

ENVISIONING A RIGHTS-BASED ECONOMY

2020 – 2023 STRATEGY



Pictured: Elected Women Representatives with The Hunger Project-India



CENTER FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH HUMAN RIGHTS

Foreword

This strategy document frames CESR's organizational goal for the next three years and sets out how we intend to reach it. Our strategy design process has coincided with an unprecedented global health crisis, predicted to trigger a worldwide recession that will eclipse the Global Financial Crisis of 2008. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted deep economic and social inequalities which are endemic to the prevailing economic system. It has underscored the urgent need for a new vision of the economy centered on values of care, justice and solidarity. We believe human rights—in particular socioeconomic rights—can play an important role in shaping that vision and catalyzing action towards it.

Socioeconomic rights—including the rights to health, education and housing; to food, clean water and sanitation; to earn a decent livelihood; and to other conditions necessary to live with dignity—have been increasingly recognized in the laws and constitutions of most countries in recent decades. But, over this same period, many governments and international institutions have entrenched neoliberal socioeconomic policies which fly in the face of these commitments. Austerity measures have slashed investment in public services and social safety nets, increasing the impoverishment of women, communities of color and other disadvantaged sectors of society. Workers' rights, particularly in the informal and gig economies, have been increasingly eroded—with wages stagnating as corporate profits soar. Public goods, from housing to healthcare, have been increasingly commodified.

As a result, at a time of unprecedented wealth, we live in societies riven by unprecedented inequality. Globally, a handful of rich men own more than half the world's population, while 700 million people live in extreme poverty on less than \$1.90 a day—a figure predicted to rise to 1.2 billion as a result of the economic crisis prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Inequality and impoverishment are not natural or inevitable. As CESR's work over the years has shown, they stem from deliberate policy choices which have widened disparities and bred avoidable hardship, from rural Uganda to the rust belt of the United States. Widespread anger at the injustice of inequality has spilled over into social protest and civil unrest on a scale not seen before; in some countries, it has been cynically coopted by populist authoritarians.

But it doesn't have to be this way. This is a moment ripe for mobilization towards systemic change. Economic solutions that would have been unthinkable a short time ago are now within reach. To seize this opportunity, we need to redouble our efforts to hold governments accountable to their socioeconomic rights commitments, which demand action to redistribute resources, remedy inequalities and rebalance power in our economies—both nationally and globally. We believe that, with bolder and more broad-based strategies and tactics, a holistic vision of human rights can provide a roadmap towards a just recovery from COVID-19, and towards a new economy that works for people and the planet.

For this reason, CESR's goal over the next three years is to advance a rights-based economy, taking into account the confluence of political, economic, climate, and health crises we now face. A rights-based economy is a broad term that describes how our societies could be organized and, importantly, resources distributed in them, if guaranteeing dignity to all while respecting planetary boundaries was our aim—rather than seeing economic growth as an end in itself. We will work with partners across different movements to co-design a blueprint for a rights-based economy and galvanize action around it. We will foster cross-movement collaboration by expanding the shared toolkit of tactics for linking human rights to economic justice, and we will build greater momentum around the struggle for fiscal justice, so that a fairer distribution of society's resources can enable current and future generations to live with dignity.

We are proud to share our new strategy and extremely grateful for the generous spirit in which so many allies gave their time and shared their views. We welcome further feedback on the Strategy and hope it will inspire you to work together with us in realizing its ambitious goal.



Ignacio Saiz,
Executive Director

2020 – 2023 Strategy Summary

Over the next three years we will focus our energy on the goal of advancing a vision of a human rights-based economy and catalyzing action towards it.

Strategic Objectives

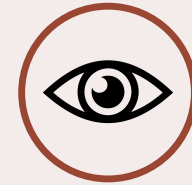
Envisioning a rights-based economy: to increase alignment with agendas for economic transformation and for a just transition.

Developing cross-movement approaches: to expand the toolkit of methods shared among the human rights, economic justice, and environmental justice communities.

Boosting collective counter-power to advance fiscal justice: to strengthen the ability of human rights and fiscal justice coalitions to influence how fiscal policymakers act on their human rights obligations.

Strengthening our storytelling: to shift the narrative about the role that human rights can play in advancing systemic change to address people’s socioeconomic grievances.

Enhancing our capacities and diversifying our capabilities: to grow as a global organization with deep connections to national groups.



Our **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 and social rights.



In pursuit of that vision, our **mission** is to harness the power of human rights to inspire fairer and more sustainable economies.

Our strategy is underpinned by our vision and mission, values, and Theory of Change.

Theory of Change

Our work tackles the unjust distribution of resources and power—within and between countries—that fuels inequality and deprives people of their socioeconomic rights. We seek systemic change, which cannot be realized without a critical mass of organizations joining forces across the social, economic and environmental justice fields, to build collective counter-power. We believe strategies and tactics grounded in a holistic and progressive vision of human rights can play an important role in bridging these fields. The action we take is based on, and tests, this understanding of how change happens. In particular, our work weaves together cutting-edge research, strategic advocacy, movement bridging and collective skill-building.



The **values** we seek to reflect in our work and workplace include: collaboration, creativity, mutual learning, solidarity, intersectionality, and boldness.

Situational Analysis

Our consultations identified a number of complex, interconnected, and sometimes paradoxical trends that our strategy needs to be responsive to. These are summarized here. See *A Climate for Change: Trends Analysis conducted for CESR's Strategy Planning Process* for the full situational analysis.

Trends in the political, economic, and environmental landscape

Economic instability is a daily reality for billions of people around the world—men and women, young and old, skilled and unskilled, middle class and poor. At the same time, those at the very top are consolidating their economic power into more and more political power. In this context, it's no surprise that debates about the **failures of neoliberalism**—and the inequality and climate crises they have given rise to—are becoming increasingly mainstream in public opinion and political discourse.

In our consultations we heard concerns about policy debates—nationally and globally—being increasingly captured by private sector interests, whose power is both pervasive and hidden. At the same time, the power of organized labor has declined dramatically and, for many people, work has become more precarious. Technological changes, such as automation and digitization, have been one driver of this. This weakens responsiveness to demands for redistributive policies and strengthens calls for financialized “techno-solutions” that risk creating more problems than they solve.

Trust in multilateralism, internationally, and in democratic principles and practices, nationally, is also in decline. So, these **debates are often polarizing**. People worried that public opinion in many contexts is swaying towards the hard right. In some, authoritarianism is on the rise. As civic space is shrinking and faith in traditional channels for democratic engagement is waning, more people are resorting to protests to put demands on their governments. A number of allies commented that activists working on socioeconomic rights are being targeted more than they were in the past, as their work is seen as embarrassing governments in the eyes of potential investors.

On top of this, **climate concerns** will likely shift the focus of—as well as entry points for—advocacy on structural economic transformation. Extreme weather events will have an increasingly direct impact on people's daily lives, particularly the most disadvantaged. At the same time, the burden of combatting climate change may well be placed on ordinary people.

The implications of the **COVID-19 pandemic** have profoundly altered the landscape in which we will operate for much of this strategy cycle. As we learned from the global financial crisis, moments of economic disruption can present a rare opportunity to tackle the status quo. But they are often used by those with vested interests to entrench it. To hold governments and international institutions accountable for the kind of recovery they pursue this time around, it is essential to be agile and responsive to the shifting context.

Trends in human rights and related social justice fields

There was a widespread sense among those we consulted that, for the most part, **human rights remain marginal** in efforts to respond to these trends. Despite obvious opportunities to connect with the growing economic justice and environmental justice fields, at times human rights actors have “been slow to describe inequities people experience in human rights terms that don't feel abstract or technocratic”. Further, strategies targeting institutional processes such as monitoring and litigation can be difficult to mobilize people around and generally have limited influence in economic policymaking.

Despite pessimism about ways of working and doubts about what's effective, everyone we spoke to still saw enormous value in **human rights as a framework for economic and social justice**. By demanding that certain material conditions are *so essential* for human dignity, they must be *guaranteed* to all, socioeconomic rights directly contest the logic of neoliberalism. Responding to this

demand means making significant structural changes to the way the economy functions. Socioeconomic rights are codified in a comprehensive framework of binding standards and principles. These have been agreed to by the vast majority of governments and shaped by the struggles of countless communities deprived of their rights. This makes them a potentially powerful and unifying frame for advancing socioeconomic justice.

There was a sense that the moment we're in "is pushing activists to be really creative in terms of where to put their energies", and that strategies are evolving as groups become "increasingly systemic in what they're trying to take on". A particular **opportunity for more systemic thinking** is how human rights delineates the role of a democratic state—capable and effective in both regulating the private sector and delivering on the public interest. This, in turn, helps create a "galvanizing vision" of what should replace neoliberalism, as well as a "roadmap of how to get there".

What would it take to really **break down the silos** and tackle the "tunnel vision" that prevents this kind of systemic thinking within and beyond the human rights field? On this question, we heard ideas about the *what* as well as the *how* of human rights work.

In terms of the *what*, there's a clear demand for more rigorous **political economy analysis** to uncover root causes and common dynamics that underlie different human rights harms. But uncovering root causes means confronting the widespread "reluctance to engage with economic systems" within the human rights field. This could be addressed by spelling out—in more concrete and accessible terms—the practical implications of human rights standards and principles for addressing specific grievances related to particular policy areas.

In the context of the climate crisis, for example, people we spoke with emphasized the need to go beyond broad statements affirming that climate change is a human rights issue. More precise definition of **what human rights obligations mean for action on climate** by states and corporations is critical. This would enable more rigorous assessment of the human rights compliance of specific climate-related policy measures. Importantly, it would also facilitate in-depth analysis showing how failure to take (adequate) efforts to reduce emissions violates a range of different rights.

In terms of the *how*, there was a clear message that a mindset conducive to **deep collaboration**—including with social movements and grassroots activists—is essential. Solutions to the challenges we face cannot come from a single, or even a handful of, organizations. That said, there was also recognition of the challenges of collaboration, particularly across fields. Suggestions for addressing these challenges included ensuring that collective work "is genuinely registering the analysis from grassroots groups". When international NGOs leverage their positioning to influence global advocacy spaces, it's important their efforts have real collective benefit.

CESR's capacity to respond

It was encouraging how consistent people were—both in describing what they see as CESR's position within the human rights field and how they see us building on our organizational strengths to respond to the challenges facing it. For example, we were praised for our **unique partnership model**. This model enables us to connect in-depth, country-level research "of a high caliber" with collective international advocacy targeting global policy influencers. In this way, we confront silos and "connect the dots" on issues that are "locally relevant, but globally significant", as one person put it.

Nevertheless, CESR has carved out several niches simultaneously. We need to conceptualize **our role in bringing about change** more clearly. Our strategies have not always been consciously aligned and our tactics have sometimes felt fragmented. This dispersal of focus also poses challenges for how we communicate. Our work is difficult to capture in a nutshell and in a way that resonates beyond a niche audience. A recurring theme in how we might address these challenges was how to ensure the different strands of our work are more mutually reinforcing, so that we have more of a "ripple effect" on broader collective efforts.

Mission, vision and values

We're proposing a more concise and compelling articulation of our vision and mission statements and have set out a values statement to help communicate who we are and aspire to be, and what makes us unique as an organization.

Vision Statement: *We envision 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 and social rights.*

Mission Statement: *We harness the power of human rights to inspire fairer and more sustainable economies.*

Values statement: The values we seek to reflect, and hold ourselves to, in our work and workplace include:

Collaboration—we know that we cannot bring about change alone, so we actively build relationships with others seeking transformational change. This involves going where there's energy; initiating collaborations that are mutually respectful, supportive, and accountable; ensuring collective goals are clearly defined and mutually owned; and fostering synergies across national, regional, and international efforts.

Creativity—we develop original ways to analyze complex problems; seek novel insights by breaking down silos and working across different disciplines; and experiment with new approaches that will increase the rigor of our research and the impact of our advocacy.

Mutual learning—we approach our work with humility, curiosity, and thoughtfulness; we ensure our strategies are context-specific and responsive to changing circumstances; we seek out reciprocal insights and shared wisdom from our collaborations, which inform continual experimentation.

Solidarity—we strive to dismantle power asymmetries in our partnerships and within the fields we work in more broadly, including North-South asymmetries; we're conscious of our institutional positioning, and aim to create space, not take it. This involves sharing power transparently and amplifying the perspective and interests of groups aligned with our mission and values.

Intersectionality—our work adopts an explicitly feminist lens and addresses overlapping forms of discrimination, oppression, and exploitation. We recognize that equality demands confronting deeply rooted power structures within and between countries and regions. Our work is grounded in the perspective of communities and individuals with lived experience of injustice.

Boldness—our ambition is to fundamentally transform the world. We approach this goal with determination and courage. We advance a progressive and transformative vision of human rights. We recognize our work is political and we're committed to advancing interconnected struggles for economic and social justice.

Theory of Change

Our work seeks to tackle the **unjust distribution of resources and power**—within and between countries—that fuels inequality and deprives billions of people of their rights. We seek **systemic change**. This includes steady progress on the policy and institutional reforms that can help shift the dynamics affecting how resources and power are distributed. We focus specifically on socioeconomic rights as a powerful, but underutilized, tool for redressing skewed distributions of resources and power. The long-term outcomes we seek reflect key characteristics of **a democratic state** that is capable and effective in ensuring the full range of human rights for all people. We recognize that in a globalized economy, a state’s effectiveness is heavily influenced by global actors and governance structures.

This type of change cannot be realized without a critical mass of organizations joining forces—across the economic, social, and environmental justice fields. We believe that strategies and tactics grounded in a progressive, holistic, and transformative vision of human rights can play an important role in bridging these fields. By **amplifying collective power** in this way, civil society, social movements, and community groups can influence the **responsiveness of key institutions**, which can in turn lead to **improved policy environments** where change can occur. At the same time, the interplay between pressure from below, pressure from above, and pressure from within is dynamic and constantly shifting. For this reason, our strategies for change must be **context specific**, using approaches and channels most effective in each setting.

Driven by this understanding of how change happens, the action we take to support progress toward more just and sustainable economies that realize human rights for all is based on, and tests, the following **logic and assumptions**:

- **If** ... CESR collaborates to produce cutting-edge research on how economic and social systems affect people’s rights, marshalling it to advocate for international, regional, and national institutions to influence policy in rights-responsive ways...
- **and** ... uses the insights from that work to build the body of knowledge, analytical skills, and tactical repertoire that others in the broader human rights, economic justice, and environmental justice fields can draw on in their research and advocacy...
- **then** ... growing coalitions of civil society organizations, social movements, oversight bodies, and policy influencers will tackle the socioeconomic justice dimensions of human rights in their work...
- **because** ... they will be able to align around unified messages, develop common agendas, and collaborate on shared approaches.

The **Theory of Change Outcome Map** included in the Annex outlines in visual form the strategies we pursue; the short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes we aim to help bring about; and the ultimate impact we seek to contribute to, which is a more just distribution of resources and power that allows all people to live with dignity. The guide to the map details the assumptions behind our approach and understanding of how change happens that inform our theory of change.

Advancing a rights-based economy: our overarching goal and program objectives

In our theory of change, we have articulated the fundamental problem our work seeks to tackle as “the unjust distribution of resources and power—within and between countries—that fuels inequality and deprives people of their socioeconomic rights”. Recognizing the breadth of this problem, the overarching goal of our strategy over the next three years will focus on the following dimension of it:

Overarching Goal | To advance a vision of a human rights-based economy and catalyze global action towards it

Why this goal?

- The failures of our current neoliberal economic model are becoming more and more glaring. Forty years of deregulation, privatization, and financialization has concentrated wealth and political power in the hands of a shrinking number. Meanwhile, billions of people around the world face poverty and economic instability.
- The moment we’re in—at the confluence of political, economic, climate, and now health crises—is ripe for mobilization around transformational systemic change. The structural inequities generating these crises have been laid bare by the current pandemic. Economic measures that would have been unthinkable months earlier are now on the table and there are growing calls for a “just recovery” in order to “build back better”.
- But policymakers are unlikely to deliver on these calls without active, cross-movement mobilization. The importance of a galvanizing vision that resonates widely for inspiring mobilization was a recurring theme in our consultations. Lists of policy demands, alone, are not enough to inspire mobilization across fields. It’s important to see the world we’re fighting for, not just the problems we’re fighting against.
- Elaborating the idea of a rights-based economy spells out such a vision. A rights-based economy is a broad term that describes how our societies could be organized and, importantly, resources distributed in them, if guaranteeing dignity to all within planetary boundaries was our goal—rather than seeing economic growth as an end in itself.
- Our work on this goal would fill a gap and add unique value to collective efforts. CESR is among the relatively few civil society actors working on the relationship between human rights and the economy. For this reason, we are uniquely placed to envisage systemic solutions and catalyze action towards them by providing rights-based analysis of current injustices.
- This goal builds on our long-standing work on fiscal policy. But it also allows us to strategically address other redistributive and pre-distributive policies critical to tackling inequality and the unjust distribution of resources. Importantly, this goal allows us to tackle the political economy of policy reform in a comprehensive and integrated manner—recognizing the inter-connectedness of systemic drivers such as corporate capture and weakening democratic governance.
- Consistent with our role as bridge builders, this goal offers opportunities to forge broader alliances with potentially aligned movements and connect the dots between different redistributive struggles, weaving a coherent narrative around them. It is a goal that allows us to foster synergies between our strategies (i.e. research, advocacy, and skill building) and that leverages our positioning at global, regional, and national levels.

We will advance this goal through the following objectives:

Objective One | Increasing alignment around a vision for a rights-based economy in agendas for economic transformation and for a just transition

Why this objective?

- The threat of impending economic meltdown posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, has triggered debates about the need for profound economic transformation to tackle the inequalities that have come to the fore in the crisis. Nevertheless, how such transformation can be achieved is often not specified.
- This objective gets us beyond broad principles, spelling out a clear and compelling vision of a rights-based economy. Our aim is for a bold vision that different groups can rally around. But that they can emphasize different elements of, and add more details to, reflecting priorities in their particular contexts.
- Key to catalyzing action on a rights-based economy is to highlight its complementarity with similarly transformative agendas and to illustrate how strategies and tactics grounded in human rights can help spur such transformation. Human rights norms codify universal values such as fairness, solidarity, and the equal worth of all life. Seen this way, they have broad resonance, which can make them a powerful frame for energizing collective action.
- As was the case following the global financial crisis, CESR is uniquely placed to lead thinking within the human rights community on this and join forces with progressive coalitions. Our role as an interpreter that is fluent across the human rights and development fields was repeatedly highlighted as one of our most distinctive contributions. This will be critical in interpreting economic concepts through a human rights lens and vice versa.
- Further, of the many potential entry points into climate justice advocacy, contributing rights-based thinking to agendas for just transition is a manageable first step towards deepening the climate-focus of our work over this strategy cycle. Global cross-sectoral coalitions working for a just transition are keen to integrate human rights voices and perspectives.

How will we pursue it?

- Our starting point will be to co-design a clear and compelling agenda or “blueprint” for a rights-based economy, key pillars of which should include: human and ecological wellbeing, including of future generations; effective provisioning of public goods; robust labor protections, especially as technological change reshapes the future of work; meaningful democratic control over resources; and reforms in global economic governance.
- Our co-design process will involve mapping current agendas; identifying potential partners and allies within and beyond the human rights community and building connections with them; and developing resources that support the exchange of knowledge, skills, and learning. We have already laid the foundations for this work through its long-standing partnership with international development organizations such as Oxfam and Christian Aid.
- To substantiate the case for change at the international level, we will continue to build up our body of comparative country-level research, that analyzes how unjust economic policy trends fuel inequalities and harm people’s rights, highlighting the global drivers of these trends and the accountability of international institutions and states of the Global North.

Objective Two | Expanding the toolkit of methods shared among the human rights, economic justice, and environmental justice communities

Why this objective?

- The scale of change we seek cannot happen without a critical mass of groups working toward it. A challenge to cross-movement collaboration is the divergence in strategies and tactics employed by each community. As raised multiple times in our consultations, specialization and technicalization has led to siloing and “tunnel vision” among civil society. Little human rights research includes political economy and root cause analysis to “follow the money”, for example, while little economic justice advocacy sees people’s concerns in human rights terms.
- Addressing this challenge is essential because, ultimately, buy-in to a framework like human rights comes through its practical application, not through its theoretical elaboration. Drawing on different disciplines strengthens methods that surface how the concentration of political and economic power enables rights violations and fuels inequality.
- Consultations affirmed that the skill building role we play is recognized and appreciated. Our methodological tools are seen as helping activists do their work better. Our analytical framework, OPERA (so-called because it groups human rights standards according to Outcomes, Policy Efforts, Resources, and Assessment), was particularly commended. But what’s valued, above all, is that these tools are developed jointly and adapted locally. This interdisciplinary experience uniquely positions us to expand our role as a skill- and bridge-builder across communities.

How will we pursue it?

- As a first step to breaking down disciplinary silos, we will build up literacy in linking economics and human rights. This is one of the specific skills that was flagged multiple times in our consultations as being most needed and one CESR is well placed to provide.
- We can do this by consolidating and reframing our current methodological tools, in particular OPERA. This will involve tailoring its focus—from facilitating economic and social rights monitoring, in general, to facilitating analysis of the impacts of specific economic policies on the specific rights of specific groups of people. This work will prioritize policy trends that relate to systemic flaws fueling inequality and deprivation.
- We will make sure these tools are more accessible for a broader audience, available in different languages, and relevant to activities being undertaken by diverse groups working at the local, national, regional, and international levels, including Indigenous, disability, and women’s rights activists.
- We recognize the importance of avoiding connotations that “capacity building” is a top-down and one-way exercise from the Global North to the Global South. Our tools are grounded in, and strengthened by, lessons from applying them in practice. So, we will also continue to pursue opportunities to accompany others to use them in different ways. Building on work done in the last strategy cycle, this could include conducting human rights impact assessments of economic reforms, for example.

Objective Three | Strengthening the ability of human rights and fiscal justice coalitions to influence how fiscal policymakers act on their human rights obligations

Why this objective?

- Fiscal justice is a core pillar of a rights-based economy. Fair public financing and progressive taxation that ensure powerful corporations and wealthy individuals pay their fair share is necessary for securing resources to fund public goods that support rights. Tax and budget policies also play a fundamental role in redressing inequalities and shaping how accountable governments are to their people.
- Despite progress in elaborating how human rights obligations relate to fiscal policy in recent years, these obligations are still largely ignored by government ministers, treasury officials, and other fiscal policymakers. Our disparate movements have gotten little traction on pushing
- Again, COVID-19 has exposed the damage this causes. Excessive debt costs and onerous loan conditions have constrained public health systems and social protection programs, particularly in poorer countries.
- We have built extensive expertise in the area and played a pioneering role in building coalitions that bring together the human rights and fiscal justice fields. These coalitions are seeking to boost their skills and capacities to effectively communicate the concrete implications these obligations have for fiscal policy, in key spaces where fiscal policy is shaped and standards are set—at the international and domestic level.

How will we pursue it?

- To build greater momentum around this agenda, we will consolidate and expand the coalitions we have convened with human rights and economic justice partners and strengthen alliances with other strategically important civil society groups and social movements, deepening our links with the labor and women's rights movements on these issues.
- Our contributions to these coalitions will focus on co-designing new approaches to spelling out the concrete implications of a rights-based approach, in order to convince fiscal experts, policymakers, and politicians why human rights matter to fiscal policy.
- The collaborative initiative to develop Principles and Guidelines for Human Rights in Fiscal Policy in Latin America, for which CESR acts as the Secretariat, will be a key vehicle for this work. During this cycle we will seek to advance the principles through regional inter-governmental processes.
- Nevertheless, we will also draw on our work in the region to advance global advocacy on critical fiscal policy issues (e.g. advocating for rights-centered expansionary policies in the context of COVID-19, for explicit commitments by international financial institutions to reverse austerity, for comprehensive debt relief, and for specific redistributive tax reform proposals).

Cross-cutting focus | Our strategies for pursuing all three objectives will integrate a cross-cutting focus on advancing gender equality and women's rights; tackling corporate capture; and promoting the indivisibility of all human rights.

Building collective counter-power: shifts in strategies and tactics

To help us achieve our objectives, it is important we rationalize, prioritize, and systematize strategies and tactics in our work—even more so in the context of the COVID-19 crisis, which has reinforced how essential agility and resilience is. The strategies CESR uses include cutting-edge research, strategic advocacy, movement-bridging, and collective skill-building. The latter strategy, by which we build the body of knowledge, analytical skills, and tactical repertoire that others draw on, is crucial to ensuring our work has a strong "ripple effect". A key shift in this strategy cycle is that we will broaden how we conceptualize collective skill-building, bringing it out more explicitly in our work and better integrating it with our other strategies. Specific ways in which we will do this include:

- *Thinking more creatively about the skills we seek to build and spelling this out more explicitly:* e.g. increasing fluency with human rights norms and their application in different contexts; bringing together analytical tools from different disciplines; expanding the tactical repertoire for evidence-based advocacy.
- *Being more strategic in how we select national-level research projects:* we'll continue to be demand-driven, responsive to requests from national partners, and attuned to our degree of influence in different spaces. But we will also prioritize country-specific projects that illustrate and advance our broader international advocacy objectives and fit our longer-term strategy. In terms of where we work, we'll continue to have a strong presence in Latin America and we'll build up new partnerships in Southern Africa and North Africa.
- *Expanding the types of resources we produce to meet specific objectives:* e.g. developing resources that "download" our thinking and learning for audiences in different fields.
- *Connecting the dots in how we measure the impact of our projects:* e.g. identifying individual and joint indicators of success with our partners and tracking progress over the longer term.
- *Ensuring that our efforts to influence global advocacy spaces also benefit national groups:* e.g. identifying channels (particularly in a more crowded digital landscape) through which we can diffuse new thinking, especially across fields.

Telling our story: our communications objective

Objective Four | Shifting the narrative about the role that human rights can play in advancing systemic change to address people's socioeconomic grievances

Why this objective?

- Communication is critical in advancing our programmatic objectives and responding to trends in the context we work in, particularly the need to break down silos to mobilize across movements.
- As flagged multiple times in our consultations, rights are often seen as technical, depoliticized, elite and, in some instances, "Western". This limits how much resonance the frames commonly used by the human rights community have in economic and environmental justice advocacy. The fact that we work with a lot of people outside the human rights field, who can give us an important perspective on the relevance and effectiveness of different rights frames, positions us well to confront these challenges directly.

- Unpacking the role that human rights can play in addressing people’s socioeconomic grievances would also assist us in articulating what we do and why the way we work is so unique. This would help address the tension between asserting our presence through our own organizational “branding” and illustrating the contribution we make to collective work. In other words, it conveys our own “power” as influencers in a way that simultaneously lifts up and amplifies our partners.

How will we pursue it?

- Our starting point will be to map primary audiences, in order to prioritize who we want to convince about the value-add of human rights.
- Weaving human rights into a narrative about economic justice also means becoming better storytellers. To do that, we will identify more measurable human-centered outcomes that showcase the work of our partners; explore how we are experimenting, learning, and innovating with them; and illustrate the difference our collaboration made.
- To better maximize our impact, we will also package and disseminate our work in a less “technical” and more digestible and accessible way, including via our website, taking into account the implications of an even more digitalized environment as a result of “social distancing”.
- As noted below, exploring strategies to boost capacity and to dedicate more time and resources to communication is an organizational priority.

Strengthening our organizational fabric: our operations objective

Objective Five | Boosting our capacities and diversifying our capabilities, in order to grow as a global organization with deep connections to national groups

Why this objective?

- The people who make up our staff team and Board are the organization’s most valuable asset. Yet our capacity remains constrained by our size. Achieving our programmatic objectives requires strengthening our organizational capacities, systems, and processes in a number of critical ways.
- Growing the staff team—in size, diversity, and cross-disciplinary competencies—is essential if we are to sustain the successes of recent years and progress towards our ambitious new objectives. This in turn will only be possible with a quantitative leap in our fundraising efforts and successes.
- Some important foundations for organizational strengthening were laid in late 2019, including investing in a development consultant to draw up a robust new development plan. Others will need to be advanced at the operational stage of strategy implementation.

How will we pursue it?

- To expand capacity in the team in line with the new strategy, we will prioritize strengthening our expertise in economics and climate change; build a more globally and culturally diverse team; and deepen our connection and proximity to the organizations we work with around the world and to the communities CESR ultimately serves.

- Our priorities for strengthening structures and processes for project management include developing a lean and agile monitoring and evaluation system, which enables us to gather the evidence we need to reflect on, and communicate about, our impact and learning.
- We will align our new strategy with an ambitious new development plan, both in its design, implementation, and tracking. We will reinforce our development capacity and ensure greater involvement of—and collaboration between—program, communications, and operations staff in reaching our fundraising objectives.
- We will ensure that the CESR Board is fully enabled to play its critical role in our organizational strengthening agenda. The appointment of a new Executive Committee and the integration of new Board members with complementary backgrounds, including connections to fundraising, will be a great asset in that regard.

Next Steps: strategy implementation

Our strategy implementation plan sets out a roadmap for advancing on our overarching goal and five strategic objectives, and details the projects we'll undertake to move us along it. It sets out:

- The different teams and staff members responsible for implementing the projects.
- A timeframe with key milestones for tracking progress on the strategy.
- Metrics of success and a plan for measuring them.
- How resources will be allocated to drive the strategic plan forward.

We're also developing an organizational learning agenda that allows us to listen, iterate, and listen again. We'll periodically take stock of who our work is reaching, what they think about it, and how they act as a result. This will be important for ensuring we stay on course and that we can adapt in response to learning, changing context, or shifting assumptions.

We welcome further feedback on our strategy. We know its implementation will be a collective endeavor and look forward to working together on carrying it out.

Appendix I: strategy design process

This strategy is the result of a rigorous process, carried out between October 2019 and March 2020. The first phase, ***Discovery and Envisioning***, centered on listening and learning, in order to test our assumptions and seek out new perspectives about CESR's role and added value in the fields we work in. We took an iterative approach to this research, involving a mix of:

- *Internal reflection*: we collectively identified critical strategic questions; took stock of our previous strategy cycle; workshopped an organizational theory of change; discussed how to interpret our observations from external consultations; and brainstormed how they should inform our strategy.
- *External consultation*: we shared a short open survey, which received 30 responses; conducted 20 in-depth interviews with key allies, partners, and funders; and held four small group consultations (involving 15 participants in total) on linking socioeconomic rights to climate change.
- *Guidance from the CESR Board and Strategy Reference Group*: our Board provided input on the strategy design process and outcomes, and we convened a small reference group, which included members of CESR's Board and Advisory Council, to act as an informal sounding board.

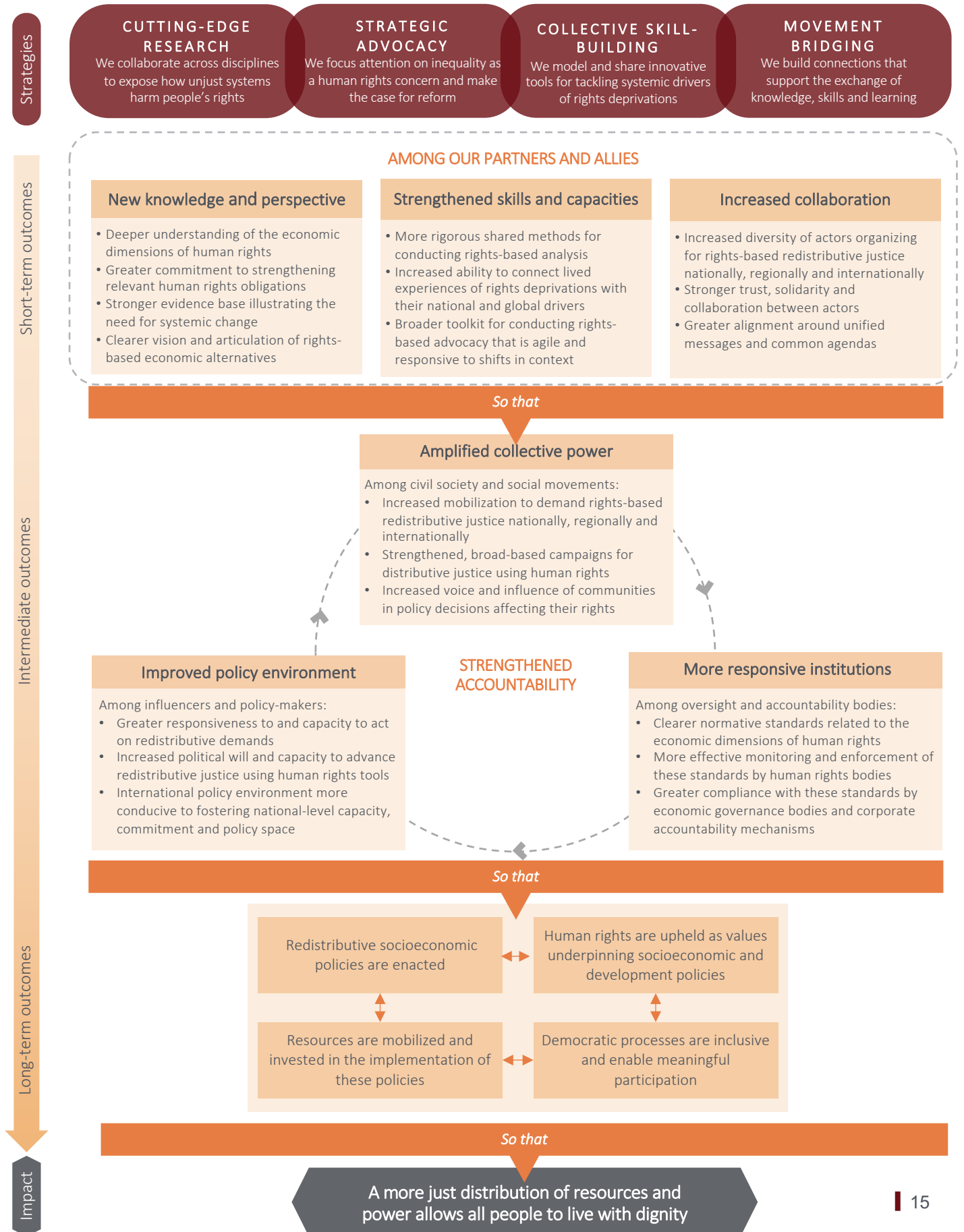
In the second phase, ***Planning and Design***, we distilled findings from phase one; conducted a scenario planning exercise; workshopped proposals for our thematic focus, strategic shifts, and organizational strengthening priorities; and revisited our draft theory of change. This strategy document reflects the outcomes of our deliberations.

Our sincere appreciation to the many people who collaborated with us throughout the process. Particular thanks go to our Reference Group: Grazielle Custódio David, Lilian Gonçalves-Ho-Kang-You, Irene Khan, Rosalind McKenna, Irene Ovonji Odida, Imad Sabi, and Mona Younis. We also received invaluable support from Dirk Slater, who facilitated much of our internal reflection; Melissa Howlett and Nikki Kalra from ORS Impact, who guided us on our Theory of Change; and Robin Yates and Anne Travers, both of whom acted as thought partners during the process.

The Strategy is the result of a dedicated, collective effort involving everyone in the CESR team, who brought great insight, creativity and commitment to the task of charting the organization's course over the next three years. Particular credit goes to Allison Corkery for overseeing the Strategy design process with exceptional skill, vision and thoughtfulness.

Appendix II: Theory Of Change Outcome Map

CESR tackles the unjust distribution of resources and power, within and between countries, that fuels inequality and deprives people of their rights. We do so by building collective counter-power to advance rights-centered economies serving people and planet.



GUIDE TO THE OUTCOME MAP

Our approach:

- We're a small organization with a broad vision, niche expertise and collaborative ethos. This makes us uniquely placed to marshal context-specific evidence that illustrates how broad regional and global socioeconomic trends impact people's rights in particular countries, as well as to foster synergies between collective efforts for change at the national, regional, and global levels.
- We believe the intersecting challenges of poverty, inequality and climate crisis are the most pressing challenges of our time. All are caused by – and in turn reproduce – widespread denials of economic and social rights and have their roots in the unjust distribution of resources and power that characterize our economic and political systems.
- We seek systemic change, which includes steady progress on the policy reform necessary to shift socioeconomic and political systems affecting distributions of resources and power.
- We recognize that this type of change cannot be realized without a critical mass of organizations working for redistributive justice – across economic, social and environmental spheres – joining forces. For this reason, our work happens through partnerships and alliances, particularly across fields. Our aim is to break down silos by increasing fluency in economic and social justice issues among human rights actors, while increasing human rights fluency among actors in related economic and social justice fields.
- We advance a progressive, holistic and transformative vision of human rights that illustrates the indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights. We focus specifically on economic and social rights as a powerful, but underutilized, tool for redressing skewed distributions of resources and power.
- We seek out a wide range of partners and allies that includes: civil society organizations, particularly those in the human rights, development, tax justice, economic justice and environmental fields; social movements such as the feminist, indigenous and labor movements; grassroots and community groups in specific countries; human rights and development oversight bodies at the national, regional and global level; and those who make or influence socioeconomic policy, domestically, regionally and internationally.

How change happens:

- The long-term outcomes we seek reflect key components of an effective state, capable of delivering on human rights in the public interest. We recognize that in a globalized economy, a state's effectiveness, including its policy space, is heavily influenced by asymmetries in who wields power in global governance spaces.
- The intermediate outcomes we seek are – in principle – mutually reinforcing; a change in one affects the others, in a virtuous cycle strengthening accountability. Increased mobilization by civil society, social movements and community groups influences the responsiveness of key institutions, which can in turn lead to an improved policy environment in which change can occur.
- At the same time, we recognize that this virtuous cycle is not always in evidence: in many cases, institutions are not responsive or have limited impact on the policy environment. The interplay between pressure from below, pressure from above, and pressure from within is dynamic and constantly shifting. For this reason, our strategies for change must be context-specific, using approaches and channels most effective in each setting.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

CESR's goal over the next three years is to advance a rights-based economy, taking into account the confluence of political, economic, climate, and health crises we now face. A rights-based economy describes how our societies could be organized and, importantly, resources distributed in them, if guaranteeing dignity to all while respecting planetary boundaries was our aim. This strategy document sets out the rationale for this strategic goal, contextualizing it in our situational analysis and grounding it in our mission, vision and values, as well as our theory of change. It also outlines the organizational objectives we will pursue to reach it and the strategies and tactics underpinning them.

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