



*Climate Action for a Green Recovery – first event in a series of five
Gold Medal Executive Roundtable Summary
Virtual Conference – June 09, 2021*

Background

On the occasion of awarding the Gold Medal 2021 to Microsoft, the World Environment Center convened an Executive Roundtable to learn from thought leaders and practitioners in key action areas about how an economic and social recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic can draw from solutions for a greener business – especially the urgent challenge to decarbonize our economies. Held under the Chatham House Rule, this Roundtable was a dialogue designed to share goals, strategies and practical solutions to scale global decarbonization efforts in ways that deliver economic opportunity and social justice for all communities in the wake of a devastating global pandemic.

Participants

Speakers represented key action areas:

- **Keynote: Climate Action for a Green Recovery: Lucas Joppa** – Chief Environmental Officer, Microsoft
- **Clean Technology: Scott Tew** – Trane Technologies
- **Natural Climate Solutions: Marcia Macedo** – Woodwell Climate Research Center
- **Environmental Justice: Aradhna Tripathi** – UCLA Center for Diverse Leadership in Science

moderated by Glenn Prickett, President & CEO, World Environment Center

The Roundtable was held virtually, with 28 senior executives from WEC member companies and other international corporations, as well as senior officials from academia and think tanks.

Key Points

- (1) A bold commitment to rapid decarbonization is most valuable** according to leading companies. While such a commitment may be beyond a company's current ability to deliver, it inspires innovation, strengthens customer relationships, and galvanizes all necessary parties to solve the challenge. A company might not fully achieve all aspects of their goal – however, the benefits in innovation and rapid progress on reducing emissions make it a worthy action nonetheless.
- (2) Action on several fronts is needed simultaneously, although it is imperative to keep in mind the order of priority when businesses distribute their resources.** According to scientists and business experts: (1) first concentrate on reducing emissions, (2) then help to conserve natural ecosystems (don't destroy what is working), (3) support the management of ecosystems so that they survive and function properly, (4) and as a fourth priority, restore natural ecosystems (the best proven carbon sinks we have). However, some companies advise concentrating first only on decarbonizing the business operations with its value chain and product as much as possible and not to be tempted to allocate time and financial resources to any kind of offsetting until the very final unavoidable emissions.



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- (3) **Total decarbonization is made from both reduction and removal.** While companies first reduce and avoid greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) as much as possible, their net zero carbon commitments can only be achieved as they offset the last remainder of unavoidable emissions from their production or product. Some roundtable participants suggested to look for opportunities to scale such removal of CO₂ from the atmosphere by creating functioning carbon removal markets. According to them, it is only through large-scale removal that the world can get to net zero GHG emissions – because many actors on the planet won't be able or willing to become carbon neutral. Global companies have the capacity to lead this.
- (4) **Building a globally functioning market for carbon removal in collaboration with governments, business and NGOs would be valuable.** Among the many categories of carbon removal options – such as ecosystem conservation, afforestation, reforestation, soil carbon sequestration, direct air capture, etc. – nature-based solutions are most important, according to participants. That is especially because here the supply is greatest, but also because the cost is comparably low. However, when thinking of removal markets, investors currently feel it is difficult to find well monitored and verified projects at large scale. It takes much effort to trust that the ecosystems they want to protect are not already preserved or sold twice, that they are managed well and kept at full capacity, and that the measurement tools used are globally accepted. Scientists that participated in the event confirmed that many suitable projects exist but at the same time they explain that globally trusted frameworks must be developed, e.g. with support of the private sector (developing a rating system for carbon capture is just one example that was mentioned).
- (5) **Our societies tend to exclude populations from discussions who may have solutions at hand.** Some parts of society, typically those who suffer most from climate change are often not being heard. However, involving underrepresented communities can incentivize contribution and support the transition to decarbonize economies in many ways. Along with governments, businesses can educate, partner, donate and involve these communities in decision-making processes. Just think of how diverse Boards produce better financial returns – something now widely acknowledged.
- (6) It was argued that **policy leaders need to hear from sector-leading companies**, to clearly show what's possible. Companies must step into a supporting role for governments: (a) showing that they are not standing in the way for ambitious climate policy actions and (b) providing solutions and best practices for the policy development process. Particularly, sector leaders should not sit at the sidelines any longer but demonstrate what is possible, share how solutions can be done at scale and articulate what is needed to scale solutions further. Often scaling requires a variety of groups to move forward. Policy makers need to understand who else is needed to make the scaling happen, so that they can incentivize those missing groups. Some participants also mentioned expectations that the voluntary commitments made by companies to be carbon neutral with their value chains, won't be voluntary to comply with in the years to come. If governments don't hold companies accountable, investors surely will.

Further resource: <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/climate-targets-of-fortune-500-companies/>