



**Summary of WEC's September 24, 2015 Roundtable on:
"Building Sustainability Knowledge for Business Managers in Emerging Markets: On-the-Ground
Initiatives to Meet Company and Societal Needs"**

Thirty-eight professionals registered for the Roundtable held at the US National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C. The Roundtable objectives included: 1) comparing solutions developed to improve sustainability knowledge for managers working in emerging markets; 2) evaluating relationships and skills necessary for collaboration; 3) reviewing strategies for integrating sustainability knowledge into business implementation at market scale; and 4) identifying potential collaboration opportunities. The Roundtable was co-sponsored by The Coca-Cola Company, The Dow Chemical Company, IBM and Royal Dutch Shell.

Company, NGO and university speakers developed a number of important findings and points of discussion. They included:

- **Major initiatives to embed sustainability into a company's development of future leaders must be owned by the CEO, be integrated with organizational culture change, and create business impacts.** While companies possess an array of mechanisms to connect to and benefit the changing societies in which they operate—e.g., Coca-Cola's 5by20 Program, the Dow Academy, IBM's Corporate Service Corps—their goal is also to create a bigger impact on the work already being performed across business units to retain leadership support.
- **Sustainability must be demanded by and expected from employees across all major business functions.** Internally, sustainability should be designed to stimulate employee engagement and develop top talent, and lead to direct partnerships with business units. Externally, sustainability-related knowledge programs can be used for selecting strategic schools for recruiting and also for advancing direct business goals through relationship building (for example, 70% of Coca-Cola purchasers are women). Setting new goals can also be used to identify different skills that will be needed.
- **Innovation and competition are key features for building sustainability knowledge among business managers and employees.** Employees selected for participation in knowledge development programs in emerging markets emerge from an expanded competitive process. They are expected by the end of their program to improve listening and problem-solving skills, design team-based decisions, collaborate with local stakeholders, develop emotional connectivity and learn from discomfort. It is important to begin prospectively measuring the impact of sustainability on the future career development of business managers in both emerging and developed countries.

SPEAKERS:

Laurence Chandy, Brookings Institute
Monica Ellis, Global Water Challenge
Jennifer Frame, Dow Chemical
Neil C. Hawkins, Dow Chemical
Lawrence Mason, Earthwatch
Sameer Mithal, WaterHealth International
Randal Newton, Ingersoll Rand
Pamela J. Oksiuta, SC Johnson
Bea Perez, Coca-Cola
M. Dale Sands, AECOM
Jennifer Smith, Vital Voices Global Partnership
Isabel Studer, EGADE, Tec de Monterrey
Gina L. Tesla, IBM
Rupert Thomas, Royal Dutch Shell
Deirdre White, Pyxera
Terry F. Yosie, World Environment Center
Yasmina Zaidman, The Acumen Fund

- ***Relationship building and related skills for expanding collaboration have become a separate field of expertise.*** Cross functional skills such as listening, negotiation, project management, shared goal setting, coalition and network development, and leveraging outcomes across value chains and companies have become essential competencies for success, in addition to traditional technical and programmatic skills. While current and prospective employees/business managers may not initially possess these attributes, a school of thinking has emerged that organizations should “hire for attitudes and train for skills.” A number of successful initiatives to evaluate and learn from include the Coca-Cola’s Replenish Africa Initiative, Unilever’s Enhancing Livelihoods, and Vital Voices Growth. A common learning across these activities is to work on-the-ground on a one-on-one basis to build capacity at the local level while co-creating scale with external partners.
- ***There exist major barriers to achieving breakthrough sustainability initiatives.*** These can include: a lack of business leadership commitment; a low tolerance for risk; a poor understanding of the materiality of sustainability knowledge; absence of on-the-ground partnerships; structural factors that influence a company’s ability to partner effectively (is the impetus originating from the business unit or the Foundation?); smaller enterprises that lack appropriate systems to be a partner with a larger company; lack of company stability due to constant re-alignments; and budgetary challenges.
- ***Emerging markets present unique circumstances for company business managers and their customers.*** In many countries, the employees are younger than in developed markets, and sustainability has captured the attention and imagination of younger talent. Different business models can be required for success in developing nations (e.g., selling Windex in a format that is affordable to the community, or creating a business model for residents to sell products on a monthly refill/subscription basis that also allows them to educate the local community on malaria prevention). Much of the recruiting process in lesser developed nations is local, and university partnerships become a critical pathway to not only attracting talent but also building brand recognition. Larger companies are increasingly integrating social services into their business functions. The UN Sustainable Development Goals will accelerate expectations concerning business engagement with civil society on such issues as women’s empowerment, access to natural and financial capital, and education.
- ***Success in building sustainability capabilities and scale has become more dependent on working with the appropriate partners.*** A common goal between a company and its partners is a rarity, but searching for compatible goals is more practical. NGO partners are conducting services that range from field research, engagement with employees and stakeholders, providing learning platforms, measuring outcomes, building targeted coalitions, and managing supply chain functions. Companies cited as good examples of scaling sustainability are Unilever and SC Johnson because of their CEO leadership, organizational culture and expectations, targets and the strong role of sustainability within the business case.