

Human Rights Centre Clinic

Rights-based economy

Partner: [Center for Economic and Social Rights \(CESR\)](#)

About

The Center for Economic and Social Rights is an international non-governmental organisation registered in New York. CESR's vision is of a world in which a just distribution of resources and power enables current and future generations to live with dignity, in full enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights. In pursuit of that vision, CESR's mission is to harness the power of human rights to inspire fairer and more sustainable economies.

Project overview

CESR has tried to catalyse and advance a vision of a human rights-based economy, a vision that different groups could rally around, a vision that sets out how societies can be organised and resources distributed. Under our new strategy, our focus is on building synergies between visions for economic alternatives to break down silos undermining collective power and advance rights-aligned transformations. This project of the Human Rights Centre Clinic will support that work through research on the diverse range of economic alternatives that are being proposed by various movements to identify areas of synergy and common priorities in terms of policy solutions.

Background

Our 2020-2023 strategy coincided with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. This seemed to open a historic window of opportunity for a paradigm shift. We recognised that to meet this moment lists of policy demands were not enough, we needed a strong galvanising vision of an alternative economic model. For this reason, we centred the strategy on advancing a vision of a [rights-based economy](#) (RBE).

Three years later, we are seeing increased [calls for](#) and references to a human rights-based economy and greater recognition of the value of rights within other economic alternatives, such as UNRISD's call for a new [eco-social contract](#). At the same time, the RBE is one of many visions that exist today. Various institutions, academics, and social movements have enunciated progressive economic alternatives, such as Degrowth; Eco-Swaraj; Eco-Social Contract; Red Deal; Social and Solidarity

Economy; Feminist Care Economy. The alternative economic models enunciated by movements, especially by indigenous peoples, feminist groups, peasants and trade unionists have given hope and some have generated practical evidence of the feasibility of such alternatives in practice. But, despite overwhelming evidence of the failure of the neoliberal economic model and its role in creating the polycrisis we now face, the neoliberal model continues to dominate global and national responses.

The multiplicity of alternatives, with different areas of emphasis, makes it challenging to agree on a set of common principles which can be advanced across movements. In addition, prominent economic alternatives tend to be articulated in a top-down manner and primarily discussed within academic, policy, NGO and UN circles in the Global North, instead of building on people's lived experiences and on the demands of social movements who have pushed for these alternatives for decades. For example, some southern movements and thinkers [criticise the concept of degrowth](#) for its lack of intersectionality and Global North dominance.

It's essential that any attempts to strengthen coordination across movements trying to advance economic alternatives hold space for a multiplicity of perspectives and diversity. CESR doesn't think it's desirable or feasible to try and get agreement on one economic alternative or a single set of demands because they are shaped by the diverse social, cultural and political contexts they function in. But CESR does see a need to identify synergies between different economic alternatives and to translate them to shared priorities around critical reforms to the economic system. CESR is particularly interested in economic alternatives that build on the lived experiences of people and on demands from social movements who have pushed for these reforms for decades. CESR plans on using this research as a starting point for conversations between different movements to identify and build on shared priorities for reforms, to help break down silos, and amplify advocacy and campaigning efforts.

This project will have three phases of research, which will overlap partly in the timeline (see below).

1. Mapping of economic alternatives and identifying other initiatives that are mapping alternatives.

There are multitudes of economic alternatives that have been developed by social movements, organizations and [thinkers](#). They focus on a wide range of issues including:

- Access to and control over natural resources such as food, housing or land – e.g. the concept of food sovereignty as enunciated by La Via Campesina;
- Replacing or dismantling the globalised, neo-colonial or neoliberal economy or models of development (including replacing GDP as a measure of progress) – e.g. degrowth, wellbeing economy, eco-social contract, or Buen Vivir;
- Challenging the nature of corporations or worker control over means of production – e.g. worker cooperatives or models focusing on replacing shareholder capitalism;
- Feminist economic alternative – e.g. caring economies; and
- Ecological governance – e.g. rights of nature or eco-swaraj.

Ashish Kothari and Vikalp Sangam have identified potential classifications and principles expressed through [various](#) economic [alternatives](#). There are also other organisations and initiatives to map

economic alternatives and identify points of convergence such as AWID's project on [feminist economies](#) and Greenpeace's [Alternative Futures](#) project.

As it will only be possible to undertake research on a sub-set of economic alternatives, the project team could undertake a literature review drawing on other initiatives to map economic alternatives and a mapping and categorisation of different models of alternatives. Based on this categorisation, CESR could work with the team to agree criteria to prioritise models which will be researched in more depth in the next phase of the project.

2. Desk research into subsets of alternatives that meet agreed criteria.

The second phase of the project will involve desk research into economic alternatives which meet agreed criteria. These are likely to include a focus on systemic change to economic models including to global financial architecture, outcomes which are complementary to those required under human rights standards, a range of thematic issues of interest, and diversity in perspectives from different groups and regions. The project isn't limited to alternatives that explicitly incorporate a rights framing, as many movements use other frames for a variety of reasons, but will focus on alternatives which aim to advance reforms or shifts in models which would further the realization of rights. The aim of the research will be to identify for each alternative: the priorities for reforms to economic systems; the key principles underlying the alternative; the key proposals for reforms and the targets and routes for achieving such reforms; and whether the outcomes that the alternative seeks to advance are aligned with those required under human rights standards. The team would then identify the potential points of convergence across all the alternatives for all these dimensions.

3. Interviews with selected movements on the alternatives they are proposing and already implementing within their own contexts.

The third phase of the project will focus on interviews with social movements on alternatives they are proposing and already implementing. These movements will be selected based on the desk research and their interest and willingness to participate in the project. The aim of this phase of the research will be to gain a better understanding of the movement's priorities and their experiences of developing and implementing these alternatives. It is hoped that the latter in particular will help provide useful learning about the feasibility of such alternatives.

Project Output

The HRC Clinic project's findings will be presented in a 10,000-12,000-word report, which will be submitted to CESR upon completion in June 2024, and one blog post (in May, 1,000 words) conveying the interim and summary findings, respectively.

CESR plans on using this research as a starting point for conversations with movements. CESR will facilitate dialogues between movements, NGOs and think-tanks and academics focusing on alternative models, advocacy and campaigning priorities. CESR will co-organise these dialogues with a movement or movement-based organisation around core areas and themes. CESR aims to bring together the feedback from different themes and movements on shared priorities and opportunities to create maps of

priority reforms, advocacy, and campaigning targets to enable more coordination on and amplification of advocacy and campaigning to advance alternatives.

Timeline

Phase 1: November – December 2023:

- Preliminary research, understanding the project and developing research/report outline.
- Identifying a list of experts for interviews and questionnaires.
- Securing ethical approval, if necessary.
- Outline, initial mapping, and bibliography to be submitted to the partner organisation for comments.

Phase 2: January – March 2024:

- Agreeing criteria for second phase of the research.
- Research and data gathering.
- Carrying out the interviews online.
- Report writing.
- Submission of the first full draft to the partner.

Phase 3: April – June 2024

- Revision and finalising the report based on input from partners.
- Presentation of project to the partner.
- Blog post: Summary findings, questions, and reflections.

Initial reading

- K. Donald, et al., [A Rights-Based Economy: Putting People and Planet First](#), Christian Aid and CESR, 2020.
- A. Kothari, '[Earth Vikalp Sangam: proposal for a Global Tapestry of Alternatives](#)', 2020, *Globalizations* Vol. 17, No. 2, pp 245 – 249.
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- Commission on a Gender-Equal Economy, [Creating a caring economy: A call to action](#), Women's Budget Group, 2020.
- ActionAid, [Another World is Possible: Advancing feminist economic alternatives to secure rights, justice and autonomy for women and a fair, green, gender equal world](#), ActionAid, 2020.
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- Jensen, Steven and Walton, Charles, "[Not 'Second-Generation Rights'](#)", in Steven Jensen and Charles Walton (eds), *Social Rights and The Politics of Obligation in History* (Cambridge University Press 2022).
- Alston, Philip, "[The Past and Future of Social Rights](#)", in Steven Jensen and Charles Walton (eds), *Social Rights and The Politics of Obligation in History* (Cambridge University Press 2022).
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Focal Point

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