



**THE EQUALITY
COLLECTIVE**

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

A zenith of systemic change



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BOARD



Megan Bryer
Rotating Chairperson
and Secretary



Yana Van Leeve
Interim Chairperson



Tess Peacock
Executive Director
and Founder



Rejane Woodroffe
Treasurer



Lunga Siyo
Board Member



**Hombakazi Mercy
Nqandeka**
Board Member



Phumla Hobe-Yabo
Board Member
(September 2024)



TEAM

Back row, from left to right: Sinovuyo Hlahla, Admin and Finance Clerk | Nkosinathi Matshini, Driver | Tshepo Mantjé, Right to ECD Coordinator | Tess Peacock, Director | Tinotenda Muringani, Research and Advocacy Officer

Front row, from left to right: Nomnikelo Dineka, Cleaner | Ncumisa Tshaya, Cleaner | Noluvo Mandukwini, Local Government and Paralegal Services Coordinator | Zoë Postman, Head of Communications for Social Change | Sibonelo Nongcula, Head of Programmes | Alana Potter, Head of Research and Advocacy



MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

2024 marked another year of meaningful growth for the Equality Collective as we strengthened our organisation and deepened our impact across the region. Celebrating almost five years of operation, we increased our budget by more than 50%—a final surge that signals the end of our start-up phase. As we move into 2025, a more moderate 30% growth trajectory reflects our transition toward long-term institutionalisation and organisational maturity.

This stability has allowed us to invest in people and systems. In 2024, we expanded our senior team by appointing a Head of Research and a Head of Programmes. Their leadership has enhanced our programme delivery, strengthened organisational resilience, and reduced dependence on the Executive Director. We also implemented a streamlined monitoring and evaluation framework and significantly improved our fundraising capabilities, securing new partnerships with Water Witness International and the Oppenheimer Memorial Trust while retaining our relationships with the Jim Joel Fund, the Solon Foundation, Ilifa Labantwana, the Tree of Life Foundation, the Raith Foundation, and the European Union. These relationships have broadened our funding base and strengthened our long-term sustainability.

Our team continued to grow as leaders. Staff participated in international platforms and fellowship opportunities, including Stockholm World Water Week and key local governance forums, elevating the Equality Collective's profile as a credible voice in both grassroots and systemic advocacy.

Alongside ongoing work on the Rights to Water and Early Childhood Development, 2024 demanded rapid response to emerging challenges. Rising violent crime in Xhora Mouth threatened community safety and well-being. In partnership with local residents, we supported community-driven safety initiatives that resulted in strengthened visible policing and the formation of a local Community Policing Forum, an important example of collective action driving tangible institutional response.

Looking ahead, 2025 is a year of consolidation and ambition. We will continue to strengthen our internal systems, deepen the impact of our core programmes, and scale innovations in community-based water governance as we expand to two new sites. Our vision remains clear: to ensure better governance through stronger, more active communities.

We remain deeply grateful to our staff, Board members, partners, and supporters who enable us to continue building a model of governance transformation deeply rooted in communities. It remains a privilege to do this work.

—Tess Peacock, Executive Director and Founder



ABOUT THE EQUALITY COLLECTIVE



The Equality Collective is an activist, community-embedded law organisation based in Mbhashe Local Municipality (Mbhashe LM) in South Africa's rural Eastern Cape. We build and network power in support of advocacy campaigns for greater socio-economic equity based on extensive research and expert analysis.

MISSION

We are innovative in the advancement of access to justice, build the capacity and infrastructure for collective participation and action, and share research and learning to create a more just and caring society.

VISION

Our vision is to have thriving communities collectively participating in a just and caring society.

PEOPLE

Our work centres our communities and their lived struggles. We prioritise the needs of marginalised communities, especially women and children.

STRATEGY

We are working to achieve improved access to socio-economic rights; enhanced responsive governance and accountability; and a strong, more active citizenry.



THREE PILLARS OF WORK



Collective action and public participation

Strengthened collective action and awareness are advanced through supporting democratic role players, collective participation and action, and coordinating advocacy campaigns.



Access to justice

Access to justice is advanced by networking power, providing basic legal services, and providing training and support.



Research and learning

Evidence-informed action is advanced through research, service delivery monitoring, and producing community data for advocacy.

THREE STREAMS OF WORK



Access to Justice



Right to Water and Local Government



Right to Early Childhood Development

TWO CAMPAIGNS



Amanzi Kumntu Wonke/ Sophakama



Real Reform for Early Childhood Development



HIGHLIGHTS

ACCESS TO JUSTICE



Catalysed provincial and national responses to increasing violent crime in Xhora Mouth, including a mobile police station, police patrol, and training for our Community Policing Forum, among others, by helping to mobilise over 350 residents in a march to the Elliotdale Police Station.



Expanded our advocacy to meet the needs of our community, including advocacy around roads, Free Basic Electricity, and voter registration.



Anchored our rural paralegal services work within a national movement by being admitted to the Community Advice Offices South Africa (CAOSA) network.



Brought legal rights education to Bulungula Community Radio (BCR) listeners by launching Masithethe Ngomthetho, our first community legal radio show.



Laid the foundation for realising a culture of safety and non-violence by expanding our gender-based violence (GBV) work five-fold to reach 526 participants across schools and communities, partnering with national organisations and local leaders.



Elevated local experiences from Mbhashe LM to an international human rights platform by representing rural South Africa at a United Nations (UN)–Dullah Omar Institute symposium.

RIGHT TO WATER AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT



Through our sustained community-municipal water partnership, witnessed a notable improvement in water reliability, with water being available at a record-high 99% of our rural bulk water scheme's (Mncwasa) reservoirs on a given day in November 2024, compared to 54% in January 2024.



Elevated our rural community action on an international platform at Stockholm World Water Week in an online session focussing on the role of community monitoring in enhancing municipal accountability and yielding tangible improvements in water services.



Began rolling out Sophakama, an action co-funded by a multi-year European Union grant, that aims to foster local government accountability and improve service delivery for rural communities, beyond Mncwasa to include rural bulk water schemes serving Centane and Dwesa in the Eastern Cape, engaging over 300 people in the process.



RIGHT TO ECD



Ensured early childhood development (ECD) remained relevant in the political discourse ahead of the 2024 elections, by helping launch the ECD Manifesto and organising an ECD Manifesto march, where over 600 ECD practitioners, parents, caregivers, and others marched to the Constitutional Court demanding that ECD be made a political priority.



Mobilised over 100 endorsements within a week through the #MakeTheBillBetter campaign, keeping national pressure on policymakers for ECD legislative reform.



Helped organise, together with the Real Reform for ECD (RR4ECD) Steering Committee, a protest outside the Department of Basic Education (DBE) offices in Pretoria, attended by over 200 ECD practitioners, to call on the DBE to table the Children's Amendment Bill before Parliament, increase the ECD subsidy, and implement an ECD nutrition pilot.



Began laying the foundation for legal recognition of the right to ECD by developing a draft Right to ECD legal framework.



Increased public discourse and awareness on the importance of ECD by facilitating RR4ECD's media appearances, reaching close to 200 media appearances for 2024 in radio, television, print, and online media.



2024: A ZENITH OF SYSTEMIC CHANGE

When the Equality Collective was born in 2020, our aim was to confront the deeper structural issues that sustain inequality and indignity in the lives of poor and vulnerable communities, rather than merely responding to the symptoms. Our vision has always been rooted in justice and equity for all, particularly for communities that have been historically and systematically oppressed and disadvantaged.

Our imagining of systemic change that would turn socio-economic rights into realities for our communities would necessitate a transformation of the underlying structures, policies, relationships, and mindsets that have led to the gap between the rights promised in our Constitution and the lived realities of our communities.

This systemic change, as we imagined it, was to be achieved by the Equality Collective being at the nexus of community-led action and experience, and legal and policy reform. Sitting at this nexus would allow us to influence legal and policy reforms, through our network of technical and legal expertise, that were rooted in the vision, needs, and lived experience of our communities. Nothing for our communities, without our communities.

Over the last five years, we have seen this vision bear fruit in tangible and fulfilling ways, with the year 2024—an election year—being a zenith. 2024 illustrated that the nexus of local action and legislative and policy reform is where the potential for transformation is strongest.



ACCESS TO JUSTICE

BRINGING JUSTICE CLOSER TO RURAL COMMUNITIES

PARALEGAL SERVICES

Umthetho Tuesdays, our weekly paralegal service which seeks to meet the immediate legal needs of our rural communities, assisted 170 community members with their varied unemployment insurance, provident fund, and inheritance claims. This amounted to about R501,218 in provident funds unlocked for three community members in 2024. Our paralegal outreach days in villages such as Manzibomvu and Tshezi further brought legal support within reach for about 184 rural residents.



Through Umthetho Tuesdays, the Equality Collective was formally admitted to Community Advice Offices South Africa, a national coordinating body of the Community Advice Office sector in South Africa. This marked a milestone in institutionalising our work within a national movement in which we could elevate experiences and learnings from our rural context to a national level.

From this deeply embedded work in our rural communities, the legal knowledge gaps became clear, and we responded by launching our first-ever legal advice radio show, Masithethe Ngomthetho. The show hosts conversations on gender-based violence, labour rights, and health law for isiXhosa listeners tuned into Bulungula Community Radio.

Our [participation](#) in the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Dullah Omar Institute symposium at the University of the Western Cape on 'Documentation as a Gateway to Dignity and Human Rights', in which we spoke to the challenges of rural communities accessing documentation, placed local insights from Mbashe LM on an international policy stage.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Between 26 and 30 August 2024, the Equality Collective partnered with the Centre for Applied Legal Studies, Gender Rights in Tech (GRIT), Masimanyane Women's Support Centre, and the Women Ikhwelo Network to deliver an expanded series of [GBV workshops](#) in Xhora Mouth. In 2024, we reached 526 community members, up from 114 in 2023, through four school workshops and two community sessions.



The sessions focused on gender sensitivity, bullying, consent between learners and teachers, rape reporting, and community action and introduced participants to the GRIT app, which helps survivors apply for protection orders.

Local leaders—including ward councillors and our traditional leader—supported the initiative, ensuring credibility and strong community participation. Feedback from participants called for sustained engagement, particularly through the creation of community forums and school-based initiatives to strengthen prevention and accountability. In response, we committed to building parent and leader capacity for non-violent conflict resolution and fostering a sustained culture of safety and non-violence.



COMMUNITY SAFETY AND POLICING

In response to a rise in violent crimes, including assaults, kidnappings, and extortion, across the Wild Coast, the Equality Collective played a pivotal role in facilitating a [march](#) to Elliotdale Police Station on 5 September 2024.

By supporting the mobilisation of over 350 residents from Xhorha Mouth villages, we helped channel fear and frustration into organised community action. We provided critical logistical and legal support by drafting the notice of gathering, assisting community leaders to develop a Memorandum of Demands, and coordinating transport, media engagement, and safety planning. The Memorandum—endorsed by traditional authorities, ward councillors, civil society organisations, and local businesses—demanded concrete reforms, including the fast-tracking of the Tafalehashe Police Station, a satellite police base in Folokhwe Village, regular patrols in Nqileni Village, and the arrest of perpetrators behind the attacks.



The march marked the first time Xhora Mouth communities collectively mobilised at this scale to hold the state accountable for safety and justice, drawing national attention through coverage in the [Daily Dispatch](#), [Carte Blanche](#), and [Daily Maverick](#).

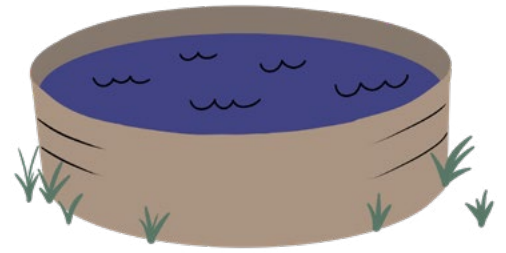
Its impact extended beyond the day of protest: the South African Police Service subsequently committed to fast-tracking the Tafalehashe Police Station, and it deployed a mobile station as well as weekly patrols and supported the formation of Community Policing Forums across four villages. Through this coordinated activism, the Equality Collective helped transform community outrage into constructive action: a critical step toward systemic change that embeds community oversight, strengthens state responsiveness, and begins to address rural policing along the Wild Coast.



RIGHT TO WATER

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AS A GOVERNANCE TOOL

In our Right to Water community monitoring work (Amanzi Kumntu Wonke), we saw a notable improvement in water reliability in our communities. In November 2024, water was available at 99% of Mncwasa’s reservoirs on a given day in the month, compared to 54% in January 2024, and 12% in October 2022—the year we first started monitoring the Scheme.



A crucial component of this improvement are our 32 Water Ambassadors who monitor the Scheme. They report any leaks or damage to the Scheme to us on a daily basis, and we collate this data into daily, weekly, and monthly water reports that we share with Amathole District Municipality (Amathole DM), our water services authority; and with our community on Bulungula Community Radio and on a WhatsApp group, where Water Ambassadors, community leaders, and municipal officials interact constructively and where issues are responded to in real time.

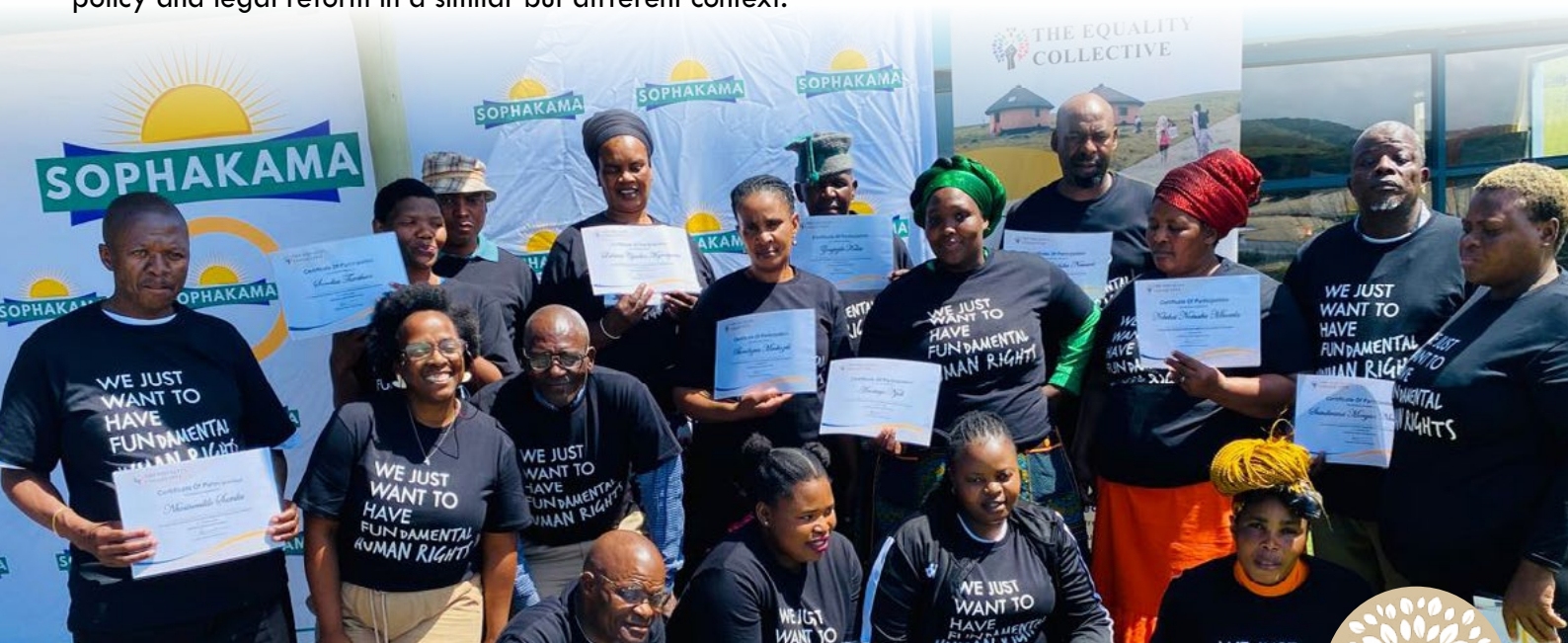
Equally as important as community monitoring has been our support to Amathole DM, which has helped the municipality to secure over R21.5 million in public investment to refurbish the Scheme.

This potential community–municipal water partnership model demonstrates that community-generated data, along with proper resourcing of the problem, can drive municipal responsiveness and result in an improvement of water provision in rural communities.

We further elevated this work to a global platform, on 29 August 2024, where we partnered with Water Witness International, Tanzania’s Shahidi Wa Maji, and Viva con Agua South Africa, in an online Stockholm World Water Week session focusing on community-driven action to influence systemic change in marginalised communities. It centred on Water Ambassadors in Amanzi Kumntu Wonke and water champions in Shahidi Wa Maji, and their role in monitoring for accountability, with this yielding tangible improvements in water services.

Building on our potential community–municipal water partnership model, we collaborated with other rural justice organisations in Kwa-Zulu Natal, Mpumalanga, North West, and Eastern Cape. We formed a consortium that successfully secured European Union co-funding for a joint initiative—Sophakama. Through Sophakama, we expanded our work into two additional areas, Centane and Dwesa, both serviced by rural bulk water schemes.

This marked a powerful evolution of our Right to Water work, one that deepened our systems change approach by connecting community-led monitoring with local government reform in two new areas. It also presented an opportunity to test our constructive advocacy model that bridges the gap between grassroots experiences and policy and legal reform in a similar but different context.



RIGHT TO ECD

GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY SHAPES NATIONAL REFORMS

In 2024, the Real Reform for ECD movement, in which we serve as the Secretariat, significantly shifted the national conversation on ECD. Beginning the year with renewed energy, RR4ECD expanded its reach to over 1,000 ECD practitioners across eight municipalities in six provinces, supported by 310 organisations. This demonstrates a truly representative and grassroots movement.



ECD MANIFESTO



The [launch](#) of the ECD Manifesto on 20 April 2024 was a defining moment. Over 600 ECD practitioners, parents, caregivers, and civil society organisations, among others, marched to the Constitutional Court calling for ECD to be made a political priority ahead of the 2024 elections. This action was supported by about 6,000 signatures and 170 organisational endorsements, as well as political party endorsements by ActionSA, Rise Mzansi and Democratic Alliance on a [petition](#). This transformed the call into a national campaign. The message was clear: 'A party for the children is a party for the future'. Through public mobilisation, petitions, engagements with political parties, and over 50 media appearances, our call to action was heard far and wide.

CHILDREN'S AMENDMENT BILL

The [#MakeTheBillBetter](#) campaign sustained national pressure on the Department of Basic Education to advance the Children's Amendment Bill, which proposes a simplified registration process for ECD centres, recognition of diverse ECD programmes, and strengthened municipal accountability for ECD. We coordinated over [100 endorsements](#) for the campaign's submission on the Bill within a week—a testament to the movement's reach and organising power—and maintained pressure through protest, submissions, and direct engagement with policymakers for the tabling of the Bill in Parliament.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT CAMPAIGN

The Make Local Government Work for ECD campaign deepened local governance reform through establishing technical task teams for ECD in uPhongolo, Rustenburg, and Breede Valley municipalities. Real Reform for ECD previously signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Breede Valley Municipality, in 2023, to work together in good faith to ensure an enabling policy and regulatory environment for the provision and expansion of ECD services. This resulted in the municipality's 2024 Integrated Development Plan (IDP) meaningfully addressing ECD.



RIGHT TO NUTRITION CAMPAIGN

In 2024, RR4ECD engaged the Department of Basic Education on plans to roll out a national nutrition programme for early learning programmes, initially envisioned as a pilot providing daily nutritious meals to young children in early learning programmes. When the DBE linked this programme to the National School Nutrition Programme and issued a centralised [R10 billion tender](#), RR4ECD raised concerns about the lack of transparency and potential inefficiency.

We mobilised collective advocacy and legal pressure by issuing a legal letter, running a public petition, and releasing a widely covered [media statement](#) commending the intent but challenging the flawed design and lack of transparency. We called for an accountable, evidence-based pilot that could test alternative delivery models rooted in community realities. Following collective public pressure, the tender was [withdrawn](#).



RIGHT TO ECD LEGAL FRAMEWORK

In parallel to our grassroots action, we laid the groundwork for legal reform, helping steer the movement toward a broader right to ECD framework. This emerging [draft legal framework](#) expands the right to ECD into an integrated vision that encompasses the rights to nutrition, sanitation, water, electricity, and play. It lays the foundation for a potential stand-alone Right to ECD Act, informed by comparative research and aimed at strengthening municipal and state accountability for young children's holistic well-being.



CONCLUSION: THE ROAD AHEAD

In 2024, it became clear that when grassroots advocacy, and policy and legal influence intersect, we begin to see milestones towards systemic change. By sitting at that unique nexus, we are helping turn socio-economic rights into lived realities for our communities. Through the courage and resistance of our communities to accepting the status quo, we have seen how collective action can transform not just laws and policies, but the very way our leaders listen and respond. The Equality Collective's role has been to accompany our communities, helping to turn lived experience into evidence, advocacy, and reform.

As we look to the future, we remain committed to walking the journey alongside our communities and ensuring that the changes we advocate for are rooted in the realities of the people we serve—and realised.



ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Income statement for the period 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024

Income	R6,803,940
Less Operating Expenses	R5,592,404
Net Surplus	R1,211,536

Balance sheet as at 31 December 2024

ASSETS

Current Assets

Cash and Cash Equivalents	R3,062,447
Total Assets	R3,062,447

RESERVES AND LIABILITIES

Total Reserves	R1,916,604
Accumulated Fund	R1,211,536
Sustainability Fund	R705,068

Non Current Liabilities -

Total Current Liabilities	R1,145,843
Grant Receipts in Advance	R1,104,687
Trade and Other Payables	R41,156

Total Reserves and Liabilities R3,062,447



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