

# THE OAKLAND INSTITUTE

## 2016 ANNUAL REPORT



The Oakland Institute

## Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

I have long believed that change begins when people are informed, active, and engaged. In an era of “fake news” and “alternative facts,” rigorous, detailed, and compelling research is both harder to find and more important than ever.

When I founded the Oakland Institute in 2004, it was with the goal of bringing fresh ideas and reframing debates around the many pressing issues of our time. In the twelve years since, the Oakland Institute has exposed the perils of land grabbing; questioned the practices of international aid and so-called development schemes; shared the stories of impacted communities worldwide; elevated solutions such as the successes of agroecology; and much more. The thread throughout this work has been meticulous research and an unwavering commitment to justice.

Today, the Oakland Institute is a go-to resource for research and policy analysis on a wide variety of social, economic, and environmental issues. But more than that, the Oakland Institute has become a go-to organization for communities on the ground.

Thanks to our various successes, communities are reaching out and asking us to support them in their struggles for their land and livelihoods. In February 2016, we were approached by a community of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Sri Lanka, displaced from their homes and land for 26 years. They petitioned us to help them return home. More recently, communities in Tanzania and Madagascar have also reached out and sought our support.

It is with humility that I share that the Oakland Institute has become not just a think tank for policy makers, but a think tank for the people.

As I look back over 2016, it is clear that our work is having an impact. In February, we released a game changing report about Papua New Guinea that showed that timber companies in the country were evading taxes and engaged in illegal practices. In the months since, the tax system for the timber industry has been overhauled and PNG’s Supreme Court returned 120,000 hectares of land to their rightful owners. In November, our IDP friends in Sri Lanka had their land returned, and they’ve now begun the long process of resettlement. Throughout the year, we have worked to ensure that US development aid is not fuelling Ethiopia’s repressive regime by testifying to Congress, helping draft a House Resolution on human rights in the country, and ensuring that the annual US Appropriations Bill states that development aid cannot be used for forced evictions in the country. The list goes on.

But while we celebrate these wins, it is clear how much more needs to be done. As we witness the impact of Donald Trump’s presidency, raising the voices of the most marginalized, holding powerful institutions accountable, reframing debates through rigorous research, and mobilizing for change is vital. Our work has never been more important.

Maintaining our independence and flexibility as an organization in the coming years will also be key. We are so grateful to our committed supporters, who allow us to work nimbly and effectively on the most pressing issues as they arise. We literally couldn’t do this work without you.

With gratitude and in solidarity for the long fight ahead,



Anushka Mittal



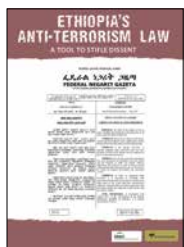




## Expanding Our Work in the Face of Injustice: Ethiopia

For the past eight years, the Oakland Institute has exposed the impact that land grabs and failed development policies continue to have on communities across Ethiopia. Through this work, we have built relationships with inspiring community members and leaders on the ground.

Sadly, in recent years the Ethiopian government has brutally cracked down on dissent. As a result, many individuals – including journalists, land rights defenders, opposition party members, religious and indigenous leaders, students, and many of our friends – are in jail simply for raising their voices against injustice.



In January 2016, we partnered with the Environmental Defender Law Center to publish a legal analysis of Ethiopia's draconian Anti-Terrorism Proclamation. This law has been the cornerstone of countless arbitrary arrests and no comprehensive legal analysis of the law had been conducted. Our report – prepared by internationally acclaimed lawyers – clearly shows that Ethiopia's anti-terrorism law violates international human rights and due process standards. It has been used in numerous court cases in defense of political prisoners and religious and indigenous leaders in Ethiopia and was submitted as an *Amicus Curiae* brief to the African Commission on Human and People's Rights.

Given the United States' status as the largest bilateral donor to Ethiopia, we have continued to work on securing legislative change here at home. For the past four years, we have ensured that the annual Appropriations Bill states that US development aid cannot be used for programs associated with forced displacements. In 2016, we also testified at the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and drafted a House Resolution on human rights in Ethiopia that is before Congress now.

Finally, we have worked tirelessly on the cases of two political prisoners in Ethiopia: Pastor Omot Agwa and Mr. Okello Akway Ochalla. Both of these men were arbitrarily detained under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation on ludicrous charges – Pastor Omot was arrested while attempting to travel to a food security conference in Nairobi and Mr. Okello's crime was speaking out to international media about orchestrated mass murders targeting his community. After years of hard work and advocacy, we were relieved that the charges against Mr. Okello were dropped from terrorism to criminal charges, but devastated when those lowered charges still came with a nine year prison sentence. His appeal was recently denied, and his lawyers are currently examining final options for justice in his case. Pastor Omot was recently released on bail, after two years in detention. He has yet to be charged.



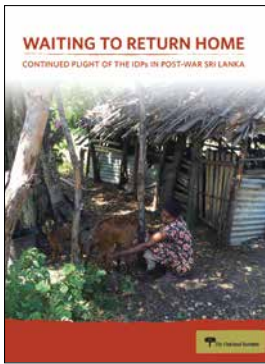
“When the world and the people who should have done this [the] right way turn[ed] back away from us...I see you and your team standing with us, doing everything [to] come across the line to free my father. That is amazing work. I know we will rejoice one day when that day come[s].”

— Obok Okello, Mr. Okello's son





## Expanding Our Work in the Face of Injustice: Sri Lanka



In 2014, five years after the end of the civil war, Sri Lanka had disappeared from international news headlines. Yet, Oakland Institute researchers were on the ground, investigating land issues and human rights abuses in the North and East of the country. Our ground-breaking field research led to the publication of the first independent investigation since the end of the war. This report was covered by major news outlets on all continents; brought international attention to the continued displacement, militarization, and horrific abuses affecting the Tamil minority; and, combined with our advocacy efforts, helped secure a United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution in October 2015.

Then, in February 2016, we received a humbling appeal from a group of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Sri Lanka’s North, who were forced off their land nearly 30 years ago:

*“Having exhausted all the domestic, political, and legal avenues ... to regain our lands and houses acquired ... by the Sri Lankan armed forces during the war, we ... have decided to seek your help to find redress to our problem.”*

This call for help led us to double down our efforts towards justice in Sri Lanka. In May, we released an update on the land and human rights situation in the North and East, providing both a critical analysis of the actions of Sri Lanka’s new administration, and sharing the heartbreaking stories of the IDPs that reached out to us. We then testified to the office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights and the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues as part of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

While abuses continue in the country, it is also clear that our work is having an impact. In November, we received the good news that most of the lands belonging to our IDP friends were released. They have begun the long, arduous process of returning home.

*“You have tremendously helped us to raise our voice internationally. Once again we thank you for your untiring support ... We do believe your continued pressure is the only solution to regain our own lands and end our lives as IDPs.”*

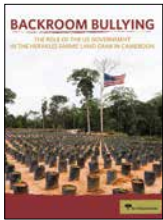
—IDP, Sri Lanka







## Providing Communities with Tools of Truth in Cameroon and PNG

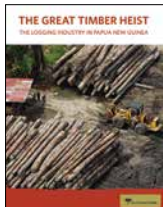


As a think tank working in solidarity with groups around the world, we conduct research, help secure media coverage, and provide tools of truth to the communities who need it most.

Three years ago, we exposed the dubious dealings of Herakles Farms, a US-based company that was set to obtain a 99-year lease for 73,000 hectares of land in Cameroon. Its plan? To deforest pristine rainforest and create a palm oil plantation.

Our research and advocacy led to significant results. Herakles Farms' lease was lessened to three years for less than 20,000 hectares of land. As the government was expected to make a decision on its renewal by the end of 2016, the Institute released a new report based on cables obtained through a Freedom of Information Act request that exposed that the US government bullied Cameroon into accepting the deal.

Our report gave fresh arguments to the communities opposing the project, and was picked up widely by media agencies. Local communities used it to renew their call to the government that the Herakles Farms deal be cancelled once and for all.



We have also continued to deepen our work and partnerships with communities in Papua New Guinea (PNG). In February 2016, the Institute released *The Great Timber Heist*, a new report that provided clear evidence that timber companies in the country were evading taxes and engaged in illegal practices.

The report was a game changer. It received massive media attention. It forced several government agencies, including the Minister of Forests, to publically respond to our research. And then, in November, the government took action and substantially increased their log export tax. This decision is expected to drastically reduce logging and deforestation in PNG and was a direct result of the public outrage created by our report.

In addition to these great wins, in September PNG's Supreme Court returned 120,000 hectares of land to their rightful owners in East Sepik in a land grabbing case that we exposed in 2013.

We are empowered by these positive outcomes, and grateful to our partners on the ground in both Cameroon and PNG for their continued dedication, tireless work, and continued partnership.



“We are short of words to express our gratitude for the marvelous work that the Oakland Institute is doing to free our communities, as well as communities around the world from wicked economic policies and business tactics used by governments and companies to marginalize and render communities landless.”

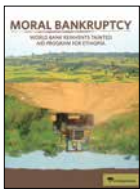
—Nasako Besingi, SEFE (Cameroon)





## Holding Powerful Actors Accountable

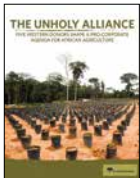
Over the years, the Oakland Institute has become known for holding powerful actors accountable around the world. 2016 was no different.



In March, we investigated a new World Bank program – *Enhancing Shared Prosperity through Equitable Services (ESPES)* – meant to bring basic services to Ethiopians nationwide. The ESPES program mirrors and replaces the highly controversial *Promoting Basic Services (PBS)* program, which came under intense scrutiny after allegations surfaced of forced evictions and human rights abuses.

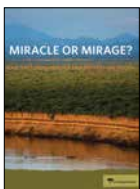
Our investigation not only exposed major flaws in the ESPES program, but also revealed that the US Treasury violated numerous congressional laws by voting in favor of it. Our report was picked up by many news outlets, and shortly after its publication, Representative Keith Ellison (D-MN) filed a formal inquiry with the US Treasury about its actions.

As part of our ongoing involvement in the *Our Land Our Business* campaign, we have continued to scrutinize the impact of the World Bank's *Enabling the Business of Agriculture (EBA)* program.



In May, we detailed how a coalition of four donor countries – the US, UK, Netherlands, and Denmark – along with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is shaping a pro-business environment in the agricultural sector of developing countries. These five donors, who bankroll the highly problematic EBA program, are rapidly expanding bilateral and multilateral aid programs to support corporate agriculture, forcing governments to deregulate and create new market opportunities for agrochemical corporations.

As part of this campaign, we called on the five donors to withdraw their support of the EBA. The Netherlands responded that they would stop financing the EBA in June 2016, and the Denmark is currently re-assessing their support of the program.



Finally, we continued to dispel development myths. As Ethiopia spiraled into political crisis, the Institute released a report analyzing Ethiopia's deeply problematic "development" model. Key to this model is making Ethiopia one of the world's largest sugar producers. Our report offered harsh lessons from Ethiopia's own history of establishing sugar and cotton plantations in the Afar region since the 1950s. These plantations drastically reduced land and water availability for people and cattle, undermined food security, and destroyed drought coping mechanisms, leading to conflict and famine. The report also detailed how plantation agriculture has been less profitable than pastoralist livestock production in Afar, demonstrating the flawed narrative of Ethiopian officials and donor countries who continue to prop-up the country as a miracle of growth.

Together, these reports have helped shape an alternative narrative of development, dispelled the myths about corporate agriculture, and exposed the truth behind various illegal and problematic actions of donor countries and agencies.

## In Memoriam

In 2016, the Oakland Institute – and the world – lost three inspiring, and courageous advocates for justice: Berta Cáceres, Tom Hayden, and Gabriel Molok.



We were devastated by the brutal assassination of indigenous leader and courageous land rights defender Berta Cáceres. As a leader and co-founder of the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH), Berta worked with indigenous Lenca communities to oppose the theft of land, water, and natural resources, and advocate for the Lenca's right to land and livelihoods. Before her death, Berta was organizing to end the construction of the Agua Zarca Dam, which was slated to be built on the sacred Gualcarque River and threatened the Lenca's survival. Berta was assassinated in her home in March 2016.



Tom Hayden was many things to many people – a Freedom Rider, a founder of Students for a Democratic Society, a member of the Chicago Eight, a California State Legislator, and much more. To the Oakland Institute, he was also one of our first Senior Fellow's and a friend. Tom's work as a Senior Fellow focused on trade issues, examining trade deals in California and the US, and how they can lead to the exploitation of workers. We remember Tom for his courage, tirelessness, and fierce commitment to justice.



Gabriel Molok was one of the Institute's closest collaborators in Papua New Guinea, leading the fight for land rights in the face of powerful timber and palm oil companies. Gabriel's work as Executive Director of the Turubu Eco Forestry Development Project secured the court victory that led to the return of over 120,000 ha of land to its rightful community owners. Regarding the decisions, Gabriel commented "Now... we can imagine a future for us and our children again. Our hope is that the ruling will spread like lightning across the country, bringing justice for numerous communities who are still battling against the theft of their lands, water, and forests."

We are honored to have worked alongside these three incredible activists, land defenders, and friends. They are greatly missed but they left us with inspiration, energy, and strength to continue and expand our work.







# Looking Forward

Our work is more important than ever under Trump’s presidency. The new US administration has come with new threats to people and the planet. We can expect regimes to continue to perpetuate human rights abuses and crackdown on dissent. We can expect more shady land deals to be pushed forward. We can expect increased surveillance and threats. And we can expect greater need for independent investigative work, for accurate facts and objective information to be made public.

No matter what the next four years bring, the Oakland Institute will continue to work in solidarity with impacted communities in the US and around the world. We pride ourselves on addressing issues that aren’t getting the attention they deserve, and bringing them to the fore. We are unwavering in our commitment to communities on the ground, and advocating for the justice they deserve. And we are steadfast in our resolve to speak truth to power.

## Financial Statements

As this chart shows, 85 percent of every dollar raised goes directly to our programs and legal defense fund. For detailed information on the Oakland Institute’s finances, please see our annual 990 forms at <https://www.oaklandinstitute.org/about/financial-reports>.

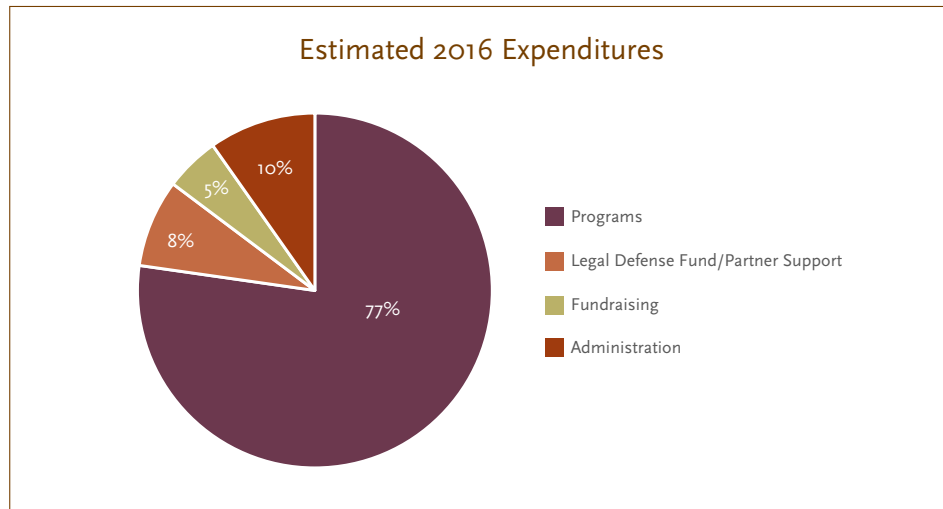


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