

JUSTICE for PEOPLE and PLANET



Strategy 2024-2028

Standing with communities for
social and environmental justice



Introduction: now's the time

The planet and people are facing an existential threat. Without changing course, human civilisation as we know it, will cease to exist. We human beings are an intrinsic part of Gaia.¹

Yet we have created economic and political systems that combined are destroying the very earth systems that support all life, posing an existential threat to our species whilst driving biodiversity loss and extinctions. Further, development is shaped by this unsustainable exploitation of our planet, with natural resource extraction and consumption patterns that are not only serving a minority and driving extreme inequalities across the globe, but also causing violations of people's rights. To change course, we must transform our relationship with nature and ensure that marginalised Indigenous Peoples control their natural resources and can shape alternative ways of development grounded in respect for traditional knowledge, innovations, and practices.

To transform means reshaping our economies so that they serve everyone and ensure fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of our collective genetic resources. We also need to make fundamental changes to how we govern, enabling people's participation in decision-making and decentralising power.

Change is urgently needed, and we cannot afford to wait for those with power to drive it. Right now, for example, over 471 oil & gas projects are scheduled to commence operations in Africa between 2024 and 2028.² These projects pose a range of environmental and social threats that could harm the health, well-being, and livelihoods of people; force the mass displacement of communities; and contribute to future conflict and large-scale, potentially cross-border involuntary migration, whilst destroying natural ecosystems. In response, frontline communities have been finding ways to challenge these projects, by claiming a place in decision-making, challenging their legality through the courts, and calling for change through advocacy and mobilising. Indigenous Peoples, local communities, young people, and women have been leading many of these actions.

Since we were founded in 2007, Natural Justice has worked with many communities across the African continent seeking to defend their rights as well as to secure control over their land and resources. We continue to see the vital importance of the legal empowerment of communities. If people know the law, they are in a position to use it, improve it, and challenge it when the need arises.

Natural Justice's 2024–2028 strategy will continue to place legal empowerment at the centre of our work, bringing together litigation, research, policy influencing, and campaigning in alliance with movements, coalitions, and impacted communities.

Looking at legal trends, climate-related litigation is continuing to grow in importance. Several communities and legal environmental organisations, including ours, have successfully gone to court to stop harmful projects and rights violations. In Kenya, we worked with allied organisations to support our community partner, Save Lamu, in successfully challenging an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Licence for the setting up of a 1050 MW coal power plant. The court found, in 2019, that the EIA had not taken account of climate change impacts, nor observed the legal requirements for public participation. In South Africa, we supported Wild Coast communities and small-scale fishers in similarly challenging Shell's exploration right to conduct seismic surveys off the country's East Coast. The Makhanda High Court ruled, in 2022, that the right was unlawfully granted and so set it aside. Together with others around the world, we are building momentum as a climate justice movement.

Beyond litigation, we will continue to assist communities in securing land tenure, which provides a systemic opportunity for achieving social justice. Land ownership can be hugely transformative, offering the economic security to increase a communities' resilience in the face of economic and climate shocks. It also offers cultural security, enabling people to live their traditional ways of life. ➤

At least a quarter of the total global land area is traditionally owned, managed, used, or occupied by Indigenous Peoples.³ Securing Indigenous Peoples’ and local communities’ ownership of their land, however, requires taking several steps, including formally recognising and enabling the environmental management role played by them. To that end, governments must transform the conservation paradigm towards rights-based approaches and redirect biodiversity finance to Indigenous and locally-led conservation projects.

We have to make big economic and political system changes to alter the global course of development.

Creating the conditions for locally-led alternative solutions that balance economic and environmental outcomes is an approach that can influence the future pathways of countries, such as those in

Africa, that are under huge pressure to advance socio-economic development. Ambitious development agendas do not by default need to push for an expansion of extractivism and large-scale infrastructure development; rather, they can be grounded in alternative economic models that work within planetary boundaries.

In implementing our new strategy, we will act in solidarity with impacted communities and wider civil society to call for these and other changes needed to transform local, national, and global systems. Above all, we will continue to listen to Indigenous knowledge holders and to women and young people as they shape and lead the way. ■

1. On Gaia, see [LINK](#)
2. Africa Oil and Gas Projects by Development Stage, Capacity, Capex, Contractor Details of All New Build and Expansion Projects to 2028; Published: April 29, 2024; [LINK](#)
3. UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), Cambridge, UK. [LINK](#)



We continue to see the vital importance of the legal empowerment of communities: if people know the law, they are in a position to use it, improve it, and challenge it.

Contents

| | | | |
|--|----|---|----|
| Who we are | 5 | Programmes | 16 |
| Our values and principles | 6 | Initiatives | 18 |
| The world we live in: today and tomorrow | 7 | Communications | 19 |
| Our theory of change | 10 | Campaigns | 20 |
| Theory of change in practice: how we work | 13 | Research, monitoring, evaluation, and learning | 21 |
| | | Sustainability | 22 |



Who we are

Natural Justice is an organisation rooted in the struggles of communities in Africa. As a team of pioneering lawyers and legal experts, we specialise in human rights, environmental, climate, land, Indigenous, and heritage law—in pursuit of social and environmental justice.

We strive to enhance the collective rights of people and protect the sacred relationships that Indigenous Peoples and local communities have with nature. Our work is informed by the values, knowledge, and self-determination of the communities with whom we work in solidarity. Through legal empowerment, research, policy influencing, and our Litigation Plus approach, we work in alliance with communities and like-minded coalitions to support communities to know the law, use the law, and shape the law.

Natural Justice’s focus includes:

- enhancing community access to land and governance of natural resources;
- contributing to the struggle against harmful extractive and infrastructure developments;

- supporting processes for recognising traditional knowledge, and access and benefit-sharing;
- supporting community rights within conservation and customary use of biodiversity; and
- strengthening community actions towards addressing the climate crisis.

Together with the communities we work with, we aim to play a key role at the national, regional, and international levels by influencing policy and laws to recognise and enhance the rights of Indigenous Peoples, impacted communities, and environmental defenders.

We are headquartered in Cape Town, South Africa, with regional hubs in Cape Town, Nairobi (Kenya), and Dakar (Senegal) and additional staff in Antananarivo (Madagascar), Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, and Somalia. Natural Justice also works across several other African countries on a project-to-project basis. ■



Our values & principles

MUTUAL RESPECT

We recognise the innate worth of all people, the value of diversity, people's interconnectedness with nature, and the need to respect the fundamental rights of people and nature.

EQUITY AND JUSTICE

We work to ensure equity of opportunity for everyone and strive to overcome any practices that marginalise and disempower people, applying the principles of justice to all our work.

RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

We will uphold the inherent dignity, identity, and social inclusion of all people, as captured in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

ACCOUNTABILITY, RESPONSIBILITY, AND TRANSPARENCY

We are accountable, at all levels, for the effectiveness of our actions and are open in our communications with others.

SOLIDARITY WITH COMMUNITY STRUGGLES

We are biased in our work towards the powerless and excluded, as we fight against injustice and inequality. The basis of our work will be community struggles. We will build our programmes by centring communities within them.

COURAGE OF CONVICTION

We are creative and radical, bold and innovative—without fear of failure—in pursuit of making the greatest possible impact; especially during this time of the climate emergency and planetary crisis. We have the courage to understand traditional and alternative knowledge systems and contribute to alternative solutions.

INDEPENDENCE

We will not impose any religious belief or party-political affiliation in our work. We will not be neutral and will be guided by our principles.

HUMILITY

We will work in a manner that recognises that we are part of a wider alliance of people working on injustice and who are working with Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and the environment.

DIVERSITY

The governing body and staff will have broad representation, reflecting the diversity of our constituencies. We will proactively ensure women hold key decision-making positions in the organisation. Natural Justice will ensure that Indigenous Peoples are represented on the board and as employees of the organisation.

FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

We subscribe to a definition of feminist leadership as leadership that seeks to advance a feminist perspective and vision for social justice, wherein people use their power, resources, and skills in non-oppressive, inclusive structures and processes to mobilise others—especially women and marginalised peoples—around a shared agenda of social, cultural, economic, and political transformation for equality and the realisation of human rights for all.⁴

DECOLONISATION

We believe that decolonisation is an essential condition for the achievement of environmental justice on the African continent. We will work to ensure that our internal practices are aligned with the objective of a decolonised world and we will continue to support community groups in bringing alternatives to political and economic models and visions of the future inherited from colonial history.

RESPECT FOR INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND ANCIENT WISDOM

We will continue fighting for the recognition of Indigenous knowledge and ancient wisdom as sources of solutions and alternatives to the climate crisis, and as part of our struggle for the defence of the human rights of Indigenous Peoples and frontline local communities. ■

4. Srilatha Batliwala, (2010), 'Feminist leadership for social transformation: Clearing the conceptual cloud', Creating Resources for Empowerment in Action. [LINK](#)

The world we live in: today and tomorrow

Over the coming decade, Africa must navigate the complex development challenges created by the Anthropocene. With nine of the hottest years on record occurring from 2014 to 2023,⁵ the trend toward an annual average global increase of 1.5 degrees Celsius is accelerating.

Even if an average temperature rise of 2 degrees Celsius may still be avoidable, we know that every increment of global warming beyond the 1.5 degrees limit will intensify multiple and concurrent hazards.⁶

Africa is and will continue to experience extreme impacts of increasing temperatures that drive more frequent and severe weather events. Heat waves, extensive floods, tropical cyclones, prolonged droughts, and sea level rise will result in loss of lives, property damage, increased scarcity, and population displacement.

The interconnected nature of climate change impacts, biodiversity loss, and natural resource consumption will accelerate ecosystem collapse. In turn, this will further threaten food supplies and livelihoods in climate-vulnerable African countries, amplifying the impacts of natural disasters, and limiting natural ecosystem capacity for climate mitigation.⁷ Meanwhile, large-scale agriculture and fossil fuel and non-compliant extractive and infrastructure projects are placing an ever-greater burden on natural ecosystems. The former is also associated with land and resource grabs, labour and human rights violations.⁸ Altogether this is putting communities at risk and affecting the continent's ability to create inclusive, just, and sustainable development.

Climate and environmental science point to the need to back renewable energy and restore and rehabilitate land as solutions to our planetary crises, but it is equally important to recognise the role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities as guardians of the land as being intrinsic to sustainable development. Communities must be able to affirm their rights. Now more than ever, the climate emergency requires a global rights-based response that analyses obligations, inequalities, and vulnerabilities and seeks to redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power.

Relevant national and international policies, laws, regulations, norms, and standards must be observed and enforced, but, in reality, national legal environments are often disabling, and the use of corporate and political power often frustrates environmental policies and programmes. Across Africa, weak national environmental laws are subject to manipulation by the executive, and there can be failure to fulfil legal obligations and integrate them into public policies and programmes. Further, the horrific trend of civic space restrictions may well continue, with this including harassment of and attacks on Indigenous peoples, local communities, and environmental and human rights defenders, as well as the media. We are also witnessing increased use of strategic lawsuits against public participation, or SLAPP suits, against rights defenders. ➤

Strategic litigation will thus remain a key part of our work. Through our litigation plus approach, we will harness legal innovations in climate and environment-related legal actions, explore rights of nature cases and affirm energy justice as an approach to the just energy transition.

Moreover, Africa's Indigenous Peoples and local communities should expect a place at the table, yet poor state accountability and lack of corporate regulation for the planning and use of natural resources results in unequal access to and ownership of resources.

Despite enshrined rights, African states often deny people decision-making authority over their resources, and there is continued marginalisation of pastoral and rural communities. Practical approaches to addressing the problem include use of the 2014 Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing.

This provides a mechanism for governments, the private sector, and communities to negotiate and ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources.

Working with the National Khoi and San Council in South Africa, Natural Justice notably used the Nagoya Protocol to secure the world's first industry-wide benefit-sharing agreement between the Khoikhoi and San, and the South African rooibos industry in 2019. We see Nagoya becoming an increasingly important legal protocol in the coming years. ➤



Now more than ever, the climate emergency requires a global rights-based response that analyses obligations, inequalities, and vulnerabilities and seeks to redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power.

Exclusionary practices against women must further be addressed. Women play key roles as environmental managers and guardians, yet they are often not involved in the conceptualisation, development, and execution of programmes. Women and girls also face other types of threats and vulnerabilities arising from gender inequality and high levels of gender-based violence (including domestic violence and rape). Patriarchy is structurally entrenched and enforced through politics, the global economy, traditions, and by the laws and practices of many countries, often leaving women facing mounting burdens of unpaid care work, unequal pay, and lack of access to means of production.

In addition to recognising and revaluing the role of women in their communities and wider societies, acknowledging the continued demographic shift toward younger generations will be essential to the success of future struggles for climate and social justice.

So too will be intergenerational solidarity, which can be strengthened in part by engaging politically active young people and youth movements through their growing interest in and respect for Indigenous knowledge and culture.

Altogether, meeting the challenges created by the Anthropocene—including the climate crisis, malfunctioning global economy, growing inequality, and sixth mass extinction⁹—requires bold, transformative, and exponential cooperation. We must work as a collective to ensure people’s rights are not violated and to fight for the protection of the planet. ■

5. The World Meteorological Organization; UN News: Global perspective Human stories; WMO confirms 2023 as warmest year on record ‘by a huge margin’ [LINK](#)
6. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), AR6 Synthesis Report 2023; Headline Statements. [LINK](#)
7. World Economic Forum (2023), Global Risks Report 2023. [LINK](#)
8. Report on Extractive Industries, Land Rights and Indigenous Populations’/Communities’ Rights, East, Central and Southern Africa by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) & Working Group on Indigenous Populations/Communities in Africa (WGIP). [LINK](#)
9. Unlike previous extinction events caused by natural phenomena, the sixth mass extinction is driven by human activity, primarily (though not limited to) the unsustainable use of land, water and energy use, and climate change. [LINK](#)



Our theory of change

Natural Justice is a pan-African organisation specialising in the law, human rights, environmental and climate justice, and rights related to Indigenous Peoples. A key principle underlying our work is respect and trust-building with communities to ensure that we support frontline communities and are guided by Indigenous Peoples.

VISION

Just and equitable societies on an ecologically diverse and healthy planet where the rights and livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in Africa are secured.

MISSION

As a pan-African organisation, our mission during this time of the planetary crisis is to use legal empowerment, research, litigation, and advocacy to support Indigenous Peoples and local communities, to defend themselves and their ecosystems against environmental impacts and assert their rights as stewards and custodians of their lands, natural resources, and traditional knowledge.

COUNTRIES AND PROGRAMMES

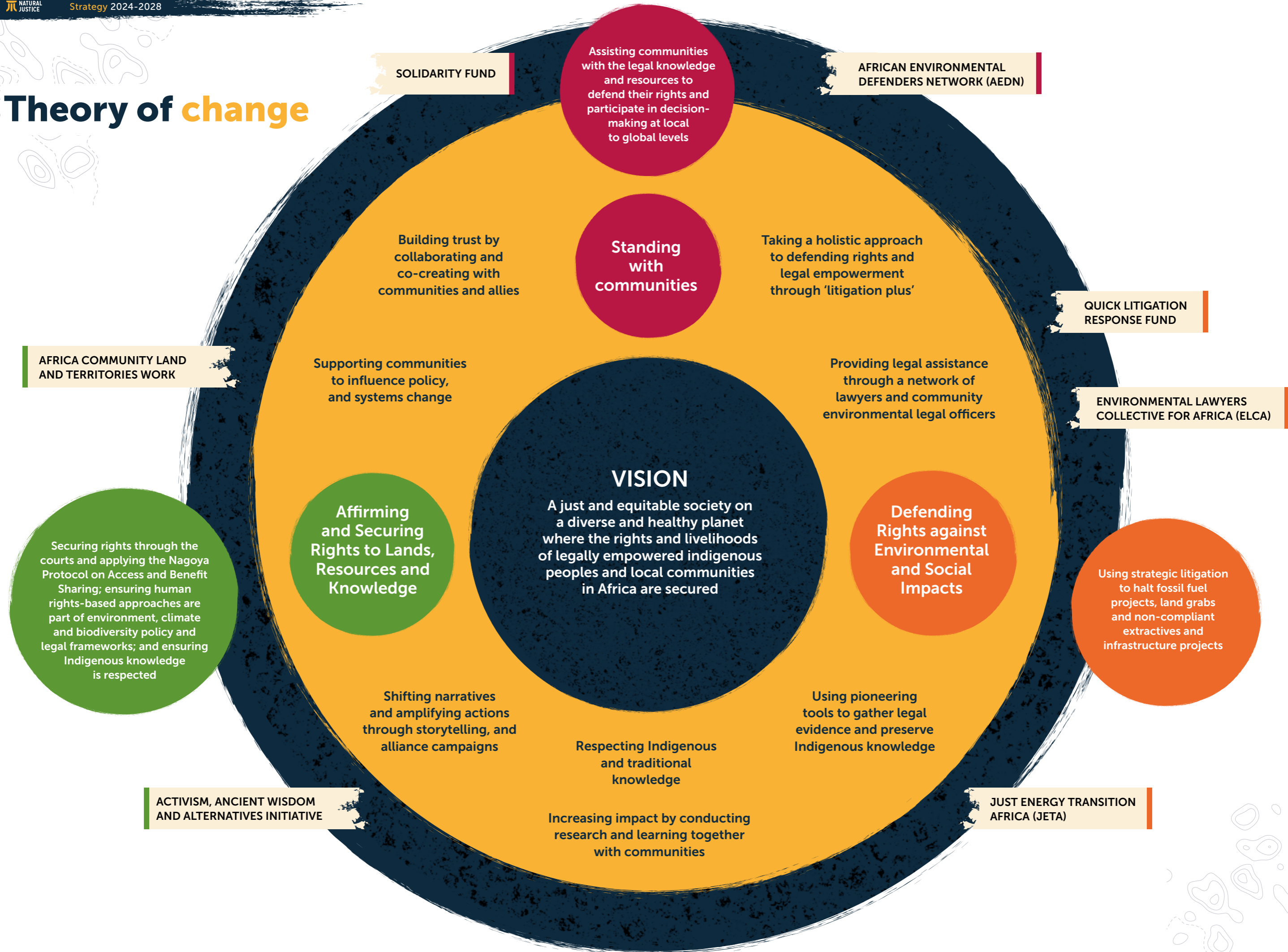
Natural Justice works in African countries where our presence can have the greatest impact. We organise our work into three interconnected programmes that advance environmental and climate justice, support frontline communities, and protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

- **Standing with Communities**, by assisting communities to have the legal knowledge and access to legal capacity to defend their rights and participate in decision-making at the local to global levels.
- **Defending Rights Against Environmental and Social Impacts**, by using strategic litigation to halt fossil fuel projects, land grabs, and non-compliant extractive and infrastructure projects.
- **Affirming and Securing Rights to Lands, Resources, and Knowledge**, by ensuring that human rights-based approaches are part of environment, climate, and biodiversity policy and legal frameworks and mechanisms, and that Indigenous knowledge is protected and the solutions it offers are realised.

At the local level, communities often confront complexity arising from the range of threats they face, which results in a need for them to be able to access different aspects of legal empowerment, litigation, solidarity actions, and more.

Our theory of change describes how to address this complexity. Whilst our three programmes each have specific initiatives – the outer ring of the diagram on page 16 and 17 – our experience shows that providing support to communities facing complex challenges, means being able to combine initiatives with the different programmes. To achieve this, we have a responsive and integrated strategy, enabled by high levels of collaboration across our East, West and Southern African Hubs, regional programme teams, and our communications and campaigns, grant-making, finance, and operations teams. ➤

Theory of change



AFRICA COMMUNITY LAND AND TERRITORIES WORK

Securing rights through the courts and applying the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing; ensuring human rights-based approaches are part of environment, climate and biodiversity policy and legal frameworks; and ensuring Indigenous knowledge is respected

ACTIVISM, ANCIENT WISDOM AND ALTERNATIVES INITIATIVE

SOLIDARITY FUND

Assisting communities with the legal knowledge and resources to defend their rights and participate in decision-making at local to global levels

AFRICAN ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS NETWORK (AEDN)

Standing with communities

Taking a holistic approach to defending rights and legal empowerment through 'litigation plus'

QUICK LITIGATION RESPONSE FUND

Supporting communities to influence policy, and systems change

Providing legal assistance through a network of lawyers and community environmental legal officers

ENVIRONMENTAL LAWYERS COLLECTIVE FOR AFRICA (ELCA)

Affirming and Securing Rights to Lands, Resources and Knowledge

A just and equitable society on a diverse and healthy planet where the rights and livelihoods of legally empowered indigenous peoples and local communities in Africa are secured

Defending Rights against Environmental and Social Impacts

Using strategic litigation to halt fossil fuel projects, land grabs and non-compliant extractives and infrastructure projects

Shifting narratives and amplifying actions through storytelling, and alliance campaigns

Using pioneering tools to gather legal evidence and preserve Indigenous knowledge

Respecting Indigenous and traditional knowledge

Increasing impact by conducting research and learning together with communities

JUST ENERGY TRANSITION AFRICA (JETA)

Theory of change in practice: how we work

Africa’s pathway to a just and equitable society on a healthy planet depends on: 1) an empowered citizenry directly participating in decision-making to stop new fossil fuel projects; 2) an accelerated just and human rights-based approach to clean energy deployment and energy justice; 3) advancing sustainable development; 4) climate justice and lastly, 5) resilience.

Communities need to be legally empowered to increase their participation in policymaking and policy planning and to affirm their rights. This means being able to understand, use, and shape the law, all of which are critical to achieving control over land tenure, ecosystems, and traditional knowledge. These shifts lead to outcomes that include greater community agency and resilience, and the potential for communities to create alternatives and solutions and to adapt to the planetary crisis.

A key assumption of our theory of change is that to create just and equitable societies on a diverse and healthy planet requires legal empowerment approaches, strategic litigation actions, advocacy programmes, and alternative development solutions that come from the bottom up and are informed by the lived experiences of the communities we work with.

THREE FOUNDATIONAL APPROACHES

In line with our goal of enabling community agency, we have three main approaches that cut across our work: building trust over time through collaboration, co-creation, and allyship; honouring Indigenous and traditional knowledge as a source of wisdom and alternative solutions; and taking a holistic approach to legal empowerment and the defence of rights (Litigation Plus).

1. **Collaborating, co-creating, and acting as allies** has helped Natural Justice become an organisation trusted by the Indigenous Peoples and local communities we work with. We nurture long-term relationships built on trust: In Kenya and South Africa, for example, we have worked with the same communities for a decade. Since our founding in 2007, we have seen time and again the impact of legal actions, policy influencing, and campaigning when owned and driven by local people and grounded in local context and evidence. We continue to be committed to the co-creation of our programmes and initiatives, starting from understanding the challenges and needs of communities to then developing solutions together.
2. **Respect for Indigenous and traditional knowledge** is crucial for communities in preserving their traditional cultures and also offers a source of wisdom, innovation, and alternatives for creating solutions to the range of challenges we face during this time of the planetary crisis. We work to protect and nurture such knowledge in various ways, which include using mapping and visioning tools, such as biocultural community protocols and community audits, and creating spaces for alternative paradigms and principles to emerge, for example, through the Activism, Ancient Wisdom, and Alternatives Initiative.
3. **Litigation Plus** is our holistic approach to legal empowerment and defending rights. We aim to provide a robust defence for Indigenous and local people when their rights are being violated, either by their government or by national or international corporations. Litigation Plus does this by bringing together litigation—through community lawyering and support for strategic litigation with communities, movements, and campaigns—with legal empowerment that enables Indigenous Peoples and local communities to develop local legal capacity and to use the law. ➤

Natural Justice has a range of supporting approaches that animate how we collaborate, respect Indigenous knowledge, and support legal empowerment and the defence of rights.

INNOVATIVE AND EFFECTIVE LEGAL SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITIES

We provide legal support to people in need, principally through a team of lawyers and a network of paralegals. Our Community Environmental Legal Officers (CELO) network of paralegals based in communities across Africa, with the paralegals often coming from the communities themselves, are central to the work. The CELO network is a powerful example of an innovative Natural Justice legal empowerment approach co-created with community representatives, in direct response to a need. We also share this approach with partners, supporting them to replicate their own CELO networks.

The Community Environmental Legal Officers perform two types of actions. First, they help ensure ongoing support to communities to take legal action and influence policy at the local to national levels. CELOs also help in gathering evidence when wider Natural Justice teams come together to support communities in their negotiation processes with governments, the private sector, and other key stakeholders.

Second, the community-based paralegals help maintain dialogue that is key to effectively providing legal capacity for and mobilising around strategic litigation. This means we can meaningfully support solidarity actions by rapidly connecting communities to our civil society partners and alliances. Awareness and engagement around both types of CELO actions are powered by our communications and campaigns team. ➤



We build trust over time through collaboration, co-creation, and allyship.

What's more, having feet on the ground continually informs the co-creation of other innovative legal empowerment work such as our legal student intern and fellows programme and Indigenous fellowship programme, through which young people gain experiences that can aid their community struggles.

COMMUNITY STRENGTHENING AND EVIDENCE GATHERING TOOLS

Over time, Natural Justice has co-designed a set of tools with communities to help in gathering evidence to support legal and policy influencing processes and to help understand rights and shape collective visions and strategies together.

Our pioneering work with biocultural community protocols is a unique approach for communities to think through a vision for their community, understand their rights, and be in a stronger position to make decisions in relation to traditional knowledge and their natural resources. They have a strong focus on free, prior, and informed consent. We further support the use of community audits, a process of community participation in critical analysis of the confrontation between regulations and observable facts through the demonstration of physical evidence of environmental or human rights violations.

CENTRING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE THROUGH RESEARCH AND LEARNING

Natural Justice has a commitment to learning together with our partners, sharing reflections and analyses based on the research we conduct and the data we collect. Our first port of call is to develop, conduct, and then share the eventual findings of any research with the Indigenous Peoples and local communities we work with. We document everything we do as part of this learning process and also apply insights, so that we can adaptively manage our programmes over time.

COMMUNITIES INFLUENCING POLICY

Our Affirming and Securing Rights to Lands, Resources, and Traditional Knowledge programme focuses on ensuring Indigenous Peoples and local communities can effectively participate in shaping policy, legal, and institutional frameworks.

The policy and advocacy work we do at the national, regional, and international levels is based largely on the work we do directly with communities. It is the experiences, challenges, and solutions from communities that must help shape policy. And so, together with civil society partners across Africa and around the world, Natural Justice aims to help amplify the voices of communities and make sure our nations' leaders listen. We work with partners to create platforms for community representatives to participate in key policy debates and in national, regional, and global processes, including the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

SOLIDARITY THROUGH ALLIANCES

Focusing on our strengths as Natural Justice, we strive to be a good partner and alliance member. Being intentional about where we are active in networks is critical to our ability to amplify community voices, to lend solidarity to campaigns, and ultimately to contribute to influencing shifts in climate, environmental and energy policies. ■



Collaboration, respect for Indigenous knowledge, and Litigation Plus, and our range of supporting approaches, inform and weave through our three main programmes: Standing with Communities; Defending Rights Against Environmental and Social Impacts; and Affirming and Securing Rights to Lands, Resources, and Knowledge.



Programmes

Natural Justice implements its work through three interconnected programmatic pillars.

1. Standing with communities

Programme Objective: Legally empowered Indigenous Peoples and local communities organize and use the law to ensure the implementation of their environmental and human rights, increase their agency, and hold governments, companies and multinational corporations accountable.

Overview: Standing with Communities seeks to shift paradigms so that people have the tools to participate in and lead decision-making processes. We seek to do this by increasing the legal empowerment of communities and supporting women and youth-led organising and movement building across the continent. Together, this powers a strong collective struggle for equality, justice, and the protection of rights, as a foundation for addressing the planetary crisis.

Legal empowerment here means Indigenous Peoples and local communities having the legal knowledge and access to legal capacity to defend their rights, to defend women’s rights, to reduce environmental injustices, and to participate in decision-making from the local to global levels, in order to hold governments, companies, and multinational corporations accountable. ➤

A key part of all three programmes - and particularly Standing with Communities - is the network of Community Environmental Legal Officers. This is a powerful example of a Natural Justice legal empowerment innovation, co-created with community representatives to enable access to legal support through community-based paralegals across Africa.



2. Defending Rights of Communities against Environmental and Social Impacts

Programme Objective: Indigenous Peoples and local communities challenge and stop fossil fuel and extractive projects, land grabs, and other exploitative projects to protect their environmental and human rights and advance environmental and climate justice.

Overview: Defending Rights seeks to stop and/or challenge projects that harm the environment and violate the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. We deploy strategic, public interest, or urgent legal actions to halt fossil fuel projects, land grabs, and non-compliant extractive and infrastructure projects. We also undertake other legal interventions such as using independent redress mechanisms and being involved in public participation processes.

Strategic environmental and climate litigation is one avenue to challenge corporations and governments. While this is time and resource intensive, each victory creates a ripple effect from the affected communities, across Africa and into the boardrooms of multinational companies.

The Quick Response Litigation Fund (QRLF) provides small grants to support urgent litigation by Indigenous or organised community groups across the continent who are fighting to protect and affirm their land, environmental, natural resource, and Indigenous knowledge rights or to promote climate and environmental justice for their communities.



3. Affirming and Securing Rights to Lands, Resources and Knowledge

Programme Objective: Legally empowered Indigenous Peoples and local communities effectively participate in shaping policy, legal, and institutional frameworks to safeguard and strengthen their environmental and human rights and provide solutions to the climate and biodiversity crises.

Overview: Affirming and securing the collective rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities to have control over their lands, ecosystems, and traditional knowledge can provide a means of livelihood, spirituality, culture, food, and health. This can in turn lead to increased community agency and resilience and provide the potential for people-powered alternatives, solutions, and adaptation to the planetary crisis.

A key part of the Affirming and Securing Rights programme is our Africa Community Land and Territories work, which offers legal support and methodologies to communities affirming their rights to their biodiverse environments, Indigenous People and Community Conserved Territories and Areas (ICCAs) under the Global Biodiversity Framework; and provides legal support to African coastal communities and small-scale fishers in dealing with specific issues concerning the exploitation of the ocean. ■



Initiatives

Our initiatives offer a space to innovate in response to emerging needs or opportunities, allowing us to explore a new line of work in collaboration with communities and allies. Initiatives often contribute to one or more programmes, help with movement building, and can be stand-alone or, over time, scale up and be integrated into a Natural Justice programme.

Over the life of the 2024–2028 strategy, we will continue to support the following initiatives with our partners.

African Environmental Defenders Network

A key party of the Standing with Communities Programme is the African Environmental Defenders Network (AEDN), which aims to protect African environmental and land defenders against a range of risks by providing emergency funding to defenders whose lives are under threat. Support includes legal and litigation funding; training including legal empowerment, and digital and physical security training; and psycho-social support. The AEDN also engages in local, national, and regional advocacy for the protection of defenders.

Environmental Lawyers Collective for Africa

The Environmental Lawyers Collective for Africa (ELCA) is a collective of African lawyers that works to ensure the effective collaboration of lawyers in support of community struggles and can work as a collective to institute litigation. The ELCA also helps young African lawyers access opportunities with organisations in the areas of climate and environmental justice. These lawyers and their community clients further have access to the Quick Response Litigation Fund and Solidarity Funds to ensure they can effectively respond to urgent challenges.

Just Energy Transition for Africa

The Just Energy Transition for Africa (JETA) initiative offers tailored legal and policy advice to support the transition to a clean energy future, which is just, fair, and equitable for communities. Africa’s pathway to a just energy transition depends on an empowered citizenry directly participating in energy decision-making to stop new fossil fuel projects, accelerate clean energy deployment, increase energy access, and advance sustainable development, climate mitigation, and resilience. Together with civil society partners across Africa and around the world, we aim to help amplify their voices and make our nations’ leaders listen.

We will invest in developing new initiatives including the following:

Activism, Ancient Wisdom, and Alternatives Initiative

The Activism, Ancient Wisdom, and Alternatives Initiative brings forth African traditional knowledge and critical thinking as part of a different paradigm to deal with the current crises, and as we explore new forms of activism and strategy. This work includes support for the Earthrise Collective for Activism, Ancient Wisdom, and Alternatives.

Solidarity Fund

The Solidarity Fund provides funding for African grassroots activists, collectives, community-based organisations, and communities for an unplanned or unexpected activity that is crucial to further their struggle for environmental or climate justice or to assert heritage and cultural rights linked to the natural environment, biocultural rights, land rights, or the right to live in a healthy and sustainable environment. ■



Communications

In this new strategic period, Natural Justice will harness the transformative power of communications to shift dominant narratives and advance solutions that centre self-determination, environmental justice, and human rights and imagine a sustainable future with people living in harmony with nature.

Our communications work aims to highlight and condemn environmental violations and human rights abuses perpetrated against defenders, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities across the continent to illustrate the African story of climate, biodiversity, and social justice.

The communications strategy will facilitate this aim by supporting and servicing Natural Justice’s programmatic priorities and initiatives; documenting human and environmental rights violations; celebrating communities’ resistance, victories, and triumphs; and amplifying the stories of African Indigenous Peoples, land and environmental defenders, women, and young people—those most marginalised from social, political, and economic life, and who are most impacted by intersecting crises and decisions made without them.

The primary external communications objectives for 2024–2028 are to:

- **Amplify struggles and solutions of African indigenous peoples** and local communities whose perspectives are erased or invalidated, and who bear the brunt of extractivism, land dispossession, human rights violations, climate crisis, and biodiversity loss;
- **Raise awareness, build capacity**, popularise the law, shift narratives, and advance pan-African sustainable solutions that centre people and planet and offer alternative possibilities for our present and future; and
- **Use narratives as a tool to build solidarity** across borders and struggles and inspire agency and collective action among our communities, allies, partners, and supporters to use and shape the law, assert their rights, and advocate for sustainable change.

Our internal communications strategy will support our external communications and broader strategic objectives by seeking to advance effective and efficient knowledge management and information flow across hubs, programmes, and initiatives and foster a culture and practice of accountability, transparency, learning, and impactful story-telling within and across Natural Justice.

We will do so by:

- **Integrating** communications, research and monitoring, evaluation and learning workflows to ensure communication of impact and impactful communication.
- **Consolidating and institutionalising** data and content gathering tools and knowledge management mechanisms for efficient, effective, and effortless information flow for successful programmes, communications, operations, and reporting.
- **Mainstreaming communications** objectives across programme streams and initiatives to continually build, expand, and amplify the story of Natural Justice both internally and externally. ■



Campaigns

Natural Justice has a long history of joining and supporting campaigns led by community activists, defenders, environmental movements, and civil society allies who are either litigating, resisting extractive or infrastructure projects, fighting for the protection of Indigenous and traditional knowledge, or advocating for biodiversity protection and climate justice.

We are currently part of many global and local alliance-led campaigns that cut across our strategic objectives, programme priorities, and initiatives. As such, our approach to campaigning is to add value to coalition and community-led campaigns while ensuring we can leverage and advance our key priorities to defend communities, affirm rights, and stand with communities.

Our approach to coalition campaigning during this strategic period will centre on the following:

- **Convening of diverse and marginalised people** across disciplines, borders, movements, and struggles to share strategies for resistance, litigation, advocacy, and sustainable change; build solidarity; and take collective action.
- **Collaboration between allies, movements, and communities** to organise and mobilise around struggles with common drivers and impacts and thus advance collective campaign goals that centre human rights, self-determination, and climate and environmental justice.
- **Collective power to ensure people and communities can collectively defend and affirm their rights** and advance alternatives and sustainable change founded on human rights and justice for people and planet. ■



Research, monitoring, evaluation and learning

RESEARCH

Natural Justice has invested in research activities since its inception. In 2024–2028, we will dedicate our efforts to strengthening our research strategy and practice, and to amplifying our research outputs through relevant and forums.

We will continue to:

- document and produce evidence and analyses of threats, and human and environmental rights violations experienced by Indigenous Peoples and local communities.
- document the dynamics of community-determined values, procedures, and priorities using traditional, domestic, and international frameworks.
- research and evaluate current and possible actions and strategies to support communities in defending and affirming their human and environmental rights.

MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING (MEL)

Natural Justice’s monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) approach is structured around the organisation’s values and principles. We know that the contexts in which we intervene and the problems that we address are complex and fast-changing. Our monitoring and evaluation approach is learning-oriented, focused on helping us and our partners to make informed decisions.

Integrity and transparency are crucial to us. We want to be able to document, analyse, and report on what we achieve and what we do not, on the challenges and barriers that our initiatives meet, and, if it happens, on the reasons we shift strategies.

The communities we work with are at the centre of our work, and so they should also be the focus of our monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities. We will make sure to systematize the use of participatory methods as we continue fine-tuning our MEL approach.

We want to be able to continually improve our effectiveness and responsibly monitor the impacts—both intended and unintended—of our programmes and initiatives.

RESOURCING

Natural Justice’s 2024–2028 resourcing strategy is focused on improving our ability to use our financial and human resources to achieve our goals and objectives sustainably.

The aims of the resourcing strategy are to:

- ensure Natural Justice has adequate financial and human resources to achieve our mission; and
- establish a fundraising and resource mobilisation strategy that advances our financial sustainability goals. ■



Sustainability

Financial sustainability continues to be a key component of our resourcing strategy. We will maintain a fundraising strategy around resource planning and priorities while mapping current and future resource channels, with a view to achieving financial sustainability.

Strengthening existing donor relationships, forging new ones, and maintaining partnerships is at the heart of this endeavour. To build mutual trust and collaborative partnerships, we have systems and processes in place that involve continuous engagement with our donors and partners throughout the design and delivery stages of our projects.

HUMAN RESOURCES

The Natural Justice team brings unique skills, knowledge, and passion that drive our vision and overall mission. We will ensure a sound human resources management policy that emphasises recruitment of the right profile of colleagues and training, as well as internal promotion, to safeguard skills and knowledge within the organization. We will further ensure this permanent team is supplemented, as needed, by experts chosen for their fields of specialisation. ■



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to all the contributors of Strategy 2024-2028, including the programme managers, heads and directors, as well as the finance team and our interns.

A special thank you to our funders who make this work possible. Thank you to our partners who support our work and contribute to the ongoing changes we see.

The biggest thank you goes out to the communities we work with- their struggles are ongoing, and we are humbled by their endurance and commitment to justice.

DONATE

If you would like to support our new strategy, kindly consider making a donation. Thank you.
naturaljustice.org/donate

FOLLOW US

www.naturaljustice.org
www.facebook.com/naturaljustice
<https://x.com/naturaljustice>
https://www.instagram.com/naturaljustice_org/

