



Blog Post

DECARBONIZING VALUE CHAINS REQUIRES THE NEXT TIER OF SUSTAINABILITY LEADERS

October 20, 2021

By Glenn Prickett
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Private sector decarbonization commitments are more vital than ever to meet the challenge of climate change. Only days remain until the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow where governments are expected to “ratchet up” their commitments under the Paris Agreement to avoid catastrophic climate change.

At this writing, the U.S. Congress has not enacted legislation to back the Biden Administration's pledge to halve emissions by 2030. China has not accelerated its prior commitment to peak emissions by 2030 and has ordered increased coal production to meet energy shortfalls. Leadership from these two global powers is essential to the summit's success.

Meanwhile, September's “Climate Week” in New York City saw the number of businesses and local governments pledging net-zero emissions double. According to a UN-backed [report](#), 1,500 companies with combined revenues over \$11.4 trillion and emissions exceeding that of the European Union are now committed to net zero.

With leadership from national governments uncertain, business can drive the transformation needed in industry and land use to decarbonize economies and adapt to climate change. In the process, business can help mobilize broad-based public support for governments to act more decisively.

The greatest challenge for companies to deliver their net-zero commitments lies in Scope 3, the emissions of their suppliers and customers. Often the majority of a company's total greenhouse gas footprint, these sources are beyond a company's direct control. Persuading consumers and other companies in a value chain to cut emissions requires a carefully targeted combination of voluntary incentives and public policies. The right tools and approaches vary by industry and geography.

WEC is committed to helping companies implement net-zero commitments across their value chains. With Trane Technologies, Chemours, and Toyota we have launched a series of **Executive Roundtables on Decarbonizing Value Chains** focused on the built environment, transportation, agriculture & land use, and industry & energy production. In these 2-day roundtables, senior executives and technical experts learn from one another about innovative solutions they can deploy in their business today and strategic challenges that demand collective action into the future.

Efforts by WEC member companies and others to decarbonize value chains place new demands on suppliers and customers that don't have a history of engagement on sustainability. The challenge is magnified by simultaneous scrutiny from investors concerned with environment, social, and governance (ESG) performance and rising customer demands for sustainable supply chains more generally.

WEC has launched our ***Next Tier Membership*** program to support companies that are new to managing sustainability in their business. Next Tier members will benefit from specialized webinars and roundtables that deal with the basics of building a sustainability management system. They will have access to the *WECosystem*, our new digital platform, so that they can meet and learn from WEC's global members. The *WECosystem* includes a geo-located directory of WEC members, a digital toolbox of sustainability resources, and a forum for queries and discussion of challenging topics. Next Tier Members will also be eligible for 1-1 mentorships to learn from more experienced WEC members in a structured, 9-month program that we will organize and support.

WEC will do all we can to help our member companies and other businesses drive decarbonization in their value chains. We hope that you will join our Executive Roundtables on Decarbonizing Value Chains and that you will encourage key suppliers and customers to become Next Tier Members of WEC. The more engagement we have from our members, the bigger the impact we can have in driving the transformation to a net-zero economy.

We don't have any time to lose.

Glenn Prickett is the President and CEO of the World Environment Center. He has spent three decades leading international environmental, natural resource and climate change policy in some of the world's preeminent NGO's.

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Blog Post



NATURE IS CALLING – THE BUSINESS CASE FOR RESILIENCE

August 9, 2021

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In late July, as wildfires and drought raged across the western United States, I paid a visit to my family’s farm in western Minnesota. The land has been in our family for 150 years – ever since my great-grandparents emigrated from Norway in the late 1800s and settled on a tall grass prairie that decades earlier had been taken from the indigenous Dakota people.

As we neared the farm, smoke from wildfires in the northern boundary waters formed a milky haze on the horizon. “Welcome to Boss Ridge Farm,” said Mark Erickson, who farms our land and neighboring properties. “Boss” refers to *Bos taurus*, the beef cattle that he raises, and “ridge” to the Continental Divide that drains one side of our land to the Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico and the other to the Red River and Hudson’s Bay.

Mark is a pioneer in regenerative agriculture. With holistic management, he is restoring the native grasslands and healthy soils that my family and our neighbors unwittingly degraded over a century of conventional farming. In Mark’s words, he aims to “create balance between the way God created it and what man needs to live well.”

In a summer of climate catastrophes, Mark’s philosophy is an inspiration. In the past few months, floods, droughts, heatwaves, wildfires, and other natural disasters have devastated communities around the world. The haze we experienced in Minnesota was a small example. These are no longer aberrations. Today’s extreme weather events will be the new normal in years to come. As greenhouse gases accumulate in the atmosphere and global temperatures rise, extreme weather events will be more frequent and destructive. Unfortunately, it only gets worse from here.

What does this mean for business? Decarbonization—as vital and challenging as it is—is not enough. Companies must prepare to do business in a radically different physical climate. Supply chains will face new vulnerabilities. Physical assets will be at risk from floods and fires. In many places, employees may be physically unable to work due to extreme heat. These business threats will also create opportunities for innovative companies to help their customers adapt to physical climate risks and make their businesses, properties, and communities more resilient.

This is where Mark Erickson’s example is so inspiring. Regenerative agriculture is drawing attention in business circles because it removes carbon from the atmosphere. But the business case for Mark is resilience. Healthy soil drains better, so he can graze prairie potholes that used to flood. It holds moisture, so his pasture is weathering a two-year drought better than it used to. Diverse grass varieties ensure that something grows in increasingly erratic weather. Biodiversity even provides natural pest control—this year’s grasshopper infestation is less costly to Mark because nematodes (roundworms) in his soil eat them.

With climate change, nature is calling. Innovators like Mark Erickson are listening and refashioning their businesses in tune with natural systems that are inherently resilient. In Mark's case, this means "mob grazing" his cattle to mimic the way wild herds grazed the prairie—tightly packed groups grazing small areas intensely and moving frequently to avoid predators. After 10 years, the result is healthy soil and tall native grasses with the inherent resilience of a natural ecosystem. He manages for a profit, but also for natural cycles of water, energy, and minerals in his fields and for the people (family, neighbors, customers, landowners) who depend on his business.

Agriculture is especially ripe to boost resilience by honoring natural systems. WEC has convened a [series of Executive Roundtables](#) on regenerative agriculture in the EU sponsored by **Syngenta** and engaging key actors throughout the value chain. We are identifying practical ways to incentivize growers to adopt regenerative practices and to measure impact. Separately, in collaboration with **UNEP**, we are conducting applied research with leaders in the food & agriculture sector to identify key opportunities and barriers to scaling nature-positive business. We will publish the results in November 2021.

But natural solutions for climate resilience aren't limited to agriculture. WEC member **Dow Chemical** learned from the work of an innovative engineer in Texas that restoring wetlands could be a more cost-effective solution for managing wastewater than building new infrastructure. Based on that insight, the company has delivered over \$500 million in value to its shareholders through natural infrastructure projects—halfway toward a goal of \$1 billion by 2025.

Coca-Cola FEMSA has invested in over 25 "water funds" across Latin America to restore natural watersheds that provide water for its bottling plants and the communities they serve. This natural infrastructure provides freshwater, sequesters carbon, and boosts livelihoods in rural areas.

Other WEC members are taking these insights and building new businesses around them. **Wavin**, an **Orbia** company, markets "TreeTanks" structures that protect root systems and allow cities to plant more trees to provide shade, improve air quality, absorb stormwater, and reduce extreme heat. **Ecolab** has created the "Smart Water Navigator" to help companies set and meet performance targets for water. A [WEC-Ecolab Executive Roundtable](#) earlier this year brought together companies who aim to be "water positive" by returning more water than they consume to the basins where they operate through conservation and watershed restoration.

None of this is as easy or straightforward as it sounds. Each of these examples required time, money, and courage in the beginning to set aside conventional practices and study natural systems for innovative solutions. Some experiments work, others do not. New partnerships with vendors, customers, NGOs, and even competitors can be required to achieve success.

These constraints have slowed progress on natural solutions—for resilience and for carbon sequestration. Despite Mark Erickson's success with my family's farm, a drive around the county revealed far fewer regenerative farms than we hoped to see, and Mark himself was uncertain about the prospects for scale, with current market and policy conditions.

WEC will do our part to bring our members together with partners in their value chains to scale innovations for resilience, especially nature-based solutions. We will continue our series of Executive Roundtables on *Regenerative Agriculture in the EU* and seek to replicate the work in North America. In upcoming Executive Roundtables on Decarbonizing Value Chains, sponsored by **Trane Technologies** and **Chemours**, we will explore how resilience can be built into solutions for decarbonizing the built environment, transportation, land use, and industrial & energy production.

We will continue our Gold Medal Executive Roundtable series on *Climate Action for a Green Recovery* with sessions in Asia and Latin America and a special focus on how business can implement the results of this year's UN conferences on biodiversity and climate change. Our capacity building work in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East will help small enterprises pursue innovative nature-based solutions for resilience in their communities.

For too long, human institutions have seen nature as something we control—to conquer or to save. But we do not conquer, save, or control nature. We are part of nature. By learning what that can mean for our businesses, we can help the communities we serve become more resilient to the new climate ahead of us. We welcome companies and NGOs to join WEC's members in this work. We have much to learn from one another and no more time to lose.

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Blog Post

CLIMATE ACTION FOR A GREEN RECOVERY?

June 4, 2021

By Glenn Prickett
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This week WEC presents our [2021 Gold Medal Award](#) to Microsoft. The pioneer of our digital age has also been a pioneer for sustainability with an impressive pledge: remove all the CO₂ from the atmosphere that the company has emitted since it was founded. Microsoft is committed to decarbonize its business, invest with others in scaling carbon removal technologies (nature and technology-based), and push for public policies to transform the global economy to net-zero. Microsoft's leadership described this challenge as a "moonshot for the world" when they made their pledge in early 2020.

COVID-19 has made the challenge even more urgent and complex. While vaccines are helping wealthy nations emerge from the pandemic, it continues to rage across the developing world, with some countries experiencing their worst rates of infection, hospitalization, and death since its outset. This crisis in public health has already delivered a damaging blow to societies and economies by pushing more than 70 million people back into poverty – the first such increase since 1998. Decades of hard-won progress on sustainable development are at risk of unraveling.

Climate action is urgent. But in the aftermath of the pandemic, we must pursue climate action in ways that advance other Sustainable Development Goals. The world committed to the "Global Goals" in 2015, the same year as the Paris Agreement on climate change. However, even before the pandemic, progress on the Global Goals was uneven. At our [SDG Workshop](#) in May, WEC member ERM shared a sobering survey of development experts who agreed that the world is falling behind on the most urgent SDGs and that most companies and organizations are not focused on the most urgent goals beyond climate change, specifically ending poverty and advancing social equity.

Companies have an impact on the Global Goals—positive or negative—whether they intend to or not. At minimum, the world needs more transparency on private sector performance against the SDGs. Disclosure against a common framework would hasten accountability and could lead to more societal pressure for action.

I'm thrilled that this week, WEC and Microsoft will launch a series of Gold Medal Executive Roundtables on *Climate Action for a Green Recovery*. The roundtables will focus on consequential actions that companies, governments, and NGOs can take to eliminate greenhouse gases, enhance resilience to climate change, and create economic opportunity for all – especially for underrepresented communities.

The first roundtable on June 9, 2021 will cast a broad, global lens on the topics of clean energy, natural climate solutions, and climate justice. To stimulate dialogue, we'll hear from a diverse panel of experts, including Microsoft's Lucas Joppa, Woodwell Climate Research Center's Marcia Macedo, Trane Technologies' Scott Tew, and UCLA Center for Diverse Leadership in Science's Aradhna Tripati.

Subsequent roundtables will dive more deeply into carbon removal, regional priorities in Asia and Latin America, and a “post-mortem” on this year’s UN conferences on climate change and biodiversity. Like all WEC roundtables, each of these sessions will focus on practical steps that companies can take to advance sustainable development. We will hold them under the Chatham House Rule to encourage a frank and honest exchange of ideas.

I’m not sure that anyone has the answers yet to how we can advance the imperative goals of climate stability, economic growth, and social justice simultaneously. I know that we need to apply a broad lens to the problem, but beyond that I have more questions than answers. Sometimes “thought leadership” means asking the right questions, listening to others, and working across diverse constituencies to develop answers. That’s WEC’s approach, and I’m proud that we can apply it to the urgent challenges in front of us.

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Blog Post

TIME FOR A RESET

By Glenn Prickett
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⤴ Swipe Up

Spring has arrived on time in Washington, DC. Tender yellow and white buds poke out of forsythias and magnolias. Warm sunshine and fresh, earthy smells fill the air. Nature is renewing itself like clockwork.

In the Prickett family, we are preparing for Passover seder. Wait, didn't we just have a Zoom seder? Where did the year go? And at the same time, how did it feel so unbearably long?

Welcome to the pandemic reset.

The pandemic is far from over. But in fortunate places like ours, with vaccination underway, we are emerging from our quarantine shells into a renewed world and starting to wonder what our "new normal" will be.

A reset is what we need.

The world went into lockdown at the start of 2020, just as scientists told us that we need to cut greenhouse gas emissions in half and conserve a third of the planet by 2030 to ensure a livable future. The pandemic revealed the inequities of our economies, as poor people and underrepresented communities suffered disproportionately from COVID-19 and its economic impact. The senseless killing of unarmed citizens in the U.S. contributed to a global movement for racial justice.

To be honest, a year ago I had a difficult time imagining how we could make the systemic changes needed to ensure planetary sustainability. The world seemed set on its economic course — despite the environmental and social warning signs flashing around us.

Then came the pandemic. We realized that we could make abrupt changes in our economies when our lives depended on it. While painful, governments and the private sector instituted shutdown plans and relief packages. We managed our way through a tragic year without the economy collapsing.

We learned to reset. Along the way, a surprising number of global companies declared deeper and more urgent commitments to environmental, social, and governance (ESG) goals. A new government was elected in the U.S. with a renewed commitment to act on climate change, economic inclusion, and racial justice. As we emerge from the pandemic, some of the emergency changes we adopted—working from home, replacing travel with Zoom meetings, spending more time outdoors with family—may take hold permanently.

Now we can apply the lesson of this reset. Societies can act decisively to tackle the ongoing challenges of sustainable development. WEC member companies can play vital roles in driving the changes we need.

We must decarbonize. As companies set science-based climate targets, they need to help governments enact smart policies for net-zero emissions. Companies on their own can't achieve the emissions reductions needed without public policies to drive changes among their suppliers and customers. WEC roundtables this year on decarbonizing value chains will explore policy and market incentives to decarbonize the built environment, transportation, land use, industry, and energy production.

We must invest in nature. The value of biodiversity is underappreciated because nature is a public good—we get its benefits for free. Yet investments in nature—conserving biodiversity through protected areas and sustainable use—deliver tangible economic benefits in water supply, flood control, agricultural productivity, climate stabilization, and more. WEC will continue its partnership with UNEP this year to document nature-positive business models and hold roundtables on regenerative agriculture and achieving net positive water.

We must pursue environmental justice. We all have a stake in ending systemic racism. As societies rebuild their economies, we must ensure that investments benefit underrepresented communities and don't further disadvantage them. This applies to companies' own sustainability initiatives, as well as to public projects. WEC will convene a roundtable this year on environmental justice and how companies can help to advance it. We will also continue our long-standing work to build capacity in micro, small, and medium enterprises in the developing world.

A year ago this month, in a column about the looming challenges of the pandemic, I wrote “we can...start thinking about opportunities to emerge from this crisis on a more sustainable and resilient path.” We've learned a lot from the reset. Now it's time to act.

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Blog Post

TURNING THE PAGE ON 2020

By Glenn Prickett
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⤴ Swipe Up

We must invest in nature. The value of biodiversity is underappreciated because nature is a public good—we get its benefits for free. Yet investments in nature—conserving biodiversity throAs I write this, encouraging reports on President-elect Joe Biden’s early cabinet picks and policy plans suggest that we are starting to turn the page on 2020 at last.

Of course, we are not through the global pandemic yet. Infections rates are rising, promising a long winter with more suffering and death among vulnerable populations. With stimulus funds drying up, the prospect of a double-dip recession is all too real.

But the arrival of vaccines in 2021 and a new U.S. administration with a more disciplined approach to combatting the virus offer hope that, with shared effort and sacrifice, we can put this pandemic behind us.

Beyond a shared commitment to public health, we will need a shared determination to tackle the four challenges that all societies face in 2021: defeat the pandemic, rebuild the economy, fight climate change, and deliver racial justice.

WEC and our members can play a key role in this effort. Our mission is right on point. Sustainable development is the ideal framework for acting on these multiple, interconnected challenges.

Societies don’t have the political or financial capital to address each problem in isolation. We must integrate economic recovery with aggressive action on climate (and other urgent environmental issues), racial and social justice, and public health.

Gro Brundtland’s definition has never been more apt: “**Sustainable development** is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

WEC’s 2021 program of **Executive Roundtables** will arm our members with practical tools to deliver integrated outcomes for decarbonization, human rights in supply chains, sustainable food production, water security, plastic waste reduction, and more, all with a through-line of broad-based economic growth.

Our **Capacity Building** programs will continue to help small enterprises in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East strengthen the economic, ecological, and social fabric of their societies while contributing to the solution of global and regional environmental challenges, most importantly climate change.

Our **Gold Medal Award** will again recognize a global corporate leader—like the Ford Motor Company in 2020—whose deep commitment to sustainable development makes a difference in its own right and inspires other companies to raise their ambition. New jurors from Asia, Europe, and the U.S. will ensure that our Gold Medalist is truly world class.

I’m especially excited about the opportunity we’ll have in 2021 to provide a sounding board for governments on effective policies to advance economic recovery, climate action, social justice, and public health through sustainable development. WEC is not an advocacy organization, but our members have encouraged us to add public policy to our agenda, since our sustainability priorities depend on it.

With a new U.S. administration and other governments embarking on economic recovery programs, WEC can convene roundtables with policymakers for our members to share effective policy recommendations. Our board is beginning to make plans for this work, and I will reach out to members for your advice in the coming weeks.

As we turn the page on 2020, I wish all of you and yours happy and healthy holidays. I can't wait to start working with you in 2021 to help all of our societies build back better.

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