of 12 members, half of which are represented by women. CAWG has proactively aimed at developing an intersectional analysis into their work, including within the Peoples’ Forum agenda specific sessions to address the differentiated impact of corporate activities on women, and consideration of what CAWG can begin to do to explicitly address this. The CAWG maintains regular dialogue through a combined list serve and regular calls in order to collectively debate evolving CAWG positions and strategies. While some advances have been made in internal CAWG communication, ongoing improvement is required to encourage even further engagement in active projects and activities like the Corporate Capture Project and Treaty Initiative, beyond the regular regionally-based communications currently occurring.

The current members of the CAWG Steering Committee are: Al-Haq (Palestine), Alternative Asean Network on Burma – AltSEAN Burma (Thailand/Burma), Conectas Direitos Humanos (Brazil), EarthRights International (US/Thailand/Peru), Green Advocates (Liberia), Habi Center for Environmental Rights (Egypt), Justiça Global (Brazil), Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People-MOSOP (Nigeria), Murielle Mignot (Angola/Cuba), Project on Organizing, Development, Education and Research – PODER (Mexico), Indigenous Peoples’ International Centre for Policy Research and Education – Tebtebba (Philippines).