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The Global Drive for Sustainability

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On The Environmental Front Today

The environmental scene has been actively evolving in recent times. While the pandemic sent people into lockdowns and quarantined situations, nature seemingly had a chance to heal and mildly revive itself in the span of several months. However, as the world moves into the phase of living with the virus with the availability of vaccines and proper testing methods, it also means nature's break from human activity is over. Sprung up once again is the warning subject of climate change, looming over environmentalists, world leaders, and civilians alike with the reminder of the Paris Agreement's goal which is still not met despite it being signed 5 years ago. The 26th Conference of Parties (COP26) brings hope that some fruitful decisions will be made on climate change.

The Occurrence of Climate Change

Climate change happens, in basic terms, when the Earth exhibits long-lasting changes in temperatures and patterns of weather. A country with no winter may experience what can be termed as impossible snowfall, and a country that usually weathers freezing temperatures might have its citizens lessening their clothing layers due to increasing warmth. The changes happening are wholly natural, but human activity cannot help but play a significant part in escalating the occurring shifts like a catalyst. The penultimate and primary cause of this impact on climate change is the burning of fossil fuels—non-renewable energy sources such as coal, oil, and gas.

The Concept of Sustainability

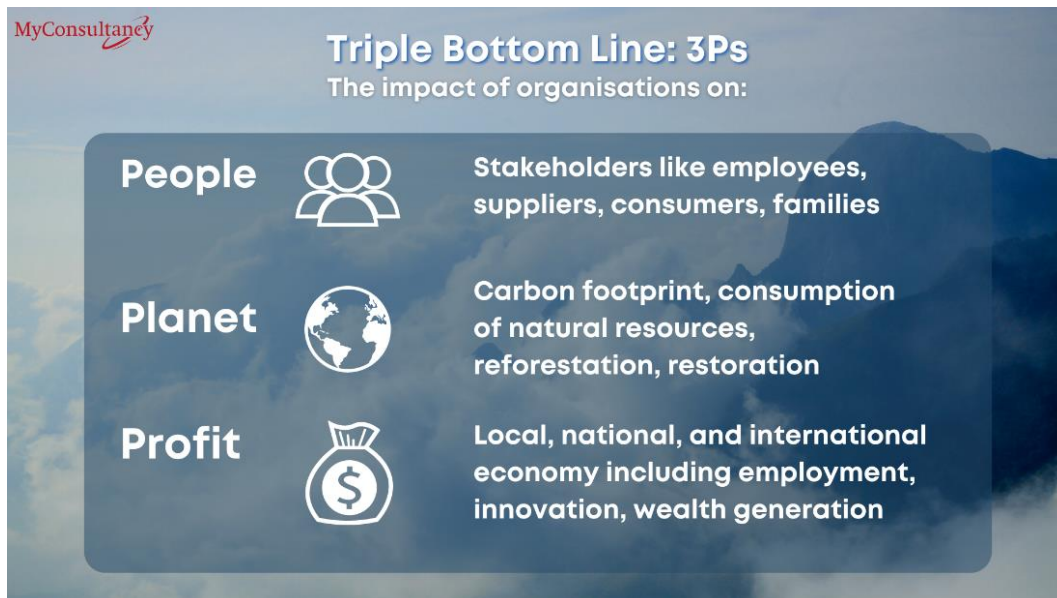
In accordance with handling climate change effectively—or simply by doing our best to prolong the current (good) period before the extremities of it—all societies across the globe will have to apply the concept of sustainability. Sustainability is defined simply as the level of endurance we can take as a planet in a continuous process across various fields in existence. Basically, sustainability is all about the ability of human beings to co-exist with the Earth's biosphere in an ongoing way; in a sustainable way as the term itself suggests. It is heavily focused on preserving the natural resources of this planet, increasing the quality of life, and protecting the ecosystem for the generations to come.

From a corporate perspective, an organisation's holistic approach is directly linked with the concept of sustainability. From the process of manufacturing all the way to customer service, an organisation is heavily responsible for incorporating sustainability into their daily operations to aid in the cause of lessening climate change. Also defined as availing the needs of the current time without jeopardising the capability of the future generation to avail theirs, sustainability can be divided into three main pillars from a business perspective, also known as the 3Ps of the Triple Bottom Line: People, Planet, and Profit.

The Triple Bottom Line's 3Ps

Coined and created by business author and serial entrepreneur John Elkington of University College London about 27 years ago as the “sustainability framework for companies”, the Triple Bottom Line consists of the 3Ps mentioned above—people, planet, and profit. The three aspects focused on by the three pillars are economic, environmental, and social; below is a brief overview of the impact of the three divisions within the concept.

- **People.** This aspect focuses on the impact, whether positive or negative, that an organisation poses upon its key stakeholders. Stakeholders in this sense refers to the employees, families, suppliers, consumers, and anyone else involved and affected by the organisation.
- **Planet.** It is the impact of an organisation on the natural surrounding environment. Issues like carbon footprint, consumption of natural resources that may include toxic materials, and also the active effort directed towards appropriate disposal of waste, restoration of possible damages caused, and reforestation.
- **Profit.** This is where the organisation impacts the local, national, and international economy, in terms of the generation of innovation, employment, wealth generation, and tax-paying.



Conference of Parties

The COP and The Paris Agreement

The Conference of Parties or COP is an annual conference where governments (the Parties) signed under the United Nations Framework Convention of Climate Change (UNFCCC) come together to address and discuss the situation of climate change. These conferences are attended by world leaders, powerful political figures, negotiators, and also people from different civil societies, businesses, organisations, as well as media representatives. Each year, the COP is held and hosted by a different country; the first one (COP1) being hosted in Berlin, Germany in 1995 and the current ongoing one (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland in the United Kingdom.

The Paris Agreement is an international treaty that is significant in the COP because almost every country in the world participated in signing it during the COP21 in Paris, France in 2015. This treaty had the ultimate purpose of controlling the rise of the global average temperature to stay below 2 degrees, preferably 1.5 degrees. Another significant point regarding the treaty is that it also aimed to reinforce the capability of all the countries involved to adapt to climate change and forge resilience whilst realigning the contribution of finances towards lowering greenhouse gas emissions and climate-aiding developments. The signatory countries of the Paris Agreement were tasked with deciding for themselves how they would execute the lowering of emissions by a designated year; these decisions were then reported to the UNFCCC in what they termed as nationally determined contributions (NDCs).

COP26: Purpose and Aims

Originally scheduled to occur in November 2020 in Glasgow, United Kingdom, the 26th COP is currently hosted by the United Kingdom in partnership with Italy after a postponement due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The COP26 is ongoing from 31 October 2021 to 12 November 2021 and the United Kingdom is hosting a large-scale physical event that includes workspaces, free transportation for attendees, less waste and reusable products, and socially distanced media centres for the purpose of environmental journalism, one of the major ways of making COP news accessible by everyone. Country representatives attending the COP26 are targeting and hoping to tackle (still) the issue of rising temperature levels, reaching net-zero in terms of phasing out fossil fuels and switching to renewable energies as well as ensuring inclusivity in environmental plans for marginalised communities.

Primarily focused on the Paris Agreement's warning of rising temperatures, including the pledge to keep it well below 2 degrees (1.5 degrees), the parties attending COP26 will have to finalise unprecedented implementation guides and NDCs to finally tackle the rising temperature issue once in for all. At present, the Paris Agreement's effort at an implementation guide is vaguely stated and parties will have to work on mobilising finances to meet the goal of the all-around adapting process of reducing climate change.

In Sync with COP26: National and Organisational Responsibilities

What Nations and Organisations Can Do

Now that we understand the significance of COP26 and the Paris Agreement, it is important that nations and its organisations dive into methods of aiding the mission of reducing climate change. Here are several responsibilities that can help with the goals of the COP26.

Green Electricity

As an organisation, electricity is almost guaranteed to be the largest factor in an inventory detailing emissions. While installing on-site solar panels is a great idea, there are many ways that an organisation can switch to green electricity. The first step is to survey the availability of green electricity pricing; every organisation is required to pay a relatively small premium to the utility providers to receive electricity generated from renewable energy resources. You can also purchase renewable energy at retail price, where end users purchase green electricity directly from retail suppliers, or from utility green tariffs where large companies purchase renewable electricity in bulk via company utility.

Transport Emissions Reduction

Addressing the transport modes and frequency within an organisation can significantly reduce emissions from the vehicles used. Company cars and trucks/lorries (if in frequent use) should be switched and upgraded to higher efficiency vehicles such as hybrid and electric vehicles. Due to the pandemic, we have also seen the rise of remote working. By implementing a national incentive and incorporation of a hybrid work situation, companies will follow suit in the incentivization process, and a significant amount of transport emissions can be reduced. Business trips that require traveling by flight can also be replaced with video conference calls, as we have all been able to familiarise with these settings in the more dire times of the pandemic.

Usage of Lower-Emission Resources

If an organisation is granted the access and transparency of their suppliers' internal processes, carbon footprint and emission reports can be requested to inventory emission reductions. Nations can develop new policies where this sort of transparency is absolutely necessary for record purposes. From here, organisations can strategise ways to reduce emissions even further and even choose to opt for suppliers or materials with lower carbon footprints. Usual consumed materials such as paper, glass, metals, and plastics can be switched for recycled versions of those materials with similar quality.

Reduction of Landfills

Landfills produce one of the most damaging consequences to the environment due to the impact it has in the long run. For the issue of too much waste, storing and dumping waste products sounds like a good idea for peace of mind because it is out of sight—but not for long. Landfills have the potential of causing groundwater pollution, methane soil pollution, and an aftercare period that takes hundreds of years for the damage to be undone. While recycling, reducing, and

composting waste are great alternatives to landfills, nations and organisations should also start practicing a Waste-to-Energy (WtE) process. The WtE process aids in high-standard recycling, where the final stage of non-recyclable waste products also gets converted to energy, enabling high-recycling nations like Belgium, Austria, and Germany to eliminate their use of landfills to almost none.

How does it work? The WtE method involves a combustion process that separates and cleans metals from combined and mixed waste, which could not be recycled (especially manually) otherwise. These combustion processes take place in designated plants and the remaining metals extracted from the residual bottom ash are reused and repurposed in new products wherever applicable. A further step in this process also involves using the remaining minerals of the bottom ash as secondary raw materials, a competent substitute for gravel or sand in construction procedures.

Green Marketing

The best way to make consumers in any nation or organisation is to sell it to them via marketing techniques. Green marketing is a more organised method of promoting equitable usage of resources because it allows for the introduction of a new environmental-oriented reality; it will eventually change consumer attitudes and behaviour towards embracing a greener and more sustainable method in their daily endeavours. For businesses, green marketing will allow for a new generation of marketing executives to develop innovative business models that promote effective consumption of goods and services, efficiently sustainable production processes, and the advocacy for more inclusive business models that touch on climate sustainability for minority communities.



Nations Championing Sustainability

While we have looked at ways that nations and organisations can help to reduce climate change and promote sustainability measures, we should also look to nations that are substantially successful in their go-green endeavours. Below are several countries that are championing sustainability in effective methods.

Costa Rica

Costa Rica is well on the way to becoming the first carbon-neutral nation on the planet with 99% of its electricity being derived from renewable sources such as geothermal, wind, hydroelectric, and solar. Costa Rica is also the first nation in Central America to encourage biodiversity growth to protect their forests by banning trophy hunting.

Denmark

By 2050, Denmark intends to attain 100% renewable energy usage and they are currently at 40%. With the use of energy sources such as wind, solar, and biomass, one of Denmark's islands known as Sanso is already running on 100% renewable energy. As a nation, the people of Denmark also practice a heavily prevalent culture of cycling more than motor vehicles, contributing to cleaner air quality.

Sweden

Similar to Denmark, Sweden also aims to fully run on 100% renewable energy and recycled sources by a certain period of time. New technologies invented by Swedish innovators such as 'passive houses' were constructed to lessen energy consumption by using heat energy produced by sunlight and human activity. Public transport in Sweden runs on biogas and renewable energies because these passive houses use body heat from daily commuters to generate power.

Switzerland

The Swiss focus heavily on waste and recycling management where all disposable waste is disposed of properly and the remaining waste is converted into energy. The nation has a generally low carbon footprint as a whole as most of the energy is generated by hydroelectricity. Switzerland also aids in sustainability by preserving water quality and maintaining the biodiversity in its National Parks, designating them as protected and untouchable land.

Final Thoughts

With devastatingly disastrous possibilities such as rising temperatures, rising sea levels, and vast areas of the Earth becoming uninhabitable approaching by 2100, the presence of COPs are of substantial importance for everyone right now. It is a prime requirement that nations and organisations work together to achieve sustainability and help to reduce climate change. Below are several reasons as to why they should join hands and adhere to the goals of COP26.

- ***Expectations of the people allow for new regulations.*** Governments and organisations can work together in a more effective manner to address environmental concerns of the people. Business organisations are given an insider preview into new policies and regulations that will give them extra time to prepare and collaborate with the government, which allows for increased revenues and economic growth.
- ***Catapult the green finance market.*** Green assets are being heavily invested in with the hopes that it will deliver paramount returns long-term. The media coverage of and incentivisation of COP26 will increase the value of the green finance market indefinitely, encouraging private organisations to endorse it financially and provide large returns for the nation economically.
- ***Innovative business models.*** COP26 allows for businesses to create new products and services along with wholly new business models. Advancing technology, increased price of carbon emissions, and increased regulatory threats for high-emission assets will send businesses into a greener mindset, such as researching alternatives for non-renewable energies.

COP26 has brought to our attention that we are far from done when it comes to meeting goals of the Paris Agreement. Playing our part in adhering to the goals will help elevate our efforts in reducing climate change as a whole; nations and organisations—however big or small—play a vital role in creating awareness and reducing carbon footprints to promote a greener and more sustainable existence. As mentioned above, it is in the term of sustainability: The only way to go from here is by implementing sustainable methods in every area of life.

A large iceberg floats in dark blue water. The visible tip is white and jagged, while the submerged part is much larger and has many icicles hanging from its edges, illustrating the concept of 'iceberg' in business or technology.

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