

# Field Notes for transformation



**“In showing us just how vulnerable we humans are, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the urgency and necessity of resisting and changing corporate power and the deadly economic system it has driven.”**

PATTI LYNN | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## No going back: the joyful work of transforming our systems

### Dear friend,

So much has changed since I wrote the last “Field notes for transformation.” (I’ve loved reading the feedback to that letter, by the way, and I hope you keep sending in responses to these pieces.)

Today, I’m writing to you in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and I am hoping you and your loved ones are staying well. These last several months have been long, scary, and heartbreaking. For me, and I know for many of you, they have also been a time of deep reflection.

As the pandemic unfolds, we are witnessing the life-or-death consequences of the deep inequities in our society. It has become clearer than ever that the systems we live within are inhumane and unsustainable.

By catalyzing such clarity of vision, this moment has become, to use author and activist Arundhati Roy’s phrase, a “portal.” We are being forced “to break with the past”; we cannot go back. Instead, we must walk through the portal of this moment,

intent on creating deep transformation. We must take part in creating a more humane, just, liberatory, and life-sustaining future.

What does that look like? How do we get there? How do we embark on the joyful work of transforming our systems?

The truth is, we’ve already embarked on this work.

### Microcosms of a new future

When the pandemic hit, movements for social and economic justice, particularly those led by Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, women, and working people around the world, were ready to spring into action. Movements and organizations around the world crafted visions and demands for how to move through this crisis toward a different future. One such vision comes from the Global Campaign to Demand Climate Justice: “Our world has been forced into solidarity by a virus which ignores all borders; our deep interdependence has never been more undeniable.

In such a crisis rethinking and reimagining our economic model is inescapable. Resilient and justice-based solutions are not only possible, but the only real solution.”

In the U.S., within weeks, the federal government passed paid sick leave legislation, made possible by years of organizing by labor and workers rights groups. Mayors and governors declared moratoriums on water and electricity shutoffs, and we and our allies ensured more than a hundred members of Congress registered their support for a national moratorium.

Thousands of people in the U.S. and around the world have been released from prisons, thanks to decades of prison abolition organizing. In Nigeria, water justice and labor movements came together to expand solidarity and strengthen the voices calling on the Nigerian government to reject privatization in favor of publicly controlled water systems. In India, where people’s movements and organizations have long demanded the nationalization of all private health and education services, at least five states took all private health services and staff under government control.

And in neighborhoods around the world, people have come together around mutual aid societies: sharing what we can and getting the help we need. Many of this mutual aid organizing was launched and supported by trusted local grassroots organizations, such as the Asian American Resources Workshop, in my own neighborhood of Dorchester in Boston.

Ideas that seemed out of reach to many just weeks before—universal healthcare and basic income, an end to evictions, creating housing for people experiencing homelessness, and more—suddenly seemed both necessary and possible.

From neighborhood microcosms to congressional offices, people have been taking care of each other and crafting policies and practices that center people, our needs, and our humanity. We have been embodying—in our demands and our actions—the kind of future we want to live in.

But of course there have been plenty of people and corporate forces pushing in the opposite direction:

doubling down on the extractive economy and giving corporations and the people (mostly white men) who run them even more power and wealth. We see it in the billions of dollars in bailouts to corporations, in the Trump family’s profiteering from the crisis, in the widespread surveillance instituted by governments around the world in partnership with private corporations.

It is as clear an illustration as I’ve ever seen that transformation is not simply about building and embodying the world we want to live in—it is also about exposing, challenging, and curbing the power of those who have created the current conditions of the world. We cannot have one without the other.

### **A just transition**

I’m enclosing a graphic that I refer back to often these days, which shows exactly this: the “Just Transition Framework,” developed by Movement Generation with the Climate Justice Alliance.

Corporate Accountability’s campaigns exist primarily in the left side of this framework. We have our hands and hearts and minds deep in the gears of the extractive economy. We work every day with allies to gunk up those gears: organizing to end abuses of irresponsible and dangerous corporations and drawing down their power while lifting up and building people power.

Together, we stop the bad, for example, by preventing the privatization of water systems in the U.S. and in Africa. We and our allies divest from the power of corporations by not buying into their greenwashing, demanding that Big Polluters be made to pay for their role in the climate crisis, and exposing industry trade associations that influence government policy. And we and our allies change the rules to “draw down money and power” at the international level. We’ve set an international precedent with the global tobacco treaty, which prioritizes health over profit, and prevents Big Tobacco from having a seat at the policymaking table. And we are working in other international arenas like the U.N. climate treaty to similarly change the rules for Big Polluters.

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As a membership organization located in the U.S., we spark people power, engaging and activating people who want to be part of building new systems.

We do all of this so that the kind of care- and justice-based systems we have caught glimpses of in these last few months can take root. Systems like “deep democracy,” to use a phrase from the Just Transition Framework, defined by the Climate Justice Alliance as a system where “workers and communities have control over decisions that affect their daily lives,” rather than decisions being made under the influence of, and to further, corporate interests. Systems in which economic control is firmly in the hands of communities rather than extracted by transnational corporations, and in which indigenous communities have sovereignty and control of their lands. A society in which people are valued for who they are rather than what they produce or consume. A world in which nature is honored and sacred.

I believe that these last few months have shown us that it is entirely possible to create this kind of transformation. And that this must be the moment when we take an evolutionary leap forward. Author Ursula K. Le Guin once said, “Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings.” In showing us just how vulnerable we humans are, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the urgency and necessity of resisting and changing corporate power and the deadly economic system that corporations have driven.

Through your partnership with Corporate Accountability, you are playing a pivotal role in moving us toward transformation. I am honored to be in this moment with you. This, more than any other time in my lifetime and perhaps yours, is the time to come together to make decisions, take action, and work together toward creating the world we want to live in. Thank you for helping to make it possible.



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