



LexQuest Foundation

Report on the 2021 Global Conference on
Health and Climate Change

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About the Organisation

LexQuest Foundation is a non-partisan, non-profit law & policy research and action organization established in 2014 in New Delhi. We conduct extensive legal and policy research and analysis to provide transformative solutions to public interest issues. At the core of our work lies our understanding of law as an expression of driving social change & creating a just & equal society.

We defend the rights of the marginalised and seek to extend and secure the civil liberties of all communities through legal & policy reform. We are dedicated to improving the public policy framework in our country to ensure sustainable development and growth for all citizens.

We strongly believe in the emancipatory potential of law, and through our multidisciplinary approach & intersectional initiatives, we ensure that our social & governance interventions have underpinnings of access to justice.



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Context

In the global response to COVID-19, the WHO has repeatedly urged nations to work together as one global family to address the impacts of the pandemic. Similarly, the global health threat of climate change requires international collaboration, increased finance, and the equitable sharing of solutions. Protecting people's health from climate change requires transformational action in every sector, including energy, transport, nature, food systems, and finance. To coherently understand and discuss the mitigation measures and health implications of Climate Change across the globe, the WHO, with the assistance of other organizations, conducted a [Global Conference on Health and Climate Change \(2021\) in Glasgow, UK](#).

Rohan Girish, Research Fellow, Climate Justice at [LexQuest Foundation](#), had the opportunity to attend the Global Conference on behalf of LQF. The Conference helped the Organisation develop a perspective on specific issues of import, further informing our research and helping align our advocacy efforts in the Environmental Domain. This report on the Conference Sessions can be utilised to inform policymakers' and other relevant stakeholders' actions in the said domain.

Introduction

The one-day hybrid Global Conference was conducted on the 6th of November 2021 from 1:10 pm to 11 pm (IST) in Glasgow, UK. The Conference was organized by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Global Climate and Health Alliance (GCHA), in close collaboration with the Glasgow Caledonian University and its Centre for Climate Justice, the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change, the Centre on Climate Change and Planetary Health of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and the Wellcome Trust. The Conference aimed to call on governments, businesses, institutions, and financial actors to drive green, healthy, and resilient recovery from COVID-19.



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Opening Keynote Address

The opening keynote on health and climate change was delivered by Ms Mary Robinson, First woman President of Ireland and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Ms Robinson pointed out the need to focus on health and social equity interventions over other aspects. Data which showed that nine nations scored zero on a scale of fifteen on implementing Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as per the Paris Agreement was highlighted by Ms Robinson. Ms Robinson spoke on the need to address the impacts of Climate Change specifically on women as women and girls are more vulnerable as Climate Victims in the form of improper Natural Resource access, nutrition access, sexual violence, and mental health issues (such as PTSD) post-natural disasters. She reasserted the right to a healthy environment being an absolute human right and stressed the importance of climate justice in promoting and protecting universal health. The need to wean away from fossil fuels and the reality of climate change affecting poorly developed nations was discussed by Ms Robinson. The need to include and accommodate the voices of women working at grassroots levels in the climate change sector in such global conferences was critically highlighted by Madam Robinson.

Technical Presentations- Health and Climate Change- From Impacts to Actions

Sir Andy Haines, Professor of Environmental Change and Public Health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, conducted a PowerPoint presentation discussing the impacts and solutions for climate change-induced health implications. According to Sir Haines, over thirty-five percent of total heat-related deaths from 1990 to 2018 result from human-induced climate change events. However, data regarding the same from Asia and Africa is not currently available. The heat stress induced by extreme climatic conditions in Gambia on pregnant women agriculturists and the emergence of life-threatening permafrost-resilient microorganisms and viruses in the North Pole due to the meltdown was discussed by Sir Haines. Adverse climate change-induced mental health effects such as an increase in disorders and climate anxiety were further highlighted. However, Sir Haines pointed out that climate change positively impacts



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mental health, encouraging one to act on Climate change mitigation to lead a better life. Sir Haines suggested an integrated approach to tackle climate change which includes Mitigation and Adaptation. Nature-based community-centric solutions were further proposed since they provide over one-third of climate change mitigation efforts needed until 2030. Sir Haines highlighted the need to shift to a net-zero carbon resilient healthcare system and mentioned the UK's National Health Service's (NHS) commitment to achieving the same by 2040. He further proposed a pathway to change that includes: encouraging climate finance, the introduction of health-centric NDCs in the Paris Agreement, active litigation, among others. Mr Diarmid Campbell-Lendrum, Team Leader, Climate Change and Health at the WHO, next discussed the WHO's [COP26 Special Report on Climate Change and Health](#), *The Health Argument for Climate Action* that provides ten recommendations to Governments for a healthy and green recovery from COVID-19.

Keynote on the need for a Global Climate and Health Strategy

Ms Julia Gillard, former Prime Minister of Australia, Chair of Wellcome Trust, delivered a keynote speech on the topic mentioned above. Ms Gillard shed light on Climate Change being one of the most urgent global health challenges with implications on agriculture, water access, premature births, the spread of infectious diseases, and rising sea levels, to name a few. Ms Gillard stressed the need to mitigate and adapt to climate change as soon as possible as the choice is not "whether" to act but "when." Ms Gillard further encouraged other nations to catch up fast on mitigating the global climate crisis and highlighted the lack of global cooperation. She further added that although scientific progress through the creation of COVID-19 vaccines is fascinating, national self-interests and international economic interests are slowing the pace of progress.



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The COP26 Health Programme

The session was based on the recently introduced COP26 Health Programme at the UN Climate Change Conference 2021, UK. Mr Dave Mc Conalogue, a health adviser at Foreign Commons Health and Development Office, UK, gave an overview of the UK Health Programme, highlighting the need to build climate-resilient health systems as per Commitment Area 1 of the COP26 Health Programme. Admiral Rachel Levine, Assistant Secretary for Health and Head of the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps (USPHS), spoke about the United States Government's aim to build a climate-resilient health system (the nation is responsible for twenty-five percent of GHG emission from the world's healthcare sector).

Dr Nick Watts, Chief Sustainability Officer at NHS, UK, spoke on the aim to deliver a low-carbon NHS (in compliance with Commitment Area 2 of the COP26 Health Programme). Dr Watts further elaborated on the UK's revamped NHS, which included: non-cooperating with suppliers not complying with NHS' net-zero targets, EV ambulances at hospitals and healthcare centers, losing 1260 Kilo Tonnes of Carbon by 2040 in the healthcare industry, among others. Mr Josh Karliner, International Director of Program and Strategy, Health Care Without Harm, USA, discussed the global scenario of low carbon, sustainable health systems. Mr Karliner stated that nineteen nations have agreed on establishing and adopting low carbon and sustainable health care systems/technologies. Mr Karliner further added that there are currently fifty-four health care institutions in twenty-one nations moving towards net-zero carbon emission goals. He emphasized the importance of financial investments, particularly from National Government Funds, to further the objectives of global carbon-free healthcare. Dr Poornima Prabhakaran, a signatory of the [Healthy Climate Prescription Letter](#), spoke about the need to facilitate Global Climate Mitigation at the earliest, citing India as an example wherein fifteen out of twenty most polluted cities in the world are in India. She elaborated on the climate prescription letter addressed to all Heads of State and National Delegates across the Globe. Moreover, Dr



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Prabhakaran spoke about a ten-point Charter of Action on Climate Change that would be handed over to the Government of India soon.

Solution Spotlight- Food Systems and Biodiversity

The discussion session comprised Mr Rayan Kassem, West Asia Regional Director for Youth4Nature, and Mr Avikesh Kumar, Founder, and Director of Bula Pulse PTE Limited, Fiji, as discussants. When asked about probable solutions for delivering/facilitating climate-resilient food systems, Mr Kassem opined that since resilience included diverse elements such as government intervention, politics, economic and social factors, etc., it is difficult for a person alone to provide solutions. He added that switching to nature-positive food systems will make a difference, especially in rural regions. Mr Kassem highlighted the harmful effects of existing food, energy, and transport systems on the ecosystem. He proposed solutions such as: decarbonizing the sectors, promoting sustainable and healthy diet patterns, and organic farming.

Mr Kumar highlighted the urgent need to remove chemicals from food and focus on organic farming. He emphasized the vital role of insects such as bees in pollination, which contributes to agriculture, and that one needs to understand the connection between humans, nature, and animals. When asked about promoting sustainable and resilient agriculture, Mr Kumar proposed cultivating traditional knowledge sharing and facilitating capacity building of farmers. He added that such traditional knowledge so acquired ought to be passed on to our future generations. He further mentioned cultivating a sense to put our ecosystem to better use to enhance our farm-productivity (using traditional methods to control pests, for instance). Developing an understanding of responsible consumption and production (to tackle issues like food wastage) coupled with changing consumer behavior, among others, was suggested by Mr Kumar.



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Solution Spotlight- Energy and Air Pollution

The discussion session comprised Jane Burston (Executive Director, Clean Air Fund), Shelly Schlenker (Executive Vice President and Chief Advocacy Officer for Common Spirit Health), Dymphna van der Lans (CEO, Clean Cooking Alliance), and Rhiannon Osborne (Youth Advocate for Energy Access and Global Health) as discussants. Insufficient monetary funding to facilitate affordable clean cooking energy access to households as per [SDG 7](#) was highlighted primarily in the discussion. The discussion threw light upon a Report on Global Air Quality Funding wherein twenty-one percent more is spent on fossil fuel projects from development funds than air pollution abatement initiatives. The discussants opined to redirect investments from polluting industries (fossil fuels) towards air pollution abatement projects. The discussion highlighted the role played by Colonialism in establishing extractive industries across the Global South and North. It emphasized providing energy access, control of energy, and resources back to indigenous communities across the globe to facilitate a just transition to Renewable Energy. The discussants stressed the need to redefine our relationship with energy, energy governance, and local communities in proximity to natural resources instead of merely shifting away from fossil fuels. The discussion noted that eighty percent of financial resources in the International Financial System stay within the system, minting money for the different actors in the system.

In comparison, only twenty percent is released into the real economy (in the last thirty years). Moreover, it observed most developing nations spent more money on repaying their debts to the International Monetary Fund during the pandemic than on their public health systems. The discussants collectively agreed on the need to ensure local community access to decision making and funding of such renewable energy projects and to enforce [WHO's recent Global Air Quality Guidelines](#) as legislations across nations (since thirty-seven countries have signed the same, but none have enforced it legally). The discussion highlighted the need for cooperation and coordination between energy producers and healthcare industry players to churn out innovative



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solutions and help find options that keep all hospitals and healthcare centers open during extreme climate conditions.

Solution Spotlight- Transportation and Cities

Mark Major (Senior Advisor, SLOCAT Partnership on Sustainable, Low Carbon Transport), Dr Richard Smith (President of the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change), Heather Thompson (International Transportation and Development), and Diarmid Campbell-Lendrum (Team Leader, Climate Change and Health at the WHO) were the discussants for the session. The discussants spoke on equity, where everyone (wealthy, poor, cyclists, pedestrians, etc.) has safe access to cities' social and economic opportunities. The session highlighted that most cities worldwide are dominated by road transport, and hence transportation revolves around cars. The discussants suggested a shift from such a tendency by promoting public transport, cycling and walking. The construction of dedicated lanes for buses and protected bike & pedestrian lanes for cyclists and pedestrians (to prevent accidents) was also proposed in the session.

The session brought up the need to rethink public transport as a public good, and hence investments should be encouraged in the public transport sector. The discussants pointed out that if the electrification focus is shifted solely towards private vehicles over public transport, we would require forty percent more electricity, which would be expensive. Instead, the discussants proposed working on a combination of sustainable land use and public transport electrification. The discussion urged Ministries of Transport to be linked with Ministries of Health to tackle/mitigate transport-induced health issues like air pollution. The session further stressed the importance of considering the "[fifteen-minute city](#)" concept while conducting urban design and planning projects. The discussants highlighted the subjective nature of transport solutions for cities as the focus should be on easy access to services rather than the mode of transport. The session concluded by stating that Ministries of Transport should look beyond the



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engineering/technology aspects of transportation by delving deeper into the health implications of urban commutation.