

The Circular Economy Forum

BUILDING SHARED PROSPERITY

REPORT 2021

Diplomatic Courier and Watershed Partners



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A REPORT BY **DIPLOMATIC COURIER AND WATERSHED PARTNERS**
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Diplomatic Courier is a global media affairs network spanning 180 countries and five continents, connecting global publics to leaders in international affairs, diplomacy, social good, technology, business, and more. Our think tank, the World in 2050, convenes multi-stakeholders in the private and public sectors through a series of global summits and forums, educational material, research papers and reports, and digital and print media.

Watershed Partners is a collaborative design firm that facilitates multi-interest alignment toward shared outcomes. In times of change and opportunity, we bring people together to find common values, build healthy relationships, and collaboratively design resilient outcomes.

Introduction

According to the [Ellen MacArthur Foundation](#), a circular economy is a systemic approach to economic development designed to benefit businesses, society, and the environment. In contrast to the ‘take-make-waste’ linear model, a circular economy is regenerative by design, and aims to gradually decouple growth from the consumption of finite resources.

We set out to explore the concept of a Circular Economy within the context of envisioning potential future states, in the company of diverse global innovators and community leaders.

The world is increasingly siloed. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, globalization was in trouble. Although the flow of information is largely free, the movement of people, goods, intellectual property (IP), and capital is not. This is a unique moment in time to connect people who don’t usually work together and generate new ideas and solutions that benefit the whole of the economy: people, planet, and profit.

It is for this exact reason that on October 13, 2020, Diplomatic Courier and Watershed Partners hosted the [Circular Economy Forum: Building Shared Prosperity](#). We convened fifty leaders from a diverse range of sectors and backgrounds—including education, infrastructure, healthcare, and business—to imagine how to better work together in pursuit of a shared and sustainable future.

The *Circular Economy Forum*—an annual World in 2050 convening—was held on the sidelines of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank Group annual meetings, and was the second in a three-part journey of curated discussions and visioning of the future in 2050 hosted by Diplomatic Courier and facilitated by Watershed Partners. We kicked off the journey with our first convening on September 22, the annual [UN SDGs in Action: High-Level Forum to Achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals](#), and it will culminate with a third convening titled *Davos Dialogues: Achieving Transformational Success in the Education and Energy Sectors* to be held in Spring 2021.

The Circular Economy Forum provided an open space for participants to reflect on insights shared during the previous gathering and form uncommon, interdisciplinary connections while discussing the Circular Economy framework and its role in the future.

Ultimately, this meeting highlighted the urgency for cross-sector collaboration in achieving the goals embedded within a circular economy. Participants reflected on how to rebuild trust in national and global institutions, redefine leadership and success/failure models, and reimagine fragmented sectors such as education, infrastructure, and healthcare.

Format

The conversation opened by introducing participants to three core themes related to what our world could look like in 2050 within the Circular Economy framework. These themes were:

- Rethinking business models to design for the future;
- Creating uncommon collaborations and interdisciplinary connections for the long-term; and
- Digital technologies and new ways of working.

Participants were then divided into six breakout groups and challenged to consider these themes through the lens of the *Three Horizons Model*, first developed by Bill Sharpe of the [International Futures Forum](#). The model suggests that we understand our collective paths forward through three distinct time frames:

1. Optimal arrival points in 2050: *Starting in the emerging future (2050), what is being born and how can we help it to arrive well?*
2. The present day: *In our 'business as unusual' world of today what is dying and how can we help it leave well?*
3. And the disruptions to the status quo between now and 2050 as we collectively move toward the 2050 arrival points: *What is being disrupted and how can it be harnessed, as opposed to simply being captured?*

While discussing these questions, participants were encouraged to be audacious and explore what 2050 could look like without feeling anchored to present-day conditions. They questioned working assumptions around production, services, resources, and capital, and considered how these might be transformed to best meet current and future demands.

To cap off this experience, participants reconvened to share high-level insights from each breakout session.

Key Takeaways

Two interlocking ideas emerged during the event. The first of these ideas is the need to adopt a generational way of thinking and acting that go beyond serving present-day needs and instead, help fulfill long-term goals. The second idea centres on the need to be aware of underlying power structures that inform how systems are structured, how decisions are made, and who gets to take part in democratic processes. With those two ideas in mind, we identified six key themes from across participants' conversations:

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|--|
| 01 | Centrality of UN SDG 17 | 04 | Money, Structures, and Incentivization to Empower Change |
| 02 | Intergenerational Collaboration and Being Good Ancestors | 05 | Responsible Data Stewardship |
| 03 | Empowering the Transition by Confronting Unconscious Bias | 06 | Reimagining Education for Inclusion in a Digital Future |

01

Centrality of UN SDG 17

Revitalizing global partnerships for sustainable development.

A radical re-envisioning of global partnerships is imperative to address inequitable power structures and build sustainable social and economic systems. To best harness our collective strengths in 2050, uncommon collaborations need to become more common, and public-private partnerships need to become more seamless. More so, many of the outdated barriers that separate and isolate organizations, regions, and nations will need to be dissolved. Moving forward, all parties will need to align their efforts to adopting multi-stakeholder approaches and shared initiatives.

One critical way to emphasize the benefits of multi-stakeholder alignment, and ultimately support its increased uptake, is by focusing on outcomes that provide clear wins for all stakeholders.

CENTRALITY OF UN SDG 17

How do we transform into the future we want?

▲ WHAT WILL BE BORN? 2050

HOLISTIC & INTEGRATED WAYS OF ORGANIZING

FACILITATING CROSS-SECTORAL COLLABORATION IN EDUCATION, HEALTH, BUSINESS, AND GOVERNMENT. ■

ENABLING POROUS BOUNDARIES BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONS, REGIONS, AND NATIONS TO SUPPORT SEAMLESS COLLABORATION. ■

DEVELOPING A STRONGER, MORE DYNAMIC GLOBAL WORKFORCE. ■

INCENTIVIZATION OF DESIRED OUTCOMES

ESTABLISHING ECONOMIC INCENTIVES THAT DRIVE COLLABORATION. ■

FOSTERING A GROWING SENSE OF ACCOUNTABILITY ACROSS NATIONS. ■

BUILDING HIGH LEVELS OF SHARED TRUST BETWEEN CAPITAL MARKETS AND PUBLIC SECTOR INSTITUTIONS. ■

▶ WHAT WILL BE HARNESSSED? 2040

UNCOMMON COLLABORATIONS

INVESTING IN THE NEXT GENERATION BY LEVERAGING CROSS-PLATFORM COLLABORATIONS. ■

ESTABLISHING PRIVATE-PUBLIC PARTNERSHIPS AS THE NORM. ■

ENSURING ALL STAKEHOLDERS, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN HISTORICALLY MARGINALIZED, HAVE THE SPACE TO COLLABORATE IN ADDRESSING AND DISRUPTING STRUCTURAL IMBALANCES. ■

INCENTIVES AND ACCELERATORS

ESTABLISHING GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES FOR THE ADOPTION OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES. ■

▼ WHAT IS DYING? 2030

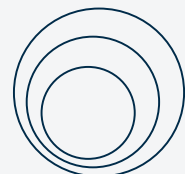
LEGACY INSTITUTIONS. ■

INCENTIVE FRAMEWORKS THAT ONLY BENEFIT SPECIFIC STAKEHOLDERS WITHIN A SYSTEM. ■

2021
TODAY

LEVELS OF CHANGE

GLOBAL ■
ORGANIZATION ■
INDIVIDUAL ■



02

Intergenerational Collaboration

Sustainable, circular economies are powered by long-term thinking.

To adapt to the needs of the future, individuals and institutions must think beyond the current generation's immediate needs when making decisions, and orient our actions to ensure that future generations can inherit a better planet and more collectively-minded world.

In adopting this long-term approach, individuals and institutions should also invest in intergenerational collaboration and capacity building between leaders of all ages to establish the social infrastructure needed to make decisions grounded in the future. A sustainable world in 2050 will be made possible if we pair generational thinking with intergenerational coalitions.

INTERGENERATIONAL COLLABORATION

How do we transform into the future we want?

▲ WHAT WILL BE BORN? 2050

ENGAGEMENT OF COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERSHIPS AT EACH LEVEL

DEVELOPING A STRONGER SENSE OF BELONGING AND AGENCY WITHIN AND ACROSS COMMUNITIES. ■

NORMALIZING NEW WAYS OF FACILITATING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS, AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS. ■

▶ WHAT WILL BE HARNESSSED? 2040

DESIGN FOR A DESIRABLE FUTURE

INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT. ■

APPLYING FRAMEWORKS FOCUSED ON LONG-TERM THINKING TO TRANSFORM CURRENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC MODELS. ■

INCREASING COMMUNICATION ACROSS ALL AGES AND LEVELS OF EDUCATION TO SHIFT COLLECTIVE THINKING. ■

THE POWER OF YOUTH

PROVIDING YOUTH WITH PLATFORMS THROUGH WHICH TO SHARE THEIR VOICES. ■

INTRODUCING YOUTH QUOTAS IN CORPORATE BOARDS AND COMPANIES. ■

▼ WHAT IS DYING? 2030

THE BOOMER GENERATION'S DOMINATING INFLUENCE. ■

2021
TODAY

LEVELS OF CHANGE

GLOBAL ■
ORGANIZATION ■
INDIVIDUAL ■



03

Empowering the Transition by Confronting Unconscious Bias

**People’s unconsciously held beliefs can reinforce
change-resistant power structures.**

To move forward and invest in our collective survival, our latent biases and firmly-held assumptions must be confronted on both individual and organizational levels. In today’s world, engaging in consumption is seen as a sign of success. We equate bigger with better, and hold oversimplified notions of the so-called developed world in contrast to the developing world.

To push back on these tendencies, there’s a defined need to recognize our collective interdependence, and shift from a shareholder to a stakeholder mindset. In 2050 there will be more responsible investment in core public goods, from public health, to social services, and democratic development.

THE TRANSFORMATION STARTS WITHIN

How do we transform into the future we want?

▲ WHAT WILL BE BORN?

2050

AWARENESS OF SYSTEMIC CHANGES THAT NEED TO TAKE PLACE

- FOSTERING AWARENESS FOR THE NEED TO ACTIVELY ADDRESS INEQUITIES. ■
- RECOGNIZING COLLECTIVE INTERDEPENDENCE. ■
- DEVELOPING SHARED BELIEF IN THE IMPORTANCE OF SUBSTANTIVELY INVESTING IN PUBLIC SERVICES. ■

IMPACTFUL ORGANIZATIONAL METRICS TO BEST INFORM OUR FUTURE COURSE

- ENSURING THAT THERE IS MEANINGFUL REPRESENTATION AND FULL ACCOUNTABILITY IN FUTURE ITERATIONS OF DEMOCRATIC SYSTEMS. ■
- CHAMPIONING ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE THAT STEMS FROM A BELIEF IN STAKEHOLDER MAXIMIZATION, NOT SHAREHOLDER MAXIMIZATION. ■
- UNDERSTANDING THE MEASURES OF SUCCESS THAT ARE REQUIRED TO MOVE FROM SHORT-TERM TO LONG-TERM THINKING. ■

▶ WHAT WILL BE HARNESSSED?

2040

THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF (HUMAN) BEINGS

- SHIFTING OUR MINDSET FROM ONE THAT PITS HUMANITY AGAINST NATURE TO ONE THAT SEEKS INTEGRATED APPROACHES TO SERVE A COLLECTIVE PURPOSE. ■

TAKING BIGGER IMAGINARY LEAPS IN OUR MINDS

- EXPANDING MINDSETS BEYOND THE PURSUIT OF 'DIGITAL MODERNIZATION' TO EMBRACE 'DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION' INSTEAD. ■
- CHALLENGING GDP AS THE MOST VALUED MEASUREMENT OF NATIONAL GROWTH. ■
- FRAMING SUSTAINABILITY AS A CRITICAL COMPONENT TO CHANGING THE WORLD, NOT AS SOMETHING THAT IS SUPPLEMENTARY OR CHARITABLE. ■

▼ WHAT IS DYING?

2030

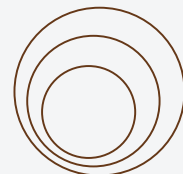
'CONSUMPTION AS SUCCESS' AND 'BIGGER IS BETTER' MINDSETS. ■

CULTURES OF DISPOSABILITY. ■

OVERSIMPLIFIED NOTIONS OF 'DEVELOPED/ DEVELOPING' WORLDS. ■

LEVELS OF CHANGE

- GLOBAL ■
- ORGANIZATION ■
- INDIVIDUAL ■



2021
TODAY



04

Money, Structures, & Incentivization to Empower Change

To envision a more sustainable and prosperous future in 2050 we need to fundamentally rethink incentivization.

Corporate profit-driven models that focus on stock markets and shareholder maximization privilege short-term, quarterly-focused thinking. Systems of the future should include economic incentives that drive collaboration and environmental stewardship, reward corporations for being environmentally responsible, and support individuals and organizations—anywhere in the world—to adopt more sustainable, low-carbon practices.

FOLLOW THE MONEY

How do we transform into the future we want?

▲ WHAT WILL BE BORN? 2050

PEOPLE-CENTERED AND PURPOSE-DRIVEN INCENTIVE MECHANISMS

CREATING DIFFERENT INCENTIVE MECHANISMS TO COLLABORATION BESIDES 'WORK FOR MONEY.' ■

INTRODUCING CORPORATIONS TO SYSTEMS THAT MONETIZE AND THUS, INCREASE SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES. ■

ENSURING GOVERNMENTS SUPPORT CITIZENS AND ORGANIZATIONS TO MINIMIZE WASTE AND EFFECTIVELY BECOME CARBON NEUTRAL. ■

▶ WHAT WILL BE HARNESSSED? 2040

WE PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT WE PAY FOR

ESTABLISHING ACCESSIBLE PATHWAYS TO SUPPORT ALL INDIVIDUALS—REGARDLESS OF THEIR SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND—TO INVEST INTO SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES AND INITIATIVES. ■

EXPLORING WAYS TO INCENTIVIZE VENTURE CAPITALISTS TO INVEST INTO SUSTAINABLE CHANGE. ■

CREATING INCENTIVES TO DISRUPT THE INERTIA BEHIND 'BUSINESS AS USUAL' THINKING. ■

▼ WHAT IS DYING? 2030

PROFIT-FOCUSED CORPORATE MODELS AND UNFETTERED COMPETITION. ■

'BRAND ABOVE ALL' THINKING THAT LIMITS AGILITY AND PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES. ■

2021
TODAY

LEVELS OF CHANGE

GLOBAL ■
ORGANIZATION ■
INDIVIDUAL ■



Responsible Data Stewardship

Data plays a large and growing role in nearly every aspect of our lives, and yet, there continues to be a deficit in data literacy and a wide-held assumption that an individual's data remains private and secure.

If we are to meaningfully design a more sustainable future then we need to challenge how data is used while investing in the practice of data stewardship to ensure that the right data is used in the right contexts. Currently, the algorithms that empower data remove an individual's ability to control their own data in service of increasing corporate profit margins for short-term gain.

In 2050, individuals retain ownership of their personal data while also retooling algorithms to share and leverage data to service public goods. This will allow us to use data to measure what matters and responsibly use Artificial Intelligence to augment human decision-making rather than replace it.

DATA STEWARDSHIP

How do we transform into the future we want?

▲ WHAT WILL BE BORN?

2050

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALS TO COMMIT TO MEASURABLE, ACHIEVABLE TARGETS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE UNITED NATIONS' SDGS. ■

USING DATA TO BETTER UNDERSTAND WHAT MATTERS MOST TO DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES. ■

INTELLIGENT DECISIONS SUPPORTED BY AI

DEVELOPING AI THAT AUGMENTS HUMAN DECISION-MAKING WITHOUT REPLACING IT. ■

LEVERAGING ALGORITHMS THAT DO NOT REPLICATE OR REINFORCE PREEXISTING HUMAN PREJUDICES. ■

▶ WHAT WILL BE HARNESSSED?

2040

THE SHIFT TOWARD DATA STEWARDSHIP

TRANSFORMING THE SOCIAL MEDIA INDUSTRY'S BUSINESS MODEL AND RE-ENGINEERING ALGORITHMS TO SERVE HUMANITY. ■

ENSURING THAT INDIVIDUALS CAN OWN THEIR PERSONAL DATA. ■

DEVELOPING AVENUES THROUGH WHICH BIG DATA IS SHARED FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD. ■

▼ WHAT IS DYING?

2030

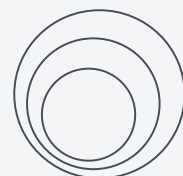
DISCONNECTED DATA THAT LACKS CONTEXT AND PURPOSE. ■

COMPLEX DATA SYSTEMS THAT DO NOT GAIN THE TRUST OF THEIR END-USERS. ■

2021
TODAY

LEVELS OF CHANGE

GLOBAL ■
ORGANIZATION ■
INDIVIDUAL ■



06

Reimagining Education for Inclusion in a Digital Future

Education systems, at all levels, are outdated.

Education systems were designed to support industrial economies and are ill-suited to prepare people for today's dynamic global knowledge economy that is rapidly evolving through the influence of advancing technologies. Education systems, at all levels, are outdated. They rely on standardized testing rather than competency models, and learning is envisioned as an early-life activity that is left behind when an individual joins the workforce.

In the year 2050, education is refashioned as a tool for people to become more holistically intelligent, hone their soft skills, and understand our interconnectivity with the planet and with one another. To equip ourselves for this future, we must embrace interdisciplinary connections, deliver virtual modes of learning, and adopt life-long learning that is more inclusive, equitable, and accessible regardless of economic circumstance—at all scales.

EDUCATIONAL REFORM

How do we transform into the future we want?

▲ WHAT WILL BE BORN? 2050

HOLISTICALLY INTELLIGENT HUMAN BEINGS

ENABLING STUDENTS TO UNDERSTAND THEIR INTERCONNECTIVITY WITH ONE ANOTHER AND THE PLANET. ■

EMPOWERING STUDENTS TO DEVELOP ROBUST SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, AND INNOVATIVE MINDSETS. ■

ESTABLISHING INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES THAT REMAIN ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL STUDENTS. ■

▶ WHAT WILL BE HARNESSSED? 2040

EVERYONE IS A LIFELONG LEARNER

EMPOWERING ADULTS TO CONTINUE OBTAINING NEW SKILLS THROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES. ■

ESTABLISHING DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO WORKFORCE TRAINING AND LABOR FORCE ADJUSTMENTS. ■

THE EDUCATION REVOLUTION

ESTABLISHING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND SOFT SKILLS AS CRITICAL COMPONENTS TO MAINSTREAM EDUCATION. ■

DELIVERING EDUCATION VIRTUALLY AND EFFECTIVELY AT SCALE. ■

RESKILLING AND TRAINING WORKERS FASTER TO MEET RAPIDLY CHANGING NEEDS. ■

▼ WHAT IS DYING? 2030

THE EDUCATION INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX. ■

OUTDATED POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEMS. ■

2021
TODAY

LEVELS OF CHANGE

GLOBAL ■
ORGANIZATION ■
INDIVIDUAL ■



Onward

How societies approach economic development will become increasingly important as conversations around sustainability and future-proofing systems gain further traction. Convening leaders from a range of disciplines to dig into questions, draw out emerging themes, and share insights is invaluable when kick-starting systems change and co-designing a vision for the future, be it 2050 or beyond.

We would like to thank everyone who joined this meeting for participating with thoughtfulness and a keen commitment to dialogue. We believe that active participation in conversations of this kind are an avenue to shared success and meaningful, systemic change.

We look forward to facilitating more dialogues, just like this one, to move the dial on collaborative, sustainable development.

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