

STRATEGIC PLAN

Evidence for Empowerment and Accountability

2016 — 2020

SOMO — CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

The Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations (SOMO) is a critical, independent, not-for-profit knowledge centre on multinationals. Since 1973 we have investigated multinational corporations and the impact of their activities on people and the environment. We provide custom-made services (research, consulting and training) to non-profit organisations and the public sector. We strengthen collaboration between civil society organisations through our worldwide network. In these three ways, we contribute to social, environmental and economic sustainability.

TABLE OF CONTENTS /

Vision & Mission	04 Our vision
	05 Our mission
Introduction	10 Momentum for responsibility and justice
	12 The challenge of entrenched corporate power
	14 The way forward in a new global context
Theory of change	22 Our theory of change
The issues	30 Economic justice
	32 Sustainable supply chains
	34 Rights, remedy and accountability
	36 Democratic control of natural resources
Strategies for change	48 Incisive research
	50 Mutual capacity building
	52 Powerful networks
	56 Persuasive lobbying and advocacy
	58 Outreach for understanding
Strategies for a strong SOMO	66 Participatory governance
	68 Ensuring stability and sustainability
	70 Fostering learning and development
	72 Communicating who we are

Our vision

SOMO envisions a global economic system that is equitable, democratic, transparent, and environmentally sustainable.

In this vision, civil society has the power to hold multinational corporations and governments to account for destructive and unfair business practices and the violation of human rights; and has the ability to realise economic alternatives, locally and globally.

We regard these as essential conditions for the elimination of the structural causes of poverty, inequality, and the exploitation of people and natural resources by multinational corporations worldwide.

Our mission

SOMO's mission is to support and empower civil society movements in promoting social and environmental interests and in defending human rights.

We do this through action-oriented research, critical analysis and by strengthening cooperation among civil society groups.

Our focus lies on the nature and impact of corporations and the social, economic, legal and political context in which they operate.



SOMO is a critical, independent, not-for-profit knowledge centre on multinationals.

Introduction

Momentum for responsibility and justice

In SOMO's vision, civil society wields the power to put an end to the unsustainable strategies and practices of multinational corporations. Instead of a global system geared toward corporate profit and power, an empowered civil society will put in place new forms of democratic, transparent decision-making and governance, and erect an economic system based on justice, sustainability, and the fair distribution of power.

We approach this new strategic plan period (2016-2020) attentive to significant changes and windows of opportunity related to our work. Diverse corporate scandals have helped us make the case for the need to improve corporate accountability—the need to close the governance gaps that enable, even encourage, multinationals to violate human and labour rights, recklessly exploit natural resources, and keep our planet on a dangerous path to irrevocable climate change.

Adoption of Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights by the United Nations and improvements to the Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises made by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reflect more widespread acknowledgement that corporations have a responsibility to respect human rights. Although such voluntary guidelines fall short of what is needed to ensure protection of human rights, their acceptance represents a positive shift that SOMO has worked tirelessly to help bring about.

REGULATION AND BINDING AGREEMENTS

Meanwhile, there is momentum building within civil society to demand the essential next step: to replace corporate self-regulation and self-auditing—which SOMO has decisively shown to be limited in effect—with regulation and legally binding agreements that include strong sanctions. A diverse coalition of civil society groups and movements is now pushing for a binding international treaty that would impose international human rights obligations on multinational corporations: the establishment by the United Nations Human Rights Council of a working group to prepare such a treaty marks a modest yet important move forward.

Another is the ground-breaking Accord on Fire & Building Safety in Bangladesh, signed by over one hundred companies under enormous global pressure following the deaths of more than a thousand garment workers in the collapse of Rana Plaza. Not only is the Accord legally binding, it confirms the key principle, persistently put forth by SOMO, that companies bear responsibility for the conditions and impacts of their supply chains. Awareness of supply chain responsibility is extending to other sectors as well: we have seen signs of progress in the electronics sector, for example, where corporations have begun to acknowledge their responsibilities throughout the production cycle, from the mining of minerals to the disposal of electronics waste.

TAX AND TRADE JUSTICE MOVEMENTS

There is also considerable energy in civil society for tackling corporate tax avoidance. No longer is SOMO one of just a handful of voices calling attention to corporate tax dodging: we are part of a burgeoning global tax justice movement. The results of this movement can be seen in the fact that key government

officials—the European Commissioner for Competition among them—are now echoing our criticism of corporate tax avoidance and the societal damage it causes.

Similarly, an increasingly loud chorus has joined SOMO in calling for a different model of trade and investment. This year, over three million people signed the European citizen's initiative calling for suspension of negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the European Union and the United States, and rejection of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) between the EU and Canada. Never before have so many citizens signed a public petition addressing the EU.

The petition's broad support signals a growing awareness that current trade policies are aimed at securing profits for multinationals, and threaten to roll back hard-won standards for labour, the environment, privacy, and consumer rights which protect and benefit citizens. As with all the positive changes we have seen, this new awareness came from years, even decades, of collective effort by SOMO and the diverse allies with whom we work.

The challenge of entrenched corporate power

Although we see many opportunities in the coming five years, we recognise the substantial challenges we face. Wielding a political power that increasingly matches their economic power, multinational corporations exert more and more influence over all types of decision-making processes and every aspect of people's lives—from food to energy, from taxation to trade, from wages to waste.

Amidst a global financial crisis, corporations have expanded and solidified their economic power, thereby accelerating the pace of rising economic inequality. A core of just 147 companies now control nearly half the wealth of the world's corporations¹ while the richest 1% of the population is soon likely to own more than half of the world's total wealth².

UNCHECKED ABUSE OF LOCAL RIGHTS

Local communities and workers in every corner of the globe contend daily with corporate human rights and environmental abuses, with little or no access to justice. In the absence of good governance, robust legal frameworks, and strict implementation of regulation and legal decisions, corporations continue to operate with impunity. From Colombia to Liberia to India to Greece, people are being evicted and deprived of their land, compelled to work in dangerous conditions for poverty wages, and forced to witness irrevocable damage to the ecosystems from which they derive their livelihoods.

Meanwhile, the space for civil society to resist corporate abuses is shrinking. In many countries, including those in Europe, conflict, war

or the threat of both has exacerbated political instability and given new impetus to nationalism and xenophobia. Freedom of expression faces increasing restrictions both because of terrorism, and in the name of it. Civil society organisations face new laws and bureaucratic hurdles that severely restrict their activities and operations. People defending and claiming their rights risk harassment, dismissal, legal persecution, imprisonment, violence, and even murder.

INCREASED VULNERABILITY

Despite the persistence of poverty, hunger, and other human rights abuses, donor countries, including the Netherlands, are increasingly promoting the private sector as a solution, rather than a key contributor to the problem. Privatisation and private investment continue unabated: governments and citizens are increasingly dependent on large corporations, which are subject to the volatility of unregulated markets, for basic public goods. At the same time, such goods are increasingly linked to complex financial markets and subject to financial speculation, with little connection or concern for the real economy, let alone social justice and sustainability.

¹ Vitali et al, The network of global corporate control ² Oxfam, Wealth: Having it all and wanting more

The way forward in a new global context

The need for systemic change is more urgent than ever before. Now more than ever, civil society organisations and social movements need to link up and work together—empowered by solid research and analysis about multinational corporations and the sectors and systems in which they operate, as well as forward-looking alternatives that will lead to a more sustainable, democratic, and fair world.

SOMO's 2016–2020 strategic plan builds on more than four decades' experience, and derives from conversations and consultations involving SOMO staff, allies and network partners, experts, and other stakeholders. In preparing the new strategic plan, we reflected on our past work—both the strategies that have worked, as well as those that didn't. We analysed the new context, opportunities, and challenges we face. The resulting strategic plan reflects important changes in the way we work and the way we think, and adapts to a new global context. International geopolitical and

economic dynamics are shifting, and powerful new actors have emerged that challenge SOMO to find new partners and ways of working with European, international organisations, and networks worldwide.

RESPONSIVE TO RAPID CHANGE

Opportunities for change increasingly arise at lightning speed: SOMO needs to be more agile and responsive to emerging issues and current events. New trends in data sharing and data mining, social media, and the way people

SOMO PLAYS THREE CRITICAL ROLES



As a **centre of knowledge** on key issues, SOMO drives analysis and pursues its own strategies aimed at social and sustainable change.



As a **host and member of networks**, SOMO facilitates and supports cooperation and coordination of strategies between CSOs worldwide to jointly influence policy-makers and corporations.



As a **provider of professional services**, SOMO works on demand for clients, offering corporate-related research, training, analysis, and advice to help them meet their own goals and implement activities and campaigns effectively.

collect, share, and communicate information require us to adapt our internal and external processes. Our research must be attuned to changing business contexts—price volatility or the rate of resource depletion, for example—and corporations' strategic response to them. In this way, we can better understand the logic and interests of companies, more accurately predict their behaviour, and improve our ability to identify the best tactics and targets for influencing them.

AFFIRMING OUR MISSION AND VISION

At the same time, we remain convinced of the overall path toward achieving our mission and vision. The power of civil society in relation to corporations must be strengthened: this remains the key objective of SOMO, as it is central to the world we envision—a world in which, simply put, people have the power to influence their own living and working conditions. Strengthening civil society is an objective in and of itself, but it is also fundamental to achieving our other objectives. SOMO seeks to change both laws and regulations, and corporate conduct and policies so they promote democracy, fairness, transparency, and environmental sustainability. It is a huge task that we will only accomplish by working in alliances and networks with a wide variety of actors, from universities to trade unions to community-based organisations to international NGOs.

In preparing the new strategic plan, SOMO has given serious thought to our added value in the various arenas where we are active and among the many partners and stakeholders with whom we work. SOMO is and will continue to be an international expert and a critical watchdog, analysing multinational corporations, and monitoring and exposing the consequences of their activities for people and the environment.

SOMO'S THREE ROLES

These roles provide the structure for SOMO's internal organisation—programmes, networks and SOMO Services.

Coupled with SOMO's support teams, this structure is designed to enable SOMO to successfully and efficiently reach both the strategic and organisational objectives laid out in this plan.



ECONOMIC JUSTICE

SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY
CHAINS

RIGHTS, REMEDY AND
ACCOUNTABILITY

DEMOCRATIC USE OF
NATURAL RESOURCES

ANALYSIS AND ADVICE ON
RELATIONSHIPS AND POLICIES
RELATED TO CORPORATIONS

TAILOR-MADE TRAININGS,
SEMINARS AND WORKSHOPS

COMPANY, SECTOR, AND
SUPPLY CHAIN RESEARCH

GOOD ELECTRONICS, MVO PLATFORM,
OECD WATCH AND MANY MORE...



Our theory of change

SOMO strives for creation of a global economic system that is sustainable, democratic and fair. In such a system, the structural causes of poverty, environmental problems, exploitation, and inequality are eliminated. In order to achieve our vision, SOMO focuses on four interrelated issues: economic justice; fair production and consumption; accountability, rights, and remedy; and the democratic use of natural resources.

In SOMO's theory, change starts with awareness of local communities and workers of injustices they face vis-à-vis powerful multinational corporations. They seek to claim or defend their rights, or tackle social and environmental problems in their local contexts, but need assistance from civil society organisations, trade unions, and social movements who can help them.

They require **solid evidence, knowledge, and analysis** about how corporations operate, the consequences of their activities for people and the environment, and identification of leverage points for change. They also need the knowledge and solidarity support to act effectively: this entails on-going **exchange of information and skills**, and strong **communication and**

collaboration in diverse national, regional, and international **networks**.

Equipped with knowledge and bolstered by well-coordinated cooperation, civil society can effectively **demand necessary changes**. It can assert its own power—securing democratic, transparent decision-making—and fundamentally redefine the role of corporations in society through laws and regulation. It can also **shape public discourse and opinion**, thereby pressuring corporations to pro-actively **change their conduct**. Meanwhile, an informed, well-networked civil society can develop and put in place alternative policies and practices, employing diverse strategies at all levels of society that contribute to a more sustainable and just world.

FIVE INTERRELATED INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

To secure the change we seek, SOMO employs five interrelated intervention strategies:



SOMO conducts **action research** on both individual corporations and the systems in which they operate to build a body of knowledge that both supports the need for change and lays out possible paths toward a sustainable, democratic, and fair transition



SOMO engages in **mutual capacity building** with civil society organisations from across the globe by exchanging and facilitating knowledge, skills, and strategies



SOMO facilitates and plays an active role in **networks and alliances**, supporting cooperation and mobilisation by providing knowledge and advice



SOMO contributes to collective efforts to **lobby and advocate** toward decision-makers and, in strategic situations, directly engages in lobbying and advocacy



SOMO conducts **outreach** for awareness-raising to media, opinion leaders, universities, and intermediary CSOs

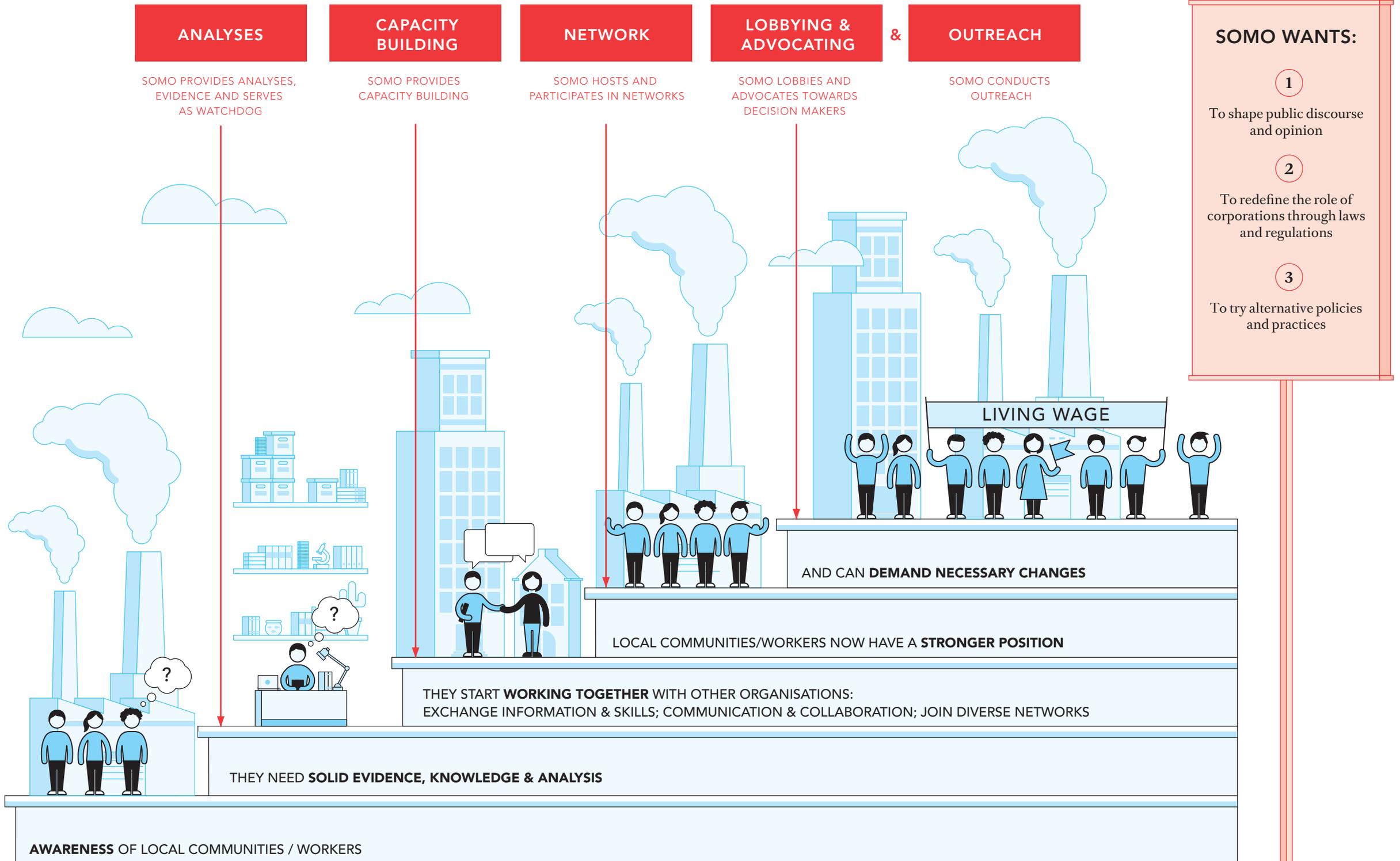
ANALYSIS AND INTERVENTION AT MULTIPLE LEVELS

In order to build the evidence for change, SOMO believes that multinationals must be analysed as both individual actors and as a group within the global context of production chains, and economic structures and regimes. At the **local level**, a company's conduct directly affects a specific community: the urgent struggle for access to justice and respect for rights plays out. Here, SOMO serves as a watchdog, working with partners to monitor the local impacts of corporate policies and practices, as well as intervening in specific cases to demand accountability. SOMO supports communities in their efforts to secure remedy through, for example, use of relevant grievance mechanisms.

Intervention is also necessary at the **supply chain and sector level**. This level involves relationships and responsibilities of companies across complex production and distribution processes and within particular markets. SOMO's research, analysis and recommendations toward sectors and across supply chains focuses on both regulation and normative standards that affect all relevant companies.

At the **international level**, corporations operate within and exert their excessive power to shape the neo-liberal global economic system. Here, SOMO focuses on regulation of tax, trade, investment, and finance, treaties and international frameworks of corporate accountability such as the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. As we implement all of our strategies at all levels, SOMO identifies leverage points and key stakeholders to secure necessary changes.

SOMO'S THEORY OF CHANGE





Many of the problems facing people in middle and low income countries (indirectly) result from the practices and policies of multinational corporations at the end of the supply chain.

The issues

Economic justice

SOMO will work to fundamentally change the economic system so it serves the public interest and facilitates equitable distribution of resources. Together with the growing global movement for economic justice, we aim to ensure people's control over their economic lives through democratic processes. In case studies and other research, we seek to illustrate how the current economic architecture simultaneously generates private gains and public losses. We will unmask the unfair mechanisms and frameworks—taxation, trade, investment, and finance—that undergird the system.

A priority for SOMO in the coming five years is to increase the public and political pressure to end harmful **tax regimes** at both international and national levels. Working with Southern partners, SOMO will research corporate tax avoidance and its effect on human rights and the public interest in their countries. We will analyse the tax policies and tax treaties that underpin this system, and develop and put forth concrete recommendations to

positively change them. The role of the Netherlands as a conduit tax haven will continue to receive special attention. In light of increasing inequality between and within member states and the on-going European debt crisis, SOMO will also expose tax-related public loss mechanisms in Europe and build pressure for the implementation of proposed alternatives that promote redistribution.

SOMO will expose the negative impacts of **investment protection and investment arbitration** and work to enhance the policy space in Southern countries for equitable and sustainable development. In the coming years, negotiations for sweeping new European Union (EU) trade and investment protection treaties—the EU-United States Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA) among others—will intensify. SOMO will provide vital research and analysis about these trade and investment proposals, investigating their implications for financial and other regulatory frameworks, and the consequences on society. SOMO's research will contribute directly to civil society campaigns in the Netherlands, the EU, and in the South. Meanwhile, with many Dutch bilateral investment treaties (BITs) nearing expiration, the Dutch government has expressed the possibility of reappraising its approach to investment protection. Within this context, SOMO will prioritise work with allies in countries that are reconsidering Dutch BITs, with a keen eye on the issue of financial services.

SOMO will also monitor, exchange information, and raise awareness about **corporate financial practices, and government financial policies and regulation**. SOMO aims to contribute to broader understanding about how financial flows are created, how the financial sector functions, and its social and environmental impacts. We will show through concrete examples in specific countries, starting with Indonesia and Greece, the link between the financial system and problems such as poverty and inequality. SOMO's research findings will contribute to the development of strategies and proposals towards financial actors and governments to deal with the problems exposed.

In our efforts to achieve progressive reform and, ultimately, secure fundamental change to the global economic system, SOMO and our allies face a grave overarching challenge: the increasing penetration of corporate interests in policymaking processes at all levels, national, EU, and international. The **corporate capture of policymaking** can be seen in everything from the opaque lobbying efforts by the financial sector against effective EU financial reform to the outsized role of private sector “experts” in development of public policy to the “revolving door” between the corporate board room and public office. Given this context, SOMO will draw attention to corporate capture within the Netherlands, linking up with allied efforts across Europe to put citizens, civil society, and the public interest in the centre of policymaking processes.

Throughout all of our economic justice research, we will **present the evidence that disproves neo-liberal ideology**. We will repudiate with concrete facts the claim that unregulated foreign direct investment leads to economic development. And we will negate the notion that privatisation, liberalisation, and deregulation lead to fair competition, economic efficiency and, ultimately, wealth that “trickles down.”

Sustainable supply chains

SOMO will push for regulation, policies, and practices that promote and protect the rights and livelihoods of individuals and communities involved in all stages of consumer goods' supply chains.

SOMO will focus on the **garments, electronics, and food and agriculture sectors** so that people working within them—farmers and factory workers, miners and migrants—earn a decent income, work under safe, secure, and healthy conditions, enjoy union and collective bargaining rights, and have influence over the way corporations conduct their business. SOMO will also pay attention to the **pharmaceutical industry**, with the aim of making it more responsive to public health needs. Taken together, these sectors have an impact on the health, lives, and livelihoods of billions of people worldwide.

Alongside of exposure of the systemic problems in global production chains, SOMO will advance effective solutions that can improve sustainability and respect for human rights. Throughout its work, SOMO will seek worker empowerment by developing and promoting **worker-led improvement mechanisms and instruments**. For instance, we will push for workers to play an implementing role in company-level grievance mechanisms, helping to ensure effective remedy when employers violate workers' rights. To that end, SOMO will play a key part in the development and expansion of Electronics Watch—a monitoring and improvement system based on local

knowledge of working conditions—which can serve as an important model for all sectors. SOMO will also push for socially responsible procurement, engaging in dialogue and discussion with Dutch ministries and agencies about implementation of the government's responsible procurement policy.

Working with allies in Europe, we will push for **fair trading practices and decent work in supply chains of Europe's leading supermarkets**. We will engage with supermarkets, governments and civil society to improve sourcing policies of supermarket “store brands,” while at the same time addressing unfair trading practices of supermarkets and maintaining a critical eye on excessive corporate buying power. Meanwhile, we will support the global movement calling for a fair and sustainable **agricultural and food system that is** capable of guaranteeing the right to food. SOMO will make a contribution to these efforts through research into corporate influence on price formation and stability, and modes of agricultural production. Together with partners in food-deprived countries, we will develop proposals **that promote positive investment** in agriculture, particularly sustainable small-holder farming.

Improving the situation of **migrant labourers, and other vulnerable groups** of workers is of particular importance to SOMO. Gender analysis will be a key part of all our research on supply chains, as well as the recommendations and solutions we propose. We will also analyse the human rights responsibility of companies making use of migrant labour, and investigate corporate practices and accountability in relation to human trafficking. SOMO's research will feed into the work of allies who are advocating for improved EU regulation on migrant labour and human trafficking.

SOMO will analyse the **business models and practices**—profit-maximisation, low prices, short lead times, unstable relations with suppliers—that lead to many of the social and environmental problems within garment, electronics, and supermarket supply chains. Because of the demonstrated ineffectiveness of current practices of **corporate self-regulation**, SOMO will, in close cooperation with partners, advocate for **legally enforceable mechanisms**.

SOMO will also apply its unique sector and supply chain analysis to the pharmaceutical industry. Our goal is to ensure that governments and public research institutions gain **democratic control over drug development**. Working in cooperation with universities and social movements, SOMO will support more democratic business models for bringing drugs to the market. SOMO will also challenge the industry's justification for extremely high priced medicines by investigating the cost structure and revealing the share of taxpayer money in the research and development of new drugs. With partners, we will examine **unethical research practices in the clinical trial phase**, with special attention on violations of Post-Trial Access (PTA) commitments.

Rights, remedy & accountability

SOMO strives for strong and rigorously enforced laws and policies to ensure that corporations respect human rights wherever they are active, and—equally important—provide remedy when they don't. SOMO seeks to address the global governance gaps that allow multinational corporations to operate with impunity by pushing for strong corporate accountability frameworks that include effective grievance mechanisms.

In collaboration with civil society organisations from across the globe, SOMO will monitor negotiations of the newly created working group within the Human Rights Council of the United Nations on a **binding international instrument on business and human rights**. SOMO will keep a keen eye on the political dynamics within the negotiations, and on opportunities and limitations of proposals under consideration.

SOMO will devote significant attention to improving people's access to remedy—vitaly important not only because it can mitigate damage suffered by workers or communities in actual cases of abuse, but also because it deters future violations. SOMO will focus on the use of **non-judicial grievance** mechanisms to address human rights, environmental, and social abuses. Non-judicial grievance mechanisms are a particularly important means of access to remedy for people living in conflict-affected areas, where rule of law may be entirely absent. In these areas, as elsewhere, SOMO will support workers, communities, individuals, and CSOs in **filing complaints** using such mechanisms, with a particular focus on the National Contact Points of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and the Independent Accountability Mechanisms of the International Financial Institutions. Through our experience with actual complaints, SOMO intends to build the case for **improving the accessibility, effectiveness, and consistency** of grievance mechanisms. SOMO will contribute to upcoming review processes of the World Bank Inspection Panel and the Complaint Mechanism of the European Investment Bank, and we will step up pressure on the OECD to improve requirements for National Contact Points in handling complaints. In light of the growing risk to human rights defenders around the world, SOMO will also develop policy recommendations to protect complainants from potential retaliation.

SOMO is one of just a handful of organisations in the world with extensive expertise in the use of non-judicial grievance mechanisms. One of our priorities going forward is to ensure that **organisations in the South**—where corporate human rights abuses are rampant and access to remedy limited—gain the necessary skills and experience to **take the lead in supporting affected communities in filing complaints**. SOMO will help support the development of regional focal points within the OECD Watch network. At the same time, we will strengthen collaboration with other grievance mechanism experts, pooling our expertise and experience to better facilitate support for communities wishing to file a complaint.

Democratic control of natural resources

SOMO strives for democratic control over natural resources and to reshape the global systems within which such resources are used so they are sustainable, transparent, and people-centered.

SOMO will focus on companies and financiers in the **agribusiness, energy, and extractives sectors**, which play a major role in the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources to the detriment of local communities and ecosystems. We will keep a close eye on the complex web that links these sectors to each other and to myriad social and environmental problems, including hunger, human rights violations, economic inequality, financial instability, and armed conflict.

On the local level, SOMO will support communities in **claiming and defending rights to land** they customarily use, occupy, or own, and their right to participate in **decision-making processes** around projects that may affect such land. Securing full implementation of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)—the international legal principle formalising these rights—is fundamental to our work. Working with Southern partners, SOMO will research the activities and policies of agribusiness corporations and financiers involved in specific cases of **large-scale land grabs**. We will support partners in advocating locally, nationally and regionally for changes in government and company policies and practices—as well as policies of multi-stakeholder initiatives—in line with FPIC.

Particular attention will be given to the conduct of multinational corporations in **conflict-affected areas**, including Colombia and South Sudan among others. Extractive and agribusiness companies are particularly active in such areas and may be unaware of, or conveniently ignore, their role as an actor in the on-going conflict or the process toward peace. SOMO will raise awareness of the role and responsibilities of companies operating in such areas, pushing them to act responsibly and in a conflict-sensitive way. We will research corporate business strategies, the role of investors, as well as incentives given

by host states to attract foreign direct investment. With local partners, we will expose the impacts of corporate activities and advocate for implementation of relevant normative frameworks, such as **human rights due diligence**, to prevent human rights and environmental abuses.

Of course many conflicts—whether national or local in scale—are closely, if not directly, connected to competition for unsustainable energy sources, including increasingly precious fossil fuels and hydropower. Although renewable energy initiatives are steadily growing in Europe, investment and promotion of massive hydroelectric dams and coal-fired power plants continues unabated in the South. SOMO will investigate **the drivers behind these large-scale destructive energy and infrastructure projects**, including the companies involved in construction, engineering, mining, trade, and finance that contribute to and benefit from such projects. With solid evidence and analyses of systematic abuses in hand, we will push Dutch and European policymakers to improve regulation and oversight of corporations involved in irresponsible energy projects abroad. Moreover, we will continue to press the Dutch government to require transparency and accountability throughout Dutch energy supply chains.

Going forward, SOMO will devote more attention to development of alternatives to the resource intensive energy system. We will investigate the impacts of the **renewable energy sector**—both its effect on the traditional energy system and major energy corporations, as well as adverse impacts related to lithium mining. SOMO seeks to identify windows of opportunity and pressure points for enabling a transition towards more democratic systems of energy provision based on the sustainable use of natural resources.

The four key issues of SOMO



Economic justice

Increase public and political pressure to end harmful tax regimes and move towards a system of fair taxation

Expose the negative impacts of investment protection and arbitration and work to enhance the policy space in Southern countries for equitable and sustainable development

Raise awareness of harmful impact of financial companies and strengthen networks fighting for a financial sector that serves public interests

Fight the corporate capture of policymaking

Present the evidence that disproves neo-liberal ideology



Sustainable supply chains

Focus on garments, electronics, food and agriculture, and pharmaceutical sectors

Promote worker-led improvement mechanisms and instruments

Push for fair trading practices and decent work in supply chains of Europe's leading supermarkets

Support the global movement calling for a fair and sustainable agricultural and food system

Propose policy interventions that promote sustainable agriculture through positive investments

Improve the situation of migrant labourers and other vulnerable groups of workers in cooperation with partner organisations

Advocate for legally enforceable corporate accountability mechanisms

Promote democratic control over drug development by challenging the prevailing business model



Rights, remedy and accountability

Encourage the development of a binding international instrument on business and human rights

Support workers, communities, individuals, and CSOs in filing complaints to non-judicial grievance mechanisms to obtain remedy for corporate-related human rights and environmental abuses

Research the accessibility and effectiveness of non-judicial grievance mechanisms

Advocate for reforms that strengthen existing non-judicial grievance mechanisms and the creation of new mechanisms

Partner with organisations in the South to support affected communities with their complaints, sharing expertise and experiences on the use of non-judicial grievance mechanisms



Democratic control of natural resources

Focus on companies and financiers in the agribusiness, energy and extractives sectors

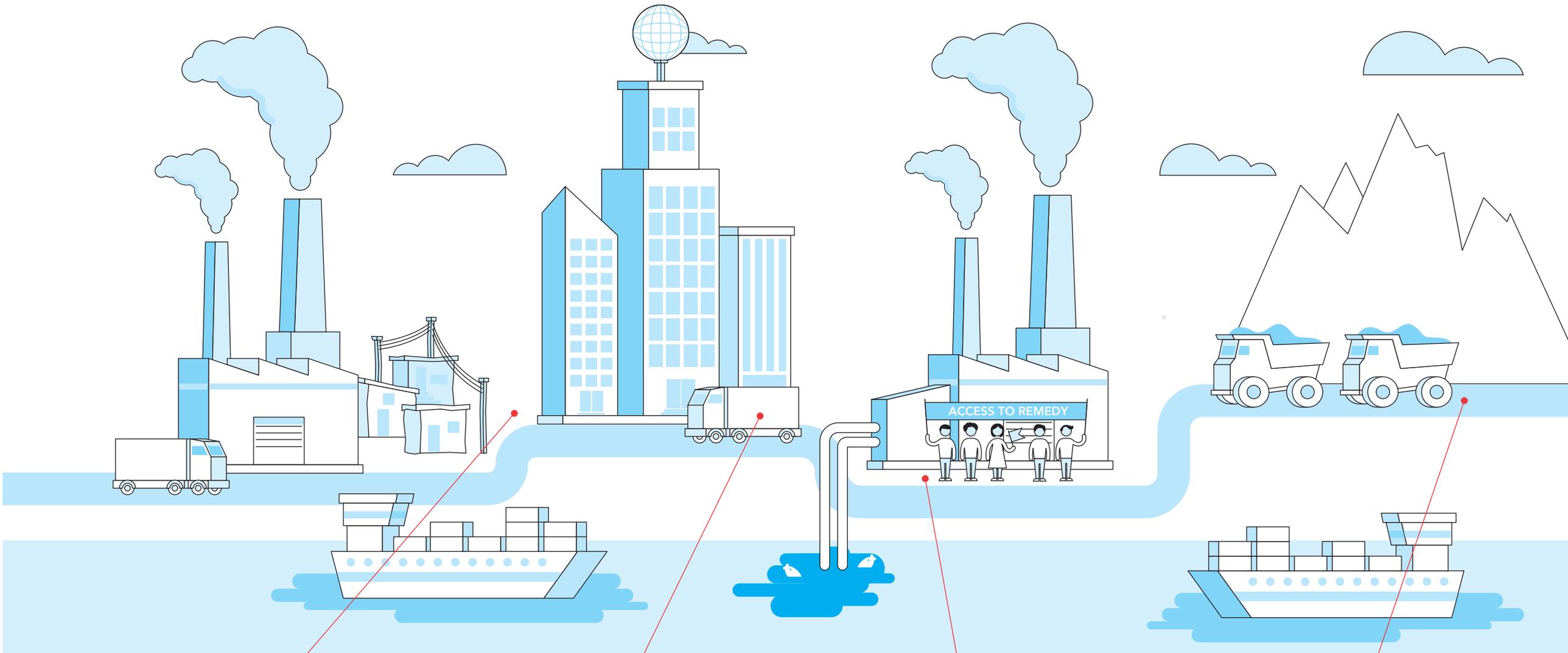
Support communities in claiming and defending rights to land and their right to participate in decision-making processes

Give special attention to the conduct of multinational corporations in conflict-affected areas

Investigate the drivers behind large-scale destructive energy and infrastructure projects

Investigate the impacts of the renewable energy sector

THE KEY ISSUES SOMO WORKS ON



ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Changing regulations for tax, trade, investment and finance for an equal distribution of power and welfare



SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAINS

Improving workers' right and sustainable production and consumption



RIGHTS, REMEDY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Improving corporate accountability and empowerment for access to justice



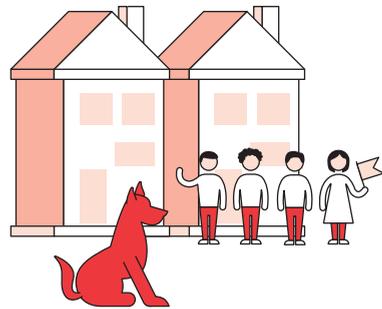
DEMOCRATIC CONTROL OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Building democratic control over land, extractives and natural resources (especially in conflict areas)

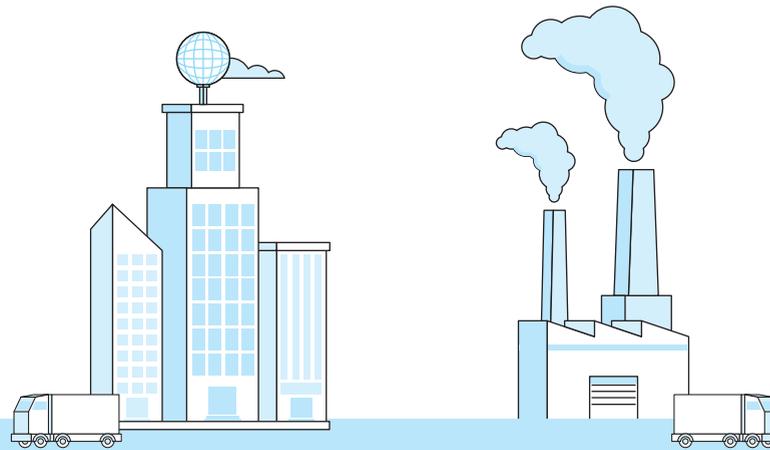
THE LEVELS SOMO WORKS ON



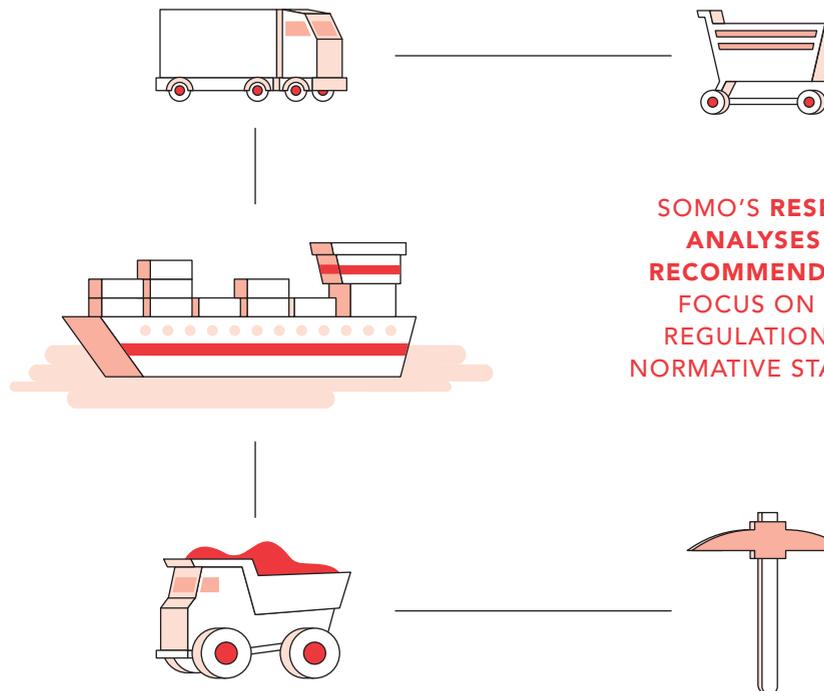
LOCAL LEVEL



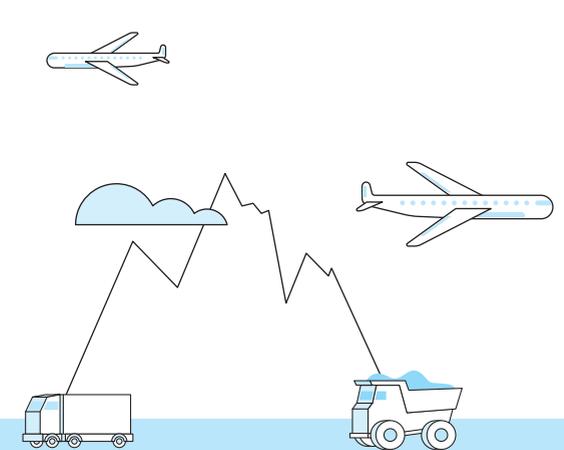
SOMO SUPPORTS COMMUNITIES AND SERVES AS A WATCHDOG



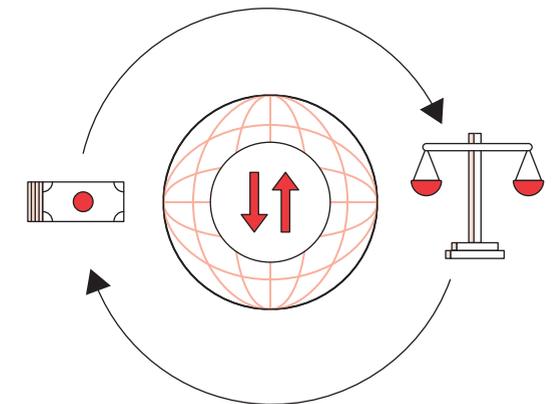
SUPPLY CHAIN & SECTOR LEVEL



SOMO'S RESEARCH, ANALYSES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOCUS ON BOTH REGULATIONS AND NORMATIVE STANDARDS



INTERNATIONAL LEVEL



SOMO FOCUSES ON REGULATION OF TAX, TRADE, INVESTMENT, FINANCE, TREATIES AND INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS OF CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY



Many of the world's poorest countries are rich in natural resources. In the absence of democratic control, these resources are being recklessly exploited, destroying local communities and ecosystems, threatening the health of the planet and contributing to the widening gap between rich and poor.

Strategies for change

Incisive research

Convoluting and quickly changing corporate structures make it difficult for people to identify who is responsible for the problems they face, let alone hold companies to account and obtain justice. Meanwhile, opaque decision-making, technical jargon, complex laws and regulations make it challenging to understand and tackle the structural causes behind major social problems, such as poverty and hunger.

Solid, reliable **research and analysis on corporations and the structures and systems within which they operate**—everything from corporate ownership structures and financial flows to supply chain dynamics to the role of corporations in tax regimes—is of critical importance for civil society. SOMO aims to build an evidence base that responds directly to the needs of social movements, with research designed and developed together with local partners.

Systems-based research on multinational corporations is at the core of SOMO's intervention strategies. To ensure that the highest quality research is embedded in all of SOMO's work and to support civil society in the broadest way possible, SOMO employs

a team of corporate research specialists. The corporate research team advises and assists SOMO's thematic researchers, while also providing independent **professional services on demand** to public interest groups and public institutions worldwide. SOMO provides clients with the facts and analysis they need to be effective in pursuit of their own strategies and goals, so they can make informed and strategic decisions about dialogues, campaigns, and partnerships involving companies.

NEW AND INNOVATIVE METHODOLOGIES

In the next five years SOMO will develop the quality and innovativeness of research methods and techniques. We will work to build an alternative body of knowledge that both

supports the need for change and identifies the route forward. To accomplish this task, SOMO will identify, understand, and analyse new sets of data and develop and employ new research methods and techniques. We aim to maintain our reputation as a centre of methodological expertise on corporate research, and to share this expertise as widely as possible.

SOMO recognises that innovation is a continuous process. We have successfully applied new methods and made use of new data in the past, but there is a need to embed innovation in our research to ensure that newly available sources and methods are used to their full potential. We must be more flexible and agile in responding to research opportunities—and risks—related to developments in ICT. A top priority will be to develop experience using **big data sets**, determining how they can best be accessed and analysed to answer our research questions. SOMO also seeks to put **geographical information system** (GIS) technology to use to process spatial and geographical data relevant to our research.

SOMO recognises great untapped potential in making use of **government data**. Such data can be extremely valuable for planned research, as well as for signalling new research directions and needs. To use such data optimally and ensure that relevant information is at hand at the start of new projects, we will integrate the writing of freedom of information requests into our research workflows. We also aim to make use of **leaked information**, which can be a valuable source of information about social injustice or opaque and undemocratic policy processes. To that end, SOMO will continue to participate in **PubLeaks**, an online system that enables whistle-blowers to upload relevant material anonymously and to forward it in a technically irreducible manner to journalists and researchers.

SOMO will also explore the use of **forensic accounting** and other methodologies for investigating capital structures and ownership, building on our recent research success in identifying the most important financiers in key sectors, along with their equity and debt, including bonds and loans. Methodologies for researching **competitive strategy**—which can be used to interpret the impact of specific corporate strategies on human rights and the environment—will also be further developed. Finally, we will enhance and diversify our data collection skills by making better use of questionnaires and honing our interview techniques.

U-SOMO: INCREASED COOPERATION WITH UNIVERSITIES

As an independent research-driven organisation, SOMO is positioned between academic institutions and civil society organisations. In 2016-2020 we will pursue opportunities to strengthen our **relationships with universities** for mutual benefit. The goals of the “U-SOMO” initiative are to influence future leaders and the academic debate; to share knowledge and insights; and to have a joint impact toward sustainable change. SOMO also aspires to improve the quality and presentation of our research, incorporating more academic input in our work and publishing in academic journals.

As part of the U-SOMO initiative, we will actively recruit promising university students for internships and conduct targeted outreach, such as participation in university lectures and in academic courses. We will devote more energy to identifying and pursuing collaborative research projects and funding with academics, and proactively exchange information via academic networks and other academic forums.

Mutual capacity building

Building capacity among civil society to understand and effectively tackle the harmful strategies and practices of multinational corporations is essential. SOMO works with thematically and geographically diverse organisations—trade unions, civil society organisations, and social movements—to develop capacities to research, to access remedy, and to lobby and advocate for practices, laws, and policies that are based on and promote democratic, participatory decision-making, justice, and sustainability.

SOMO believes that learning and strengthened capacities are **facilitated by and fostered through the act of cooperation**—working together with partners and allies on research, developing a shared strategy, agreeing on jointly supported policy recommendations. Capacity building isn't one directional, but mutual, and it cuts across all of SOMO's intervention strategies. In this new strategic plan period, SOMO's approach to capacity building will fully reflect this belief.

We aim to establish **strategic partnerships with a set of civil society organisations** to conduct joint research, implement follow-up strategies, and agree on learning trajectories to operationalise mutual capacity development. Comprehensive strategic planning and continuous alignment will be a key part of the cooperation and will help ensure continued relevance of SOMO's work for civil society internationally. Within these partnerships, joint identification of goals, equality, reciprocity, and joint learning will have a central place: a good understanding of and due respect for the existing capabilities and capacity development processes is key to effective mutual capacity building.

In 2016-2020 we will enhance and further develop methods and tools for conducting seminars, skills transfer, access to knowledge, and joint resource mobilisation with partners. Recognising the increased risks that many of our partners face, in the coming years SOMO will participate in efforts to build capacity to **ensure the safety and security of partners** and other human rights defenders against risks and retaliation in relation to activities done in cooperation with SOMO. Moreover, the issue of **enforcement power** will feature more centrally in our capacity building activities, including trainings and our work on cases.

In addition to mutual capacity building activities with partners, SOMO provides **training and consulting services upon request** to civil society and public sector clients. The provision of professional services to such clients—whose strategies may be different from our own—provides us the opportunity to learn about and understand new perspectives, which we feed back into our own programme work.

Powerful networks

Learning together, thinking together, acting together: it is only through strengthened cooperation between all kinds of civil society actors from every corner of the globe that we can bring about the kind of change we envision. Such cooperation is made possible through active participation and facilitation of strong networks, a critical SOMO strategy.

SOMO has and will continue to play a key role in dozens of different networks—Dutch, European and international—each focused on a particular goal or target group. By engaging in networks, SOMO seeks to effectively **disseminate its specialised knowledge and insights, and stimulate civil society collaboration and action**, such as campaigning, lobbying and advocacy. Moreover, SOMO benefits from new contacts and relationships with a broad field of actors who inspire us to think in new ways and make new connections.

In 2016-2020 SOMO will continue to **host and facilitate** three vitally important networks:

- MVO Platform, a coalition of Dutch unions and organisations working to promote corporate social responsibility
- OECD Watch, an international network whose members are committed to improving corporate accountability mechanisms, with a focus on the OECD Guidelines for Multi-national Enterprises
- Good Electronics, an international network of organisations seeking to improve protection and respect for human rights and the environment in the electronics industry

As a network host, SOMO promotes the exchange of information and collaboration among members. SOMO maintains the networks' websites, publishes their newsletters, and responds to requests for information about the networks' specific activities. While the network coordinators are housed at SOMO, the networks are autonomous: each has its own system of governance and decision-making. SOMO contributes to these processes on an equal footing with other network members.

SOMO will also continue to **play leadership roles and participate as a member** in other key networks and alliances. These include several **formal multi-year partnerships** with network allies and partners on jointly funded projects. From 2016 to 2020, for example, SOMO will work closely with Oxfam Novib and members of the Fair Green and Global Alliance (Both ENDS, the Clean Clothes Campaign, Milieudefensie, Action Aid Netherlands, and the Transnational Institute) in strategic partnerships with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

SOMO values the opportunity to work closely with allies and partners in formal partnerships. We are committed to actively pursuing these opportunities in the coming years, taking the initiative to coordinate proposals and serving as lead applicant when appropriate.

SELECTION OF KEY NETWORKS/ ALLIANCES IN WHICH SOMO PARTICIPATES

NETHERLANDS

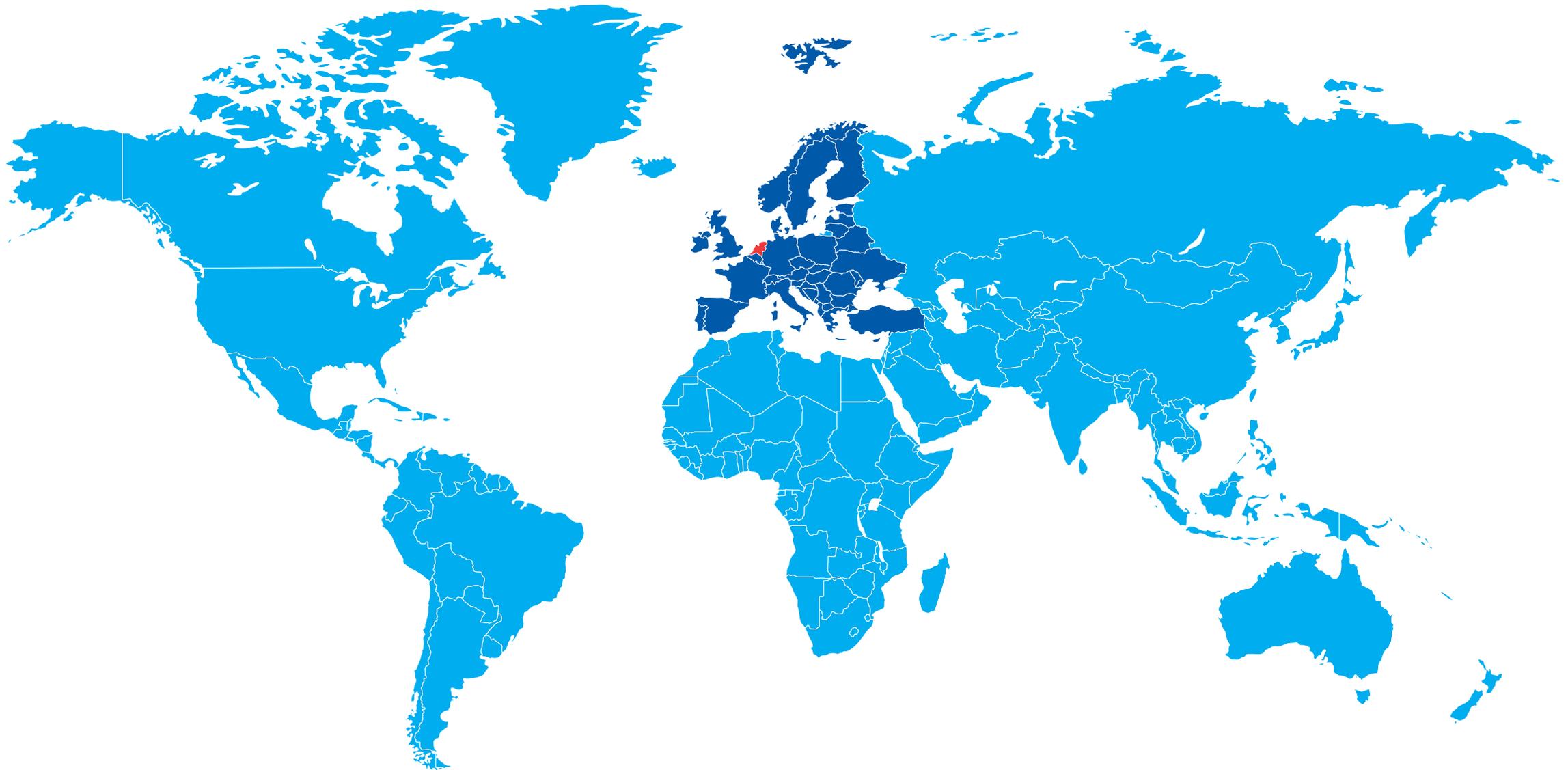
- Clean Clothes Network
- Fair, Green, and Global Alliance
- MVO Platform
- Tax Justice Netherlands

EUROPEAN

- Eurodad
- EuroIFI Network
- European Coalition for Corporate Justice
- EU-NGO Network for Conflict Minerals
- Seattle to Brussels Network
- Supply Challenge Consortium

GLOBAL

- Agribusiness Accountability Initiative
- Global Alliance for Tax Justice
- Global Union Research Network
- Good Electronics
- International Advocates Working Group
- OECD Watch
- Treaty Alliance



Persuasive lobbying and advocacy

The world we envision and the transition toward it will be shaped by new laws, regulations, policies, and practices at all levels of society. Lobbying and advocacy by civil society actors can help make clear to decision-makers—from regulators to ministers to members of parliament—what exactly is needed and why.

In the coming five years SOMO will work in close cooperation with network partners in support of efforts to influence decision-makers and secure the changes we seek. SOMO primarily influences policy indirectly as a **contributor to joint lobbying and advocacy** by the networks to which we belong and by **facilitating participation of Southern partners** in policymaking forums. SOMO adds value to these collective lobbying and advocacy efforts through research and analysis, helping to formulate and substantiate jointly agreed recommendations.

Alongside of this, SOMO **engages with decision-makers directly in our role as experts** on a specific topic. To maximise the reach and impact of our lobbying efforts (while also promoting transparency), SOMO will publish all lobbying communications on our website. We will also work to ensure coherence within the organisation by appointing a lobby coordinator and a member of the management team to oversee lobbying across SOMO's different teams and areas of work.

Outreach for understanding

In their roles as both citizens and consumers, the public needs to know and understand how corporate conduct and the features of the current economic system—from open markets and free floating capital to deregulation and privatisation—affect ordinary people and societies the world over.

Outreach has featured increasingly in SOMO's work in recent years: we have had considerable success in raising awareness in the Netherlands about key issues that we work on—global economic inequality, dangerous working conditions in the garment industry, and corporate tax avoidance to name a few. SOMO's strength is in rendering **complex and technical research and analysis into accessible information that inspires action**.

In 2016-2020 we aim to build on this strength, significantly **expanding dissemination of research results and analysis** to specific target groups, including other civil society organisations, opinion leaders, academics, policy-makers, and the media. With this goal in mind, we will integrate strategic communications planning into the entire research process, including identification of target audiences and media outlets with whom results will ultimately be shared at the research development stage. Throughout the research process, we will cooperate closely with movements and organisations that specialise in campaigning and mobilising. We will do our part to inform, raise awareness, and inspire people to act; they will channel that energy, mobilising citizens and consumers to demand change.

SOMO will continue to **experiment with and make use of a variety of communications methods**—video, infographics, storytelling, and other innovative techniques—to ensure that research is presented appropriately for specific target groups. Interpreting and presenting data for a lay audience is one of our top priorities in the coming years, which will surely require us to explore new presentation techniques.

In 2016 we will launch a **state-of-the-art, dynamic website** designed to enhance accessibility of information and to reach our diverse target groups more effectively. SOMO will intensify outreach to international media outlets with the aim of securing an equal distribution of media coverage in the Netherlands and internationally by 2020. To achieve this, SOMO staff will play an increasingly active role as personal conveyors of information to the public—writing opinion pieces, guest articles, and blog posts for external media outlets. We will also explore cooperation with investigative journalists, whose unique ability in presenting research in an engaging and understandable way make them a perfect match for SOMO.



Across the globe, people face enormous challenges in securing respect for their rights and receiving remedy for corporate-related abuses.

Strategies for a strong SOMO

SOMO's ambitions are unabashedly big: we want to generate critical knowledge and build strong connections that can empower civil society to reshape the world and the role of multinational corporations within it.

We want to create a new economic system based on justice, sustainability, and the fair distribution of power, where all people everywhere enjoy respect for their rights and livelihoods.

Our key issues and intervention strategies for 2016-2020 are clear: we know where and how we can make a difference. We also know that to put our plan into action, we need a stable, sustainable, and healthy organisation capable of learning and innovation: we need a strong SOMO.

Fortunately, SOMO is entering this new strategic plan period in an excellent state of organisational health. We have a proven record of achieving results, our governance and management systems function smoothly and reflect our commitment to participatory decision-making, and our finances are stable.

Yet we are always attentive to the possibility or the need to do things differently—more effectively, more efficiently, or more strategically.

Participatory governance

In the coming five years SOMO will continue to experiment and fine-tune our governance structure. SOMO is proud to have a system of organisational governance that is not only effective, but reflects the values and principles of the organisation, including participatory decision-making, transparency, and self-determination.

In SOMO's structure, expertise rather than hierarchy is the defining organising principle: those closest to the subject determine SOMO's positions and represent SOMO on the issues. This helps ensure that SOMO's recommendations are based on knowledge and thorough analysis, which is fostered by consultation and collaboration both within and across SOMO's self-led programme teams. SOMO's participatory approach to governance applies not only to thematic policies, but also to its overall strategies as an organisation.

This ties into an essential aspect of SOMO's management philosophy: the organisation is best guided by individuals who remain directly involved in implementing SOMO's strategies. SOMO's management team is comprised of the Managing Director and three members of various programme teams. The management team members carry out their management responsibilities alongside on-going involvement in research and other programme-related work activities.

In 2016-2020 SOMO's organisational structure will be further developed to promote participatory decision-making, effective cooperation, strong ownership of work and related responsibilities, and broad commitment to organisational development. The management team will focus on fostering learning and development in line with the new strategic plan. The team will be responsible for monitoring quality, and coaching and supervising staff members, as well as designing processes and structures for efficient collaboration, strategy development, and decision-making across the organisation.

Ensuring stability and sustainability

Ensuring the financial, social, and environmental sustainability of SOMO is of critical importance to achieving our objectives, and leading by example. We are very pleased to have been selected as a strategic partner by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in two consortia—one with Oxfam Novib and the other with the Fair, Green, and Global Alliance—for the duration of the strategic plan period, 2016-2020.

The partnerships, which focus on building lobbying and advocacy capacity among civil society organisations in low income countries, provide SOMO with new and exciting opportunities to work, as well as a solid funding base for 2016-2020.

SOMO's recent success in fundraising means that a significant portion of the income needed to implement this strategic plan effectively is already secure. Yet we recognise the need to **diversify our sources of income** and reduce the proportion of funding from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. After 2020, we will ensure that no more than half of our income comes from a single donor. Our primary

focus will be on raising funds from governments in Europe: we aim to secure at least 50% of our income from EU member states and the European Commission.

We will also invest in building relationships with private foundations in Europe and the United States with the goal of increasing funding from these sources to at least 15% of our budget. SOMO will also explore new funding opportunities through crowdfunding as well as strengthened collaboration with academic institutions as part of the U-SOMO initiative. Furthermore, we will implement a new, balanced contribution structure for the networks we host.

SOMO's provision of professional services to civil society organisations, labour unions, research institutes, and public institutions is another key element of our strategy for financial sustainability. In the period 2016-2020, SOMO aims to expand its external services significantly, reaching out to new clients from a broader geographic area. Fees from clients, both Dutch and international, should ultimately account for at least 20% of our income, providing SOMO with a solid source of undesignated income.

Ensuring the sustainability of SOMO also means being **attentive to the risks we face and taking steps to mitigate them**. SOMO seeks to continuously improve its policies and responses in relation to new risks, as well as changing expectations of accountability. For example, we aim to minimise the risks of **legal liability** by implementing review procedures for publications and research, obtaining legal advice when needed, and formalising our complaint mechanism.

We also recognise emerging threats in relation to **information and communication technology**. Access and sharing of information electronically poses risks to partners, who may be subject to surveillance. SOMO's strength as an independent research organisation, as well as the security of its data, may also be threatened if we fall behind in technological development. We will be attentive to these risks as we invest in ICT, choosing applications that mitigate such risks and ensuring that we develop our ICT skills appropriately.

SOMO and our partners everywhere are working in the context of shrinking political space for civil society and increased criminalisation of social activism. In response, SOMO will adapt our **safety and security guidelines**, and develop a safety training protocol and crisis management plan to deal with the increasing

risk to employees and partners in conducting research and implementing SOMO activities.

Accountability, transparency, social and environmental sustainability—they are fundamental not only to SOMO's mission, but also to the way we operate as an organisation. We are committed to **practicing what we propose**. As a watchdog organisation, SOMO takes seriously its responsibility to avoid causing undue harm in the work that we do: our review procedures for publications and research and our code of conduct are based on this principle. We will encourage other civil society organisations, such as partners and network members, to implement similar standards in their work. In 2016 SOMO will begin reporting in line with the IATI transparency standards. In addition to reporting on financial information, SOMO will report on Economic, Social and Governmental (ESG) results. An analysis of SOMO's procurement procedures and carbon emissions will be complete in 2016.

SOMO strives to use equipment and products that are produced fairly and sustainably, including recycled, and organic products, and open source software. The analysis will serve as a baseline for subsequent annual reporting on our progress toward a more **sustainable office**. Similarly, SOMO's financial reserves will be managed in a responsible way, according to our values. SOMO will only invest in banks and products that have strong corporate accountability ratings and do not conflict with the goals of SOMO. In common cause with the fossil fuel divestment movement, we aim to make our pension fund, PGGM, fossil free.

Fostering learning and development

As a knowledge-driven organisation, SOMO strives to embed learning in each and every thing that we do—learning about the issues we research, learning how we can best achieve our goals, learning new professional and personal skills.

With this goal in mind, we aim to put organisational **reflection and learning on a more equal footing with accountability**. We will adjust and broaden our approach to planning, monitoring, and evaluation (PME) so that it not only satisfies accountability to donors and other constituents, but also captures all types of results—including the intangible and unexpected—from which we can learn. The new PME approach should also stimulate ownership of PME activities at the programme or project level. Furthermore, SOMO seeks to improve our existing information management systems, starting with implementation in 2016 of a new document management system, SOMO's **new digital work space**. The new system will ensure that that communication, monitoring and steering at all organisational levels—individual, team, and management—are optimally supported. The digital work space will also enable staff to build workflows, thereby improving day-to-day planning.

In 2016–2020 SOMO will engage in joint learning processes with key allies and partners. We have developed **a learning agenda with our partners** in the Fair, Green and Global Alliance. The agenda is focused on four important issues of common interest: the development of alternatives to the dominant neo-liberal discourse and system, protection and support of human rights defenders, gender sensitivity of strategies and working methods, and approaches to effective mutual capacity building.

Our emphasis on learning is not only organisational, but individual. We will work to ensure that staff has the space and support they need to continuously develop their skills and knowledge. We will create a **learning environment for employees** through lunch lectures, in-house and external trainings or workshops to stimulate exchange of knowledge and skills between colleagues. We will also train employees to manage a healthy workload. This is particularly important given that the organisation aims to grow in impact, not in size: we will maintain focus on our core work, engaging external specialists and researchers for special tasks or projects.

Communicating who we are

SOMO strives to be recognised and known worldwide for all that it is and does. Our organisational communications strategy will focus on ensuring that target audiences understand the three different roles SOMO plays.

SOMO is already well known as an independent **knowledge centre**, driving analysis and pursuing our own strategies. In 2016–2020 we will work to ensure that our various audiences also recognise us as a **key player in national and global networks**, connected to diverse civil society actors—social movements, NGOs, and trade unions across the globe. In this capacity, SOMO can facilitate all kinds of connections, not just between people or organisations, but also information and ideas. Similarly, we will enhance awareness of SOMO's ability to **provide a wide variety of services on demand** to clients. We aim to ensure that organisations and institutions know they can call on SOMO to deliver custom-designed corporate-related research, training, analysis, and advice according to their needs.

Furthermore, we will work on establishing a more recognisable identity for SOMO. We want our target groups to **recognise SOMO as an independent, reliable, accurate, courageous, critical, movement-supportive, expert organisation that starts public debates**.

Of course effectively communicating who we are depends on effectively communicating what we know. We will shift from a focus on publicising individual research publications on a particular subject to broad **communication of SOMO's expertise and knowledge**. Achieving our outreach ambitions depends on ensuring that each and every SOMO researcher plays an active part in the development and execution of a communications strategy

around their field of research. To this end, SOMO's researchers will be supported with coaching and training to **enhance communications-related planning, skills, and effectiveness**. SOMO's power lies in the expertise of its professional staff and this is where we intend to shine the spotlight. Our new website, to be launched in 2016, will reflect this focus, as will other key outreach strategies.

The new website is part of a broader modernisation of SOMO's online communications, which also includes the new **digital work space** designed to enhance the organisation and accessibility of documents. One of the key goals of the digital work space is to facilitate partners' access to and ability to work on all types of documents relevant to their cooperation with SOMO—from grant contracts to drafts of joint publications to the SOMO research manual. The work space promises to make communication with partners at once easier, more efficient, and digitally secure.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-2020
EVIDENCE FOR EMPOWERMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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