

A red line starts from the top left, curves across the top, loops on the right side, and then curves down towards the bottom right corner.

**CORPORATE  
ACCOUNTABILITY  
LAB**

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**ANNUAL REPORT 2019**

# Founder's Note

Dear Friends,

The world sure has changed in just a few short months. As I sit in my office – unusually quiet due to the COVID-19 outbreak--it seems that a lifetime has passed since 2019.

Here at Corporate Accountability Lab, 2019 was full of connection, collaboration, and mutual support. With three new attorneys, expanded office space, and an ever-growing network of co-conspirators, we embraced failure and chased crazy ideas for corporate accountability to the ground or to the moon. Our design days brought interns, fellows, law school clinics, and designers into the same physical space to make beautiful messes with sticky notes, pipe cleaners, and play dough, and emerge with fresh ideas and energy. Taking those ideas to Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Europe, we collaborated with and learned from our partner organizations across the globe and invested in the co-creation of a safer and more just world.

In 2020, while physical distance has become the new norm, our global mutual reliance is no longer in question. Whoever you are-- the first lady of Canada, a Foxconn worker in China, or a retiree on a cruise ship--our commonality has dwarfed our difference: we can all get sick; we all miss human contact when we're quarantined; we all wonder how long this will last.

The fight for human rights is ultimately a fight against disconnection – against viewing the other as expendable, or unworthy of notice. It is a fight against forgetting, against apathy, against a false sense of self-sufficiency. When major companies abuse human rights, they often do so out of negligence, in

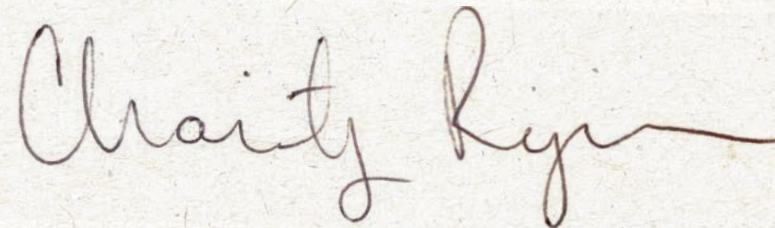
the mindless pursuit of profit, and with a belief that those they harm are not their responsibility. Companies must now consider how poor working conditions – the norm for workers across the globe producing for Global North markets – will exacerbate the spread of disease. Privatized healthcare, prisons, and immigrant detention are also part of the problem, making a clear link between the pursuit of profit, human rights, and public health. What we do now affects everyone, from the urban poor to the political and economic elite.

This reveals a simple fact: a world that actively pursues justice is safer for us all. As you review this report, we invite you to reflect with us on all the amazing human connections that took place in 2019 and those we continue to make.

**"The fight for human rights is ultimately a fight against disconnection... against forgetting, against apathy, against a false sense of self-sufficiency."**

In gratitude,

Charity Ryerson  
Legal Director, Founder



# OUR MISSION

Corporate Accountability Lab unleashes the creative potential of the law to protect people and the planet from corporate abuse.

# OUR WORK

Corporate Accountability Lab develops innovative legal strategies to hold corporations accountable. We do this by researching and mapping the many actors involved in human rights and environmental abuses. We then use our unique human-centered legal design process to innovate and develop new legal strategies.



The CAL team at the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights, Geneva, November 2019

# LEGAL DESIGN LAB

At Corporate Accountability Lab, we use our human-centered legal design process to develop innovations to protect people and the planet from corporate abuse. Our Design Lab provides a space for staff, interns, and Innovation Fellows to develop new and under-utilized legal strategies to hold corporations accountable for human rights and environmental abuses. The Lab offers resources to partner organizations, lawyers, and academics to support innovations in their work and it contributes to the development of a culture of creative thinking, innovation, and collaboration in the human rights field.



## Idea Bank

In 2019, we began developing an “idea bank” that will serve as the Lab’s “knowledge hub” and a resource for the corporate accountability community. The Idea Bank will house ideas for legal innovation; serve as a tool to enable, foster, and supplement in-person and online connections between colleagues; and provide a working space for legal design and innovation.

## Innovation Fellowship

We debuted our Innovation Fellowship program in which attorneys-in-residence research and develop their own legal innovations with support and collaboration in the Lab. We hosted Zobaida Khan (Bangladesh) and Tladi Marumo (South Africa) as our first Innovation Fellows. These two fellows took their areas of research (labor compliance in the Bangladeshi garment sector, and human rights-related class actions in the South African mining sector, respectively) and moved them from paper to practice.

**CREATIVITY BEGINS  
WITH COURAGE.**

## Legal Design

CAL provided research support to partner organizations and affected communities to explore legal options available in “hard cases” – where companies were responsible for or complicit in an abuse, but human rights and environmental laws may fail to provide a remedy.

We collaborated with partner organizations to amplify innovative strategies developed outside of our Lab. For example, we worked with EarthRights International to update their guide for practitioners on using a US statute to support human rights proceedings abroad with evidence located in the US. This guide will be published in 2020.

We hosted multiple in-house design days and shared our work and approach through presentations and legal design workshops at conferences, workshops, and universities across the US and internationally.

## Brain Trust & Clinical Partnerships

We cultivated our Brain Trust, the community of lawyers, activists, and academics who provide invaluable pro bono support. We also collaborated with human rights clinics at Harvard, Northwestern, and the University of California Irvine law schools on corporate accountability projects and conducted legal research with the support of interns from law schools across the country.

# PROJECTS

LEARNING BY DOING

Corporate Accountability Lab designs innovative legal strategies to address corporate impunity for human rights and environmental abuses. But our innovations are not meant to stay in the Lab. They are most useful when brought to the field, the factory, and the courtroom. After an idea has proved its viability in the Lab through research and feedback, it moves into a testing or pilot phase, after which it can be refined and then expanded. In 2019, we continued our work piloting several innovations, based on research conducted in the Lab over the past three years.

# Innovating for the Future of Corporate Social Responsibility

Despite years of major private sector investment in voluntary corporate social responsibility schemes to clean up global supply chains, these initiatives have not resulted in significant changes for workers and affected communities. Corporate Accountability Lab is developing legal innovations for real accountability.

In 2019, we continued to follow and assess a test case in which we added innovative contract language to codes of conduct under which fourteen US-based suppliers operate. Under these contracts, suppliers are obligated to abide by human rights and environmental standards or risk being sued not just by the buying company, but also by impacted workers or community members with enforcement rights.

We also worked to expand the use of this strategy by collaborating with socially-conscious businesses and organizations in the corporate accountability field. We developed tools to make the concept accessible to a broader audience, including by drafting a “how to” guide for businesses to implement the strategy.



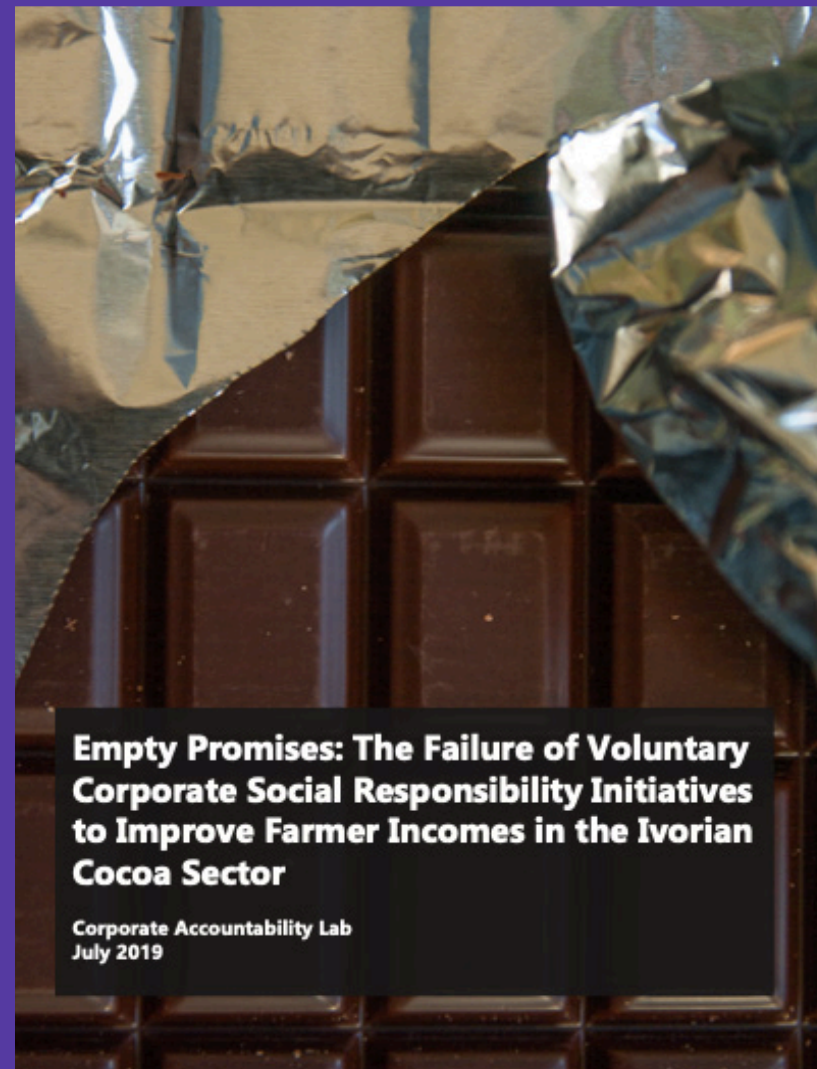
# Leveraging Trade Law

Multinational corporations benefit from a litany of trade laws. Corporate Accountability Lab is using trade law to stop companies from violating human rights and benefitting from those very violations.

Since our founding in 2017, Corporate Accountability Lab has been developing a novel litigation strategy using trade law to challenge the use of unfair methods of competition from practices abusive to human rights (including forced and child labor). After choosing a test industry and finding a firm to litigate the case pro bono, in 2019 we began working with local and affected communities to establish the contours of a settlement agreement proposal for the test case.

Throughout the year we collected evidence to file a complaint with Customs and Border Protection (CBP) under Section 307 of the Tariff Act of 1930, a statute that allows CBP to take action to stop the importation of goods “manufactured in any part with” forced labor. Our Section 307 petition focused on the West African cocoa industry, which is notoriously rife with child labor. We collected evidence of forced child labor in the Ivorian cocoa sector and used this evidence to file the Section 307 petition in collaboration with International Rights Advocates and UC Irvine Human Rights Clinic in February 2020.





# Promoting Ethical Intellectual Property



Creators of intellectual property (IP) have a unique opportunity to ensure that their IP is not used in furtherance of human rights or environmental abuses. Research papers, paintings, software code, and inventions are all types of IP. These are legally protected (if the creator chooses) through copyrights, trademarks, and patents.

Building on CAL's ethical licenses released in 2017 and 2018, in 2019 we released employment assignment clauses and continued to collaborate with partners in various fields to scale up the use of this innovation.



# Addressing Corporate Accountability in Transitional Justice in Colombia and Beyond

As countries and regions transition from violent conflict to democracy and peace, many enter formal processes of transitional justice that provide a space for both legal justice and social reckoning for the atrocities that occurred. Historically, transitional justice processes and institutions have failed to adequately address the role that economic actors, including corporations, play in benefiting from, sustaining, and sometimes actively participating in conflict.

In 2019, Corporate Accountability Lab worked with Colombian organizations Dejusticia and the Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz to design and begin a multi-year transitional justice project. The project will analyze the failure of transitional justice processes to include economic actors in their mandates, push the Colombian transitional justice process and related institutions to include economic actors within their work, develop complementary accountability mechanisms for economic actors, and create replicable strategies for other transitional justice processes globally.



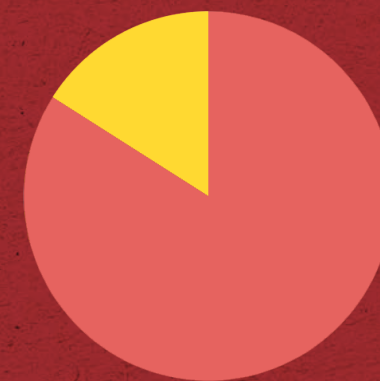
# FISCAL YEAR 2019

## INCOME

- Grants: \$1,020,000\*
- Individual Donations: \$22,478
- Consulting: \$12,200
- Interest Income: \$1,042

TOTAL: \$1,055,720

*\*Includes multi-year grants*



## EXPENSE

- Program Services: \$275,172
- Admin and General: \$54,087

TOTAL: \$329,259

Corporate Accountability Lab is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. We do not accept donations from corporations or certain corporate foundations to avoid the appearance or reality of conflicts of interest.

Corporate Accountability Lab is committed to pay equity and just allocation of resources. Our current policy ensures that the highest paid staff member may not earn more than 200% the salary of the lowest paid staff member. Our highest paid staff currently earn 133% of the salary of our lowest paid staff.

Some of our funders have chosen to give anonymously. We are grateful to these donors, as well as to the Freedom Fund, Bertha Foundation, Michael and Alice Kuhn Foundation, Wheaton Franciscans, Coure e Mani Foundation, and Justice Catalyst for their support of our work.

Corporate Accountability Lab relies on individual and foundation support to conduct this important work. Thank you for your generosity and dedication!

# OUR STAFF



## STAFF

Charity Ryerson, Founder, Legal Director  
Katherine McDonnell, Director of Legal Advocacy  
Allie Brudney, Justice Catalyst Legal Fellow  
Avery Kelly, Staff Attorney  
Zobaida Khan, 2019 Innovation Fellow  
Tladi Marumo, 2019 Innovation Fellow

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# THANK YOU!



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