

# THE OAKLAND INSTITUTE

## 2017 ANNUAL REPORT



The Oakland Institute



## Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

When I look back on 2017, I think of it as a year of fierceness. In the US, it was a year in which scores of athletes took a knee to protest police brutality; tens of thousands occupied airports across the country to resist an immoral and racist travel ban; and the #MeToo campaign broke the silence about sexual harassment and assault.

I witness this same fierceness every day at the Oakland Institute. Whether it is campaigning for the freedom of Mr. Okello Akway Ochalla, whose courage to speak out about the human rights abuses faced by his Anuak community in Ethiopia became an act of terrorism; championing the cause of the IDPs in Sri Lanka and their right to return home; elevating the impact of the occupation of Palestine on many like the Tamimi family of Nabi Salih and their struggle for freedom and justice; or supporting our partners in PNG to end illegal logging on their lands and forests – this fierceness is evident day in and day out.

2017 was also marked by moments of profound joy. Our friend and partner, Pastor Omot Agwa, was released on bail after nearly two years of unjust detention in Ethiopia. As 2018 began, Mr. Okello was also released. We built new partnerships with inspiring organizations and individuals working to revive sustainable agriculture while they struggle for liberation in Palestine. And we scored major victories in our campaign against the World Bank.

There was definitely much to celebrate when we welcomed five heroic land rights defenders from around the world to spend a week with us in Oakland in October. We shared meals and stories, laughter and tears; we built new collaborations and partnerships; and we strategized for the struggles ahead.

While we witness pain and suffering in our work – jail and repression, and even the assassinations of activists and citizens defending their land and their environment against corporate greed – I have always felt privileged and energized to work with the most beautiful, courageous, intelligent, and resilient people in the world – a feeling exemplified during that week.

When I look forward into 2018, I feel great hope. There is a huge, fierce, and yes – joyful – movement that is building all around us. This movement isn't on the fringe – it is right here, uniting people and organizations around the world standing up for social and economic justice, for human rights, for our environment, and for the climate. I am more humbled than ever to be part of it, and I hope you are too.

So in 2018, at the Oakland Institute we remember what is possible, rejoice in what we've achieved, and continue the struggle for a better world.

Onwards,



Anushka Mittal





## Who We Are

The Oakland Institute is an independent policy think tank bringing fresh ideas and bold action to the most pressing social, economic, and environmental issues of our time. We do this by combining meticulous research with creative communications strategies and advocacy campaigns to bring change around the globe. Our work often starts at the invitation of local communities to assist their struggles. We are proud to work strategically and collaboratively with these partners!

## What We Do

### **Hold Powerful Actors Accountable**

Our work holds governments, corporations, and international institutions accountable for their actions and policies. This includes publishing reports, organizing advocacy campaigns, testifying at hearings, and more.

### **Dismantle False Solutions**

The Institute's research and advocacy exposes and challenges the false solutions put forward by governments and corporations to fight hunger, climate change, and bring about development.

### **Strengthen Land Rights and Livelihoods**

In partnership with impacted communities, we document threats to land rights, livelihoods, and natural resources, and develop communications and advocacy campaigns to support and elevate these struggles in the international arena.

### **Support Sustainable Farmer-led Food Systems**

We support sustainable farmer-led food systems and work to build a farm economy from the bottom up. Our research is bringing forward blueprints and evidence of what these systems can look like and what policy changes are needed for them to flourish.

### **Stand by our Partners in the Face of Criminalization**

The Legal Defense Fund we started three years ago to support land rights activists is assisting individuals and groups in a growing number of countries.

### **Elevate People's Voices**

Underlying all the work of the Oakland Institute is our strong commitment to elevate the voices of farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, indigenous people, and all communities who are ignored, marginalized, and repressed in the name of development. After all, the poor are the experts on poverty; the oppressed are the experts on human rights; and peasants and rural communities are the experts on agricultural development.





## 2017 Highlights

### **Advocating for land and human rights in Ethiopia**

We focused on making the US – Ethiopia’s largest bilateral donor – accountable for its continued support of a repressive regime. We advocated for the passage of two Congressional resolutions on human rights in Ethiopia, testified at Congressional and Senate briefings, ensured language regarding forced evictions remains in all future Appropriations Bills, and more.

### **Our Land Our Business: A Campaign against the World Bank’s business rankings**

The 280-organization-strong campaign continued to lambast the World Bank’s disastrous ranking programs, successfully convincing two anchor donors – the Dutch and the Danish governments – to withdraw financing of the Bank’s Enabling the Business of Agriculture project.

### **Green Resources in Uganda: Dismantling false solutions to climate change**

Our research and advocacy exposed the false climate solutions pedaled by Green Resources, a Norwegian forestry plantation and carbon credit company operating in Uganda, and how its “climate mitigation” programs continue to cause acute hunger and the denial of access to water, firewood, and land for grazing animals for thousands of impacted villagers.

### **Winning battles against illegal logging in Papua New Guinea**

Our earlier exposé of tax evasion by logging companies put tremendous pressure on foreign logging firms in PNG. In 2017, the logging industry complained that their operations were being undermined by the increase in the log export tax that was implemented by the government as a result of our research. While this is bad news for the loggers, we celebrate this good news for the people, the rainforest, and the country’s incredible biodiversity.

### **Towards an international declaration on the rights of peasants**

We participated in the negotiations of a historic international declaration on the rights of peasants at the United Nations in Geneva, urging policy makers and governments to do more than just enshrine these essential rights, and instead put peasants in the driver’s seat of their own development.

### **Palestine: For land and life**

Our bold multimedia project on land rights in Palestine humanized one of the most polarizing issues of our time by weaving together history and policy issues with inspirational stories of resistance and resilience. Several of our reports showcase inspirational farmer-led initiatives including the Palestine Heirloom Seed Library and the Canaan Palestine Project.

### **Sri Lanka: Still pressing for justice and resettlement**

We continue to press the international community for true justice in Sri Lanka. Our latest report, released during a session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, exposed the myriad issues that still plague land release, resettlement, and transitional justice in the country.

### **Legal Defense Fund: Standing by our partners in the face of criminalization**

In 2017, the Fund supported land rights defenders facing criminalization for their work in Ethiopia, Madagascar, Cameroon, Papua New Guinea, Palestine, and Tanzania. We were thrilled to secure the release of three partners who had been held behind bars: Pastor Omot Agwa (Ethiopia), Nasako Besingi (Cameroon), and Okello Akway Ochalla (Ethiopia).



## A Snapshot of Our Work in Ethiopia

Through our publications and advocacy work, the Institute remains at the forefront of exposing land grabbing, failed development policies, and associated human rights abuses in Ethiopia. Last year, the country descended into deeper chaos with over a thousand killed and tens of thousands arrested for standing up for their rights to land, livelihoods, and democracy. Martial law has been imposed twice since 2016, while indigenous communities are losing their land and water sources to large-scale agricultural plantations and urban development.


In 2017, we pressed the US – Ethiopia’s largest bilateral donor – to take strong action. Speaking at Congressional and Senate briefings, we have advocated for the passage of House Resolution 128 and Senate Resolution 168, Congressional resolutions that the Institute drafted, and ensured that language regarding forced evictions remains in all forthcoming Appropriations Bills.

Our advocacy has not gone unnoticed. Aside from our reports and opinion pieces triggering written responses and press releases from the Ethiopian government, the Ethiopian Embassy hired a DC-based lobbying firm to the tune of \$150,000 per month to oppose HR 128 and SR 168. The Ethiopian government also threatened Congress that it would pull out of regional counter-terrorism efforts if these resolutions pass. We remain undeterred by these misguided attempts as we are on the side of the people when we challenge “development” policies that marginalize and dispossess indigenous groups from their lands and livelihoods.

“I have a deep respect for the brave and selfless work that the Oakland Institute has done on behalf of Ethiopians... Your advocacy and activism has directly influenced the growing attention being given to the situation in Ethiopia, which should soon result in concrete action by the US House of Representatives.”

– Representative Keith Ellison, Member of Congress



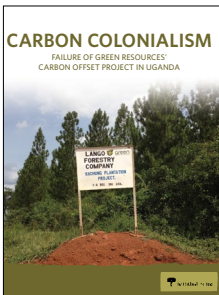


## Dismantling False Climate Solutions

Advocating for serious action and meaningful solutions to the climate crisis is at the core of our work. However, some “solutions” touted by powerful companies are having nefarious consequences.

Our 2014 investigation revealed that Green Resources, a Norwegian forestry plantation and carbon credit company operating in Uganda, had forcibly evicted thousands of villagers from land they relied on for their food and livelihoods – all in the name of climate change mitigation.

This exposé secured major wins – the company’s only carbon credit buyer, the Swedish Energy Agency (SEA), suspended funding in 2015 and outlined ten actions for Green Resources to undertake to reinstate payments and Green Resources’ major shareholder, Phaunos Timber Fund, divested from the company.



With the Swedish Energy Agency reassessing whether to resume payments to Green Resources in 2018, our new report, *Carbon Colonialism*, was an irrefutable indictment on the failure of Green Resources to address its harmful impacts on local communities. This fresh research also debunked a recent audit of the company that presents Green Resources as being compliant in most areas of reform demanded by the SEA, revealing instead that local communities continue to face an acute hunger crisis with access to water, firewood, and land for grazing animals denied.

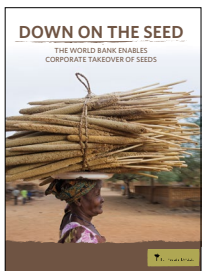
With partners in Uganda, Mozambique, Sweden, and Norway, we have now started an international campaign calling on the SEA to stop funding Green Resources once and for all.

“The Oakland Institute’s first report amplified the voices of those who carry the heaviest burden of carbon offset projects in Uganda and brought global attention to Green Resources’ misdeeds. This gave local people hope their calls for justice may be respected. Our hope with this second report is that justice will be delivered to our communities. That would be a good present to the people of Kachung.” – David Ssemwogerere, Suubi Centre, Uganda



## Building Sustainable, Farmer-led Food Systems

Sustainable, farmer-led, agroecological food systems are the way forward. But corporate-friendly agricultural policies dictated to governments by powerful financial institutions like the World Bank are undermining solutions to the climate and equity crises that we face. This concern inspired the creation of the multicontinental, 280+ organization strong *Our Land Our Business* (OLOB) campaign in 2014, led by the Oakland Institute.



The campaign has successfully brought to light the Bank's role in the corporate takeover of agriculture and natural resources. Our 2017 report, *Down on the Seed*, accompanied by a letter to World Bank President Jim Yong Kim, signed by 157 organizations and academics from around the world, denounced the Bank's Enabling the Business of Agriculture (EBA) project, which encourages the take-over of the world's seeds by a handful of private companies, while neglecting the farmer-managed seed systems that account for 80-90 percent of seed sharing and distribution in developing countries.

Just weeks after our report and letter were released, the World Bank incorporated our language directly in their Enabling the Business of Agriculture 2017 report, which guides government's agricultural policies around the world, recognizing for the first time the value of farmer-managed seed systems!

Another major advocacy success for the campaign is that two of the five anchor donors of the EBA – DANIDA and the Dutch government – recently ended their funding of the program. We are committed to build upon this momentum and bring an end to the EBA.

While campaigning against harmful World Bank policies, we advocate for development solutions driven by those most impacted. In 2017, we testified at the negotiations of a historic international declaration on the rights of peasants, urging policy makers and governments to not just enshrine these essential rights, but to put peasants in the driver's seat of their own development.

“You are fighters, role models, and an inspiration for so many around the world. I feel blessed to get the chance to know you.”

– A donor to the Oakland Institute



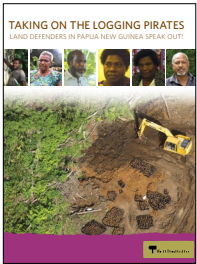




## Winning Battles against Illegal Logging and Palm Oil in PNG

Since 2012, the Institute's work with partners in Papua New Guinea has exposed the country's failed development model, especially as it relates to the disastrous impact of Special Agricultural Business Leases (SABLs) on land rights and livelihoods.

Our work has secured major wins. Our report, *The Great Timber Heist*, revealed widespread tax evasion by foreign logging companies operating in the country. The public outrage created by our research forced the government to substantially increase its log export tax, contributing to a decrease of tropical timber exports by 20 percent in the first nine months of 2017. We are now demanding an elimination of raw log exports – a move that would further reduce timber exports, while increasing jobs and strengthening the local economic in PNG.



In addition, we continued our work to secure land rights and strengthen livelihoods of the impacted communities. Our report, *Taking on the Logging Pirates*, provided a platform for land rights defenders to share their struggles and visions. We also hosted land rights defender Paul Palosualrea Pavol in Oakland bringing his story to funders, partners, and media agencies in the US.

The impact of our research and advocacy continues to be felt across PNG. In early 2018, the Governor of PNG's Oro province, Gary Juffa, waged a major crackdown on illegal logging in his province, arresting several loggers, and impounding their logs and machinery. This marks a major shift and a strong step for land rights defenders in PNG.



Paul Palosualrea Pavol speaking at our October 2017 event  
© The Oakland Institute

“I want the land to be given back to the people. Please don't understand this wrong. I'm not saying I don't want development – roads, bridges, schools, etc. I believe it is the duty and responsibility of the state of PNG to achieve this, but I don't think people's resources should be compromised for this. I only want a better future.”

– PNG Land Rights Defender Paul Palosualrea Pavol

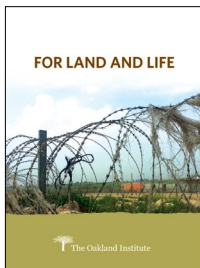


## Producing Rigorous Research to Inform Debates

What sets the Oakland Institute's work apart is our ability to successfully combine meticulous research with creative communications strategies, effective international advocacy campaigns, and deep local partnerships. In 2017, we took on several new research projects.



On the eve of Donald Trump's inauguration, we released a ground-breaking report on notorious Blackwater founder Erik Prince. Containing never-seen-before information, the report tracks Prince's post-Blackwater manoeuvres, exposing his power to shape and manipulate the US foreign policy agenda. As Prince considers a run for Congress, we will continue to shed light on his disastrous acts.



To mark 50 years since the Six-Day War and Israel's occupation, we embarked on field research and a bold multimedia project on land rights in Palestine. The resulting project shares the stories of courageous activists, farmers, and community leaders across the West Bank, humanizing one of the most polarizing issues of our time by weaving together history and policy issues with inspirational stories of resistance, resilience, and a call for justice. At a time when US foreign policy in the Middle East is further dividing the region, as a US-based think tank focused on land issues, we are glad to lend our capacity and credibility to this struggle. *Palestine: For Land and Life* has been used extensively by groups in Palestine, including the Palestine Heirloom Seed Library, Canaan Palestine, Youth Against Settlements, and the BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights, and strengthened our collaborations with these inspiring organizations.

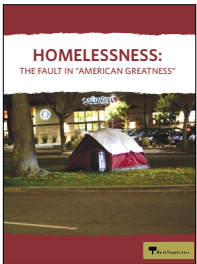


Palestinian agriculturalist, Vivien Sansour © Ayed Arafah

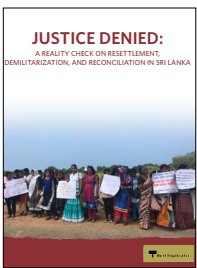
“Let me congratulate you on a wonderful report so well-crafted and presented. The information about life on the ground [in Palestine] is often presented in generalities that do not give the people or the place or the issues justice and often render them objectified. The recent report you issued does exactly the opposite bringing to life and light so much of the hard lived and well lived realities of Palestine.”

– Vivien Sansour, Palestine Heirloom Seed Library





We've continued to show up to support communities under attack across the US. From exposing the links between Trump's disastrous budget and the Bay Area's homeless crisis, to speaking up against white supremacy, to standing alongside all immigrants in the face of Trump's tirade against them, we have – and will always – continue to stand up for justice in our own backyard.



Finally, we have continued to pressure the international community for true justice in Sri Lanka. In March 2017, while Sri Lanka's "progress" on transitional justice was under review by the UN Human Rights Council, we released *Justice Denied*, a new report that revealed the myriad issues that continue to plague land release and resettlement in the country, as well as the failure of the Sri Lankan government to fulfill its international commitments to transitional justice. Our research on Sri Lanka continues to have an impact. In 2017, the UK and Canadian governments used our reports to inform their decision to grant refugee status and asylum to thousands of Tamil refugees. Our work has also helped secure the release of additional lands in Northern Sri Lanka, allowing internally displaced people to finally begin rebuilding their lives.

<b>Subject:</b>	Thank you for your support
<b>From:</b>	██████████
<b>To:</b>	Elizabeth Fraser < <a href="mailto:efraser@oaklandinstitute.org">efraser@oaklandinstitute.org</a> >

Hello Elizabeth,

This is ██████████ from Vavuniya. You might have known that, couple of weeks ago. around 650 acres private land released for resettlement in surrounding of Palali (JAFFNA) area. undoubtedly, i can say, you contribution in this regard, is high. i appreciate your efforts to working together with the protracted displaced community in northern srilanka.

Wish you all the best. pray for keep continue your contribution.

Regards,

██████████ (former internally displaced person, Sri Lanka)



## Supporting Land Rights Defenders

2017 was the one of the deadliest years on record for land rights defenders. Nearly 200 people were assassinated for defending their community's land – and those are the ones we know of. Thousands more face displacement, violence, intimidation, and arrest – all for defending their right to live on their land.

In the face of this crisis, in 2015 the Oakland Institute launched a Legal Defense Fund. In 2017, this fund supported land rights defenders in Ethiopia, Madagascar, Cameroon, Papua New Guinea, Palestine, and Tanzania.

**“It’s a disaster. People have been evicted from land that is the basis of their livelihoods, their culture, and their social fabric. People have been imprisoned, tortured, and even killed because they demanded their right for the land.”** – Ethiopian Land Rights Defender<sup>1</sup>

The groups we support through this fund aren't professional NGOs. They don't have access to pro bono lawyers, large budgets, or international media. Often they don't even have a postal address. They are communities of pastoralists, indigenous groups, and farmers at the forefront of the global struggle for land and life, who are taking risks every day in the name of justice.

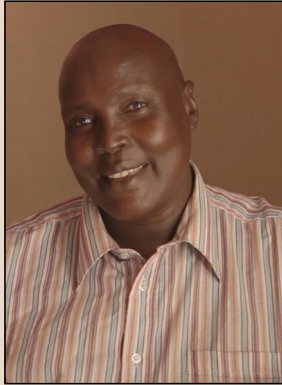
**When the bulldozers or the police arrive, the Oakland Institute is proud to be by their side. We've learned that advocating for land rights, indigenous groups, and agroecological alternatives is about much more than writing policy briefs. It's also about organizing lawyers, support networks, and bail money for community leaders when they are detained; denouncing the anti-terrorism legislation that locks up land rights defenders; and standing up for the rights of those who take risks everyday around the world for their land, life, and freedom.**

This fall we invited five land rights defenders from Palestine, Ethiopia, Madagascar, and Papua New Guinea to spend a week with us here in Oakland. During our time together, we strategized, shared stories and experiences, and even spent a day by the ocean together. The week culminated in an event where these courageous individuals shared their struggles with funders, journalists, and other supporters here in the US. We continue to shine light on the vital work of our partners, lifting up their voices to new audiences and fighting alongside them for justice in their communities.

<sup>1</sup> Name withheld due to security concerns.



## Free at Last: The Institute's Legal Defense Fund at Work



### **Omot Agwa, Ethiopia**

In March 2015, Pastor Omot Agwa was arrested in Addis Ababa, while trying to travel to Kenya to attend a food security conference. For six months, he was detained without charge, denied access to legal representation, and endured torture and solitary confinement. Then, in September 2015, Pastor Omot was charged as a terrorist on the ridiculous claim that the food security workshop he was trying to attend – organized by the international NGOs Bread for All and GRAIN – was a “terrorist group meeting.”

Pastor Omot is an outspoken advocate for land rights in Ethiopia's Gambella region. He also worked as an interpreter for the World Bank Inspection Panel's 2014 investigation into the forced displacement of indigenous Anuak during the Bank's Promoting Basic Services program in Gambella. In the weeks before his arrest, the Inspection Panel's report was released, after which Omot raised concerns with numerous organizations about increasing threats from Ethiopian security officials because of his work.

In January 2017, after nearly two years in jail, Pastor Omot was released on bail, and in April 2018 all charges against Pastor Omot were dropped.

### **Nasako Besingi, Cameroon**

On September 25, 2017, Nasako Besingi, Executive Director of Struggle to Economize Future Environment (SEFE), and long-time partner of the Institute, was arrested in Cameroon. For days after his arrest, no information was given to his family or lawyer about his location or the charges against him.

This is not the first time Nasako has been targeted by the Cameroonian authorities. He has previously faced arrest, assault, and been sued for his work opposing a 20,000 ha land grab by US-based Herakles Farms. This includes being sentenced by a Cameroonian court in January 2016 with high fines or jail time because of allegations made by Herakles Farms that Nasako distributed t-shirts that read “No plantation on our Land! Herakles Farms Out!” at a local demonstration.



Upon learning of Nasako's September arrest, in partnership with international civil society, the Institute launched a campaign to pressure Cameroonian President Paul Biya to immediately release Nasako and end the judicial harassment that he has faced for his peaceful work promoting land rights in Cameroon. On November 2017, a Military Judge in Buea officially dropped all charges and signed the release order for Nasako, who was subsequently released following over two months in detention.

## Okello Akway Ochalla, Ethiopia

On February 14, 2018, Mr. Okello Akway Ochalla, an indigenous Anuak leader, Norwegian citizen, and the former Governor of the Gambella region of Ethiopia, was released after being held as a prisoner on trumped up charges in an Ethiopian jail for nearly four years.

In March 2014, while visiting relatives in South Sudan, Mr. Okello was forcibly taken to Ethiopia and charged under the country's draconian Anti-Terrorism Proclamation. His crimes included speaking to the international media, including the *BBC* and *Voice of America*, about the 2003 massacre of the Anuak people, and ongoing forced evictions and human rights abuses to make way for large-scale agricultural investments in Gambella.



Mr. Okello returning to his family in Norway

Since Mr. Okello's abduction, the Oakland Institute has worked tirelessly with his family and lawyers, launching a public campaign, mobilizing international media and NGOs, and advocating for his freedom with the Ethiopian, Norwegian, and US governments. His release comes after four years of injustice, including torture, solitary confinement, and charges in a judicial system that pays no regard to the rule of law.

We are grateful to Ameha Mekonnen, defense lawyer in Ethiopia; Lewis Gordon of the Environmental Defender Law Center; Obok Akway, Mr. Okello's son; and all who supported this campaign over the years.

## Unnamed Asylum Seeker, Ethiopia

The Institute also supported the successful asylum claim of another Ethiopian land rights defender, who fled the country in fear of persecution for standing up for the rights of their community. Given ongoing security concerns aimed at this person's family, their name and story are not being shared in this report.



"I would like to thank the Oakland Institute for its devotion to my father's case, and commitment to see him free. When the world turned its back on my father, everyone at the Oakland Institute was there to support him and my family." – Obok Akway, Mr. Okello's son



# Organizational Overview

Frédéric Mousseau, Flora Sonkin, Elizabeth Fraser, Anuradha Mittal and Takahiro Noguchi

## Team

Anuradha Mittal  
Executive Director

Frédéric Mousseau  
Policy Director

Takahiro Noguchi  
Creative Technology Director

Elizabeth Fraser  
Senior Policy Analyst

Alice Martin-Prével (2017)  
Policy Analyst

Amy Woloszyn  
Designer

Flora Sonkin (2018)  
Research Associate

Janhavi Mittal (2018)  
Research Associate

## Contributors

Lim Li Ching, Senior Fellow

Kristen Lyons, Senior Fellow

## Intern Scholars

Josephin Robinette

Paola Langer

## Board of Directors

Carolyn Purcell, Chair

Jeff Furman, Treasurer

Atul Sharan, Secretary

Elsadig Elsheikh

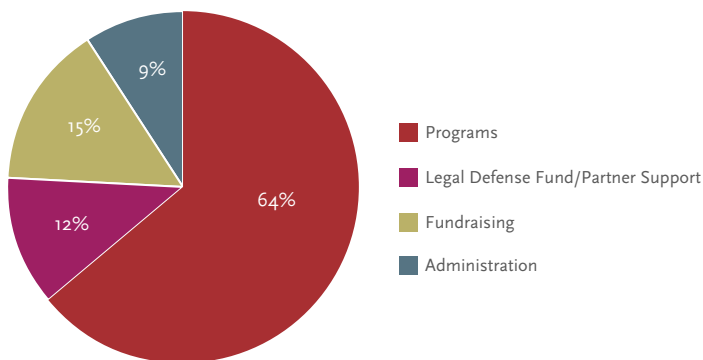
Lewis Gordon

Carol Johnson

Anuradha Mittal

Sonja Swift

## Estimated 2017 Expenditures



## Financial Statements

As this chart shows, 76 percent of every dollar raised goes directly to our programs, partners, and legal defense fund.

For detailed information on the Oakland Institute's finances, please see our annual 990 forms at: [www.oaklandinstitute.org/about/annual-reports](http://www.oaklandinstitute.org/about/annual-reports)

Photo credits:

Cover photo: Mrs. Isobel Chirwa standing in her pigeonpea field intercropped with several nitrogen-fixing shrubs © Carmen Bezner Kerr

Ngorongoro Crater, Tanzania © The Oakland Institute

Harvest time in Canaan, Palestine, the land of milk and honey © The Oakland Institute

Poster of Olympic silver medalist Feyisa Lilesa at a protest in Oakland, California © The Oakland Institute

A truckload of harvested timber from Green Resources' carbon offset project © The Oakland Institute

Zephaniah Phiri Maseko pioneer of agroecology in his farm in Zvishavane, Zimbabwe © Ken Wilson

Logging camp in Fergusson Island, Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea © Paul Hilton/Greenpeace

Investigating illegal logging in Papua New Guinea © The Oakland Institute

Arthur, a homeless veteran in downtown Berkeley © Rucha Chitnis/The Oakland Institute

Tulgit, Ethiopia © The Oakland Institute

