

ALIGNING DEMANDS FOR A JUST RECOVERY

LEARNING FROM OUR COMMUNITY JUNE 2021

WHAT DID WE DO?

In late June, the Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) organized two community calls with partners and allies from across the social, economic, and environmental justice movements on mobilizing for rights-based economic transformation in the wake of COVID-19. More than 30 people joined the two calls—a diverse group of activists and advocates from around the world, whose works spans a range of issues from the local to global level. The idea was to **come together in a more informal way; to collectively reflect on shared challenges and opportunities; to explore synergies between our efforts; and to create space for more open conversations and spontaneous connections.**

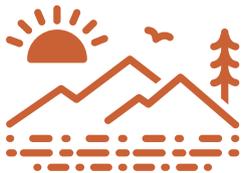
The calls were an opportunity to dig deeper into one of the challenges shared in the previous [calls](#) held in April: **how to frame—and show the connections between—our demands, striking a balance between pursuing more immediate wins and more transformative shifts, given the complex advocacy landscape we face.** The goal was to share insights about framing demands in the current political context, and explore ideas for how we can stay better engaged to advance common goals. We're so grateful to everyone who shared their wisdom on this topic so generously. Highlights from the discussion are summarized in this short reflection note.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

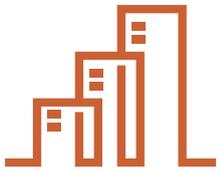
In the April calls, we heard about different ways groups were framing their demands for a just recovery: a green recovery, a feminist recovery, a rights-based recovery etc. A challenge raised in the discussion was how to use these more systemic framings in our campaigns. As a number of people highlighted, there can be tension when deciding to prioritize narrow, more “winnable” reforms, which are important for movement building, or broader transformative agendas, which can make a bigger difference. In reality, groups are often navigating between both. But this can lead to fragmentation and siloing. To avoid this, **we need ways of “crowding in”, not “crowding out” various demands being made by allied movements. How to do this was a key theme during these calls.**

WHAT WHAT ARE THE EXISTING CONNECTIONS AND GAPS IN OUR WORK?

To help us look for opportunities for synergy and alignment, we started by more systematically visibilizing existing connections; and identifying gaps, opportunities and pathways for building new ones. To collectively map out our work, we experimented with a framework adapted from [The Systems Sanctuary](#), which identifies multiple levels in a system:



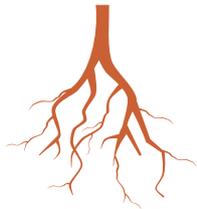
Landscape: shifts in narratives and in large economic, environmental, and cultural influences on society.



Regime: shifts in rules, norms, policies and institutions.



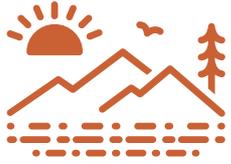
Niche: shifts through local and smaller-scale initiatives, collaborations, and innovations.



Deep roots: shifts through listening, valuing lived experience, deep relationship building, finding connections between communities, understanding intersectionality.

Participants were asked to plot their work on each of these levels, using sticky notes on a virtual board. In full group, we discussed: What patterns or interesting things do you see? What are you encouraged by? What are some useful questions to ask of the board? A summary of the virtual boards follows. After that, some key themes in the discussion follow.

BOARD 1*



Landscape

The economic system we want

Respect for human rights in economic and social policies

Shift in narrative on the role of the state vis a vis private sector in development

The public services we want

Economic development and economic and social rights for all

Debunking myths about fiscal policy that perpetuate inequality and injustice: shifting the narrative about resources and rights

Envisioning a rights-based economy

Working for a decolonial feminist global green new deal

Contrast pervasiveness of private finance in development, including ODA

Supporting community-led development visions to get more visibility

Challenging the idea that there is not alternative to our current economic / corporate system



Regime

The taxation regimes

Systemic economic solutions/ international financial architecture reforms at the UN

Source taxing rights

Scrutinize and influence the WB. Maximizing Finance for Development agenda

Better mechanisms of wealth distribution

Supporting debt relief and cancellation or restructuring

Reforms of global economic governance, including international debt architecture

Debt cancellation, international tax cooperation, moratorium on ISDS, democratizing global econ governance

Inclusion of human rights clauses in all transnational agreements

Putting human rights principles and standards into development world, especially regarding the impacts of Dev.Institutions.

Developing a new set of principles for human rights in fiscal policy in LatAm

Fight against economic policies and IMF programmes conducive to austerity

Supporting calls for debt relief

Champions for open and accountable public finance/gender responsive budgeting and equity in resource allocation and utilization

CLIMATE JUSTICE

Streamline climate justice and gender justice in development finance



Niche

Taxation of automated digital services, multilateral tax treaty updation

Using human rights tools to create alternatives to assess Covid-19 recovery polices from a rights perspective

Promoting human rights impact assessments as a way to influence economic policy debates

Promoting, piloting alternatives to dominant - and harmful - corporate forms

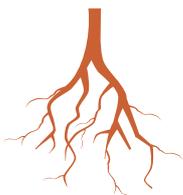
USING HUMAN RIGHTS AS A BASIS/ GROUNDING

Importance of grass-roots and civil society initiatives. Intersectional, feminist, and 'minority sensitive' perspectives

Refocus innovations at local/city level (rf financialization for example)

Linking agendas and expertise & experiences

Advancing alternative economic models



Deep roots

Desire to pay taxes by MNEs and High Net Worth Individuals

Deepening work with indigenous and afro-descendant communities in Latin America to understand how fiscal responses to COVID impact their rights and realities

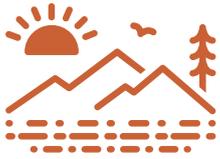
Diversifying voices in the public eye

Feminist development justice

Challenging Capitalism as the dominant economic model

*Adapted from Miro board used during the call.

BOARD 2*



Landscape

Making more explicit the role of colonisation in the shaping of global economy - through our macro feminist analysis

Working with our allies to change the narrative on austerity, and for a just, anti-racist and feminist recovery

"Vaccine apartheid" - as wedge to shift narratives about global inequalities & skewed economic governance

Flagship on Inequalities in Times of Crisis

People's Recovery - new economic model focused on putting people first, and SMEs before corporates.

Rights-based economy

Pushing for community-led development

Highlighting the centrality of the care economy as part of Covid recovery



Regime

Different projects on policy reform etc.

Better mechanisms of wealth distribution

Beginning the slow process of introducing the concept of reparations within the UK gov't's Foreign Office

Influencing to avoid austerity policies. Also, implementation of debt treatments and access to liquidity from a systemic approach

Lobby for UNGPs to include tax / transparency at UNBT / UNBHR Forum. - linked to inadequate People's Recovery spending.

Applying rights to our macro policy proposals especially those associated with climate crisis

AA also working to influence IMF & end austerity - specific focus on public sector wage bills

Oxfam influencing the IMF to avoid another austerity push and for a just recovery

OPPOSING DIVERSION OF ODA TO SUBSIDIES FOR PRIVATE SECTOR (ESP. USING HUMAN RIGHTS ARGUMENTS)

Reforms of global economic governance, including international debt architecture

Influencing to avoid austerity policies. Also, implementation of debt treatments and access to liquidity from a systemic approach.

IEJ Series of Factsheets (with CESR and S27) on COVID-19 and rights in South Africa

Holding african governments accountable in their debt management for social outcomes

Targeting IMF to hold to account vis-a-vis its emerging climate commitments

UN Tax Committee and OECD; source taxation of MNE income from capital gains, royalties, digital services, etc.

Lobbying BO laws, and Minimum Global Corp Tax, Financial Transaction Taxes to 'pay for the crisis' in shifting economic rules

Submission to UNESCO on SA Concluding Observations

CESR's work on fiscal policy and human rights, particularly the Principles and Guidelines

Phenix Center holding the World Bank accountable to its interventions as part of the Arab Watch Coalition via reporting

CESR's work on fiscal policy and human rights, particularly the Principles and Guidelines



Niche

Exploring ways to facilitate members (NGOS) collaborating w social movements in MENA

ECONOMICS AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIRTUAL CONVENING BRINGING TOGETHER PRACTITIONERS TO CHANGE HOW WE THINK ABOUT INTERSECTIONS

UNRISD piloting a new network on a eco-social contract

Engaging in discussions over trade-offs, including timeframe, as perceived by differing communities on issues of rights, equality, climate and economic recovery

GATJ tax & gender working group, AMWA, GADN & NAWI framing feminist tax -justice

IDENTIFY WHAT IS A 'FISCAL SPACE' LINKING DEBT, IFI, AUSTERITY POLICIES THAT CONSTRAIN FISCAL DECISIONS.

Refocus innovations at local/city level (rf financialization for example)

Developing tools for assessing the impact of economic policies on human rights

Economics and Human Rights virtual convening bringing together HR practitioners and Economists to change how we think about the interesections

Tools for tracking human rights impacts of fiscal responses to COVID (CESR, but also FTC, Latindadd & others)

Work around safeguards

Promoting, piloting alternatives to dominant & harmful corporate forms



Deep roots

AA works with communities around lived experience and empowerment focusing on unpaid care work, gender responsive public services, tax justice and a feminist just transition

Research partners in GS stongly affected by pandemic

Community Resource Exchange: leveraging support for communities in need through collaborations

Demystifying rights concepts

Create a platform to find gender analysis / quantitative analysis of who benefits of recovery spending data for citizens interested in it

Phenix Center Participating in a community modeling assessment for health care needs post COVID

Learn from citizens about what they know about debt issues, what does that mean for them in their daily lves and impact it has

*Adapted from Miro board used during the call.

- **Deep roots:** there were comparatively few sticky notes at this level. **This is a gap.** Most people on the call are working globally. But there has been such a massive wave of movements during the past year. A useful question to ask is why we're not connecting better.
- **Niche:** it was encouraging to see the range of examples of modeling and piloting work, such as different corporate forms that prioritize workers, or mutual aid groups that have popped up during COVID-19. This can complement systems change work by showing what alternatives look like; **a way to combat the narrative that there are no alternatives to the dominant structure.**
- **Regime:** reforms to **tax and debt policies were a clear priority at this level**—both nationally and internationally. Demanding greater accountability from the international institutions that shape these policies, in particular the IMF and the World Bank, is a key way that groups are pushing for such reforms.
- **Across levels:** A key theme in the discussion was how work at the different levels in the framework relate to one another. **How can we look at the connections a little more systematically in the work we are all carrying out?** How can we build support among actors working at these different levels?
- Another thought-provoking question was **whether we're using the same approach we used after the Global Financial Crisis and, if so, whether we're making the same mistakes.** For example, a lot of inaccessible terms are being used in efforts to shift narratives. Do we use the dominant language to change what it means, or do we try to create new language? Are people doing work to popularize these new narratives? How can we bring more complex and diverse messages from local level into global conversations?

HOW DO WE BUILD GREATER ALIGNMENT?

Shifting from strategy to tactics, we also grappled with the questions: What does successful alignment across progressive movements look like? What obstacles are we up against in building alignment? What strategies might help overcome them? To answer these questions, we shared examples of (both successful and unsuccessful) efforts to gather cross-movement support for a particular policy ask or for broader reform agendas and reflected on what we could learn from them.

Key themes to emerge from this conversation included:

- The importance of having a **shared analysis of how systems of oppression operate**, coupled with a recognition of the challenges of facilitating this. A number of people described benefits of focusing on the structural drivers of oppression (such as racism, patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism), including as a way to: bring together diverse demands more easily; facilitate quicker reactions to advocacy openings; and take conservative partners in a more progressive direction. By contrast, others shared experiences of efforts to bring together groups with very different ideological perspectives, where a lot of things get “boiled down to a minimum shared consensus”. This might make it possible to get a longer list of signatories to endorse a set of demands. But it makes it harder to move forward and concretely shared things.

- How collective learning can help foster shared analysis. Several people commented on the **importance of continued listening and learning**. This helps “get the message out” across diverse movements that “our struggles are interlinked”, which is key for influencing the “outside world”. To do this, we need to build trust and shared knowledge. A starting point for that is recognizing that we can benefit from each other’s expertise.
- A specific example of this was how to **increase knowledge of human rights norms among tax officials**. The South Centre described hearing a Nigerian tax official using human rights arguments to push back against arbitration. While this was a story of success, it’s a fairly uncommon one. One idea for building this cross-disciplinary expertise could be for tax experts to put forward challenges they are facing and then for human rights experts to put forward suggestions for framing solutions in terms of governments’ obligations.
- The **combination of technical and lived expertise** was also flagged as particularly important. Social movement organizing is a critical factor in achieving change, because we need to build political force, not just elaborate policy reforms. That said, calls for economic justice can be inaccessible to the general public, making broad mobilizations difficult. The People’s Vaccine campaign for a TRIPS waiver was shared as a successful example. It shows the direct and immediate impact it would have to people’s lives; identifies a clear ‘bad guy’ to focus on; and demonstrates the innate urgency of the issue. The campaign for a global corporate minimum tax campaign was shared as example where it had been more of a struggle to connect with people’s immediate needs.
- One of the preconditions for combining technical and lived expertise is making sure to use **easily accessible language**. At times, it can be hard to do this in practice. One issue flagged is that sometimes it’s important that language persuade multiple audiences at once, including those who don’t take lived expertise seriously. There was interest in digging more into examples of this challenge and distilling learnings from efforts to overcome it.
- An additional struggle is in **bringing people together due to restrictions on in-person gatherings and the reliance on virtual meeting spaces**. In one example shared from Jordan, a rule to prevent spreading “misinformation” proved to be a big challenge in getting groups on the same page.
- Another area where we need to break down silos is **between activists from different generations. When activists from across generations come together, they can learn a lot from one another**. Campaigns on debt over the past year were highlighted as an example of this. These campaigns are bringing together many organizations that haven’t worked together before, reconvening and remobilizing expertise that was in the debt justice sector from previous campaigns.
- Having a focus on **intersectionality and root causes of an issue** can help all the different actors impacted by it to come together to fight. This is especially the case when it’s less clear who is benefiting from the status quo, who has the power to change it, and what the opportunities are to influence them. When there’s a demand that someone give up something, success is harder. Examples of this included:
 - Successful **campaigns for the IMF to issue Special Drawing Rights**, compared to campaigns for debt relief, where there’s been much more resistance. The role of private creditors is something the debt justice movement work should work harder to verbalize, it was suggested.

- Successful **“naming and shaming” of pandemic profiteers, compared to the more difficult work of identifying a “baddie” in recovery efforts.** For example, there are numerous efforts to calculate where stimulus money is going: eg the People’s Recovery campaign found 63% of recovery money went to corporate actors (only 23% to social protection and less to 1% to the informal sector).
- Finally, it was noted that **it’s easier to organize against a common enemy or problem. But, it’s harder to build a propositional vision across movements.** There’s lots of attention being paid to alternatives to neoliberalism. There’s also increasing convergence between groups working on feminist economics/ tax and fiscal justice/ environmental justice. But visions of a just economic system that can exist within planetary bounds remain vaguer. An example shared, in this regard, was of a coalition working to build narrative around the kind of public services we want and should have, including around financing. Those involved were initially brought together around a negative agenda (i.e., challenging privatization). But they’re now working to put a collective vision forward. The narrative piece of this work was flagged as critical, or the positive vision risks sounding like a long “wish list”.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The feedback we received on the calls highlighted their **value in fostering peer-to-peer learning and allowing much-needed space for strategizing, which more conventional virtual gatherings rarely allow.** In particular, participants enjoyed meeting new people from different parts of the world; hearing their experiences, insights and ideas on a common theme; and making connections they might not otherwise have made. The methodology for the calls was seen as a key factor for this; it balanced formal and informal interactions and kept everyone engaged through different formats. That said, we heard some concrete suggestions for refining the methodology further, which we’ll take into account when we plan our next calls.

We’re so grateful, again, to everyone who shared their wisdom so generously. Our next calls are planned for September. These will dig deeper into—and brainstorm ways to address—some of the identified challenges in using human rights to frame demands for economic transformation. **Please stay tuned!**



CENTER FOR ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH HUMAN RIGHTS

