

FEDERATION OFFICE FOR SYSTEMIC JUSTICE - Repairing Relationships, Changing Systems

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In February, Joan Atkinson, Varka Kalaydzhieva, and I attended the [United Nations' Commission on Social Development](#) (CSocD) 2024. It was good to be there together so that we could share thoughts on the meetings we attended.

This year's Commission brought together government representatives, businesspersons, academics, and members of civil society organizations from around the world to examine how, collectively, we can contribute toward the elimination of poverty. The



theme of the Commission was: **"Fostering social development and social justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication"**.

Yes, the theme is a mouthful, but it boils down to participants sharing both analysis and practical solutions for how to achieve the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) and work toward the elimination of poverty. Even though the Sustainable Development Goals are a global framework for measuring progress, this progress depends on good government policies at local, provincial, and national levels. That's why it's so important for us to be there. In meetings, we not only hear ideas on good policies for which to advocate, we also contribute to the analysis, based on what's happening in Canada.

One of the strongest voices at the Commission was that of economist [Bhumika Muchala](#). She examined what's happening in the global economy. She noted that the debt crisis is intensifying inequality between

the global north and south, forcing lower-income countries to pay more on servicing their debts than on social protections, such as access to adequate income, food, housing, health care, education and pension.

At the same time, Muchala pointed to a pattern which negatively affects people living with low-incomes in every country of the world: In hard economic times, governments too often turn toward austerity. They claim, for example, that government can't afford to spend money on social protections; it's better to give tax breaks to corporations in the hopes that it will strengthen the economy. However, Muchala insisted that data from past economic downturns show that government austerity does not lead to economic growth. Rather, when governments invest in the public sector, it leads to greater sustainability.

Conversations about financial and economic models might sound too abstract and theoretical to matter. But [consider health care in Ontario](#). We know that, per capita, the government of Ontario spends less on health care than any other province. With a weakened public system, the situation is ripe for private equity investment (investment partnerships that buy and manage companies before selling them for a profit). After buying out dentists, pharmacies and nursing homes, private equity is now moving into areas that are more deeply publicly subsidized such as day surgeries, diagnostic facilities, and home care, often delivering inferior service (remember the increased death rate at for-profit long-term care facilities during the pandemic) and pulling dollars out of the public system. Because the goal of the model tends to be to deliver short-term financial gains for investors, this model is not well-suited to health care services.

Financial and economic models affect our daily lives. They can either make our lives better or worse. They can create greater fairness or inequity. They can protect the environment or damage it.

We need financial and economic models that can repair our relationships with earth and each other.

But what can we do?

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What if we focus on the conversations we have with friends, neighbours, and families? Might this be a way for us to work at the grassroots level, to shape the stories we tell each other about the economy and our social protections? It's important to shift the assumptions in our dominant social narratives because these narratives function to maintain the status quo. By shifting assumptions, we can help to create the political will for new financial and economic models.

Ask questions: Why does the government have billions of dollars for subsidies to fossil fuel companies but not for social protections? Check the assumptions we make about the need for austerity: Governments can raise billions of dollars simply by agreeing to work together to increase taxes on corporations, stop tax evasion, or implement a small tax on financial transactions. This money can then be used to finance a fair transition to a decarbonized future --- a future that cares for the planet and leaves no one behind.