



# sage FUND

STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY  
IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

OUR MISSION & IMPACT

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## ◀ COVER IMAGE

Lindomar, from the Rio Preto community in the Cerrado region of Brazil. Beginning in 2008, Rio Preto had been the scene of some of the worst land conflict in the Cerrado — a global biodiversity “hotspot” — when land grabbers tried to forcibly expel communities from the area in order to acquire their land for industrial agriculture. With the support of Rede Social de Justiça e Direitos Humanos and the Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT) of Piauí, residents of Rio Preto filed a formal

complaint and in 2019 the fraudulent land titles were cancelled, granting land security to the Rio Preto families. SAGE has supported Rede Social and CPT since 2017, enabling communities to defend their territories and providing critical documentation to support an international campaign to stem the flow of international investment funds fueling landgrabs, human rights violations and climate change in the Brazilian Cerrado.

*Photo: José Cicero Silva/Pública*

# The SAGE Fund cultivates powerful new ways to build a healthy, just, and inclusive global economy.

As worldwide economic forces expand and become more complex, the power of large-scale corporations and financial institutions has grown sharply. As a result, communities face increasing human rights violations and environmental crises, often without avenues to hold powerful actors accountable.



At the same time, while the global economy has brought benefits, these gains have been unevenly distributed. Increasing inequality has taken an acute toll on people and the planet, including:

- 1 FORCED DISPLACEMENT OF COMMUNITIES** by large infrastructure, energy, and agriculture projects backed by development finance institutions, state-owned funds, or commercial banks
- 2 SEVERE HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS** caused by exploitation of natural resources and factory operations, including chemical pollution from over 350,000 substances, plastics chief among them
- 3 POOR AND DANGEROUS WORKING CONDITIONS** in global supply chains, including lack of social protection, employment contracts, and bargaining power for women in textile, agriculture, or home-based manufacturing sectors

A healthy, just, and inclusive global economy should work for everyone, not just those with the most power. We advance the ability of advocates—in the human rights, labor, environment, indigenous, and women’s rights movements—to build an equitable and sustainable economy that doesn’t put corporate interests ahead of the needs of people and the planet.

One of the first funders to focus on human rights and the global economy as an ecosystem, SAGE works with frontline groups to develop strategies that target the powerful economic actors. As a collaborative fund, we pool resources, working with grantees to develop strategies, cultivate partnerships and leverage openings to produce outcomes greater than any one group or donor can create alone.



## WHAT WE DO

The SAGE Fund incubates new ideas and practices that advance human rights in the global economy. Our “laboratory” approach equips advocates with the financial and technical resources along with hands-on support to develop breakthrough strategies that hold economic actors accountable. Beginning at the concept phase, running through project testing, launch, and beyond, SAGE provides investment and thought partnership that spark cross-field experimentation, learning, and impact.

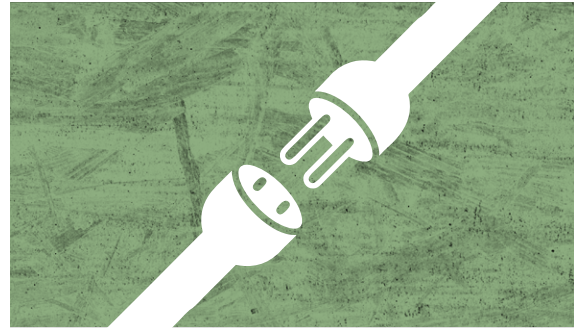
Rather than imposing a top-down agenda, we cultivate projects from the ground up to understand where the field is headed and to rapidly fuel the most promising initiatives. Using an open Request for Proposals format, we design a set of thematic grants based on emerging trends identified by frontline advocates. From there, we partner with affected communities and allies to develop their ideas. In contrast with other funders, our process is open to all interested organizations and movements.

SAGE uniquely enhances the human rights field in several critical ways:

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**A GENUINELY OPEN PROCESS.** Any group with a promising idea can receive SAGE funding. Our intensive outreach and engagement with prospective grantees amplifies new and diverse voices.



**UNEXPECTED CONNECTIONS.** Guided by a commitment to inclusive collaboration, we encourage cross-field partnerships (between Global North and South NGOs; international, national, and local communities; and across regions). We leverage the insights each field and level have to offer.



**FEARLESS EXPERIMENTATION.** Failure is a productive part of learning and often represents an essential next step when challenging powerful economic actors. Experimentation and iteration are fundamental to our approach, yielding fresh learning and breakthroughs.



**OUTSIZED IMPACT.** By generating a diverse pool of proposals aligned around shared themes, we magnify their combined impact. The resulting innovations help shape the future of the field, often laying the groundwork for greater investment by larger donors.



## OUR IMPACT

Our proven track record of collaboration with grantees and funders delivers significant advances in accountability in the global economy.

Recent successes include the following. ►



PROJECT  
Southeast  
Asia

# Following The Money to Hold Investors Responsible



Inclusive Development  
International



អង្គការ សមធម៌កម្ពុជា  
equitable cambodia

Equitable Cambodia



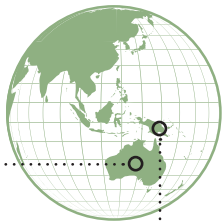
Millions of people in the Mekong region of Southeast Asia have been forcibly displaced by mines, plantations, and other projects, with disastrous results. SAGE supported Inclusive Development International (IDI) and Equitable Cambodia to pilot a tool that uses private financial databases and public information to illuminate the chain of institutions behind harmful investments. Affected communities can “follow the money” to identify leverage points to seek redress for lost land and livelihoods. After SAGE promot-

ed the tool to the larger field, the initiative secured further support, scaled up, and has now been deployed by IDI in other regions. To date, it has led to investigations of over 170 harmful corporate projects in 29 countries, helping communities to identify and seize over 485 advocacy opportunities. Harmful projects have been thwarted or completely stopped in several countries, and dozens of communities in Africa and Asia have secured remedies for damage suffered.

*One of the best things SAGE did was invite us to international human rights funders meetings to present the initiative. Through those introductions, we attracted other funders, allowing us to scale the project globally. Along with seed funding from SAGE, our idea is helping successfully address gaps in access to information and remedy in the corporate accountability ecosystem.*

**DAVID PRED**

**PRESIDENT & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, IDI**



PROJECT  
Papua  
New Guinea

GRANTEE  
Australia

# Setting Precedents for Legacy Mine Sites

Human  
Rights  
Law  
Centre

Human Rights Law Centre

More than three decades ago, mining giant Rio Tinto dumped a billion tons of waste into rivers in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea. When local communities rose up in response to damage to their land, water, and health, Rio Tinto abandoned the mine. No remediation was taken, and mine contamination continues to harm thousands who live downstream. In 2021, after six months of negotiation, the Human Rights Law Centre (HRLC), representing community members, and Rio Tinto announced a landmark agreement to identify the most urgent threats. SAGE supported the campaign that led to this significant first step and helped connect other allies to advance HRLC's strategy.



*SAGE put us in touch with people working on the same issue, which really improved access and knowledge on the ground. SAGE's input inspired us to do a lot of the thinking up front, including identifying hurdles and mapping a detailed timeframe. Everything they pointed out in terms of weakness in the campaign was spot on, and they spent a huge amount of time helping us strengthen it.*

**KEREN ADAMS**

**LEGAL DIRECTOR, HRLC**



PROJECT  
Worldwide

# Replicating Worker-Driven Supply Chain Accountability

PARTNERS FOR  
DIGNITY & RIGHTS

Partners for Dignity & Rights



Migrant Justice

W R C

WORKER RIGHTS  
CONSORTIUM

Worker Rights Consortium



T'ruah



Coalition of Immokalee  
Workers



Business and Human Rights  
Resource Centre



Fair Foods Standards Council

In response to the failure of voluntary corporate initiatives to protect workers' rights in global supply chains, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) created a new accountability model designed, monitored, and enforced by workers. Following the model's successful implementation in CIW's Fair Food Program, workers and allies sought hands-on support in replicating the model to advance enforceable brand agreements across other supply chains. SAGE's early support contributed to creating the Worker-Driven Social Responsibility Network (WSRN), which expanded the model into other regions and sectors.

Following the creation and implementation of the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, a binding agreement covering more than 200 appar-

el brands and more than 2 million workers, WSRN played a critical role in seeding the binding agreement model in the U.S. dairy industry and, most recently, in Lesotho. The Lesotho agreement came after the Worker Rights Consortium found extensive and systemic gender-based violence and harassment against female employees in factories producing denim for major international brands. The agreement—signed by national unions, women's rights organizations, U.S.-based workers' rights organizations, and global apparel brands—established a complaints office, based on mechanisms of the Fair Food Program and the Bangladesh Accord, with the authority to investigate complaints and order the company to take action, including terminating abusive managers.

*Beyond funding, SAGE has repeatedly provided us with strategic insight and actionable counsel on matters programmatic and financial. I come away from every brainstorming session with refreshed optimism and percolating ideas. I love that SAGE has an organizer's grasp of how leverage is built and recognizes that South-North alliances are the fulcrum.*

**SCOTT NOVA**

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WORKER RIGHTS CONSORTIUM**



PROJECT  
Brazil

# Women Leading Accountability for Tailings Disasters



Christian Aid



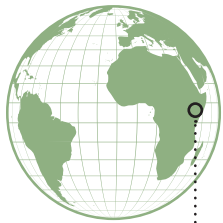
Movement of People  
Affected by Dams

In 2019, a dam containing mining waste collapsed in Brumadinho, Brazil, killing 272 people. Vale, the corporation responsible, has yet to fully compensate for the loss of life and livelihoods, as well as environmental damage. With SAGE support, the Movement of People Affected by Dams (MAB) and their partner Christian Aid are helping directly affected women tell their stories and seek remedy. As a result of their work, Vale is now required to negotiate two compensation agreements

for each affected household: one recognizing women's lost income, in addition to the male-led household income. MAB also organizes community workshops to create arpilleras, a form of embroidery that originated in Chile under the military dictatorship. Together, they amplify the demands that remain unmet—that the government and Vale provide compensation for all affected women and communities, access to fresh water and rehabilitate the Paraopeba River.



*We are building a partnership with SAGE based on mutual respect and collaboration with the people affected by dams in Brazil. SAGE has contributed important ideas, such as the international exhibition of arpilleras and the need to expand our networks at a global level.*



PROJECT  
Kenya

# Promoting Worker Rights and a Circular Economy



Centre for Environment  
Justice and Development



Global Alliance for  
Incinerator Alternatives



Parts of Africa are awash in plastic waste, much of it shipped there from other countries. Recycling is left to waste pickers, who prevent plastics from ending up in landfills and return them to the economy. Yet in most cases, they face stigma and unsafe working conditions. With SAGE's support, the Centre for Environment Justice and Development (CEJAD) and Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA) catalyzed the formation of waste picker associations in Kenya to demand better prices for recyclables, safer working conditions, and inclusion in the country's formal waste management system.

Together, they promote economic security and labor rights while reducing waste incineration and climate impacts. The national waste pickers association quickly gained government recognition to provide input on Kenya's waste management policy. The partners have also successfully advocated for governments to include waste pickers in upcoming UN negotiations for an international treaty on plastics. The associations in Kenya help propel a growing regional and global movement to recognize waste pickers' critical role in the circular economy.

*SAGE understands the importance of listening and offering feedback to the organizations they support. They provide a great balance between critical insight and understanding where our members are on their fundraising journey. Few other funders operate this way, and it has been a pleasure to work with SAGE.*

**CHRIS FLOOD**

**DEVELOPMENT AND RESOURCE MOBILIZATION MANAGER, GAIA**

## Expanding Women-Led Global Economy Initiatives

Women continue to be overrepresented among precarious workers in the global economy. They are paid less than men—or not paid at all—and often lack protection against exploitation. SAGE piloted a program to identify and support a set of innovative strategies to advance women’s economic justice and secure women’s livelihoods. The response to our program was tremendous, yielding nearly 900 concept notes, reflecting urgent demand in the field. Through the resulting cohort, SAGE supports women-led strategies to prevent or remedy the negative impacts of economic actors and policies on women, creating field infrastructure to advance this work and expand engagement with economic justice issues among women’s rights practitioners.

## Uniting Grantmakers to Tackle Drivers of Economic Inequality

Momentum is growing to shift the balance of power in the global economy toward greater accountability, and SAGE is harnessing it in the philanthropic community. In partnership with a group of leading donors, we spearheaded a new initiative, FORGE (Funders Organized for Rights in the Global Economy), providing the organizational and programmatic home for FORGE as it is being built. We coordinate more impactful strategies, leverage collective resources, and push boundaries to build the power of workers and communities. These efforts include a two-year pilot in collaborative grantmaking, led and staffed by SAGE.

# Learn more at sagefundrights.org

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