How can the Human Rights Council urgently break the silos that are impeding the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights?

There are key common themes that have emerged from the interventions by numerous speakers (experts, civil society and government delegates) in the last three days on factors that continue to undermine the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights. These have ranged from austerity policies, the lack of investment in public services and privatisation of these services, vicious cycle of debt distress, developing countries’ loss of much needed revenues because of corporate tax evasion and wealth concentration facilitated by international tax rules. Jayati Ghosh highlighted the additional blows of inflation and monetary tightening by central banks in developing countries. The “cost-of-living crisis” induced by inflation is much more severe in the low- and middle-income countries, because food and fuel price increases are amplified in their case. Monetary tightening, higher interest rates, and a strong dollar resulted in more capital outflows at a tight when countries can afford it least. We have heard powerful accounts of the devastating consequences for people around the world and realisation of all ESCRights, from health to education and work.

Mandate holders appointed by the Human Rights Council have explored most of these issues and made detailed recommendations. The critical question as we reach the end of this workshop is how will the HRC and governments follow up on these discussions and what concrete actions will you take?

Silos – often referenced along with the need for a holistic approach – but still remain. When we speak to government officials, we still hear this is an issue for NY not for Geneva or macroeconomic policy and development issues are for the GA second committee not the human rights council. These silos are understandable – civil society groups have also struggled with them and a key component of CESR’s work has been to find ways to bridge these silos. At the governmental level, we also know divisions of portfolios between departments and ministries who deal with different international bodies though based on practical reasons such as administrative convenience and skills sets also make it a struggle. However, at the point of time that we are currently at, we simply can’t afford this. Fragmented approach results in human rights concerns and obligations remaining ignored or referenced as rhetoric.

Whatever your views are on the links between human rights and economic policies or your political positions, the simple truth is that neither the people suffering all over the world or the planet can wait any longer for the rhetoric to shift to reality. If governments choose to delay any further and fail to agree and implement a holistic approach grounded in human rights obligations to mobilise and allocate necessary resources to address the polycrises or multiple crises we face, the consequences will be felt for generations to come.

UN SG - The global financial architecture does not need a simple evolution; it needs a radical transformation. The Human Rights Council and all governments need to ensure that this radical transformation is rooted in human rights obligations and that it is concretely materialised through all the discussions and political processes this year. To give a few examples of these avenues and opportunities, they range from the LDC5 conference next month to COP28. They require that whether it is the intergovernmental discussions on ways to strengthen the inclusiveness and effectiveness of international tax cooperation or the multilateral development bank evolution roadmap, we are not tinkering at the edges but truly transforming global financial architecture to increase fiscal space to realise rights for all as well as accountability of all actors.

It is also essential that the HRC takes forward the call from the High Commissioner to question our current economic models and policies, and to find new ways to advance the realization of economic, social and cultural rights through a human rights economy. This echoes our own experience and work which has made it clear that there is no way for us really address the polycrisis without changing the flowed economic model that has created these crises and to instead advance a Rights-Based Economy which puts people and the planet first.