

WHITE PAPER

Year of Sustainability: Lightning Round with Leaders in Sustainable Impact

Majra, National CSR Fund 2023



Content:

1. Introduction
2. The Industries
 3. Public
 - a. Private
 - b. Social Enterprises and NGOs
 - c. Academia
4. What Can Be Done?
5. Conclusion

Keywords: Sustainability; International Organizations; Automation;
Social Responsibility; Circular Economy; Greenwashing; SDGs;
Social Enterprises; Biomimicry



Introduction

The United Arab Emirates is gearing up to host COP 28 in 2023, bringing sustainability to the forefront of discussions for organizations of all sizes. In line with this, the UAE has declared 2023 the Year of Sustainability, under the theme "Today for Tomorrow," focusing on initiatives, activities, and events that align with the country's sustainability values and the legacy of its Founding President, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan.

To commemorate the Year of Sustainability, the National CSR Fund, the federal arm responsible for establishing the framework and governance for Corporate Social Responsibility in the UAE, hosted a Panel Discussion on the sidelines of Investopia 2023 in Abu Dhabi.

Stemming from National CSR Fund's efforts towards unifying efforts and bringing different stakeholders together to co-design and discuss national priority projects in the UAE, the panel discussion "Year of Sustainability: Lightning Round with Leaders in Sustainable Impact" brought together leaders from the public, private, social enterprise, non-governmental organization, and academia sectors to answer questions posed by students from various universities in the UAE.

The discussion provided comprehensive and impactful responses to a series of questions that covered environmental sustainability, social sustainability, economic sustainability, and the role of technology and innovation in advancing sustainability goals. Not only that, but it also served as a platform for these leaders to share their insights, experiences, and perspectives on various aspects of sustainability.

They delved into subjects such as greenwashing, sustainability best practices, and methods used by entities, the UAE's net-zero initiative, the circular economy approach in operations, how the UAE government supports companies in their sustainability efforts, the regulations or policy suggestions that could help incentivize more companies to prioritize sustainability and the role academia can play in embedding sustainability in the minds of future generations.



The Public Sector

Theme: Greenwashing, Joint Efforts, Automation, and the Future of Jobs

Speaker: H.E Ruqayya Albalooshi; Dana Kamali

Executive Director of International Relations and Government Knowledge Exchange at the Prime Minister's Office, **HE Ruqayya Albalooshi** emphasized the need for collaboration between international organizations and countries to address poverty and sustainability issues, highlighting the UAE's efforts in implementing sustainable development goals.

According to HE, International Organizations must work alongside governments to achieve the global standards put in place, tackling questions on poverty, sustainability, and inequality. Not only that, but it also ensures that the conversation is going between all the stakeholders, be it public or private, to drive impact.

The following are examples from the UAE government:

1. **SDG Committee:** The UAE has a national committee for SDGs. Members and custodians from each ministry and federal entities work together to achieve the 17 SDGs. To ensure compliance, the SDGs also fall under the entities' KPIs.
2. **Global Council Advisory Board:** The UAE brings global expertise together to find solutions and policy legislations as they serve as a great framework for governments and private sectors to implement.

3. Circle Economy: The UAE became the first country to sign the coalition of "Circle Economy" at the World Economic Forum in 2018. Two key players joined the discussion: the Minister of AI and the Minister of Climate Change. According to HE, employing technology with sustainability speeds up the process.

a. The "National Committee on Circle Economy" was created in the UAE. People from the government and private sectors where actual companies implementing circularity were brought together to have discussions. The committee put forth the first policy on Circle Economy in the UAE.

b. The UAE created a global framework that guides governments around the world on how to implement CE in their country and across organizations.



"UAE was the first country to join the Circular Economy Coalition with the World Economic Forum. It resulted in the first national policy on circle economy, a strategy and a roadmap to implement it." - Executive Director of International

Relations and Government Knowledge

Exchange at the Prime Minister's

Office, HE Ruqayya Albalooshi



Dana Kamali, Chief Business Officer at Majra - National CSR Fund, discussed the role of Majra in promoting sustainable impact, including verifying sustainability projects, bringing stakeholders together to prioritize initiatives, and ensuring there is no greenwashing- where initiatives under the umbrella of sustainability have long term impacts. According to Kamali, Majra's scope of work thus far can be summarized in the following:

- **Raising Awareness:** Moving away from CSR towards ensuring long-term Sustainable Impact, defining how this impact is aligned to global standards of ESG and SDGs alongside the country's priorities, and how every entity can play its role in this field regardless of size.
- **Verifying Projects:** Validating projects that have a sustainable impact and are aligned with ESGs and SDGs – to avoid greenwashing
- **Recognizing Businesses:** Entities that claim to be sustainable businesses are not only subject to verification but can also apply to the Impact Seal, where they are recognized and provided with tailored feedback.
- **National Priority Projects:** Bringing different stakeholders together to co-design national priority projects in the UAE and build partnerships to implement projects and initiatives with sustainable impact.

Kamali explained that Majra, National CSR Fund's operating model is one built on bringing different voices together to unify conversations under the umbrella of sustainability, ensuring a magnified outcome. It aims to support entities in achieving their sustainability goals and enable them to contribute to the social, environmental and economic development of the UAE. It also works with various stakeholders and sectors, representing government, private, academia and third sectors, to elevate the sustainability agenda of the country. Kamali emphasized that collaboration and partnership are key to maximizing the impact of sustainability initiatives and drive sustainable impact in the UAE. She also highlighted that entities should strive towards excellence without fearing limitations, as the government, we are here to listen, support and achieve a sustainable future as sustainability is a major focus for the UAE evident in this year being named 'Year of Sustainability'.



"HH Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum said that nothing is impossible in the UAE. So as long as you are in this country, I encourage you to aim for the dreams that others may deem impossible. In line with HH vision, our aim is to position the UAE as a global driver of Sustainable Impact." Dana Kamali - Chief Business Officer, Majra National CSR Fund



The Private Sector

Theme: Sustainability Practices Across Different Companies.

Speaker: David Ramos; Ghada Abdelkadir; Jomon Thomas

The discussion among the panelists revolved around the sustainability practices of their respective companies, with each sharing their success stories and challenges.

Ghada Abdelkader, Senior Vice President of Crescent Enterprises, shed light on the four pillars of sustainability at the company and how it contributes to 12 SDGs. Abdelkader stressed that sustainability is a continuous journey that requires setting clear targets and committing to them. She acknowledged that sustainability can be an expensive endeavor, and it is therefore important to present it as a business case and conduct a cost-benefit analysis. Furthermore, Abdelkader provided a practical example of Crescent Enterprises' commitment to sustainability through its port business in the US. The company recently switched from diesel-generated cranes to electric ones, which on the face of it is more expensive. However, this move has resulted in fewer carbon emissions, a longer lifespan for the cranes, and a sensor system that ensures the safety of employees. This example highlights the importance of considering the long-term impacts of sustainable practices and investing in them for the benefit of both the environment and the company. Overall, Abdelkader's insights demonstrate how companies like Crescent Enterprises are taking concrete steps towards sustainability, and how sustainability can be incorporated into business practices for long-term success.



“

"When effective leadership is in place, sustainability becomes a top priority, as exemplified by the UAE's Year of Sustainability." -

Senior Vice President of Crescent Enterprises, Ghada Abdelkader

”



David Ramos, Acting Head of Sustainability MENAT at HSBC, provided insights into how HSBC Bank perceives a shift in the mindset of investors towards sustainability. As a result, HSBC is issuing more funds for sustainable finance products to meet the increasing demand from clients. Ramos emphasized that HSBC's clients are looking for sustainable finance options and innovations in their daily operations, including lending, where the price of companies' products is voluntarily linked to sustainability. This shift in focus towards sustainability has raised awareness around the importance of understanding the difference between the price and the cost of things, which has become a crucial subject when discussing sustainability. According to Ramos, studies have shown that the cost of not taking action regarding climate change becomes three to four times greater than investing in sustainable development. This finding makes sustainability a no-brainer from an economic perspective, as the impact and results of sustainable practices are long-term. In conclusion, Ramos' insights into the shift towards sustainability at HSBC provide an example of how financial institutions are adapting to the growing demand for sustainable finance products and acknowledging the economic benefits of sustainable practices. .



"The difference between the price and the cost of things is crucial when talking about sustainability. The cost of not doing anything regarding climate change becomes 3-4 larger than actually investing in sustainable development." –

Acting Head of Sustainability
MENAT at HSBC, David Ramos



Jomon Thomas, Director of Quality and Sustainability at Khidma, discussed the company's net-zero action plan and its efforts to optimize resources and digitalization to decarbonize emissions. Thomas highlighted that Khidma has set internal targets for 2023, including a 45% reduction in its scope 3 emissions. Additionally, Thomas discussed the various measures that can be taken towards sustainability, such as obtaining "LEED Certification" and "WELL Certification." While the former focuses on the physical health of the building, the latter prioritizes the well-being of the people within the building.

Thomas emphasized that the UAE is among the top 10 countries outside of the USA in terms of LEED-certified buildings, with the data based on information from January 1 to December 31, 2021. It is worth noting that the USA remains the world's largest market for LEED, with over 280 million square feet certified to LEED in 2021. Overall, Thomas' insights into Khidma's net-zero action plan and the benefits of LEED and WELL Certification demonstrate how companies can take concrete steps towards sustainability and improve both the physical environment and the well-being of their employees.



“

"The UAE is amongst the top 10 countries in LEED-certified buildings." - Director of Quality and Sustainability at Khidma Jomon Thomas

”

Social Enterprises and NGOs

Theme: Sustainability and Positive Impact on Communities

Speaker: Bedour Al Raqbani; Farsheid Jabarkhyl; Shadiah Al Jaber

During a recent panel discussion, social enterprise and NGO representatives emphasized the critical role of sustainability in positively impacting communities. The speakers defined social enterprises as businesses that prioritize making an impact rather than solely focusing on financial gain. They highlighted the importance of education, self-learning, and social skills, particularly for young people who have been excluded from the education system due to poverty. They also underscored the need for businesses to transition to a circular economy and support underprivileged communities.

Bedour Al Raqbani, an Emirati social entrepreneur, discussed how the concept of philanthropy is an integral part of Islamic society's upbringing, which led her organization to emerge as a social enterprise that prioritizes social advancement over capital gain. Al Raqbani pointed out that social enterprises usually focus on addressing a specific problem. In her case, she noticed that Arabic resources were not easily accessible to people with disabilities in the Arab region. Through creative education, she and her team developed a model that can be adopted and replicated to address similar problems elsewhere.



"The concept of philanthropy in Islam is an integral part of our bringing. This made it natural for us to adopt a social enterprise approach, where social advancement is prioritized over capital gain."

- Bedour Al Raqbani



In addition to discussing the importance of raising awareness about sustainability, **Farshied Jabarkhyl**, Managing Director of Fatima Bin Mohammad Bin Zayed Initiative, also emphasized the need for businesses to incorporate sustainable practices into their daily operations. He highlighted the concept of sustainable entrepreneurship, which focuses on using innovative and sustainable business models to create social and environmental impact, while also generating profits. Jabarkhyl noted that businesses that adopt sustainable practices often see increased profitability, improved reputation, and greater customer loyalty.

Furthermore, Jabarkhyl highlighted the importance of collaboration between businesses, NGOs, and governments to achieve sustainability goals. He noted that by working together, these entities can share knowledge and resources, and implement more effective and holistic sustainability solutions. Additionally, Jabarkhyl emphasized the role of education in promoting sustainability, both within organizations and in society as a whole. He suggested that educating employees about sustainable practices and providing training and resources can help create a culture of sustainability within organizations, while also empowering individuals to make more sustainable choices in their daily lives.



“

“We should aim to make sustainable products appeal to the average customer. Sustainability should be the primary reason for purchasing products” - Managing Director of Fatima Bin Mohammad Bin Zayed Initiative, Farshied Jabarkhyl

”

Founder and Director of Rawafed Center **Shadijah Al Jaberi** emphasized the role of technology in decreasing social inequality. Al Jaberi highlighted that technology has the potential to bridge the gap between marginalized communities and the rest of society, provided that these communities are equipped with the necessary literacy skills to utilize the readily available technology and become self-learners. Moreover, Al Jaberi suggested that businesses can play a critical role in working with NGOs to provide them with expertise to build their infrastructure and connect marginalized communities with the right networks. Such partnerships can help to create a more sustainable and inclusive future for all.



"Technology has the potential to decrease social inequality, provided that marginalized kids are equipped with the literacy skills needed to utilize the readily available technology to become self-learners." -

Founder and Director of Rawafed Center Shadijah Al Jaberi



Academic Sectors

Theme: Sustainable Innovation

Speaker: Suzanna El Massah; Randah Taher

Speakers from the academic sector also participated in the discussion. They highlighted a range of sustainable practices that can help reduce costs for businesses.

Associate Professor of Economics at Zayed University, **Suzanna El Massah**, provided an example of Sea Green, a new application that tracks the carbon emissions of products and facilitates the connection of a company's waste or surplus to the input of another company. This innovative approach to reducing waste and promoting circularity can be a significant driver for sustainable development. El Massah further emphasized the role of digital transformation and AI applications in enabling circularity, which can help reduce waste and contribute to a more sustainable economy. By utilizing digital tools, companies can better manage their resources, reduce their carbon footprint, and promote a more sustainable approach to business.



"Zayed University became the first university in the UAE to implement an interdisciplinary curriculum that is agile, dynamic, and based on real-world problems and real case studies." - Suzanna El Massah



Cultural Designer and Innovation Facilitator at Sajory, **Randah Taher**, highlighted the concept of biomimicry. Taher explained that biomimicry is an innovative approach inspired by nature, seeking to learn from the natural world's examples of energy use, insulation, and more. She stated that nature has no concept of waste, and is always in a cyclical mode, which could be replicated in industrial parks. For instance, the heat produced in one place could be used as input for another, resulting in lower costs, reduced risks, and increased revenue and ESGs.

Taher shared that the wastewater produced from food processing and manufacturing has 10 times more energy than the energy used to treat it. She then gave an example of how biomimicry was used in the design of the Japanese Bullet Train. The train had to pass through tunnels, causing pressure changes that would make passengers' ears pop. By emulating the unique beak design of the kingfisher bird, which can dive into the water without making a sound, the bullet train was made almost soundless, becoming the fastest train in the world. Taher emphasized that by learning practical mechanisms from nature and replicating them, businesses can achieve sustainable practices and benefit from them.



“

"Nature has an unexplored library of technologies. It has managed information, processes, and materials for 3.8 billion years. Nature has cracked the code on how to do things and create strategies long before humans inhabited earth."

– Randah Taher

”

What Can Be Done?

Sustainability is a significant challenge facing governments, businesses, and communities worldwide. To tackle this issue, sustainability experts have proposed several policy recommendations to promote sustainability across various sectors. One of the primary policy recommendations is to expand information literacy in both the private and public sectors. This involves increasing the capacity of individuals and organizations to access, evaluate, and utilize information to support sustainable practices.

Another crucial policy recommendation is to drive sustainability practices within the private sector through regulatory mechanisms. During the panel discussion, it was suggested that having a robust set of regulations on finance and investments would better sustainability outcomes in the UAE. Additionally, creating a government-backed fund to allow entities like banks to be more involved in sustainable development was recommended. Another recommendation focused on motivating countries to link waste management to companies' licenses. Furthermore, it was suggested that governments drive discussions and create initiatives that private sectors can adopt to start contributing towards sustainability.

Social entrepreneurship and joint ventures were also identified as promising avenues for promoting sustainability. Panelists recommended the establishment of a detailed social enterprise framework to ensure it can be replicated elsewhere. Additionally, it was suggested that private organizations provide their expertise to grassroots organizations and social enterprises in managing different departments and creating financial and communication plans.

Finally, on the future of sustainable innovation, experts recommended creating academic curriculums that are agile, dynamic, and based on real-world problems and case studies. This would equip students with the knowledge and skills to address sustainability challenges in practical ways. Another recommendation was to turn to nature for sustainable innovation, where one can learn practical mechanisms and replicate them in real life.

In conclusion, these policy recommendations offer a blueprint for promoting sustainability across various sectors. By enhancing information literacy, promoting regulatory mechanisms, supporting social entrepreneurship and joint ventures, and encouraging sustainable innovation, governments, businesses, and communities can work together to achieve a more sustainable future. Although each recommendation has its unique advantages and limitations, the comprehensive implementation of these policies could play a critical role in mitigating the adverse impacts of unsustainable practices and achieving sustainable development goals.

Conclusion

This white paper provides insights into the panel discussion on sustainability that took place during Investopia 2023. The panel was an invaluable source of information that laid the groundwork for deeper conversations about sustainability. The experts offered a comprehensive overview of the current state of sustainability, including the latest trends and best practices. They identified key challenges and opportunities in the field and proposed practical ideas for overcoming these challenges and leveraging these opportunities for greater sustainable impact. The recommendations made by the experts were based on their extensive knowledge and experience in the field, making them highly practical and actionable.

The panel discussion and this white paper contribute significantly to the ongoing dialogue around sustainability and its role in creating a more equitable and sustainable future. The insights and recommendations offered by the experts provide individuals and organizations with a deeper appreciation of the complex issues involved in promoting sustainable practices. The practical and actionable nature of the recommendations further ensures that individuals and organizations are equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to promote sustainability in their respective fields. Overall, this white paper serves as a vital resource for anyone seeking to implement sustainable practices and drive meaningful change.







