

NAVIGATING REGULATION AND TRANSFORMATION

Climate Leaders Roundtable
Report

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Be Better Sustainability, osapiens and
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Insights on Global Sustainability Challenges

Hosted by Ilana Adamson, Founder of [Be Better Sustainability](#)

The Be Better Sustainability table, hosted by [Ilana Adamson](#), focused on the global nature of sustainability challenges, the complexities of sustainability reporting and the evolving role of businesses and governments in driving meaningful change. The discussion ranged from the tension between regulation and innovation, to the pressing need for a "just transition" in emerging markets and the shifting dynamics of corporate sustainability leadership.



The 'Just Transition' and Global Sustainability

A central theme in the discussion was the concept of a "just transition," particularly relevant in developing markets. Attendees highlighted that sustainable development is a global challenge, with both social and environmental effects felt on local and global scales. The shift to net zero and sustainability goals must balance the immediate needs of societies, especially in developed markets, where there is concern about poverty and social breakdown caused by rapid changes.

The discussion also pointed out the difficulty in moving entire economies towards sustainability, as many are still reliant on fossil fuels for growth. The group emphasised the importance of creating pathways for emerging economies to develop sustainably without being hindered by excessive regulation.

Regulation and Innovation

The table raised concerns over excessive regulation, particularly in finance, which attendees felt was stifling innovation. Despite frameworks like CSRD and SBTi being seen as entry points for corporate sustainability, the lack of clear incentives for companies to go beyond the minimum compliance was a key point.

Companies are often reactive, only addressing sustainability when it becomes an immediate issue, such as flooding or other environmental events. This lack of proactive action highlights the broader issue of corporate short-termism, where long-term sustainability goals are often sidelined in favour of immediate business needs. Many organisations are realising that without proper sustainability reporting frameworks, they won't be able to progress. This realisation is pushing companies to focus more on having the right reports in place to meet both regulatory expectations and customer demands.

Embedding Sustainability Within Organisations

Attendees shared challenges in embedding sustainability into their organisations. Many companies focus primarily on carbon reduction, with social aspects not fully integrated into their sustainability strategies.

One attendee mentioned that their company had set a net zero target for 2030, with intermediate steps such as achieving 350,000 voluntary hours by 2025. To prevent greenwashing, measures like

monitoring sustainability communication and double-checking numbers were in place. However, there was a concern that many companies overestimate their proximity to net zero, especially when unsustainable suppliers are involved.

Several participants noted that procurement teams are increasingly asking about sustainability reporting, but there remains a disconnect between what sustainability teams need and what procurement requires. Companies are unsure of the precise reporting formats, like ESRS, payment terms and value chain mapping, creating a gap in collaboration.

The Role of Consultants and Corporate Leadership

The role of external consultants in sustainability was discussed, with many companies relying on them for expertise due to a lack of internal capacity. There was a recognition that companies without dedicated sustainability advisers or consultants are more likely to set unrealistic targets. The shifting of sustainability roles within companies was also noted: sustainability leads are increasingly moving to CFO positions, but this transition often highlights a lack of expertise in risk management, leading to burnout and high turnover.

The table also discussed the growing reliance on consultancies to handle the implementation of internal ESG frameworks, particularly when companies are not yet capable of managing sustainability reporting on their own. In some sectors, clients are pushing businesses to meet ESG standards as a precondition for working together, as many businesses now require clear sustainability targets and practices.

Emerging vs Developed Markets

The conversation around emerging markets vs. developed markets focused on the need for a more balanced approach to sustainability, one that allows emerging economies to develop while also addressing the environmental impact. In developed markets, especially in regions with right-wing governments, the cost of transitioning to net zero is often viewed as a barrier, creating a tension between economic growth and environmental responsibility. The group emphasised the need for governments to clearly communicate the strategy behind sustainability regulations and to provide support to businesses through financial mechanisms like insurance and subsidies.

Corporate Sustainability and Reporting Challenges

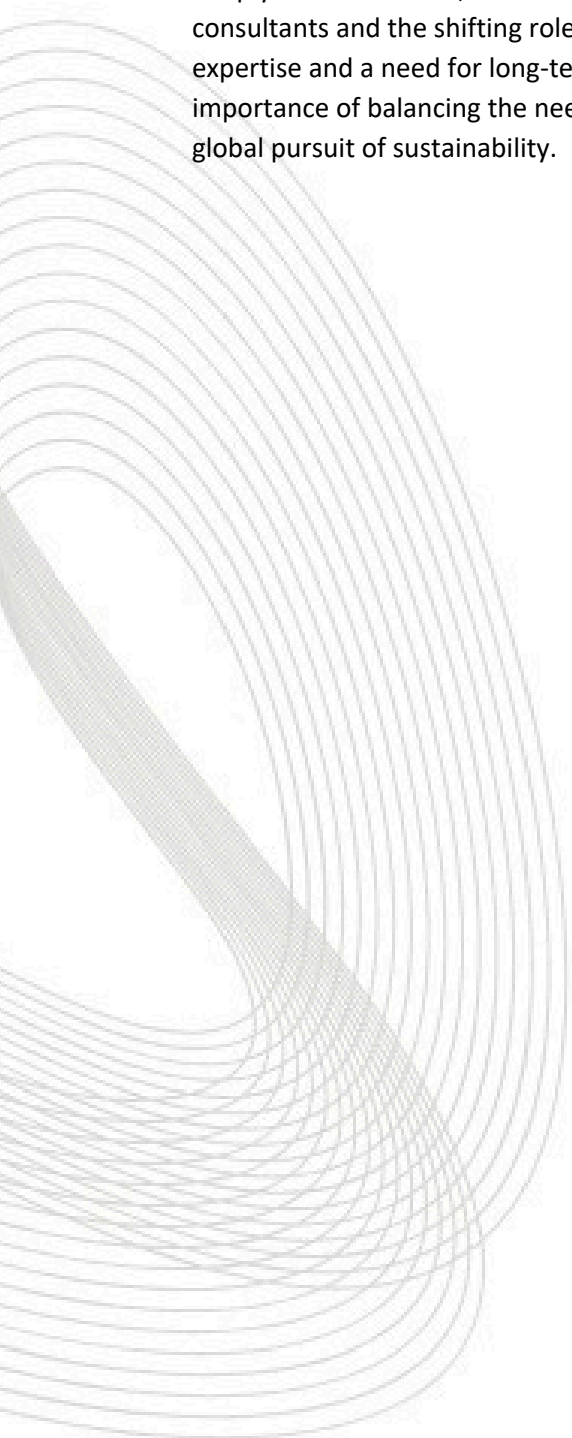
A recurring theme was the lack of clear corporate incentives to go beyond the bare minimum in sustainability reporting. The pressure on businesses to comply with regulations like CSRD often results in a focus on short-term compliance rather than long-term growth. Many companies struggle with reporting due to a lack of maturity in sustainability practices and the absence of clear guidance on how to assess vulnerabilities for long-term growth. The table discussed the importance of understanding time horizons and integrating long-term strategies into business models to encourage sustainable development.

Advertising and marketing perspectives also reflected this shift, with clients increasingly unwilling to work with companies that don't meet sustainability criteria. For instance, companies without clear sustainability KPIs are being sidelined in favour of those with more robust reporting practices. This

trend underscores the growing importance of sustainability not only for regulatory compliance but for securing business relationships and driving long-term growth.

Key Takeaways

The Be Better Sustainability table highlighted several critical issues in the ongoing sustainability journey. While regulatory frameworks like CSRD and SBTi offer a starting point, there is a need for clearer corporate incentives to go beyond compliance. Companies must embed sustainability more deeply across all areas, from carbon reduction to social responsibility. The growing reliance on consultants and the shifting roles of sustainability leaders within companies signal both a gap in expertise and a need for long-term strategy development. Finally, the conversation underlined the importance of balancing the needs of emerging markets with those of developed economies in the global pursuit of sustainability.



Sustainability and Reporting

Hosted by [Tim Lambert](#), Regional Lead at [osapiens](#)

The osapiens table, hosted by [Tim Lambert](#), discussion centred on the challenges organisations face with sustainability reporting under frameworks like CSRD, particularly around data availability, resource allocation and long-term transformation. The group also explored the broader sentiment surrounding ESG, the role of leadership and the need for building sustainable reporting maturity over time.



Challenges in Data and Expertise

A key challenge identified was the lack of available data for new CSRD Key Performance Indicators. Attendees noted that different teams within companies interpret data in varied ways, which complicates building cohesive and reliable reporting models. This data inconsistency is compounded by the green skills gap, where organisations face a shortage of expertise needed to meet evolving sustainability demands.

Governments were called upon to provide clearer guidance and pathways to develop green skills, as the skills gap is expected to worsen without intervention. Attendees emphasised that a lack of organisational capacity, both in terms of expertise and resources, limits progress in meeting compliance requirements.

Resource Allocation and Prioritisation

Sustainability initiatives require dedicated time and financial resources, yet many organisations operate reactively, scraping by with minimum compliance efforts. This short-term approach was criticised for stalling meaningful transformation, as robust reporting systems take years to stabilise and become cost-effective.

The group also acknowledged that sustainability prioritisation often depends on an organisation's leadership and values. While 80% of companies reportedly approach sustainability as a tick-box exercise, only 20% are truly value-driven, highlighting the need for cultural and structural shifts.

Regulation and Reporting

The group discussed how the layering of new regulations, including CSRD, is often perceived as a financial burden by businesses. There was a call for governments to communicate their strategies and the necessity of these regulations more clearly to foster better understanding and engagement.

Double materiality was seen as a positive development, as it encourages businesses to think about their broader environmental and social impacts. However, attendees noted that certain metrics, such as balancing outgoings and incomings, are not always conducive to long-term strategic planning.

Building Sustainability Maturity

Achieving effective sustainability reporting requires a phased approach, with organisations building capability and maturity over time. Attendees agreed that reporting requirements bring consistency

by creating a shared framework, but the need for immediate reporting often conflicts with the time required to establish robust, efficient systems.

Leadership vision plays a critical role, with attendees noting that sustainability needs to be integrated at the top level of organisational models to drive meaningful change.

Observations on Market Trends

Germany's early adoption of sustainability regulations was discussed as a case study. Although the country saw benefits in growing major markets, the complexity of regulations (specifically ERS) and the time investment required were highlighted as significant challenges.

One attendee noted that about 80% of businesses are currently focused on compliance rather than value-driven initiatives, reflecting a broader trend of short-termism. Conversely, companies with structured business models and a focus on long-term sustainability goals were better positioned to adapt to new requirements.

Key Takeaways

The osapiens table emphasised the need to address systemic challenges such as data consistency, the green skills gap and resource allocation. Building long-term sustainability maturity requires balancing immediate compliance needs with strategic investments in expertise, leadership and robust systems. Double materiality and evolving frameworks like CSRD offer opportunities to reshape organisational priorities, but success depends on sustained commitment and collaboration across stakeholders.

Regulation and Reporting Frameworks

Hosted by James Thompson, Director at [CGFI](#)

The discussion at the CGFI table, hosted by [James Thompson](#), revolved around the challenges and opportunities posed by sustainability reporting frameworks, particularly CSRD. Attendees explored themes such as the importance of data quality, the risks of greenwashing, the evolving roles of finance and sustainability teams, the implications of regulatory divergences and the broader shifts in corporate and public policy.



Data Quality and Usage

A major theme was the importance of reliable and usable data - referred to as “datability.” It is not enough for organisations to merely have data; the quality and sourcing of this data play a pivotal role. Poor data presents significant challenges, which can stem not only from internal issues within a business but also from the bandwidth or scope of the data being used.

The group stressed that data should not be viewed simply as a “tick-box” exercise to suit regulatory reports. Instead, it should be seen as a tool that enables the company to assess its operations and make meaningful changes based on the results. Different companies approach data handling in various ways. Some are more people-driven, relying on manual reviews or “eyeballing” data sets to ensure accuracy. Others take a procedural approach, focusing on compliance and whether the data meets specific standards. Across the board, the group emphasised the critical importance of audited and assured data to build trust and ensure accountability.

Greenwashing Risks

The group also explored the risks of greenwashing, highlighting that it often arises from unintentional miscommunication or a lack of thorough planning. Too often, organisations fail to engage deeply with their governance and compliance frameworks, resulting in shallow or incomplete reporting.

To address this, governance and compliance reporting should align closely with practical data points such as training documentation. For example, audit reports must correspond with HR records of employee numbers and the volume of training conducted. Similarly, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) data should be aligned with compliance requirements. Organisations can achieve this by collaborating with HR departments that already report under eco-legislation mandates.

A proactive approach is key, beginning with setting the narrative upfront. Using established frameworks as a foundation for decision-making ensures consistency and adopting double materiality positioning can help align the organisation’s story with its reporting goals.

Responsibility for Reporting

Responsibility for sustainability reporting varies widely depending on the company. In some organisations, risk teams handle reporting while in others it is managed within specific departments. Larger organisations, in particular, often display a more complex distribution of responsibilities.

The discussion highlighted an important distinction between risk and impact teams. Risk teams typically focus on identifying risks and opportunities, while impact teams assess the effects of operations on environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors. This distinction shapes how different organisations structure their reporting processes.

The Role of Finance in CSRD Reporting

The CSRD framework often aligns well with finance teams, as these teams are adept at structuring and solidifying frameworks. Sustainability teams, on the other hand, are typically better positioned to drive action. Increasingly, sustainability departments seek members with financial expertise to bridge the gap between planning and execution.

CFOs are playing a more prominent role in sustainability strategies. They tend to have greater influence and a stronger narrative within organisations, making them well-suited to drive decisions and implement meaningful change. By leveraging sustainability as a growth function, CFOs can move organisations beyond mere compliance, encouraging them to translate reporting into actionable improvements.

Broader Challenges and Trends

The discussion also touched on broader challenges, including the fragmented nature of global regulations. While harmonisation between regions like Europe and the US seems unlikely, many countries adopt elements from leading frameworks. In the UK, mandatory sustainability reporting is scheduled to begin in 2026, aligning with national environmental goals.

Future-proofing strategies emerged as a recurring theme, with attendees advocating for a forward-looking approach. Organisations must consider what is needed now to achieve their 2040 objectives.

Additionally, evolving technologies like AI and the transition to electric vehicles raise questions about energy efficiency and long-term sustainability. While these advancements are key to innovation and sustainability, they also pose challenges regarding energy efficiency and resource allocation. The group emphasised the need for organisations to account for these factors in long-term planning, balancing technological progress with sustainable energy solutions.

Key Takeaways

The discussion emphasised the importance of actionable reporting. Organisations must ensure that what they report drives meaningful change rather than simply ticking regulatory boxes. Effective collaboration between finance and sustainability teams is crucial to executing strategies. Finally, framework decisions must consider political and regulatory influences, including shifts driven by right-wing political movements.

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