

Forum for Global Challenges: Creating an inclusive, healthier and sustainable future

Conference, 3 – 5 May 2022: Call for contributions

In May 2022, the University of Birmingham's Institute for Global Innovation will host the first conference of the Forum for Global Challenges. Taking place at Birmingham's International Convention Centre, the conference will bring together academics, policy-makers, practitioners, business leaders and industry representatives to collaboratively develop solutions to global challenges faced by people and the planet. Informed by over a year of deliberation and consultation, the conference will be a unique opportunity to share experience and ideas.

The Forum for Global Challenges seeks solutions to the overarching challenges of climate change and inequalities. We are inviting proposals for contributions to a number of topics, with details on each topic provided later in this call. In brief these are:

1. Green Economy
2. Restoring Nature
3. Future of Cities
4. Mobilities and Migration
5. Food and Nutrition Security
6. Health and Wellbeing
7. Education and Employment Futures
8. Gender Equality
9. Making Change Happen

Proposals for contributions can address more than one of these topics, as we recognise that many challenges lie at the intersections between them.

If accepted, a number of selected contributions will be given through short live presentations – in person or virtually. The remainder will be recorded contributions, uploaded to the virtual conference platform. Recorded contributions can include a PowerPoint presentation or poster, both with a short supporting video.

Contributors

Contributions are welcome from any sector and from any part of the world. They can be made by academics, policy-makers, practitioners, business leaders and industry representatives. We particularly encourage contributions that are interdisciplinary – proposed and delivered by a collaboration of people and/or organisations from different sectors, and/or from different academic disciplines - recognising that global challenges are complex and different perspectives and ideas are needed.

Contributions

Contributions should be informed by good, reliable evidence – that may come from academic research or from the experience of industry, business, governments, practitioners or communities. Contributions should explain what issues are being addressed and how those issues are understood, ***but the focus should be on solutions***. Solutions could be centred on technology, society, politics or

economics, business practice or government policy, and have multiple aspects to them (multi-system or whole-system solutions) or they could focus specifically on one of those areas. Contributions can come from any part of the world and ideally would be relevant to more than one part of the world. Contributors are encouraged to include reflections on how their solution could be effective, fair and sustainable, and what challenges might need to be overcome in acting on their proposal.

Submitting a contribution proposal

Proposals will be submitted in text format on the online portal available at <https://b-com.mci-group.com/AbstractSubmission/FGC2022.aspx>

Proposals should be no longer than 3000 characters (including spaces) and include the following information: what is the problem you're focusing on in relation to at least one of the issues listed under each topic area; what is the solution you are proposing or have experience of; and, what evidence do you draw on in understanding the problem and developing or supporting the solution?

Further details

On submitting a proposal, a preference can be stated for a live or recorded contribution, but given the limited space for live contributions, decisions will be made on the form of presentation to be offered to contributors by the organising committee. More information about how to provide electronic contributions will be provided at a later date, including when and how to submit material for live presentations. Feedback on material for live contributions will be provided several weeks ahead of the conference to ensure that the contributions fit well and that the sessions are as effective as possible. Contributors may be asked to make revisions to the material for live contributions.

There may be opportunity to include contributions in publications arising from the Forum for Global Challenges, which may include edited books, working papers and articles in academic and industry journals.

Format of the conference

The main conference venue will be the International Convention Centre, located in the heart of the city of Birmingham. A number of sessions will be held live in selected locations throughout the world, making this a truly global event. All sessions and activities will also be accessible via the virtual platform, with space and opportunity for interaction between participants in person and online. The conference will take place over 2.5 days, with panel discussions, TED-style talks, workshops and presentations. Sessions will include invited speakers, as well as some contributions submitted via this open call. Each session will last for 1.5 hours and will be recorded and made available to all registered conference participants.

Timelines

Call opens: June 2021

Call closes: 7 February 2022

Abstract review period: February 2022

Notification of acceptance: March 2022

Topic details

1. Green Economy

The green economy is seen by many as critical to the response to climate change, delivering on decarbonisation within a just transition. Given the economic slowdown resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the opportunity must be seized now to catalyse action towards a decarbonised economy

and society, whilst creating opportunities for all. The sessions within this topic will investigate the place of economic growth in the green economy and the vision of shared prosperity for all. The open call for contributions welcomes proposals for sessions on the following sub-topics:

- 1.1 **Delivering on decarbonisation:** proposals are sought that provide evidence for solutions that relate to technologies, products and services, infrastructure, incentives, regulations and other policy measures in progressing towards or delivering on decarbonisation.
- 1.2 **Closing the loop for the green economy:** an expert panel will review brief presentations showcasing innovations from different parts of the world and finding solutions to the challenges of delivering a circular economy in ways that are just and equitable.
- 1.3 **Financing the green economy:** this sub-topic will take a critical look at how governments and business are seeking to finance the green economy, asking how effective and fair sustainable finance is, what the role of tax is in delivering on a green economy and whether alternative measures should be used to incentivise changes in business practices and impacts.

2. Restoring Nature

Sustained biodiversity loss and deterioration of landscapes and ecosystems has resulted from decades of development, extraction and pollution across much of the world. Recent reports such as the 2019 Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services confirm the declining situation despite longstanding commitments to move in the opposite direction. There is now momentum towards making a real change in the direction of biodiversity loss and towards restoring nature, including the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030) and attention to nature-based solutions to climate change as part of the UNFCCC COP26. However, multiple challenges remain in delivering on the UN Decade ambitions, reversing biodiversity and habitat loss and developing effective and fair nature-based solutions. This topic therefore seeks contributions in the following areas:

- 2.1 **Diversity in values of nature in policy and practice:** Contributions are sought of practical examples to assess, capture, negotiate and communicate the value of nature, whether certain categories of value or multiple values, that can be used to inform policy and practice of government and/or business/industry. Types of value may include economic, cultural/spiritual, place-based, wellbeing/psychological and intrinsic. We particularly welcome contributions that reflect on the negotiation of alternative, potentially conflicting values and ambitions in restoring nature, based on competing demands on ecosystems and the functions and services they provide.
- 2.2 **Delivering on just ecosystem restoration:** Conserving and restoring ecosystems can have negative as well as positive impacts on the lives of those living within and near to those ecosystems. Yet, local and indigenous communities have long contributed to the conservation and restoration of nature. We seek contributions that showcase examples of, and learn lessons from, local and indigenous community engagement with ecosystem restoration, identifying solutions to ecosystem restoration that are fair to local and indigenous communities, just and effective.
- 2.3 **Evidencing and incentivising efficient implementation of ecosystem restoration.** There is a wide range of approaches to ecosystem restoration and the protection of the environment and ecosystem functioning with the efficiency of interventions, their longevity and scale on impacts across different types of ecosystems often not understood. We solicit contributions that evidence and report on approaches to assess the efficiency and impact of ecosystem restoration and protection practice and showcase and analyse successes and failures in implementing different protection and restoration strategies. We specifically call on examples that demonstrate effective

and sustainable financing mechanisms, the use of tools, and approaches, to better deliver on ecosystem restoration in land-use planning and development, and on the roles of different stakeholder groups – government, the private sector, communities and international organisations.

3. Future of Cities

Approximately 55% of the global population lives in urban areas. By 2050 this proportion is estimated to reach 68%. Urbanisation has the potential to improve the well-being of societies, yet also presents a number of development challenges including exacerbation of environmental risks, with exposure determined by a range of social, technological, environmental, and behavioural factors. Key environmental health issues include poor water quality and sanitation, flooding, and the dual risks of indoor and ambient air pollution exposure. The aim of this topic is to understand what makes cities unique and how to improve them for all while simultaneously reducing their global environmental footprint and social inequalities. Proposals for contributions are sought that address the following issues:

3.1 Cities as an engine for environmental change: climate change is the greatest threat facing the world. Air pollution is the leading environmental risk factor with approximately 7 million premature deaths per year globally. Both climate change and air pollution are intricately linked to cities because they are where the majority of humans live and where the majority of emissions are made either directly or indirectly. Contributions are sought that present findings on effective and equitable solutions to climate change and air pollution using cities as the engine for change.

3.2 Building more inclusive and resilient cities: urban inequalities around the world call for policies for more inclusive and sustainable cities. There is no simple answer due to the multi-dimensional nature of some urban problems, though integrated strategies can make a big difference. The need for change is ever more evident given the COVID-19 pandemic. Contributions are sought that provide evidence and ideas to reinvent cities, building resilience and responding to inequalities through planning, economic development and social innovation.

3.3 Urban wellbeing and better quality of life. The urban environment is an important determinant of our wellbeing. Through placing wellbeing at the heart of policy and design, cities also can make a positive impact on people and communities such as providing access to green spaces, clean air, healthy food, active transport options, spaces to promote positive interactions, adequate housing and work, and promoting a sense of safety and belonging. As we look towards the future, cities will be facing new wellbeing challenges due to ageing populations, climate change, and land consumption and urban sprawl. Contributions for this section will be sought on the policies and practices of wellbeing cities and evidence-based ways to support and promote urban wellbeing.

4. Mobilities and migration

Mobility is a natural element of societies. Be it in the form of physical movement or the dynamics within social structures, mobility is what shapes the way that we use and share the natural and the built environment. The global disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical role that the connectedness between physical and social structures play in (re) shaping society in the post-pandemic world. With that, the mobility and migration topic searches for a holistic approach that finds common grounds between the different types of mobility (goods, services and people), and how changes in these infrastructures of mobility affect patterns of human and other mobilities.

4.1 Climate crisis, mobility and migration: The aim of this topic is to envision what a sustainable and yet interconnected world would look like. We will explore examples where mobility infrastructures and circulation contribute to global green recovery and to the development of

more sustainable and equal societies. Contributions are sought on examples of good practices and lessons learned from around the world.

4.2 Connected cities, connecting people: Local transport solutions can increase social cohesion and mobility. Cities across the world are experimenting with new ways to connect what are increasingly diverse urban environments. Contributions are sought that explore how mobility infrastructures can contribute to shape new and more sustainable forms of connectedness in urban settings.

4.3 Moving stories, moving people: What could a more sustainable, equal and connected world look and sound like? Contributions are sought that examine pathways to engage diverse communities into reimagining post-pandemic connected societies and trade-offs that may be required to achieve more equal and sustainable societies.

5. Food and Nutrition Security

The World Food Summit (UN, 1996) established the concept of food security and defined it as existing when “all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life.” The UN regards food security as a basic human right and over 40 countries now have the right to food enshrined in their constitution. There are multiple reasons why food and nutrition security is so challenging to deliver on and so many dimensions to the food supply chain. Climate change presents significant challenges to food and nutrition security too – both in terms of agriculture and food supply chains contributing to climate change and being affected by climate change. This topic therefore focuses in on several key issues: access to local, nutritious food in cities; nutrition with food supply chains; and, how to encourage and support resilient, sustainable agriculture. Contributions are therefore sought on:

5.1 Delivering on nutritional, sustainable, affordable and locally produced food in cities: multiple inequalities exist within cities and access to nutritional, sustainable and affordable food is particularly problematic for low-income populations. This sub-topic seeks contributions that evidence how access to nutritional, sustainable and affordable food has been improved and scaled up in cities and what can be learnt from experience, with examples including locally produced food encouraged.

5.2 Improving nutrition within food supply chains: food security must include nutrition security, addressing challenges of malnutrition found in different parts of the world. Whilst much attention has been given to improving nutrition through crop and livestock production, maintaining nutrition along food supply chains remains a challenge. This sub-topic seeks contributions that evidence how nutrition can be enhanced and maintained along multiple production and supply chains, identifying challenges experienced, whether technical, social or economic, and how those could be overcome.

5.3 Encouraging resilient, ecologically sustainable and equitable agriculture in different parts of the world: extreme weather events of prolonged drought and flooding events resulting from climate change bring significant challenges to food production and agricultural livelihoods. Evidence is sought on what resilient and sustainable agricultural systems look like, recognising that it is likely to have diversity at its heart. Both crop diversity in terms of a wide array cultivated material and genetic diversity mean each cultivar has maximum diversity as that provides the best options for resilience in diverse conditions. For farmers, particularly smallholder farmers, this will involve retaining cultivation of diverse local varieties with support in adapting to climate change, whilst reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

6. Health and Wellbeing

Optimising physical and mental health and wellbeing across the lifespan is an urgent global priority. It is imperative that we create environments (e.g., housing, public spaces, transportation) and societies that promote full and equal access to systems, services, and policies promoting mental and physical health and wellbeing from conception into old age. The indignities and devastation resulting from disparities in health and wellbeing that occur across the lifespan have been recognised for decades, and have been further magnified during the COVID-19 pandemic. These disparities exist in all nations and societies, and have yet to be rectified. This topic aims to support the transformation of environments and societies to promote full and equal access to systems, services, and policies that address inequities with the goal to optimising mental and physical health across the lifespan. Contributions are sought within the following areas:

6.1 Equitable access to quality healthcare globally: the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the challenges that exist in accessing quality healthcare across the world, either due to resourcing, finance or capacity. Contributions are sought that explore context-specific solutions to optimising access to quality health care, as well as examples of shared learning across low-, middle-, and high-income countries. Examples of novel approaches focusing on partnership working across healthcare and non-healthcare sectors are particularly welcome.

6.2 Reimagining mental health provision in communities: Mental health disorders exist in all societies, but prevention and treatment approaches, and their effectiveness, are highly variable. Contributions are sought that share examples where barriers to prevention and/or treatment have been overcome, as well as examples of how addressing youth mental health promotes health throughout the lifespan.

6.3 Realising sustainable health through cross-sector cooperation: The concept of sustainable health is gaining widespread attention, but the definition and conceptualisation of sustainable health across communities, regions and countries are not well documented. Contributions are sought that identify initiatives that can shape our understanding of what sustainable health is, and how it can be achieved. Case examples of successful cooperation across sectors are particularly welcome.

7. Education and Employment Futures

The goal of universal education for all children has been a key driver for government policies and development goals for decades. Education – as skilling and self-improvement – has also become a vital component of transitions to adulthood and throughout the lifecourse. Yet there remain ongoing questions both about the success of this aspiration and the relevance of more traditional mechanisms to realise it. In many contexts, education is also tied into questions about employment. There exist widespread concerns about the increasing precarity of work, equality of work opportunity, and underemployment, especially for current generations of young people as they grow into adulthood.

This topic aims to generate frameworks for education and employment futures that are inclusive, equitable, sustainable and responsive to the needs of learners – especially children and young people – and to the future health, wealth and flourishing of societies. Contributions are therefore sought that address the following:

7.1 Reviewing educational ‘alternatives’. There exist many attempts to think ‘beyond’ mainstream forms of education– from homeschooling, to alternative educational philosophies (such as democratic schools), to outdoor education, to the use of digital technologies.

- 7.2 **Reviewing employment ‘alternatives’.** As with education, there exist and have existed many attempts to re-think what ‘work’ might look like. Employment might be paid or unpaid, voluntary or forced, with clear or precarious routes through ‘careers’. For some thinkers, automated technologies offer the prospect of a world without (human) work, whereas others question how equitable access to that world might be, and others still recognise the centrality of forms of work to people’s identities, livelihoods and senses of well-being. To what extent do employment ‘alternatives’ challenge conventional forms of employment, what might be retained, how might employment be ‘otherwise’, and what are the drivers of change? What are the opportunities and dangers of these alternatives?
- 7.3 **Examining potential solutions to current and future challenges for education and employment.** Whilst the alternatives mentioned above might in themselves purport to offer ‘solutions’ for pressing, generational issues facing the futures of education and employment, to what extent might it be possible to find ways forward – for policy-makers, practitioners, employers, learners and employees – that are equitable, sustainable and sensitive to local context? What might these look like in practice and how might we get there? What might be the relationship between education and employment, and what should education prepare (young) people for? Ultimately, and in balancing questions of economic productivity with creating equitable, healthy, sustainable societies, what kinds of world should education and employment serve and, recursively, (re)produce?

8. Gender equality

Achieving gender equality is integral to sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Expanding opportunities by closing gender gaps in the labour market and in education and health, by increasing access to social protection, and by improving access to social and political participation leads to higher productivity, economic growth, and reduced poverty, as well as more peaceful and resilient societies. While there has been improvement, progress has been slow and uneven. To facilitate the advancement of gender equality, legal and institutional arrangements on gender equality must be implemented, monitored, and reinforced by making accountability mechanisms stronger, and through multisectoral collaborations between national and local governments, civil society, NGOs, the private sector, and academic researchers. Proposals for contributions are sought in response to:

- 8.1 **Mechanisms and challenges in ensuring inclusive policy design, and accountability and sustainability of gender equality initiatives:** This entails examining case studies of what’s working and what is not working, and debates about why, and understanding how the impact of initiatives and interventions can be meaningfully measured and valued.
- 8.2 **How language, culture and education influence women’s access to and experiences of healthcare, and the multidimensional responses needed:** Displacement and migration are phenomena that often result from gender inequality. Particular issues arise with regard to the access of migrant women to healthcare, both in internal displacement and cross border migration settings.
- 8.3 **Learning from different perspectives on what it means to take a ‘whole of society’ approach in advancing gender equality.** What are the different perspectives, and what are the implications of these different perspectives for developing, implementing and evaluating initiatives and interventions? What examples are there of good and bad governance approaches? How can women’s leadership and social and political participation be achieved? How can the involvement of the public and private sector in gender equality initiatives be encouraged, incentivised, and funded?

9. Making change happen

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the importance of ethical and effective leadership at community, city, national, and global levels like never before. To confront contemporary global challenges and bring about a sustainable and equitable post-COVID recovery, better understanding of the complex processes that lead to change is needed, in addition to the need to educate, train and develop people with the knowledge, skills and capacities to practice effective leadership. Within and beyond leadership, a range of opportunities, spaces and mechanisms can be utilized to catalyse change. Proposals for contributions are sought in response to:

9.1 Ethical effective leadership for global challenges: this will involve exploring what is understood by the term ‘ethical effective leadership’ and how more inclusive leadership can be encouraged in different contexts – from communities to the global level.

9.2 Mechanisms to make change happen: a wide range of strategies must be employed to help deliver on change and catalyse action. These include grassroots activism, informal negotiations within international conventions and influencing government policy and business practice. Contributions are sought that provide insights into tools, approaches and experience in catalysing change in different contexts that help to address the climate emergency and inequalities.