

EmiratesGBC 2023 Congress Briefing

Pathway to COP28: The Role of Sustainable Built Environment in Accelerating Climate Action

Fire-side Chat

The fire-side chat's objective was to foster a discussion between two pioneering women in the field of sustainability focusing on the pivotal role of the sustainable built environment in accelerating climate action.

Speakers

Alida Saleh, Head of Sustainability MEA, JLL, and Climate Champions, Senior Advisor for Built Environment, High Level Climate Champions

Habiba Al Marashi, President of Arabia CSR Network, The Co-Founder, Chairperson of Emirates Environmental Group (EEG) and Co-Founder and Treasurer of Emirates GBC

Ms. Alida initiated the discussion by underscoring the critical significance of the built environment, often underrepresented in climate discourse. She emphasized that buildings account for a staggering 40% of global greenhouse gas emissions, emphasizing the urgency of transitioning to green buildings, particularly in regions like the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where 75% of buildings are at risk due to climate change.

Supporting Ms. Alida's insights, Ms. Habiba raised critical questions about the long-term vision for construction projects, emphasizing the need for responsible business practices that prioritize both profitability and the well-being of people and the environment. She stressed the importance of setting clear time frames and leveraging available technologies to facilitate the transition to a net-zero carbon future.

Ms. Habiba also commended the UAE's commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 but highlighted the need for collective efforts involving government, the private sector, academia, civil society, and society as a whole.

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She stressed the importance of harnessing the UAE's unique expertise and engaging the private sector's leadership role in strategically positioning the transition to net zero.

Capacity building emerged as a key message, with an emphasis on various platforms for capacity building such as seminars, networking events, training programs, and workshops. Ms. Habiba stressed the need for multinational companies to cascade sustainability requirements to all dealers and suppliers and emphasized the significance of partnerships and collaboration in adopting a collaborative, win-win approach to sustainability.

When asked how companies can start their journey toward Net Zero, Ms. Alida advised organizations to begin where they are, with leadership commitment being crucial. Understanding their current carbon footprint, setting specific reduction targets, and collaborating with competitors to innovate together were recommended steps. She also stressed the importance of preparing for upcoming regulations and adopting a phased approach.

Reflecting on common challenges in integrating sustainability and Net Zero goals into existing operations, Ms. Habiba highlighted knowledge gaps, resource requirements, and the fear of the unknown. She emphasized the importance of involving the supply chain, engaging the private sector from the beginning, and ensuring that they contribute to the development of regulations and policies.

Ms. Alida discussed the Race to Zero campaign, which involves over 12,000 organizations worldwide but lacks participation from the MENA region. She encouraged organizations interested in joining the campaign to engage with representatives from the World Green Building Council and Climate Champions and emphasized the benefits of participating, including global recognition.

Ms. Habiba shared EmiratesGBC's plans to support businesses in their Net Zero transition, focusing on knowledge sharing, capacity building, and advocacy for appropriate laws and regulations. She highlighted EmiratesGBC's role in recognition and incentivization through the MENA Green Building Award and emphasized collaboration across sectors.

In conclusion, both speakers emphasized the importance of collaboration and collective action in addressing sustainability challenges in the built environment, recognizing the immense potential for positive change in the UAE and beyond when stakeholders work together toward a common goal.