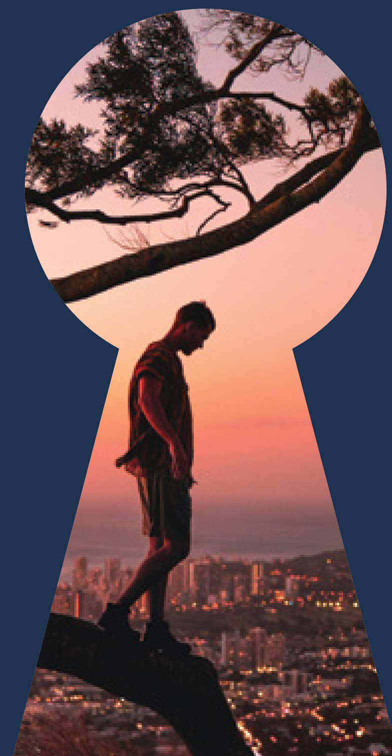
United Nations Global Compact-Accenture 2025 CEO Study



Turning the Key

Unlocking the Next Era of Sustainability Leadership

United Nations Global Compact | 25 YEARS

accenture

> *"We can only meet [our] goals with stronger collaboration between Governments, and across society and sectors. Those that lag behind need not be a reason for us to be discouraged, but to increase our commitment to move forward.*
>
> *The rewards are there for the taking, for all those ready and willing to lead the world through these troubled times. We are at a turning point. I urge you to seize this moment; and seize the prize.*

António Guterres
United Nations Secretary-General
Petersberg Climate Dialogue Remarks, March 2025

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Building Resilience: Balancing Now and Next

Executive summary

Sustainability has entered an era of pragmatism. Since 2007, the UN Global Compact-Accenture CEO Study has traced sustainability's evolution from a moral movement rooted in reputational risk to a central pillar of corporate strategy, reinforced by governance frameworks and industry standards.

Today, the world is navigating fractured governance, intensifying global crises and rapid technological advances. In response, leaders are balancing immediate business concerns and a broader vision for the future by translating bold, long-term sustainability goals into concrete and measurable near-term actions. Despite competing priorities and new challenges, 90 per cent of CEOs advise their successors to continue investment in sustainability initiatives.

Pragmatism comes with a paradox. As CEOs adjust to increasing consumer demand, employee expectations and evolving regulations, 88 per cent believe the business case for sustainability is stronger today than five years ago, and 99 per cent intend to maintain or expand their sustainability commitments. Yet only half feel very comfortable communicating their progress publicly, with many companies having pulled back from public sustainability statements amid growing political and public scrutiny.

Decisive action is needed from business leaders as well as governments. Only 35 per cent of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) targets are on track, and 2024 marked the first calendar year to exceed the Paris Agreement threshold of 1.5°C. CEOs are calling for the public sector to step up, with 92 per cent believing strong global governance and policy alignment is "critical" or "important" to achieving the global sustainability agenda.

The private sector is not prepared for the challenges ahead. Only 26 per cent of CEOs have dedicated scenario planning teams, and fewer than 14 per cent feel well-prepared for global challenges such as inflation, trade regulation and climate change. While 96 per cent of CEOs view innovation and technology as "critical" or "important" to advancing the global sustainability agenda, just 26 per cent rank them among their top strategic priorities.

CEOs' actions in the next few years will determine whether the private sector moves toward sustainable growth or defaults to scattered progress. The path of coordinated acceleration would see CEOs uniting around five key priorities—collaborating on regulation, harnessing consumer demand, expanding access to technology, upskilling for the future and leading with credibility and purpose—to ignite momentum, build trust and align public and private sectors for systemic impact. The alternative is fragmented adoption, wherein uneven regulations, misaligned incentives and inequitable access to capital and technology stall momentum for a generation.

The necessary tools, such as renewable energy and generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI), are available. What remains to be found is the courage to act with credibility and speed. Decisions made now will shape not only the trajectory of global sustainability, but also the kind of inclusive, resilient and regenerative world we leave behind. The future is not something we inherit. It is something we create.

Sanda Ojiambo
Assistant Secretary General and CEO, United Nations Global Compact

Foreword

As we commemorate 25 years since the founding of the UN Global Compact, now is not only a time to reflect, it is a time for greater ambition, unity and collaboration. This milestone reminds us to celebrate progress while recognizing that the world has fallen short of our shared ambitions. We still face serious risks from climate change, widening inequality, rising tensions and growing polarization.

There are signs of advancement on common goals: Over 91 per cent of CEOs believe the private sector has made "some" or "significant" progress in transparency, ethical business practices, equality, representation and renewable energy development.

While these gains are encouraging, with five years remaining to achieve the SDGs, only 35 per cent of targets are on track to be achieved. The world faces a stark choice: accelerate collective measures or risk lasting consequences.

Reassuringly, 99 per cent of CEOs report they are focused on expanding or maintaining their sustainability-related commitments. However, business action remains limited by a lack of robust public sector investment and ambition. CEOs told us they are doubling down on areas where business value and societal impact align with supply chain sustainability and end-to-end company transformation. This approach is good for business and society as a whole, yet we need to dramatically scale the number of companies embedding sustainability in their operations at the speed required.

As we mark nearly two decades of collaboration on the CEO Study, we are grateful to our many colleagues at the UN Global Compact and our collaborators at Accenture for their contributions to this study and previous editions. We also extend our appreciation to the business leaders and other stakeholders who were instrumental in developing this report.

Business as usual is not an option. Many of the tools and technologies necessary for the private sector to align its core business strategies with the SDGs, build resilience in supply chains and prioritize long-term value and growth are now available

The future of sustainability leadership will be defined by the choices we make today—and by the costs of inaction. CEOs now face a moment of decision, with the opportunity to move beyond ambition, embedding sustainability into the core of strategy and culture through bold, inclusive action. By aligning business fundamentals with sustainable leadership, we can accelerate coordinated progress and avoid a fragmented, uneven path that leaves opportunity—and resilience—on the table. Now is the time for action.

Introduction

Looking back at the nearly 20-year history of the CEO Study, the private sector has undergone a remarkable transformation regarding sustainability, leveraging its resources, innovation and influence to create meaningful change. Today, 88 per cent of CEOs believe the business case for sustainability is stronger than it was five years ago. This shift in executive mindset is happening as CEOs face geopolitical shifts, economic and profitability pressures and regulatory and reporting complexities.

This research has engaged thousands of chief executives over the last several years—including nearly 2,000 this year—offering unique insight into the evolving sentiments of senior business leaders. A clear majority of CEOs today report that sustainability is integrated into their company's core operations, with over 99 per cent anticipating further integration into their core business strategy and leadership priorities. Yet despite this momentum, public mentions by CEOs on sustainability have declined—just as the world exceeded the Paris Agreement 1.5°C threshold.

At the same time, CEOs overwhelmingly recognize the role of innovation in advancing the sustainability agenda: 96 per cent agree that innovation and technological progress are essential to achieving the global sustainability agenda. Still, only one in four currently rank technology and innovation among their top three strategic priorities—revealing significant untapped potential to accelerate sustainable development.

As governments face fiscal pressure and geopolitical gridlock, businesses remain the most agile actors to drive SDG achievement. This year's report celebrates hard-won progress and confronts our urgent challenges. It explores five keys for CEOs across regulation, consumers, technology, upskilling and leadership to reimagine the road to long-term global resilience. Adopting these keys will help shape the pragmatic approaches we need to build momentum and deliver value.

We are grateful to the UN Global Compact for our long-standing partnership and to its teams for their insightful contributions throughout this exciting and critical work. We look forward to our continued collaboration as we call on the private sector to lead with purpose and decisiveness toward a sustainable future.

Stephanie Jamison
Global Resources Industry Practice Chair and Global Sustainability Services Lead, Accenture

Michael D. Hughes
Director of Sustainability Strategy and UN Programs Lead, Accenture

Illuminating the Past: The Evolution of Sustainable Business

Sustainability is not a new concept

Sustainability has transformed from ancient cultural practices to a corrective for industrial-era exploitation to a modern business strategy

As a term, *sustainability* was popularized in the 1980s to describe a development approach aimed at minimizing environmental harm. But almost nothing about it is modern. For centuries, Indigenous peoples have embraced sustainability as a core principle, living in harmony with nature to secure essential resources. Today, companies are increasingly adopting that same approach, balancing environmental and social stability alongside long-term profitability and resilience.

Pivotal moments have brought sustainability into focus for CEOs

Tensions—and connections—between business, society and climate emerged in the post-World War II environment

Born out of the aftermath of World War II, the United Nations has played a pivotal role in supporting stable markets through global cooperation, which greatly benefits the private sector. As the world rebuilt, the accelerating impacts of industrialization—biodiversity loss, worker exploitation and public health crises—became increasingly evident. Tragedies including the 1948 Donora smog disaster in the US and the 1956 spread of Minamata disease in Japan captured public attention, with grassroots movements beginning to advocate for change.[1] Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) helped ignite public awareness and early environmentalism. Intensifying concern about the planet's health fueled calls for action from governments and businesses, leading to the first Earth Day in 1970.[2]

From the 1970s through the early 2000s, growing public pressure expanded environmental policy to include social and governance concerns. The 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment launched a global conversation on the links between economic growth, pollution and human well-being. In 1987, *Our Common Future*, commonly known as the *Brundtland Report*, introduced the concept of "sustainable development." The 1992 Rio Earth Summit produced *Agenda 21*, a sustainable development action plan, and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, aimed at preventing anthropogenic climate impact. These milestones led to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which set binding greenhouse gas emissions targets. At the same time, growing corporate awareness began to emerge, as reflected in frameworks such as John Elkington's triple bottom line.[3]

The United Nations Global Compact mobilized the private sector around the principles of sustainability

Public backlash to globalization peaked with the 1999 "Battle in Seattle" protests against the World Trade Organization. In this context, then-United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan proposed "a global compact of shared values and principles, which will give a human face to the global market."[4] Launched in 2000, the United Nations Global Compact is a call to companies everywhere to align with universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption, and to take action in support of UN goals.

Several United Nations conventions—the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (1998) and the United Nations Convention against Corruption (2003)—underpinned The Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact, finalized in 2004. In the years that followed, the Compact helped shepherd in a new age of deeper business engagement with sustainability, elevating the issue's importance on the CEO agenda.

The CEO Study gives voice to evolving ambition, action and challenges for business and sustainability[5]

Since its inception in 2007, the United Nations Global Compact–Accenture CEO Study has captured thousands of voices from Chief Executives around the world. This amounts to the largest longitudinal record of CEO sentiment and action on sustainability, providing a unique perspective on how leaders embed sustainability into strategies and operations and form partnerships to scale progress. The progression of these reports highlights the transformation of sustainability from a peripheral concern to a strategic business imperative—and reveals where private sector action needs to equal or exceed ambition.

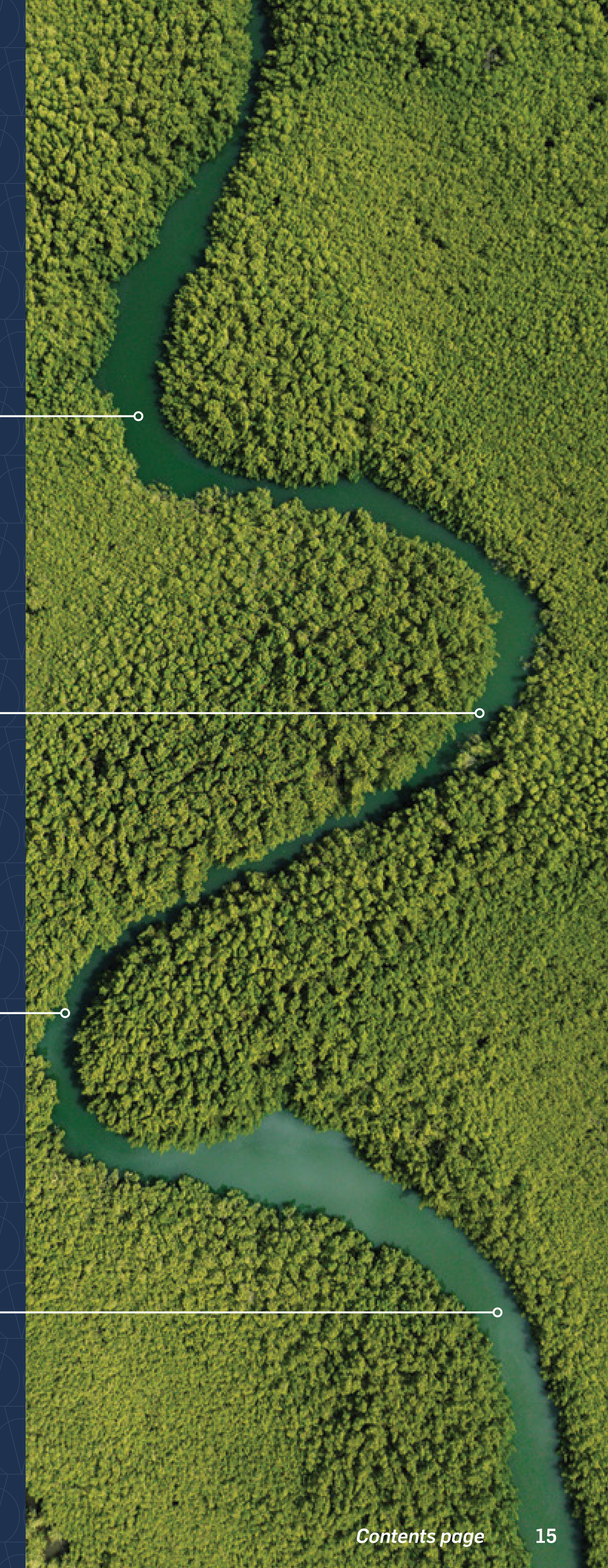
CEO Study Eras of Sustainability

2007–2012
Moral Movement to Business Basic
Reputational risk unlocked the first door

2013–2018
Emerging Strategic Priority
Sustainability strategy takes shape with support from new frameworks and governance

2019–2022
Business Takes a Holistic Approach
Sustainability gains traction as CEOs embrace metrics and investors take notice

2023–Present
Competing Priorities and the Fight for Sustainability
Governance fractures as data and AI reshape the path to global cooperation



> “Sustainability issues are critically important for our company’s future.
>
> *Hirokazu Hashimoto, Former Chairman and Representative Director of Anritsu Corporation, 2010*

> “You will increasingly be judged by the contributions that you will make to society.
>
> *Paul Polman, Former CEO of Unilever, 2010*

> “Sustainability now has to be on everyone’s agenda, and that represents a fundamental change.
>
> *Klaus Kleinfeld, Former Chairman and CEO of Alcoa, 2010*

> “Investment funds are starting to ask the right questions.
>
> *Barbara Krumsiek, Former President, CEO and Chair of Calvert Group Ltd, 2010*

Moral Movement to Business Basic (2007–2012)

Reputational risk unlocked the first door

In 2007, CEOs primarily understood sustainability as a moral imperative essential to reputation, but not yet as a foundational element of business strategy. The Kyoto Protocol had just become legally binding in 2005, marking the first international agreement to set emissions reduction targets for industrialized nations.

Seeking to galvanize broader support for the sustainability agenda, the UN Global Compact and UN Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP FI) joined forces to establish the UN Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) in 2006. This organization helped formalize sustainability in capital markets by encouraging institutional investors to incorporate environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors into their decision-making processes. The UN Global Compact then launched the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) to strengthen sustainability competencies in business. PRME focused on preparing responsible leaders to make decisions that will advance sustainable development.

By 2010, more than nine in ten CEOs were already calling sustainability an important issue, but they remained focused on reputation and risk.

The *UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*, published in 2011, defined corporate responsibility to respect human rights and became a key reference for national policies and company due diligence practices. Yet corporate accountability was modest, with many business leaders describing sustainability initiatives as largely reactive or discretionary. Financial justifications for these efforts proved elusive, leaving the impression that corporate engagement with sustainability was more about image than measurable business benefit.

Emerging Strategic Priority (2013–2018)

Sustainability strategy takes shape with support from new frameworks and governance

By 2013, the narrative had shifted significantly. Business leaders spoke of sustainability not merely as reputation management but as central to innovation and competitive advantage. Former HSBC CEO Douglas Flint declared, “Sustainability is now mainstream,” signaling that CEOs had begun to see tangible opportunities for revenue growth and cost reductions from sustainable practices.

Legislation including the United Kingdom’s Companies Act (2013) and South Africa’s King Code (2014) introduced rules requiring companies to disclose ESG performance—marking a shift toward corporate accountability and transparency. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assessment reports released in 2013 and 2014 renewed public interest by drawing attention to increasing social inequity and accelerating environmental crises that would result from a lack of ambitious and coordinated international action.

Despite rising enthusiasm, implementation lagged behind aspiration. Fewer than one in five CEOs strongly agreed that they accepted personal accountability, and they reported a top barrier was “competing strategic priorities.” With metrics scarce, this gap is unsurprising as it remained difficult to connect sustainability to clear business value. Kasper Rorsted, former CEO of Henkel, articulated the challenge in 2013: “We need a plan that is progressive enough, and rigorous enough, to set real priorities for action.”

Adoption of the Paris Agreement and the United Nations SDGs in 2015 provided fresh momentum. While designed primarily for governments, the SDGs offered a shared vision that transcended industries and countries, helping align efforts across nations, sectors and cultures. For many CEOs, the SDGs served as a powerful reference point to connect their strategies to broader societal and environmental priorities.

The UN Global Compact established itself as a leader, helping CEOs translate the SDGs into concrete business actions and facilitating global cooperation. Former Carlson Chairperson and CEO Marilyn Carlson Nelson described the value of this collaboration: “Each of us has to inform each other and come together in new and exciting ways in order to be transformative.”

The Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) set credible benchmarks for emissions reductions in 2015. The SBTi drove further integration of sustainability and business strategy and prompted CEOs to recognize the importance of linking business KPIs to environmental impact.

Business Takes a Holistic Approach (2019–2022)

Sustainability gains traction as CEOs embrace metrics and investors take notice

By the end of the decade, it was clear that targets alone were not enough. The UN Global Compact campaign Business Ambition for 1.5°C (2019) and new initiatives including the CFO Taskforce for the SDGs signaled a growing urgency to create measurable impact.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in 2020, highlighted the fragility and interconnectedness of global systems, leading many businesses and governments to reevaluate their agility, supply chain risk and potential long-term benefits of sustainability-related strategies. For many communities, especially those long affected by environmental injustice, this renewed focus underscored what they had long understood—resilience and sustainability are essential to safeguarding the lives, livelihoods and systems on which society depends.[6]

> **The CEO has to be personally committed to sustainability to drive action through the company.**
>
> *Rosamaría Lázaro Ordaz,*
> *CEO of Lazzar,*
> *2019*

> **Creating change in a company is about leadership. It's about leaders meaning what they say, walking the walk and talking the talk.**
>
> *Bruce Cleaver,*
> *Former Chairperson and CEO of De Beers Group,*
> *2019*

> **Given increased customer, investor, regulator, media and stakeholder appetite for responsible business practices, it has become important to not only have ambitious ESG strategies, but to ensure they are integrated with business strategy.**
>
> *Debbie Crosbie,*
> *Former CEO of TSB Bank,*
> *2021*

> **A climate crisis is a human rights crisis.**
>
> *Mairead Lavery,*
> *Former President and CEO of Export Development Canada,*
> *2022*

> **I don't think that we can actually solve climate change if we don't solve inequality.**
>
> *Peter Oosterveer,*
> *Former CEO of Arcadis,*
> *2022*

> **Biodiversity is much more complicated than climate because it has so many angles.**
>
> *Ronald Wuijster,*
> *Executive Board Member and Former Chairman of APG Group,*
> *2022*

> **Biodiversity protection . . . can only succeed when it is supported by a strong framework or system developed by the government.**
>
> *Takeshi Niinami,*
> *Chairman and CEO of Suntory,*
> *2022*

While ESG gained prominence within financial markets, CEO narratives evolved again, shifting the tone from promise to performance. By 2022, Baker Hughes Chairman and CEO Lorenzo Simonelli reflected on the new ethos, noting, "Sustainability is now an essential part of doing business." At that time, 94 per cent of CEOs saw the SDGs as a unifying vision, and 73 per cent said they were personally accountable for delivering progress toward that vision—nearly a fourfold jump in a decade.

Many executives, including Belén Garijo, Chair of the Executive Board and CEO of Merck Group, emphasized the need to balance "people and financial performance equally," recognizing that customers, employees and communities were increasingly scrutinizing corporate commitments.

CEOs broadened their sustainability agenda, tackling not just climate change but interconnected issues such as inequality, biodiversity loss and geopolitical stability. Many CEOs argued compellingly that environmental challenges cannot be solved without addressing systemic inequities, marking a profound shift toward viewing sustainability as a holistic global responsibility. With this broadened perspective, companies began implementing more robust monitoring and metrics systems, enabling clearer insights on sustainability progress—and highlighting opportunities for future sustainability progress and business growth.

Competing Priorities and the Fight for Sustainability (2023–Present)

Governance fractures as data and AI reshape the path to global cooperation

Today, sustainability is increasingly challenged, with differing public policy perspectives complicating its integration into economic and social policy. Regulations have created both motivation for action as well as challenges including inconsistent enforcement, regional disparities in ambition and a fragile consensus. The governance landscape now offers a path forward, but it is marked by tension, uneven progress, unclear metrics and reporting and a need for constant negotiation.[7]

Concurrently, the global surge in data—from about 33 zettabytes (ZB) in 2018 to a projected 175 ZB by 2025—together with the use of open data platforms and interoperability standards has allowed for unprecedented cross-sector collaboration.[8] This has provided the baseline for real-time SDG monitoring and informed policymaking worldwide. Machine learning and AI have enabled predictive analytics for climate risk modeling, energy optimization and supply chain transparency. The *Gen AI for the Global Goals* report, developed by the United Nations Global Compact in collaboration with Accenture, outlined several innovative solutions that will maximize the positive impact on the SDGs from these emerging technologies.[9]

Most recently, the conversation among CEOs has highlighted the urgent need for systemic transformation. Executives increasingly advocate for collaborative models that include businesses, governments and civil society working together toward a new, inclusive globalization. For instance, in 2022, CEO Thomas Buberl of AXA and Badr Jafar, CEO of Crescent Enterprises, stressed that globalization, while indispensable, must evolve into a more balanced system—one that delivers shared prosperity rather than exacerbating inequalities.

However, ambition alone has not translated into consistent action. Business leadership on sustainability has often appeared stalled due to internal inertia as well as persistent structural barriers. CEOs point to long-term payback periods, inadequate policy incentives and inconsistent data as key constraints. This disconnect is also reflected in corporate communications: Earnings-call analysis shows mentions of clean-energy technology, carbon and climate change peaking in 2021. Since then, use of these terms has precipitously dropped, suggesting the language is rapidly shifting even as expectations remain high.

At the same time, policy momentum has also faltered, with some governments backsliding on climate and sustainability commitments. This dual stagnation on both the business and policy fronts has reinforced a focus on the short term and undermined the scale of transformation needed. Consequently, by 2022, nearly half of all CEOs identified governments and policy makers as their key partner in how they will manage sustainability, marking public-sector collaboration as a clear priority in driving sustainability.

Together, the voices and the metrics tell a single story: Sustainability has moved from aspiration to expectation—and CEOs know the scoreboard is now public. This illustrates the journey and evolution of sustainability leadership—yet in today's complex global context, the question is: Where do CEOs stand now?

The Era of Pragmatism: Less Talk, More Results

The Evolution of Sustainability

Corporate values and branding — Business imperative

2007
72% of CEOs prioritize brand and reputation outcomes

2022
79% of CEOs see a business case for at least one SDG

2025
88% of CEOs believe the business case for sustainability is stronger today than five years ago

97% of CEOs remain committed to the SDGs

Sourcing Smarter

CEOs are broadening their focus from company-specific action to value-chain engagement

2022
33% of CEOs reward ESG performance across their ecosystems

2025
75% of CEOs are actively constructing responsible supply chains

Rewarding Progress

Rewards and compensation are increasingly tied to sustainability metrics

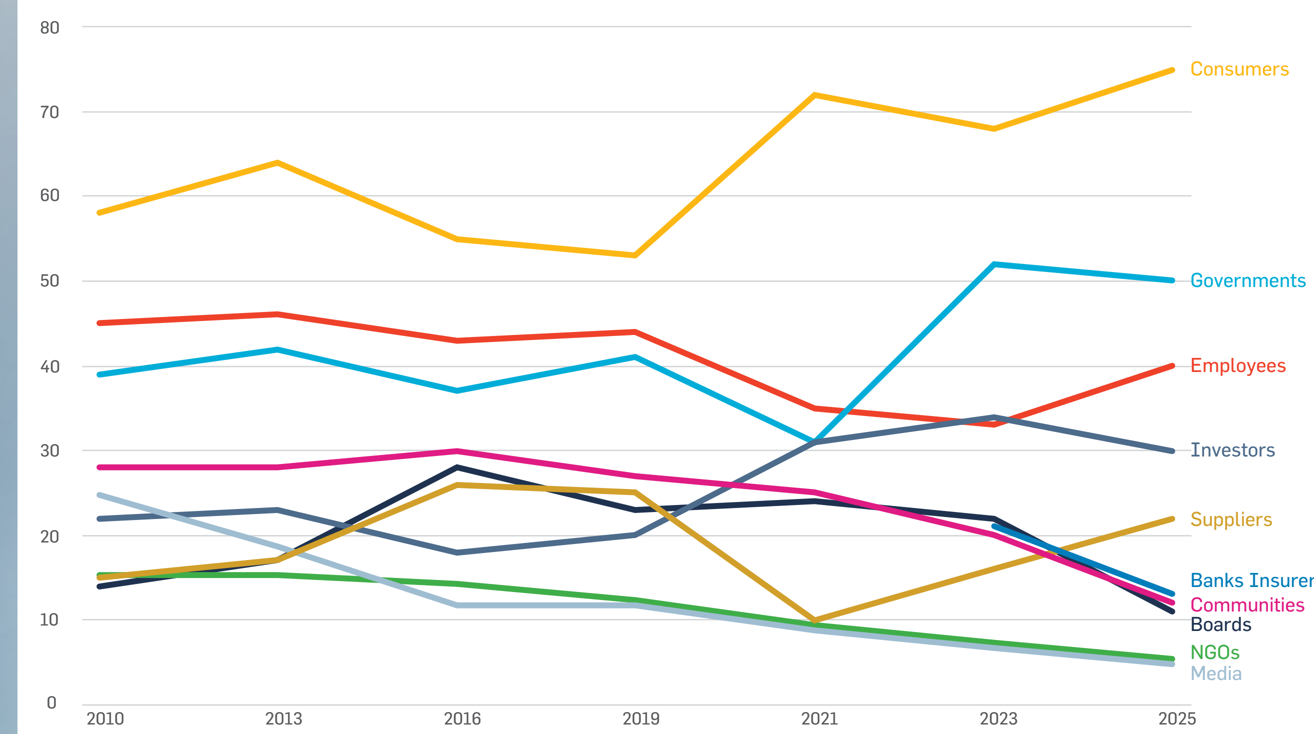
2019: Emerging intention
66% of top CEOs support linking executive pay to independent sustainability measures

2022: Early adoption
34% of companies have made leadership compensation dependent on hitting targets

2025: Broadening expansion
59% of CEOs use sustainability criteria to evaluate and reward leaders and departments

Stakeholder Influence

As the pressures on CEOs have evolved over the past five years, the importance of consumers and governments has risen while that of financial institutions has waned



Key Takeaways

Consumers apply pressure: CEOs face growing demand from consumers to act

Finance retreats: Banks, insurers and investors are collectively becoming less influential

Boards step back: CEOs no longer see boards as central to sustainability efforts

Suppliers step up: Suppliers are emerging as key partners, signaling a shift toward ecosystem-wide collaboration

Survey question: Which stakeholder group do you believe will have the greatest impact on the way you manage sustainability over the next five years?

Navigating the Present: Complex Global Forces and Strategic Focus

Sustainability rises as crises reshape strategy

Private sector leaders now confront a critical choice—preserve business models focused on short-term returns, or reimagine their companies sustainably to unlock lasting resilience and growth

Crises such as the 2008 financial collapse, the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing geopolitical disruptions have exposed the fragility of global systems, forcing businesses and governments to reevaluate their priorities, including sustainability. Each event influenced the sustainability agenda, often shifting the focus from long-term goals to immediate issues impacting day-to-day operations. Today CEOs face growing pressures from global events, technological breakthroughs, political change and shifting societal expectations that are fundamentally reshaping sustainability and the world.

Key topics influencing CEO views on sustainability today

1 Technology and Innovation

- The role of technology
- Renewable energy
- AI and human potential
- Sustainability tools

2 Geopolitics

- Geopolitical disruptions
- Global goals, local realities
- Communicating sustainability

3 More Voices and Leadership

- The pace of change
- Employee voices
- Consumer demand
- Community investment
- Sustainable finance

Business strategy increasingly starts with sustainability

CEOs are moving from commitment to integration, embedding sustainability into strategy, operations and leadership priorities[10]

Growing customer expectations, new metrics, stricter reporting rules and greater product traceability all reinforce the need to hardwire sustainability into everyday business decisions. From product design to supply chain management, this integration reduces risk, drives innovation and creates long-term value for business and society.

Most companies already reflect this new reality, with 86 per cent of CEOs reporting that sustainability is currently integrated into their company's core operations. Flix SE CEO and Co-Founder André Schwämmlein affirms this: "We believe sustainability and business objectives can coexist. FlixBus was built on the idea that travel can be both commercially viable and sustainable." Many CEOs, including Toseef Din of M.P. Shah Hospital, now view sustainability "as a 'must-have' rather than a 'nice-to-have.'"

> ***"Leaders must make sustainability a core part of the strategy, not an appendage. It's not about meeting regulations or issuing a nice report. Well-managed sustainability is a competitive advantage, a way of mitigating risks, luring talent, gaining clients' loyalty and ensuring long-term resilience."***
> Alejandro Simón,
> CEO of Sancor Seguros Group

Despite the progress already made, CEOs recognize there is more to do. Many are actively planning to deepen their commitments to sustainability priorities in the years ahead. A robust 66 per cent of CEOs believe the private sector can drive significant progress by integrating sustainability into core business strategy and leadership remuneration over the next 25 years. Only 34 per cent believe companies have already accomplished the same over the previous 25 years. To make this shift, CEOs are prioritizing regulatory compliance, responsible supply chains (including consideration of Scope 3 emissions) and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reductions.

26%

of CEOs identified **reinventing existing products as their top priority**; more than 48 per cent said it was a significant priority

Businesses are also transforming products and services to reduce environmental impacts. For example, TITAN Group CEO Marcel Cobuz explains, "By expanding our alternative cementitious business, we advance construction sustainability through the circular use of industrial by-products, such as fly ash and slag, while meeting rising demand for low-carbon and high-performance materials."

These developments reflect a deeper cultural shift among business leaders—one that recognizes sustainability not as a side initiative, but as a core business imperative. Ingka Group, IKEA CEO and Vice Chair of the United Nations Global Compact Advisory Board Jesper Brodin echoes this sentiment: "Sustainability is not an add-on—it's in our DNA."

1

Technology is reshaping the path forward—and raising new challenges

Technological advancements influence nearly every area of business and civil society, including sustainability priorities

Technological progress has surged, but its benefits have not been felt uniformly around the globe. Looking ahead, AI may deepen this divide, with North America and China poised to capture the largest gains, while lower adoption rates in the Global South risk leaving many behind.[11]

Businesses in emerging markets face a range of challenges, including unstable currencies, youth unemployment and unpredictable energy availability. Yet amid these hurdles, technology is opening the door to optimism. Santorelli Group President and CEO Roberto Santorelli remarked, “If the youth see that agriculture uses technology, they might be more likely to help build the future.” Bolaji Balogun, CEO of Chapel Hill Denham, expressed a broad sense of possibility: “From the outside, Africa is viewed as a continent of high risk and challenges, but if you operate in Africa, you smell and see the opportunity every day.”

Innovations in infrastructure, digital systems and data-driven governance have helped expand access to basic utilities. For example, low-cost sensor technology and digital monitoring tools have improved water management and contributed to safe management of 73 per cent of the world’s drinking water in 2022—an increase from 61 per cent in 2000.[12] Similarly, off-grid solar solutions, smart grids and electrification technologies supported a rise in global electricity access from 73 per cent in 2000 to 92 per cent today.[13]

Technology and the rapid exchange of ideas enable progress across the sustainability agenda, including significant social benefits. Today, mobile broadband reaches over 95 per cent of the global population, and 68 per cent are using the internet as of 2024.[14]

Nearly 80 per cent of people aged 10 and older owned a mobile phone in 2024, a jump from 71 per cent in 2019.[15] As technology adoption has increased, so has financial education and inclusion. By 2021, 76 per cent of adults globally had a bank or mobile money account, compared to 51 per cent in 2011.[16] Increased connectivity can also play a role in awareness and enforcement of national laws, such as those in place across more than 150 countries addressing domestic violence.[17]

In East Africa, mobile money services have empowered millions, especially women, with more control over their finances and futures.[18]

Renewable energy is key to meet global demand

Despite remarkable progress in renewable technologies, rising electricity consumption and climate thresholds demand faster, more collaborative action to scale adoption

Over the past 25 years, scientific advancements in renewable technologies have accelerated significantly, leading to major improvements in energy efficiency. However, global electricity demand has nearly doubled over the past two decades—rising from approximately 15,277 TWh in 2000 to 29,471 TWh in 2023—outstripping gains in renewable energy generation.[19]

Decarbonization has been a critical priority for CEOs. Fifty-three per cent report that the private sector has fostered significant progress in renewable energy adoption over the previous 25 years—greater progress than in any other sustainability area surveyed.

Renewable energy development has brought significant economic benefits worldwide. The global share of renewably sourced electricity jumped from 18 per cent in 2000 to 30 per cent in 2023.[20] As a result, renewable energy was responsible for 16.2 million jobs in 2023, an increase of more than 350 per cent from the estimated 3.5 million renewable energy jobs in 2010.[21] The levelized cost of renewable energy (LCOE) has dropped globally, while installation and other associated costs have also seen significant reductions. Utility-scale solar photovoltaic (fixed-axis) costs dropped by more than 89 per cent, while onshore wind costs decreased by 67 per cent.[22] This underscores the rapid improvements in capacity and cost competitiveness for renewables so far this century.

Yet the pace and scale of renewable energy adoption will need to accelerate. Scientists have confirmed that 2024 was the first year to exceed 1.5°C of warming, signaling that the Paris Agreement threshold has effectively been breached.[23] Evangelos Mytilineos, Chairman and CEO of METLEN Energy & Metals and President of Eurometaux, spoke to the challenge: “While the world is investing in green technologies and renewables, the foundation is not secure. Currently, in the peak of summer, up to 25 per cent of renewable energy is wasted as it would otherwise overwhelm the grid. We need to invest in the foundation to make sure that we move forward in a strategic manner.” Spiros Nomikos, CEO of Solvay Sodi (Bulgaria), emphasized urgency: “Our energy transition needs to occur to keep our competitiveness in the worldwide markets.”

This transition cannot be achieved alone. As Flix SE CEO and Co-Founder André Schwämmlein points out: “Decarbonization is a team sport. We must innovate, collaborate and accelerate the transformation with everyone in the sector; OEMs, fuel suppliers, infrastructure and technical providers as well as environmental NGOs. A stronger, coordinated alliance must be formed between the industry and regulators to be able to achieve the joint net-zero goals together.”

77%
of global top 2,000 public companies have reduced emissions intensity since 2023[24]

93%
of CEOs believe business has driven renewable energy progress since 2000

72%
of CEOs expect major renewable energy advances by 2050

AI can elevate operational and human potential

Artificial intelligence is a critical enabler of business performance that can drive measurable improvements in productivity and resilience, as well as how people work

As AI continues to evolve rapidly, the race for resources to support its growth is becoming as significant as the efficiency improvements it offers. Accenture's research on how AI is reinventing work, workforce and workers reveals that two-thirds of executives say they do not have the technology and change leadership expertise to fully leverage the transformative power of Gen AI.[25]

Early AI, machine learning and now Gen AI have helped companies streamline their operations and build resilience through real-time visibility and autonomous or augmented decision-making. However, their most profound impact may lie in how they reshape the workforce. OMRON Corporation President and CEO Junta Tsujinaga described how OMRON Corporation is using AI to broaden access to tools and insights: "We leverage AI to enable less-experienced workers to perform at a higher level, helping factories sustain productivity despite skill gaps." This diffusion of expertise is redefining how organizations think about talent deployment.

Tom Gitogo, Group Managing Director and CEO of Britam Holdings PLC, also remarked on the opportunity to better serve communities: "Artificial intelligence has significantly improved the speed and accuracy of claims processing. It enables us to match the right solutions to the specific needs of each community, especially in underserved and vulnerable regions."

Recent research on AI-powered supply chains identifies potential for operational, financial and strategic improvements. An Accenture study projects that companies with resilient and autonomous supply chains could realize 5 per cent increases in earnings before income, tax and amortization (EBITA), 7 per cent improvements in return on capital employed, 27 per cent faster order lead times, 25 per cent productivity boosts and 60 per cent quicker recoveries post-disruption.[26] These networks will depend on sustainably powered data platforms, an upskilled workforce and partnerships across the value chain.

However, the expansion of resource-intensive technology, including AI, digital infrastructure and data centers, have significantly increased carbon emissions, water use, e-waste and local environmental burdens. Data centers powering AI are on track to consume 612 TWh of energy per year by 2030—matching Canada's total yearly electricity use.[27] This underscores the urgency of deploying technology in ways that ensure both adoption and equitable, sustainable impact.

25 per cent of CEOs identified the pace of technological change as a top global challenge

only 27%

of those CEOs feel very prepared to address it

"It is technology that democratizes access to sustainability intelligence, facilitating broader engagement, creating hyperpersonalized communication and enabling real-time responsiveness to sustainability concerns from investors, regulators and the market."
Leila Fourie,
Group CEO of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange

Tools for sustainability tracking will be instrumental

Digital tools are essential but remain under-prioritized in corporate sustainability and investment strategies

Interest in digital tools that track sustainability metrics—for example, carbon accounting platforms, supplier traceability systems and sustainability analytics dashboards—is high, but there are structural bottlenecks that limit widespread adoption and lasting impact. Ninety-seven per cent of CEOs surveyed expect progress in digital tracking and sustainable supply chains in the next 25 years, but only 27 per cent currently consider these tools a top priority.

Limited resource allocation and conflicting business priorities are creating a gap between sustainable technology ambition and implementation. Frederico Rodrigues da Silva, President of Banco Atitude, discussed the importance of this technology: "AI and digital tools help us analyze large volumes of data to identify ESG risks and opportunities with greater precision." As technology evolves, it is imperative that companies evolve with it.

2

Geopolitical disruptions are challenging business resilience

The current macroeconomic and political climates are both constraint and catalyst for private sector sustainability efforts

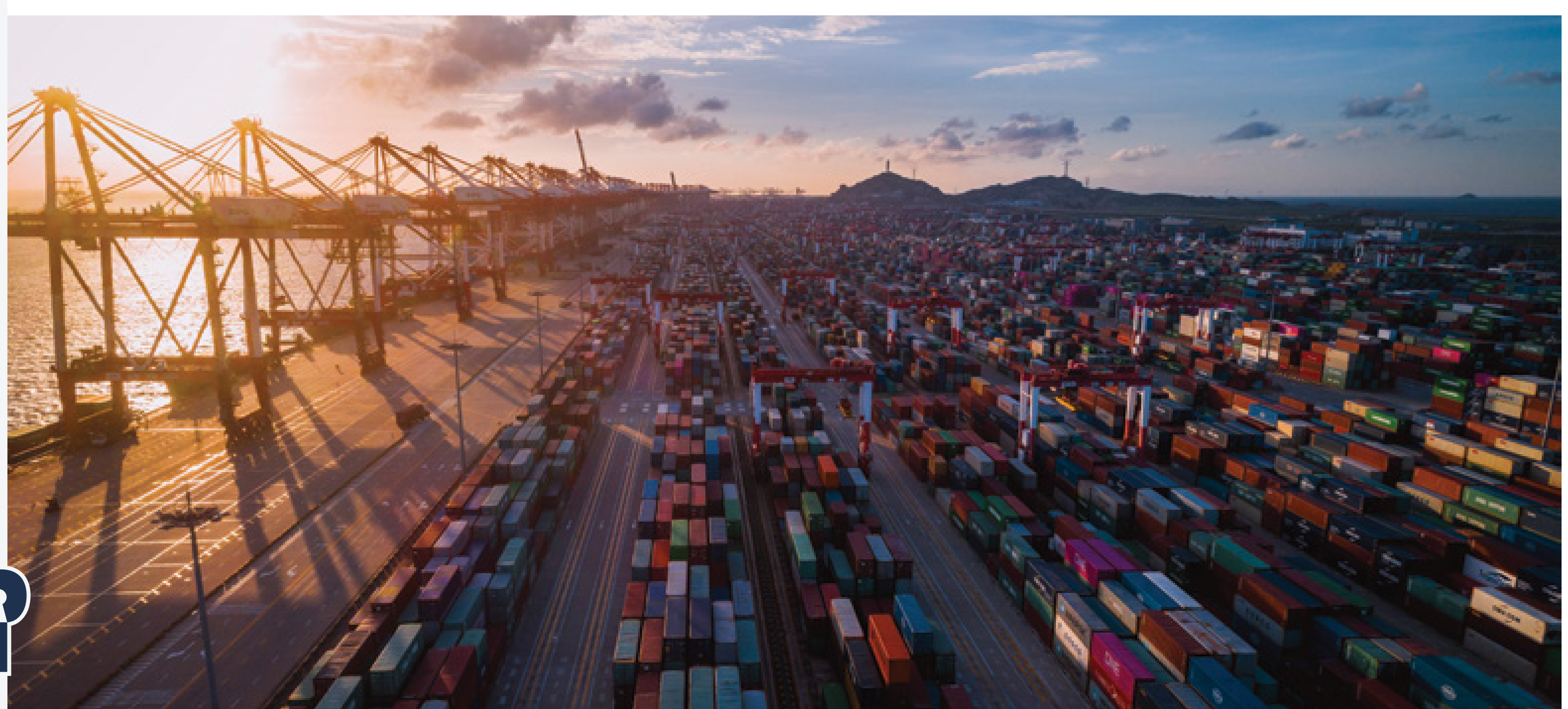
Escalating conflicts around the world are reshaping the private sector, often compelling CEOs to divert focus and resources away from sustainability efforts as human and economic costs mount. High inflation, rising interest rates and fiscal tightening have constrained capital availability and delayed investments in long-term sustainability initiatives. At the same time, climate-related disruptions, shifting consumer expectations and evolving regulatory demands have created powerful incentives for companies to future-proof their operations. In fact, CEOs list inflation, trade regulation and climate change among their top challenges today. However, of the CEOs most concerned about these issues, more than 70 per cent report being only "somewhat prepared," or "not at all prepared," to address them.

The juxtaposition of these conflicting forces presents a complex dynamic for sustainability in the private sector—simultaneously stalling progress and unlocking new momentum. As Sanofi's CEO Paul Hudson commented,

"Events like war and energy crises reveal the fragility of traditional systems, emphasizing the need for resilience and the interconnectedness of geopolitics, energy and sustainability, prompting companies to address systemic risks."

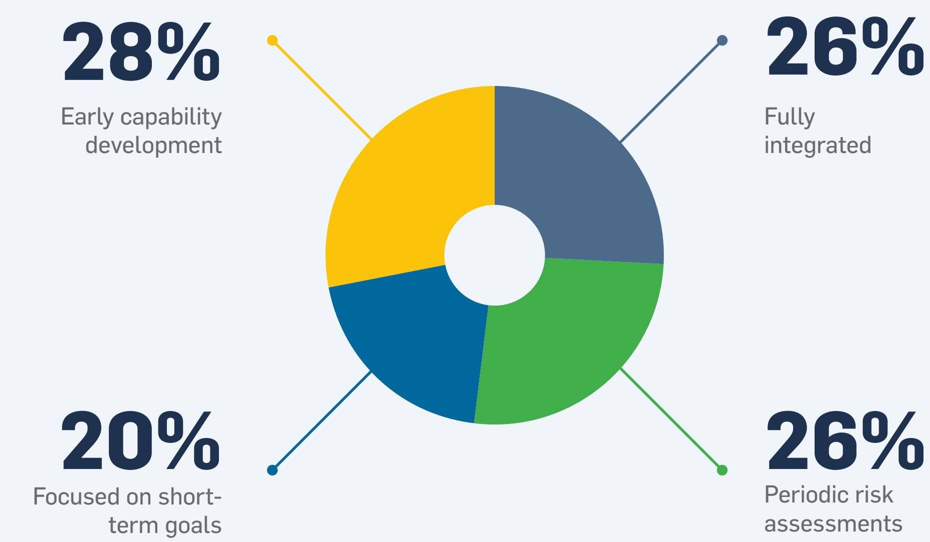
This fragility is especially evident in the responsible sourcing of raw materials, a fundamental element of sustainable value chains. Building resilient supplier relationships can take years, but recent disruptions have forced companies to pivot overnight, sometimes compromising sustainability standards to meet urgent demand. Nine out of ten CEOs have seen progress in collaboration between industry and suppliers across the value chain, but there is a long way to go over the next 25 years. With proper scenario planning and supply chain diversification, companies can uphold sustainability standards during disruptions or recover swiftly once stability returns.

There is a clear opportunity for more mature, future-minded planning practices. Across surveyed companies, approaches ranged from fully integrated scenario planning to one-off efforts, reflecting the varying levels of maturity in aligning sustainability with business planning. Building this capability will enable organizations to embed greater foresight and resilience—cornerstones of sound sustainability planning—into their core business strategies.



Sustainability scenario planning

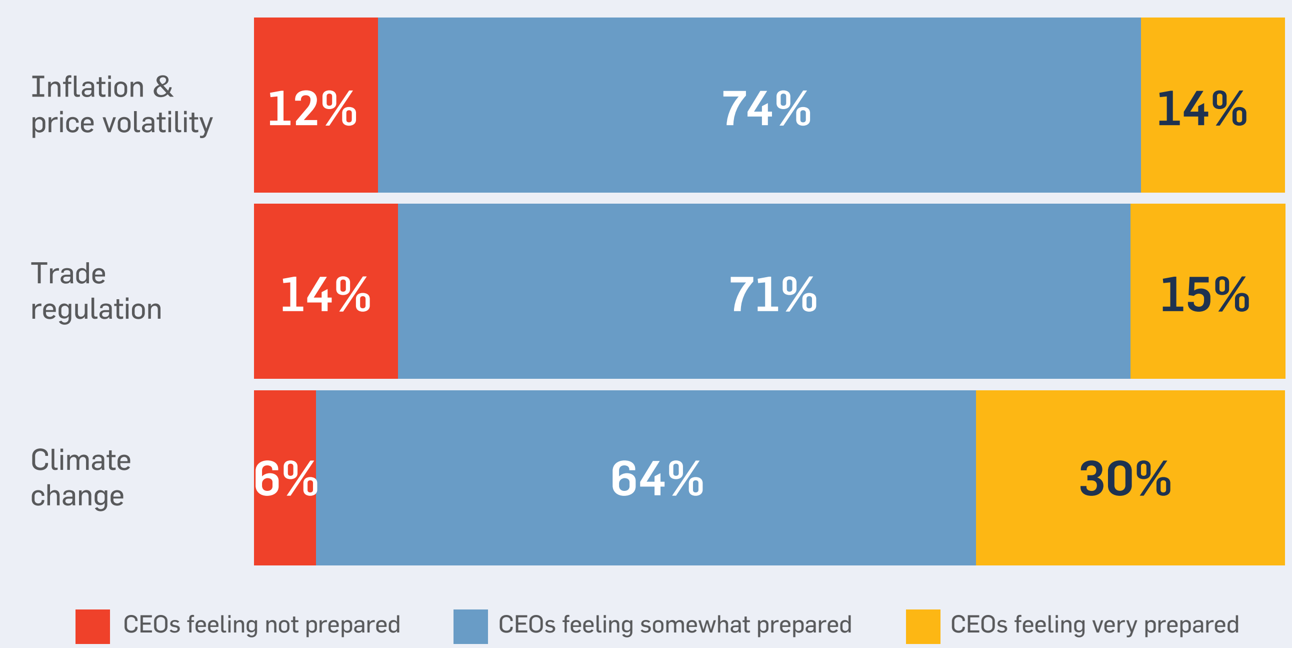
CEOs report varying levels of readiness, with responses spread fairly evenly across different levels of maturity



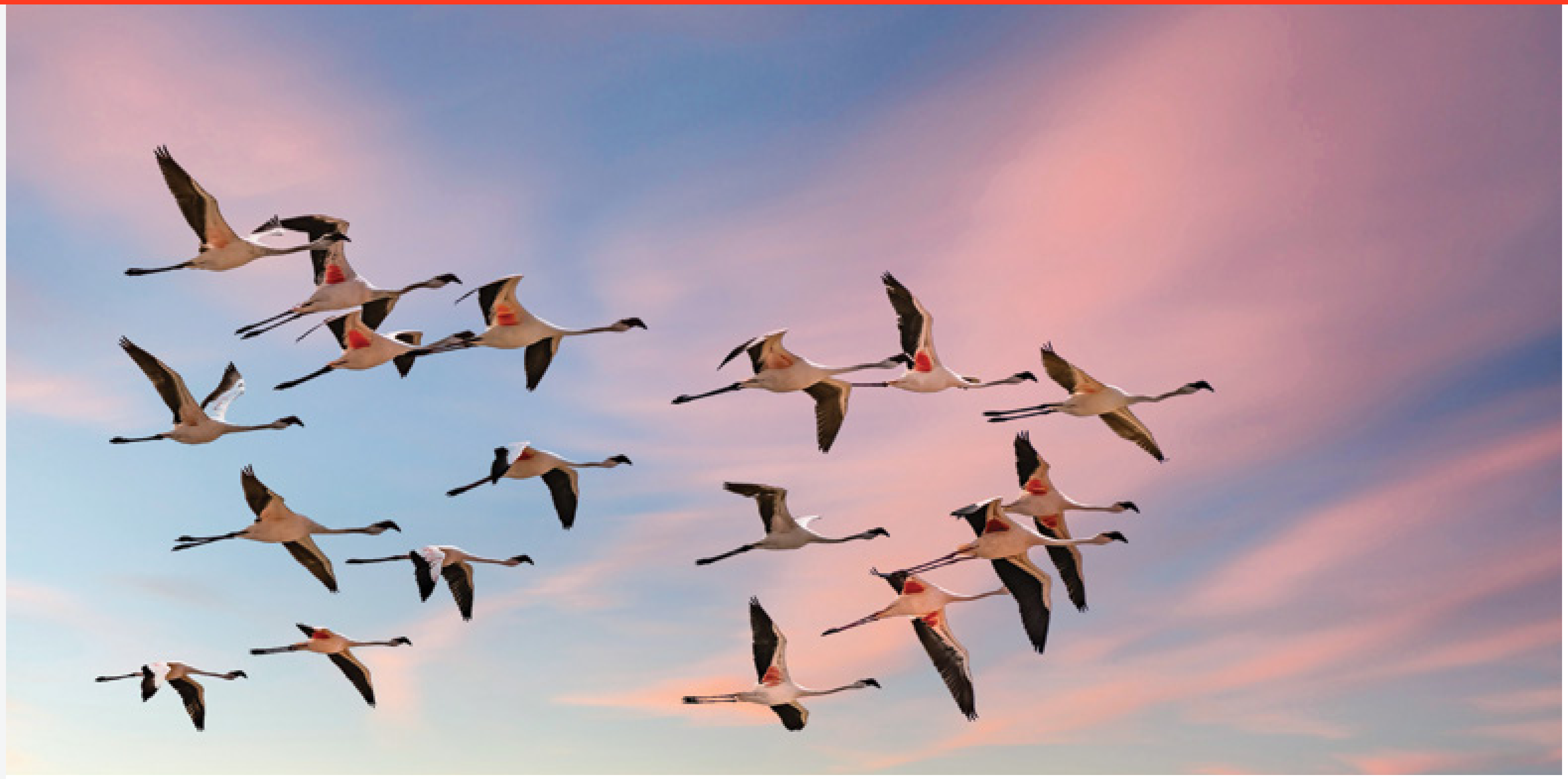
Survey question: How will you incorporate scenario planning for sustainability in the next 25 years?

CEO confidence in navigating key global challenges

Companies are better prepared for climate change than macroeconomic changes



Survey question: How prepared is your company to address the top global challenges that presently impact your business?



CEOs must balance global ambitions with local realities

As shifting political landscapes influence sustainability agendas, CEOs are being challenged to reconcile immediate social and economic imperatives with longer-term sustainability goals

In 2024, half the world's population voted in elections that brought many ESG-skeptical leaders to power. These political turns are placing private sector leaders at the threshold of a challenging new policy landscape—one marked by regulatory changes, evolving disclosure requirements and greater uncertainty. More than 20 per cent of CEOs ranked "warfare and conflict" or "political shifts" as a one of their top three global challenges—but only 10 per cent of these CEOs feel "very prepared" for these challenges.

In the Global North, inflation, energy shocks from geopolitical conflicts and shifting political dynamics have contributed to ESG push-back and increased regulatory uncertainty. Yet there has also been record public spending on clean energy initiatives, such as the European Green Deal in the European Union (EU) and the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 in the United States (US).

The Global South has faced different circumstances, characterized by tightening fiscal constraints, higher borrowing costs and declining foreign direct investment (FDI). In 2023, FDI fell to its lowest level since 2005.[28] Developing nations thus have limited ability to invest in climate resilience despite being among the most vulnerable to climate impacts. As Bolaji Balogun, CEO of Chapel Hill Denham, said, "Demography is destiny; the population on the African continent continues to grow, and if we do not attract capital investment to develop infrastructure and systems, and educate people with modern day skills, there will be a serious problem."

Despite the political and economic headwinds, there has been strong growth in the use of global disclosure frameworks. Adoption has been strongest in the Global North—capturing over 60 per cent of global GDP across approximately 36 jurisdictions.[29] But these frameworks are gaining real traction in the Global South, where both regulators and companies are accelerating uptake and public support of International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) standards.[30]

Though regulatory fragmentation and evolving trade dynamics pose risks, simplified and consistent disclosures reflect the potential of collective action, policy innovation and global cooperation to drive meaningful change.

140+ countries now have **net-zero carbon emissions targets** covering more than **90%** **of global GDP**[31]

5,000 companies now have **science-based targets** jumping from under 500 companies in 2018[32]

4,000+ organizations now use TCFD-aligned reporting to improve **climate risk transparency**[33]

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

More than **18,700 companies** **disclosed environmental data** through CDP in 2022, a **233% increase** since the Paris Agreement[34]

10,000 organizations across more than **100 countries** use **GRI sustainability reporting standards**[35]

> *Today's crises—from climate change to inequality—demand that businesses stay the course on sustainability. While their voices may be quieter, progress is still underway.*
>
> *Solange Ribeiro,*
> *Vice President of Neoenergia and Vice Chair of the United Nations Global Compact Advisory Board*

> *The future priorities of sustainability remain consistent with those of the past and present—the underlying needs haven't changed, even if public discourse has.*
>
> *Massimo Reynaudo,*
> *President and CEO of UPM*

> *Sustainability is integral to our people and our stakeholders; we are continuing to act even as political cycles are shifting leadership opinions.*
>
> *James Thornton,*
> *CEO of Intrepid Travel*

> *Many companies are taking meaningful action but not articulating their sustainability strategies in a way that builds trust.*
>
> *Leila Fourie,*
> *Group CEO of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange*

99%
of CEOs are staying the course on sustainability commitments

88%
of CEOs say the business case is stronger today than five years ago

Sustainability communication is being reframed for today's fragmented landscape

Amid rising scrutiny, companies are scaling back public messaging while quietly advancing sustainability commitments behind the scenes

Many companies have pulled back from bold, public sustainability statements in response to growing political and public scrutiny. In the financial sector, the Net-Zero Banking Alliance has recently paused activities to reassess its structure following the departure of 14 of the largest banks in North America and the United Kingdom. This illustrates how some institutions are recalibrating their public positions in response to evolving political and regulatory dynamics.

However, quiet progress is still taking shape. While communication may not always be as robust, CEOs continue to support and invest in key sustainability programs. Crucially, 88 per cent of companies surveyed this year report that they believe the business case for sustainability is stronger today than it was five years ago. CEOs are therefore continuing their sustainability journeys—sometimes despite public sector or regulatory developments—because they see its business value.

Leaders recognize that sustainability must continue to remain a priority, even in a shifting geopolitical environment. Ninety-nine per cent of CEOs say their companies will maintain or expand their climate, environmental and social commitments—a notable stance amid growing headwinds. When asked if Interface would alter its commitments to accommodate the current demands from skeptical global leaders, CEO Laurel Hurd responded: "No! We will lean in more boldly if anything; we are not shy about sustainability because it is who we are."

To avoid the perception of greenwashing, leaders must substantiate their ambitions with clear interim milestones, transparent progress tracking and integration into core business operations—rather than setting targets decades away without meaningful short-term action. Conversely, companies that no longer communicate their commitments publicly should understand the risk that their sustainability legacies may be in jeopardy.

3

A broader set of voices is raising the bar

Sustainability is being shaped—and accelerated—by a growing network of investors, regulators, consumers and civil society, all of whom are raising expectations and setting higher standards for corporate action. According to CEOs, their company's customers, policymakers, employees, investors and suppliers will be increasingly influential over the next five years

When large companies lead, systems change

Large companies and their partners must set the pace for sustainability, shaping progress across supply chains and peer networks

Given their global reach, resource capacity and structural influence, large multinational corporations bear a disproportionate responsibility for addressing climate change.[36] Implementation comes at a cost, and financial capital, technical expertise and institutional support are often more readily available for well-established commercial entities. Studies of both Brazilian and Chinese manufacturers show that smaller companies look to larger company leaders to act, following suit once they see proof of effective implementation and a supportive environment.[37] Because of this dynamic, larger companies have stronger sway when it comes to sustainability action, and their voice is imperative in advancing sustainability.[38]

Survey data shows nearly all CEOs expect progress in industry and value chain collaboration (97 per cent) and embedding sustainability across value chains (98 per cent). This suggests that peer influence, value chain alignment and cooperative ecosystems are central to how CEOs envision delivering on sustainability.

97%
of CEOs expect progress in value chain collaboration

Leaders and employees shape a culture of sustainability together

When employees embrace leadership's vision, sustainability becomes a shared practice that fuels long-term business growth

Employee engagement is now a key driver of long-term sustainability, with 39 per cent of CEOs identifying employees as one of the top three influencers for their sustainability agenda. As responsibility for sustainability is distributed across leaders and functions, CEOs are focused on bringing employees along the journey. Nikolaj Sørensen, CEO and President of Orexo AB, shared that, "Job candidates often ask what you're doing for sustainability—you need an answer." This exemplifies a growing expectation among talent—especially younger talent—that sustainability is not just a corporate value, but a lived practice.

To build lasting impact, leaders invest in the sustainability knowledge of their employees. As Farah Mazid (Saddha), CEO of Baldha Group, notes, "Sustainability education and socialization—through programs, symposiums and social media—are critical to closing knowledge and resource gaps, especially for small and growing businesses." The Johannesburg Stock Exchange and Banco Atitude, for instance, host regular ESG trainings and workshops to keep sustainability top of mind. Ingka Group, IKEA CEO and Vice Chair of the United Nations Global Compact Advisory Board Jesper Brodin emphasized "We've elevated all our country retail managers to the role of Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO)—a shared title that reflects their dual responsibility to drive both profit and purpose."

When leadership and employees share a clear vision, sustainability is more likely to move from strategy to action. Ekaterine Kavtaradze, CEO of Tegeta Holding, observed, "Our investment in inclusion, support and mobility strengthens long-term loyalty and motivation to perform for the betterment of the company."

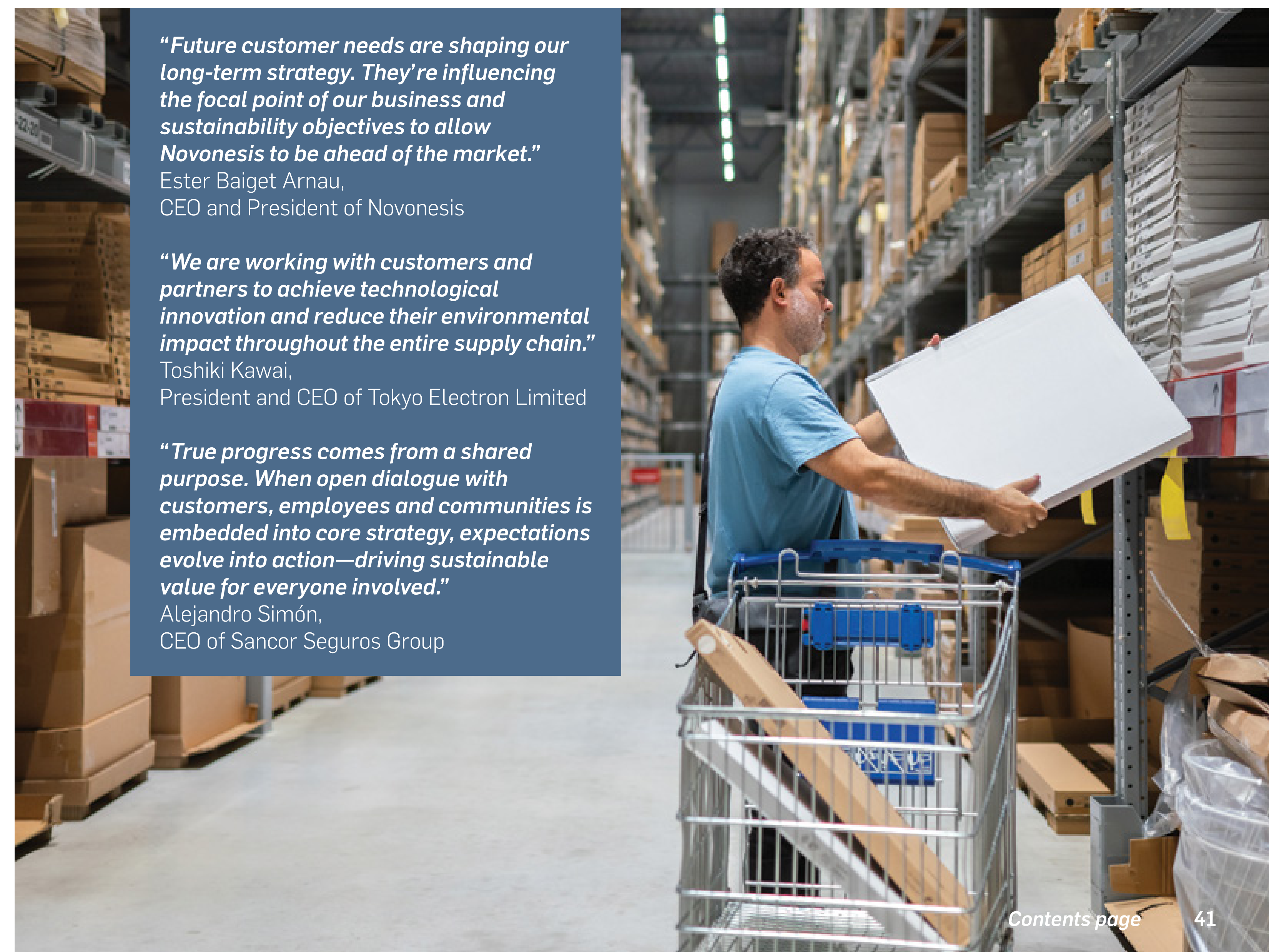
Consumer signals reveal sustainable product opportunities

Consumer expectations are reshaping sustainability strategies, but systemic gaps must be addressed to unlock the full impact

In this year's survey, 60 per cent of CEOs ranked customer demand and consumer preferences among the top three drivers of their sustainability agenda. Four out of ten CEOs identified consumers as the single group with the most influence over their sustainability approach for the next five years.

While consumers increasingly value sustainable products and lifestyles, barriers persist, including price, awareness and availability.[39] Still, 54 per cent of CEOs believe consumer demand supports a premium on sustainability. Leading companies are responding by integrating customer insights directly into product development.

However, indirect distribution models can dilute the impact of strong consumer interest. Multiple CEOs remarked that final purchasing decisions often lie with buyers, not end consumers. This disconnect highlights the need for stronger value chain relationships and supplier engagement to ensure sustainable products and services reach the people who care most.



"Future customer needs are shaping our long-term strategy. They're influencing the focal point of our business and sustainability objectives to allow Novonesis to be ahead of the market."
Ester Baiget Arnau,
CEO and President of Novonesis

"We are working with customers and partners to achieve technological innovation and reduce their environmental impact throughout the entire supply chain."
Toshiki Kawai,
President and CEO of Tokyo Electron Limited

"True progress comes from a shared purpose. When open dialogue with customers, employees and communities is embedded into core strategy, expectations evolve into action—driving sustainable value for everyone involved."
Alejandro Simón,
CEO of Sancor Seguros Group

Investments in communities strengthen global impact

Local engagement is driving social and environmental progress, reinforcing the role of business in all facets of sustainability

Community engagement has long been central to sustainability strategies, and it's more important than ever in today's fragmented global landscape. Eighty-one per cent of CEOs report progress in establishing programs that benefited local communities over the last 25 years, and nearly all (96 per cent) expect the private sector to deepen this impact in the next 25 years. Businesses are contributing to communities in ways that not only build trust, but also strengthen a company's license to operate.

Social and environmental well-being are deeply connected, and several indicators reflect global progress in both. Local communities have made notable progress in recent years protecting and preserving ecosystems to ensure a healthier and more equitable future. In Brazil, Amazon deforestation fell by 50 per cent from 2022 to 2023.[40] Globally, Marine Protected Areas now cover over 8 per cent of the world's oceans, up from just 1 per cent in 2000.[41] Air quality in major cities has also improved. Particulate Matter 2.5 concentrations have declined by 20–40 per cent since 2010 due to the implementation of clean transport policies.[42]

Community impact secures social license to operate

Francesca Fondse, CEO and Founder of De Angelus Estates and Chairperson of Angelus Africa in South Africa, shared that ***"[they] strive to create economic instruments and projects that empower women, specifically in rural communities."***

In Bulgaria, the Santorelli Family Group invests in the local community by ***supporting unhoused children with mentorship and job opportunities.***

In Australia, Intrepid Travel's approach to global tourism focuses on adding to the local economy by ensuring ***more than 80 per cent of their supply-chain spend goes to locally owned businesses.***

By investing in communities, businesses help build a more equitable and sustainable future—both locally and globally

1 NO POVERTY

1990–2019

1B

people lifted out of extreme poverty
(defined as living on less than $2.15 per day)[43]

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

2020

92%

youth literacy rate
(ages 15–24), up from 83 per cent in 1990[44]

5 GENDER EQUALITY

1993–2023

22%

decline in The Gender Inequality Index
(from 0.582 in 1993 to 0.455 in 2023), reflecting progress in reproductive health, empowerment and labor force participation[45]

A tool that builds public trust: the Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD) framework

Businesses can safeguard their reputation, ensure operational stability and maintain their social license to operate by systematically assessing and acting on potential human rights risks.

HRDD is an essential risk-management framework under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and core to the UN Global Compact Participant CEO commitment to The Ten Principles. The process helps companies manage risk in both their direct operations and those of their suppliers and other business partners.

Sustainable finance is ready to evolve

Companies are navigating investor expectations, new financial instruments and community relationships to balance impact, innovation and long-term value creation

Achieving both business and sustainability goals requires clarity on the true cost of initiatives and their potential returns—across time horizons as well as financial and ESG metrics. Francesca Fondse, CEO and Founder of De Angelus Estates and Chairperson of Angelus Africa, emphasizes, “There needs to be far more education about what sustainability means across all professions.” As leaders of this effort, 89 per cent of CEOs report feeling comfortable talking about sustainability with their investors, consumers and governments.

Sustainable investments typically require upfront investments of capital, new infrastructure, digital tools and emerging technologies, which often realize returns over longer time-frames. This dynamic can lead to hesitation among investors who prioritize short-term performance. As Matias Saul Cortada, CEO of Azul Jacaranda, notes, “There’s not enough of a connection between lenders and borrowers right now, and this is a space where CEOs can lead.” Over time, these investments improve efficiency, mitigate risk and unlock green capital that strengthens competitive advantage.[46]

Ali Matalon, Founder and CEO of CorpCare, captured the crux of the issue, “Money talks the loudest—access to capital is the biggest catalyst for sustainability right now.” While 80 per cent of CEOs report progress on expanding access to sustainable capital over the past 25 years, only 55 per cent expect significant progress over the next 25 years. Access to sustainable finance remains uneven and there is a need for more expertise and talent devoted to developing sustainable finance products, especially in the Global South.[47] Without new financial models and tools that put investment capital within reach, continued sustainable technological innovation may stall.

Regulation plays a key role in unlocking capital through mechanisms such as green bonds and public-private partnerships as well as frameworks, like the EU Sustainable Finance Taxonomy, that identify environmentally sustainable economic activities. Nikolaj Sørensen, CEO and President of Orexo AB, noted that, “When regulation supports sustainability, capital follows. When compliance outweighs impact, the opportunity to do good at scale is lost.”

External financing can offer immediate gains, but lasting impact depends on local support. Tom Gitogo, Group Managing Director and CEO of Britam Holdings PLC, cautioned that, “Foreign investment can catalyze short-term innovation. However, without meaningful engagement with local leadership to shape long-term outcomes, the socioeconomic gains are rarely sustainable.”

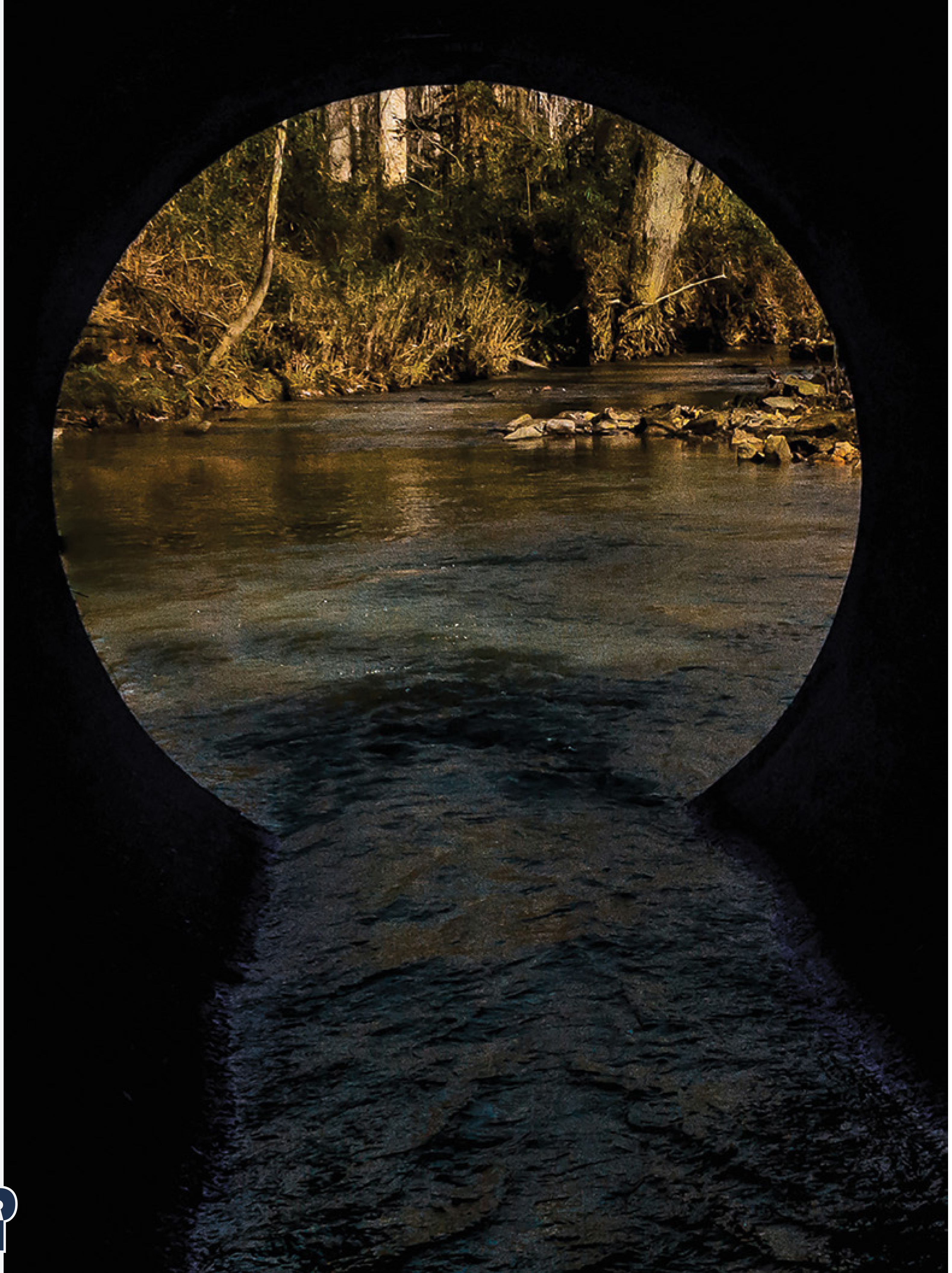
This challenge extends beyond financial investment to community engagement. Augusto Bauer, Deputy CEO of AJE Group, stressed that, “Gaining community support for sustainability initiatives requires deep, relationship-based work—going community by community, building trust with local and regional authorities. It takes time, effort and dedicated people on the ground to make it happen.”

Firms large and small continue to recognize the importance of sustainable finance in their business architecture.

> ***In markets where sustainable finance is accelerating, having sustainability integrated in your products and services isn’t optional—it’s a competitive requirement.***
>
> *Jianlong Shen,*
> *CEO of KHD*

> ***Alfonso Maíllo Innovation Centre (CIAM), our Innovation Centre based in Zaragoza, Spain, represents our commitment to research, development and innovation linked with the circular economy. Through CIAM, we’re creating opportunities for clients, public authorities and research institutions to collaborate on sustainable investment projects.***
>
> *Fernando Abril-Martorell Hernández,*
> *CEO of Urbaser*

> ***We include shadow prices in our business cases for carbon; these types of analysis have become important to us.***
>
> *Juan Manuel Rojas,*
> *CEO of Promigas*



The risks of inaction are increasing

By delaying sustainability progress, businesses make themselves vulnerable to growing threats, while values-driven action can build long-term resilience

The pressure to prioritize short-term business needs is often impossible to resist, but the cost of delaying long-term sustainable transformation is rising. By the year 2100, a business-as-usual trajectory is forecast to generate economic losses five times greater than the total capital investments required to limit warming to 1.5°C.[48] Inaction already adds at least $500 billion per year in additional costs for meeting policy targets—in the form of higher future spending, more expensive technologies and escalating damages. This makes course correction even more difficult. Proven integrated solutions from more than 150 case studies—across biodiversity, food, water, health and climate—could unlock $10 trillion in business opportunities and generate 395 million jobs globally by 2030.[49]

For many leading companies, sustainability is not only a market-driven imperative—it is a values-driven commitment. Resilient organizations navigate inevitable disruptions by remaining anchored in their core values and priorities while fortifying ties to the communities they serve.

> ***"If you respect people and the planet, your business earns the right to last and leave a legacy for future generations."***
> Roberto Santorelli
> President and CEO of Santorelli Group

Resilience requires adaptation and a commitment to building a shared future. Matias Saul Cortada, CEO of Azul Jacaranda, remarked that in the agricultural sector, "If you don't adapt, it is a rough environment for business." Grupo Ficohsa's Executive Vice President Luis Atala observed, "Our most successful business outcomes arise when the countries where we operate are thriving—when people have access to sustainable incomes, essential social services, like education and healthcare, and equal opportunities. This is how countries will develop."

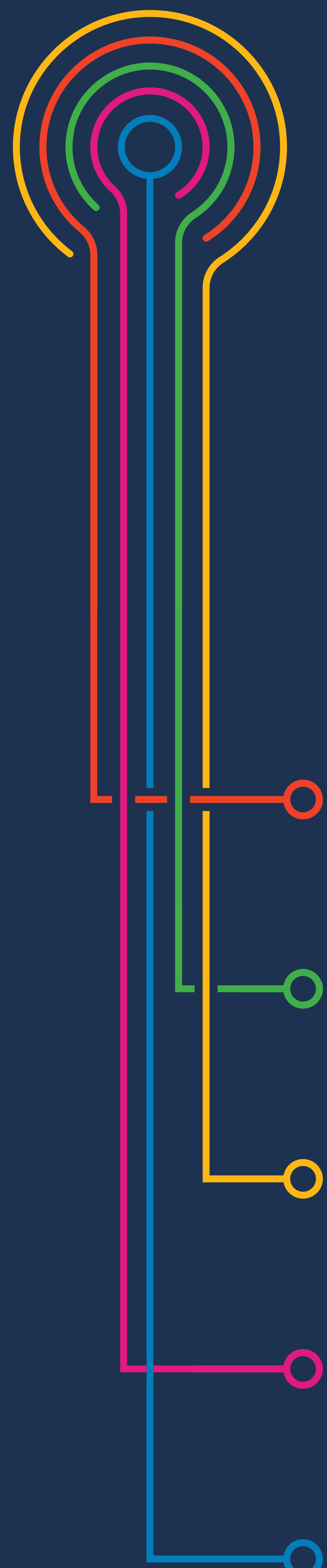
Shaping the Future: Moving from Intention to Impact

Time is running out—now is the time for bold action

As global crises converge, CEOs must embed sustainability into strategy through decisive, inclusive action

Accelerating climate change, ecosystem collapse and resource depletion are creating a planetary emergency, amplified by escalating crises of inequality and economic insecurity. The question is no longer whether to act, but how to act decisively with sustainability at the core of business strategy. The sustainability drivers of the past—shared goals, technological innovation, industry collaboration and regulatory incentives—remain critical. However, the next era of sustainability leaders will be further distinguished by their ability to transform intention into execution and ambition into impact.

There are five essential keys that will open the doors to resilience and growth. These keys work together; activating one makes the others more powerful, while missing one leaves vital opportunities locked away. How leaders use them will determine whether the future is defined by shared prosperity and progress or by fragmentation and uneven gains.



Five Keys for the Next Era of Sustainable Leadership

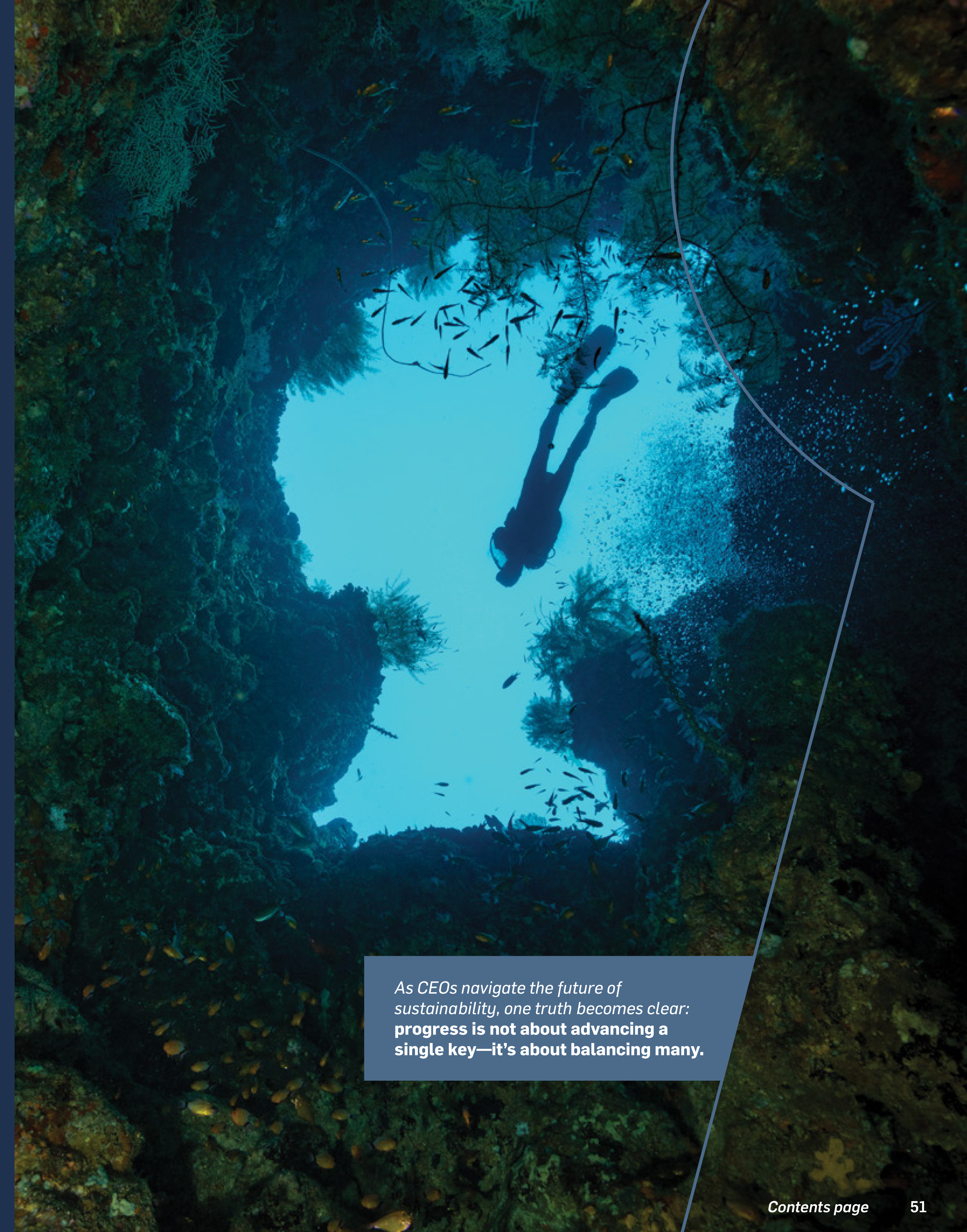
1 Collaborate on regulation

2 Harness consumer demand

3 Expand access to technology

4 Upskill for the future

5 Lead with credibility and purpose



As CEOs navigate the future of sustainability, one truth becomes clear: **progress is not about advancing a single key—it's about balancing many.**

1

Collaborate on Regulation

CEOs must integrate ESG governance, proactively engage policymakers and cooperate across sectors to shape regulatory environments that enable sustainable growth, both regionally and globally

Sustainability regulation is now a defining force in global business, impacting how companies operate, compete and create value. From climate disclosures to supply chain transparency and living wages, regulations are evolving rapidly but unevenly across regions. This presents both a risk and an opportunity: companies that delay may find themselves outpaced and unprepared to meet their obligations, while early movers can help develop regulations that promote sustainable growth.

KEY ISSUES

Governance and systemic barriers: CEOs identify robust global governance and policy alignment as critical enablers for achieving sustainability goals—alongside leadership accountability, access to capital and innovation. As highlighted in the UN Global Compact report *Policy Enablers for Private Sector SDG Acceleration*, navigating ESG regulation requires addressing systemic barriers such as infrastructure and financing gaps, regulatory complexity and workforce readiness. CEOs must advocate for policy coherence and capacity-building initiatives that unlock the private sector's potential for sustainable impact.[50]

Collaborative policymaking: CEOs recognize the value of consistently engaging lawmakers to develop global and regional policy. Eighty-four per cent agree that "staying ahead of evolving global regulations" should be a priority for future leaders. This marks a shift from reactive compliance to proactive engagement, reflecting a greater interest in regulatory strategy amid political uncertainty.

"In this new age of collaboration, it is important to have governmental and NGO support promoting and implementing innovative solutions for capital building, technology innovation and workforce upskilling."
Augusto Bauer,
Deputy CEO of AJE Group

The work that the UN Global Compact is doing to build a global movement around living wages provides a model for this collaboration. Since 2023, the UN Global Compact has hosted nearly 30 regional and national events to explore how living wages can become a cornerstone of decent work and inclusive economic growth. By fostering national-level engagement and encouraging bold corporate commitments, these discussions aim to create bottom-up support for policy change.

Standardized reporting: A unified global regulatory framework could accelerate sustainability by streamlining compliance across regions and enabling sustainable investors to make data-driven decisions. Ester Baiget Arnau, CEO and President of Novonesis, which operates in 140 countries, asserts, "We need to create a home for the majority to engage and incentivize supporting regulation so that it will be contagious for others."

KEY ACTIONS

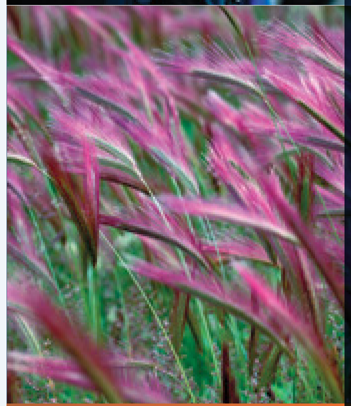
Strengthen internal ESG governance structures: Assign clear ownership for ESG regulatory readiness and data integrity to an ESG Comptroller, Chief Sustainability Officer or Chief Sustainability Data Officer. Paul Hudson, CEO of Sanofi, notes the company has linked "CEO and Executive Committee incentives to two to three key sustainability topics, ensuring long-term commitment and accountability." This practice not only embeds sustainability into governance but also signals to investors, regulators and employees that companies are committed to aligning long-term value creation with environmental and social responsibility.

Engage in business, government and civil forums: Ninety-four per cent of CEOs expect "some" or a "significant" increase in collaboration with international NGOs over the next 25 years. Organizations such as the UN Global Compact and regional business councils provide platforms for dialogue on sustainability priorities, business-aligned standards and knowledge-sharing across sectors.[51]

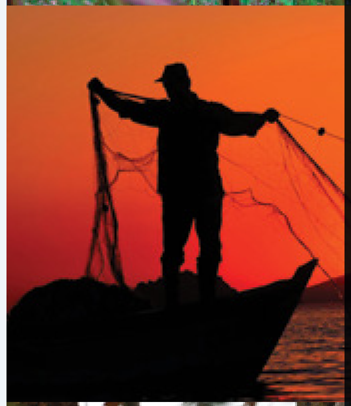
Invest in digital platforms and AI-powered analytics: These innovative tools not only prepare companies for future reporting mandates, they also build trust with regulators, investors and the broader public.[52] Solange Ribeiro, Vice President of Neoenergia and Vice Chair of the United Nations Global Compact Advisory Board, observes, "Using digital platforms enables ESG data management and supports accountability across the business."

CEOs are already preparing for a more regulated future

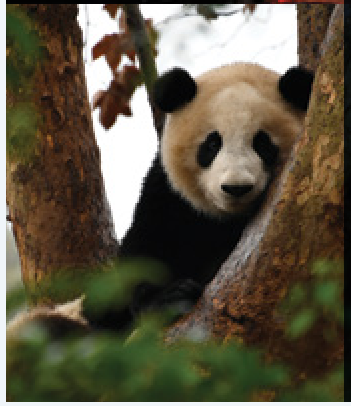
92% agree that the private sector has advanced transparency and ethical business practices



84% affirm that their companies are ready to meet upcoming sustainability regulations



95% report that regulatory compliance is a leading priority for their organizations



92% believe strong global governance and unified policy is "critical" or "important" for the sustainability agenda

2

Harness Consumer Demand

CEOs must tap into consumer momentum by embedding sustainability into product design, pricing and partnerships to lead in a demand-driven future

Consumer expectations are no longer a trailing indicator; they are the driving force in sustainability strategy. CEOs now rank consumer influence above that of governments, employees and even investors. This shift signals a new era of market-driven accountability, where brand trust, loyalty and growth are increasingly tied to sustainability performance. Ninety-eight per cent of CEOs agree the private sector can drive progress through sustainable products and services. But capitalizing on this demand requires more than messaging—it demands action.

"For customers who care, they continue to care—even if they're more hesitant to talk about it now. We haven't seen major shifts in customer behavior. Making the right choice isn't controversial."
Laurel Hurd,
CEO of Interface

Consumers aren't always ready to choose green—but when the long-term value is articulated clearly, demand follows. We're already seeing it."
Marcel Cobuz,
CEO of TITAN Group

"Businesses must prioritize the development and delivery of sustainable products to remain competitive and meet evolving market demands. These offerings are no longer optional but essential for securing long-term growth while positively contributing to the welfare of society and the planet."
Paul Hudson,
CEO of Sanofi

KEY ISSUES

Value chain partnerships: While activation will vary by industry, nearly all CEOs (97 per cent) agree that collaboration across industries and value chains will be essential to meeting consumer expectations. As Augusto Bauer, Deputy CEO of AJE Group, states, "Companies need to have a positive impact on their ecosystem, community and clients. Profits come after this."

Demand-driven innovation: Consumers can use their preferences to drive innovation by calling for companies to incorporate sustainable, high-performance and ethically sourced materials. This pressure influences capital flows and reshapes the workforce by creating demand for talent in emerging areas. Companies that fail to evolve risk losing relevance in the changing marketplace.

KEY ACTIONS

Collaborate on standards: Eighty-eight per cent of CEOs say product lifecycle stewardship will be "critical" or "important" to advancing the global sustainability agenda. This requires working with suppliers and partners across the value chain to establish new best practices—for example, universal living wage standards. Cross-sector alliances facilitate development of common frameworks for emissions reduction and responsible sourcing and product circularity.

Test with technology: Generative AI offers innovative ways to design, test and optimize sustainable products and services. From rapid prototyping to scenario modeling and performance testing, it enables businesses to accelerate product development timelines.

Explore new business models: By designing products for reuse, recycling or regeneration, businesses can transition from linear to circular business structures. Encouragingly, more than 73 per cent of CEOs are already prioritizing circularity in their businesses. As Jianlong Shen, CEO of KHD, says, "We have moved from viewing ESG as a reporting task to seeing it as a growth and innovation enabler." Incorporating circular features can attract consumers, deepen loyalty and build long-term resilience.

"

Cooperation among the public and private sector, academia and civil society is fundamental for driving sustainable economic growth.

Fernando Abril-Martorell Hernández,
CEO of Urbaser

"

We need to advocate for the strengthening of global systems like the UN to create a framework for sustainability that will form one common story for us all.

Simon Baloyi,
President and CEO of Sasol

"

Collective action is the strongest lever we have. When we move in sync, the transition to sustainability accelerates and the business rationale becomes even more compelling.

Tom Gitogo,
Group Managing Director and
CEO of Britam Holdings PLC

3

Expand Access to Technology

CEOs must democratize digital tools and data to ensure sustainable innovation is inclusive, scalable and equitably distributed

Ninety-six per cent of CEOs believe that innovation and technology are "critical" or "important" to achieving the global sustainability agenda. While technology is an essential catalyst, it cannot reach its full potential until access and skills are shared equitably.

KEY ISSUES

Digital tool development: Ninety-seven per cent of CEOs believe the private sector will play an important role in developing digital tools to track and measure ESG performance, reflecting the anticipated demand for actionable sustainability metrics. However, tools like AI-powered emissions monitoring and blockchain-enabled supply chain tracking depend on embedding sustainability into tomorrow's AI models and data platforms.

Democratized access: To ensure inclusive progress, startups, small businesses, governments, communities and individuals must develop new technologies and capabilities alongside larger, well-resourced corporations. CEOs point to capital constraints (50 per cent) and trade restrictions (39 per cent) as barriers currently preventing this action. Providing broad access to tools, data and training will be essential for developing and scaling solutions that address unique, place-based challenges.

KEY ACTIONS

Invest in innovation: CEOs play a direct role in allocating resources and shaping partnerships that determine who has access to emerging technologies. Despite consensus on the importance of digital capabilities and innovation, only 26 per cent of CEOs currently rank them among their top three strategic priorities—trailing behind revenue growth, long-term vision and operational efficiency. Increased investment in local innovators, inclusive financing and incubation ecosystems can accelerate sustainable development. This is particularly true in emerging markets, where countries often bypass traditional development stages by adopting next-generation solutions from the start.

Design with intention: Technology delivers the greatest impact when it is both inclusive and adaptable. Part of the challenge is simply overcoming inertia. "There's so much low-hanging fruit—just get started. There's a perception that sustainability is expensive, but that's not necessarily true," says Laurel Hurd, CEO of Interface. CEOs have the opportunity to promote flexibly designed products that can be customized to local, regional and global needs.

4

Upskill for the Future

CEOs must invest in building future-ready workforces and human-centered skills that drive sustainability and innovation strategies

The future of work is being reshaped by powerful forces, from the rise of generative and agentic AI to the global shift toward clean energy and circular business models. While these transitions run on machines, industrial equipment and technology platforms, they will ultimately be powered by people. As a result, businesses are now rethinking the skills they need to stay competitive while becoming more resilient and sustainable.

KEY ISSUES

Upskilling as strategy: CEOs recognize that workforce transformation is not just a talent issue, but a strategic imperative for staying competitive—99 per cent believe they can use it to drive progress over the next 25 years. Upskilling efforts now extend beyond sustainability literacy into digital fluency, systems thinking, adaptability and other competencies essential for the future of work.

Thriving with AI: Rather than replacing people, AI is set to augment their capabilities. As AI automates routine tasks, human strengths—such as judgment, creativity, empathy and ethical decision-making—will grow in importance. For example, supply chain analysts may shift from manually compiling reports to interpreting predictive insights and scenario models, while customer service agents evolve into experience managers supported by AI-driven tools. However, without inclusive workforce development, AI adoption could leave some workers behind.

KEY ACTIONS

Stay anchored in humanity and decent work: The human element remains the thread connecting innovation, resilience and progress. CEOs can promote worker agency through upskilling and reskilling programs while supporting fair transitions for those being affected by disruption. Keeping workers engaged—on factory floors, in data centers or across frontline operations—means fostering a sense of purpose at every level of the workforce.

Build future-ready talent pipelines: In an era of constant change, advanced technology and sustainability strategies require a future-ready workforce; investment in broad-based, strategic development can enable innovation and agility. Accenture's Future Skills Pilot found that, with a plan in place, individuals can often be reskilled for entirely new roles within six months.[53] Toseef Din, CEO of M.P. Shah Hospital, states, "We're not just building internal awareness—we're planting values that ripple through our broader ecosystem."

> ***Diversity and well-being should be prioritized—people want this, especially the new generation.***
>
> *Spiros Nomikos,*
> *CEO of Solvay Sodi (Bulgaria)*

> ***Our ultimate goal is to create a more equitable society through our business activities; we strive to provide opportunities for people of diverse abilities to thrive around the world.***
>
> *Junta Tsujinaga,*
> *President and CEO*
> *of OMRON Corporation*

> ***Technology will progress, innovation will be there as an enabling tool, but the personal and the collective transformation—that is what keeps you going.***
>
> *Marcel Cobuz,*
> *CEO of TITAN Group*

5

Lead with Credibility and Purpose

CEOs must lead with courage, credibility and consistency to build trust and create long-term impact

The ability to engage credibly and authentically has become a critical driver of progress—enabling CEOs to build trust, inspire action and translate sustainability commitments into impact. However, only 50 per cent of CEOs strongly agree that their companies are comfortable communicating their sustainability progress. This hesitancy is apparent in public discourse; Accenture's analysis of earnings calls from the world's top 2,000 companies found CEO mentions of clean energy, climate change and carbon topics declined nearly 45 per cent from their 2021 peak to 2024.[54] The gap between words and actions is undermining private sector sustainability leadership.

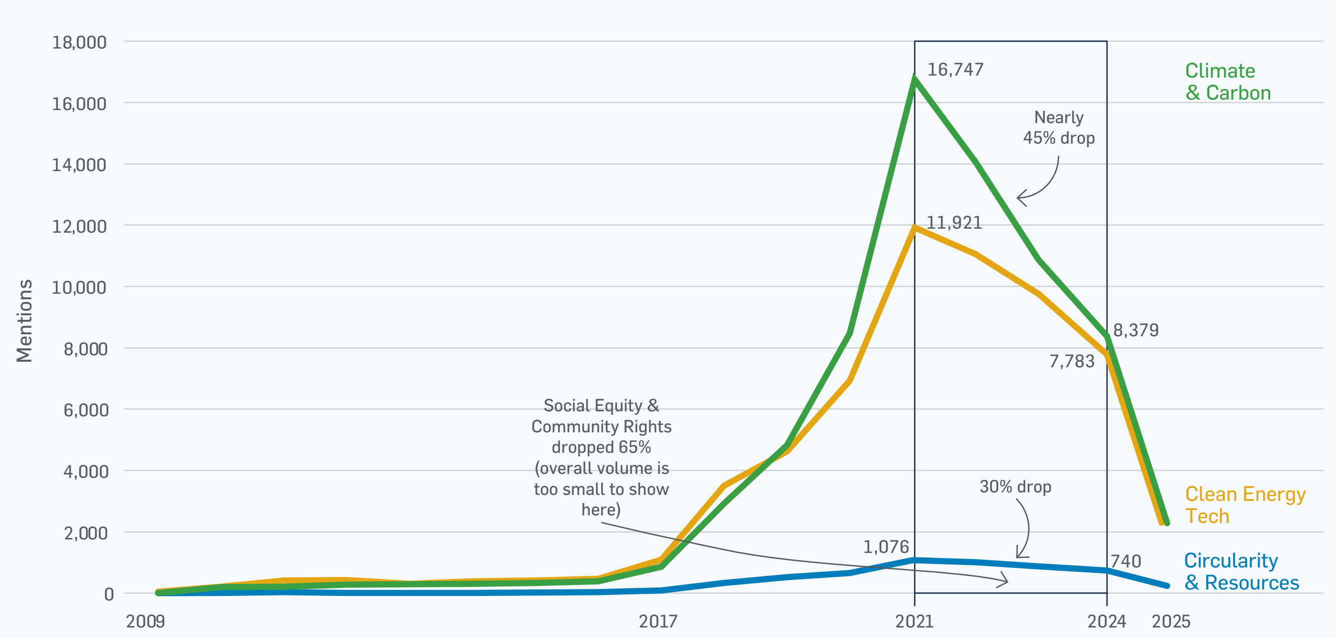
KEY ISSUES

Quieter voices: Despite increased membership in the UN Global Compact, participation in this year's CEO Study declined, with 25 per cent fewer survey participants and over 50 per cent fewer interviews. This suggests a potential disconnect: while leaders recognize the strategic importance of sustainability, fewer are talking about it. Whether due to uncertainty about messaging, shifting priorities or fear of scrutiny, the result is a quieter corporate voice at a time when clarity and leadership are most needed.

Navigating alone: As some businesses withdraw from partnerships with NGOs, academic institutions and multilateral organizations, the loss of collective action and ambition is stifling innovation. Without venues for learning and building momentum, progress on complex sustainability topics slows. Matias Saul Cortada, CEO of Azul Jacaranda, notes that "Transformation needs visibility—if you don't show what you're doing, no one will follow."

Historical Earnings Call Analysis

Sustainability terms have faded from earnings call conversations since their 2021 peak



KEY ACTIONS

Anchor in business fundamentals: Framing sustainability through the lens of risk management, regulatory readiness and return on investment helps shift the narrative from moral imperative to strategic advantage. CEOs who link sustainability to resilience and long-term value creation are better positioned to engage employees, investors, customers and communities with clarity. In fact, 90 per cent of CEOs still urge their successors to invest in sustainability initiatives with a clear business case.

They must also deliver meaningful change while meeting the basic needs of customers. As Promigas CEO Juan Manuel Rojas describes, "We have to balance poverty alleviation, climate actions and the rest ... and it's rarely going to be a perfect balance." Building strategies that can absorb shocks, adapt to change and include others in the process is part of modern leadership. It's not about perfection—it's about staying practical and responsive while moving forward.

Investing in sustainability is a data-driven business decision—one that Flix treats with the same rigor as any other investment.
André Schwämmlein,
CEO and Co-Founder of Flix SE

Tegeta reports sustainability as seriously as when reporting financial performance—because it is a critical performance indicator.
Ekaterine Kavtaradze,
CEO of Tegeta Holding

Keep messaging authentic and simple: Companies must shift from internal consensus-building to external engagement that builds trust. Not every company needs a bold campaign; many start by sharing progress on disclosures, employee training or supply chain initiatives—expanding the narrative as confidence and capabilities grow. Authenticity drives trust and aligns messaging with operational maturity.

52%	53%
of CEOs will expand climate-related environmental commitments	of CEOs will increase social commitments

We explain all of that to investors and try to avoid creating a false sense or impression of something that we are not. So for me, clarity is better than promises.
Simon Baloyi,
President and CEO of Sasol

We've had to adapt our communication strategies by simplifying key messages and ensuring they resonate across diverse stakeholder groups.
Tom Gitogo,
Group Managing Director and CEO
of Britam Holdings PLC

Ali Matalon, Founder and CEO of CorpCare, shares that, "It's not inherently bad to be underestimated when it comes to sustainability—it can be nice to have room to grow your muscles so you can eventually flex them." This reflects the idea that, for some companies, staying quiet in their external messaging is a deliberate strategy, even while building strong internal sustainability capabilities.

Learn and grow together: Sustainability communication is not a one-time announcement—it is an ongoing conversation. As conditions shift, CEOs must keep the dialogue going. The CEO of Chapel Hill Denham, Bolaji Balogun, suggests that global leaders can learn from each other in pursuit of sustainability objectives: "Leaders today need each other. There is a lot to learn from both the Global North and Global South experiences." Ester Baiget Arnau, CEO and President of Novonesis, believes, "The only way of moving forward is through collaboration and partnerships. No company, government or NGO can tackle sustainability alone."

The Fork in the Road: Navigating Possible Sustainability Futures

Global progress hinges on current leadership

The choices we make today will determine the world we live in tomorrow

Systemic challenges demand systemic solutions. As companies deepen their sustainability capabilities, they are increasingly constrained by forces beyond their control—fragmented regulations, misaligned incentives and uneven access to capital and technology. Addressing these structural issues requires coordinated action.

The forces shaping our future—policy, innovation, capital and collaboration—are advancing at different speeds across regions and sectors. Consumers are currently a source of momentum and 94 per cent of CEOs agree they will remain critically influential. But their desires and expectations may vary. As a result, the world stands at an inflection point. Depending on how these forces converge or diverge, two plausible futures lie ahead.

What happens next will depend not only on global ambition but on global cooperation.

> ***Sustainability investments are strategic, not costs, and are essential for future-proofing the business.***
>
> *Frederico Rodrigues da Silva,*
> *President of Banco Atitude*

> ***There should not be a difference between sustainability and business. Sustainability should be a part of business as usual.***
>
> *Massimo Reynaudo,*
> *President and CEO of UPM*

> ***Sustainability is becoming a natural part of how businesses work. You have to walk the talk.***
>
> *Nikolaj Sørensen,*
> *CEO and President of Orexo AB*

> ***If you want to be sustainable, you must do it long-term.***
>
> *Francesca Fondse,*
> *CEO and Founder of De Angelus Estates and Chairperson of Angelus Africa*

Coordinated acceleration unlocks scalable impact

CEO leadership and global alignment drive system-wide transformation, unlocking inclusive innovation and resilient growth while creating long-term value

In this future, CEOs don't just lead companies—they help shift entire systems. By acting across the five keys of sustainable leadership, they ignite momentum that unites businesses, governments and communities around shared goals.

This alignment stems from deliberate and credible leadership. CEOs embed sustainability into business fundamentals, coordinate capital, tie executive incentives to long-term sustainability outcomes and communicate progress with clarity and confidence. Their transparency builds trust; their actions drive impact.

As CEOs develop digital infrastructure and AI-powered sustainability tools, technology becomes more inclusive and accessible. Forward-thinking leaders accelerate the adoption of renewable energy, carbon capture, sustainable agriculture and circular economy solutions. This, in turn, drives rapid decarbonization and improves resource efficiency across sectors.

They also transform their workforces through upskilling programs and by making sustainability a shared responsibility. At the same time, they deepen their commitments to local communities, providing funding, training and infrastructure to the people and places directly affected by sustainability challenges. These investments ensure solutions are not only designed for specific communities but co-created with them.

CEOs advance uniform ESG standards by aligning their companies with leading frameworks, engaging proactively with regulators and collaborating across industries to share best practices that enable system-level change. In parallel, they forge cross-border and cross-sector partnerships to tackle complex sustainability challenges that no one organization can solve alone.

The result is a more stable, equitable and regenerative global economy—one where sustainability drives growth, competitiveness and shared prosperity.

> ***Your business can only survive if you provide something that meets the latest innovation trends alongside the needs of people and the planet.***
>
> *Jianlong Shen,*
> *CEO of KHD*

> ***Sustainability is a team sport, not just the job of the CEO alone.***
>
> *Toseef Din,*
> *CEO of M.P. Shah Hospital*

> ***Anything related to circularity, new technologies, new types of ingredients that can be regenerative or reusable, should be prioritized.***
>
> *Augusto Bauer,*
> *Deputy CEO of AJE Group*

> ***Building a strong and resilient society requires us to confront and overcome numerous challenges—and digitalization and decarbonization are central to solving them.***
>
> *Toshiki Kawai,*
> *President and CEO of Tokyo Electron Limited*

> ***Lead with conviction. There will be pressure, doubt and resistance. Nevertheless, leadership with purpose, that knows that businesses exist to create economic, social and environmental value, prints the real footprint.***
>
> *Alejandro Simón,*
> *CEO of Sancor Seguros Group*

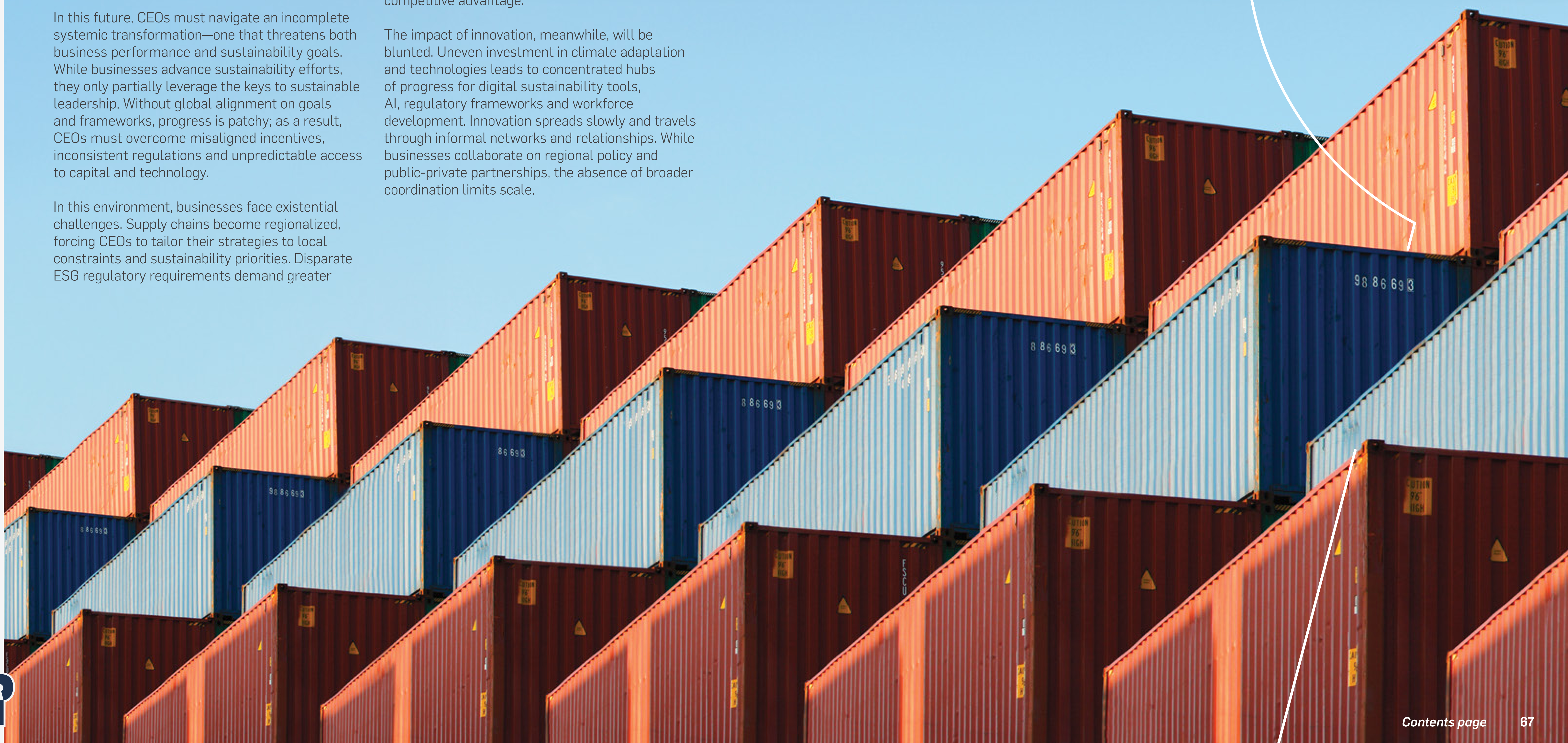
Fragmented adoption demands strategic resilience

In a world of disjointed regulations and uneven access, resilience and regional strategies become essential for navigating complexity

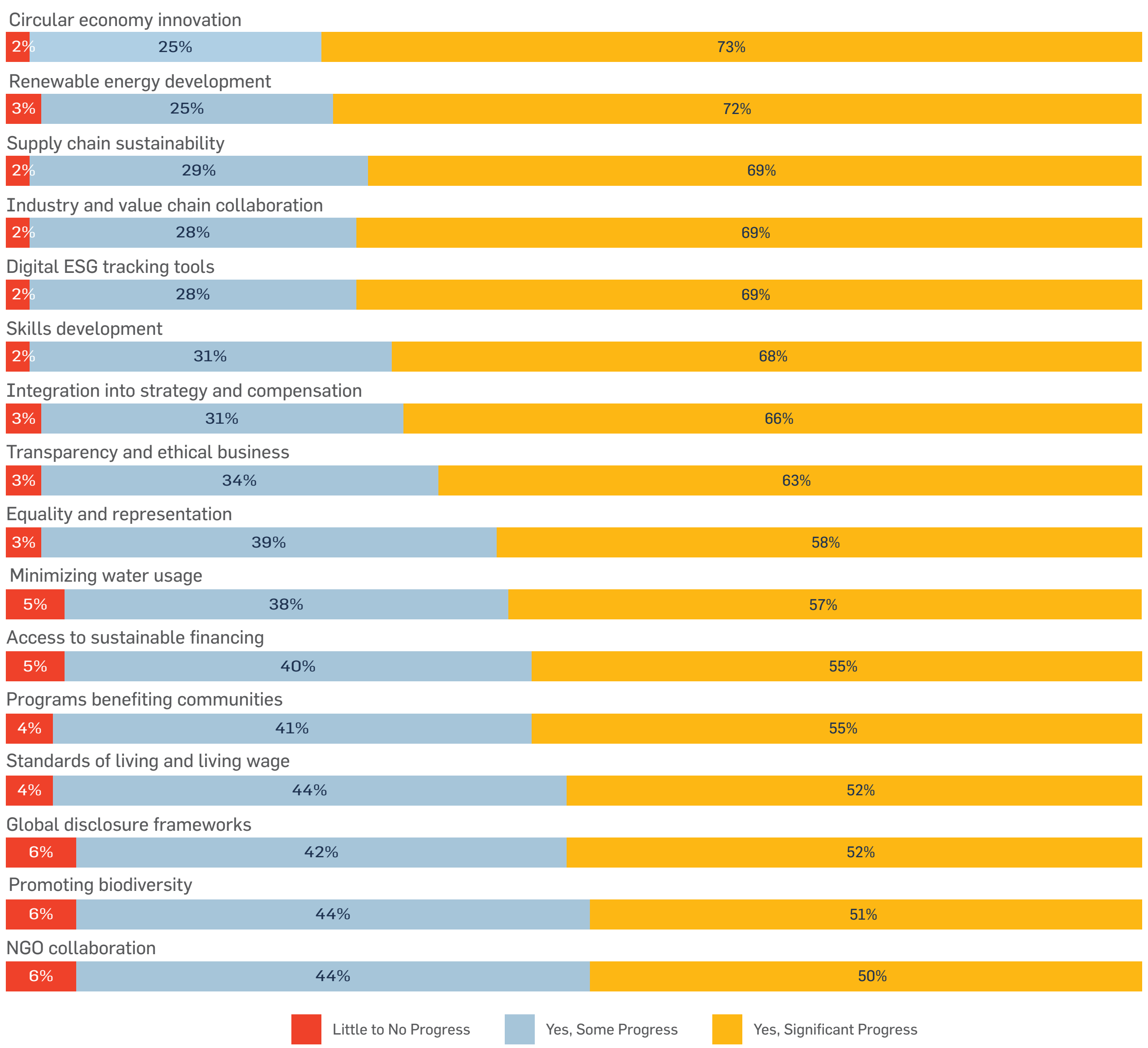
In this future, CEOs must navigate an incomplete systemic transformation—one that threatens both business performance and sustainability goals. While businesses advance sustainability efforts, they only partially leverage the keys to sustainable leadership. Without global alignment on goals and frameworks, progress is patchy; as a result, CEOs must overcome misaligned incentives, inconsistent regulations and unpredictable access to capital and technology.

In this environment, businesses face existential challenges. Supply chains become regionalized, forcing CEOs to tailor their strategies to local constraints and sustainability priorities. Disparate ESG regulatory requirements demand greater resources to maintain compliance. However, businesses that remain committed to sustainability will build resilience that becomes a strong competitive advantage.

The impact of innovation, meanwhile, will be blunted. Uneven investment in climate adaptation and technologies leads to concentrated hubs of progress for digital sustainability tools, AI, regulatory frameworks and workforce development. Innovation spreads slowly and travels through informal networks and relationships. While businesses collaborate on regional policy and public-private partnerships, the absence of broader coordination limits scale.

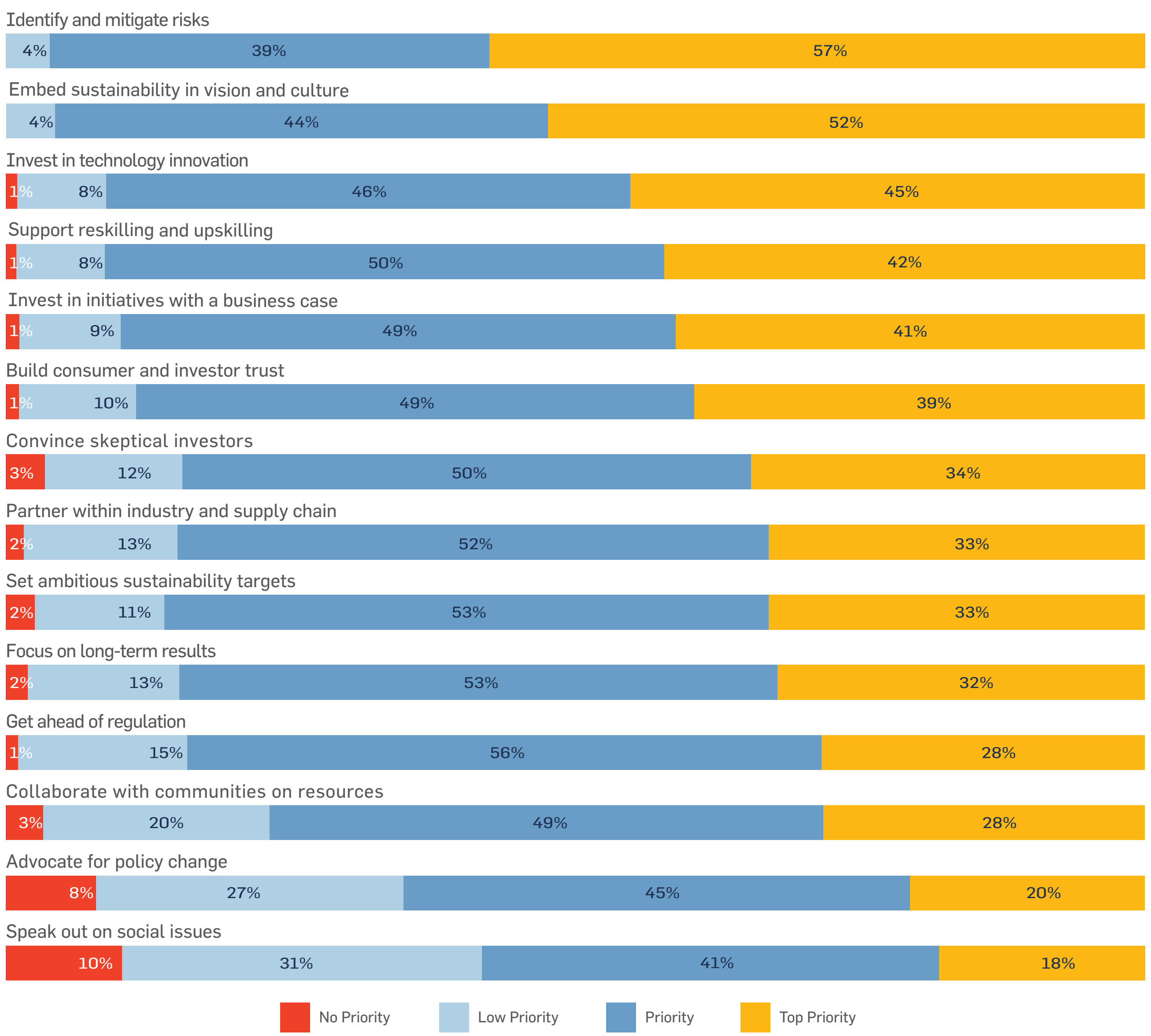


Areas where business can drive lasting progress
Over the next 25 years, CEOs say that the private sector can drive significant progress in areas that impact natural resource use



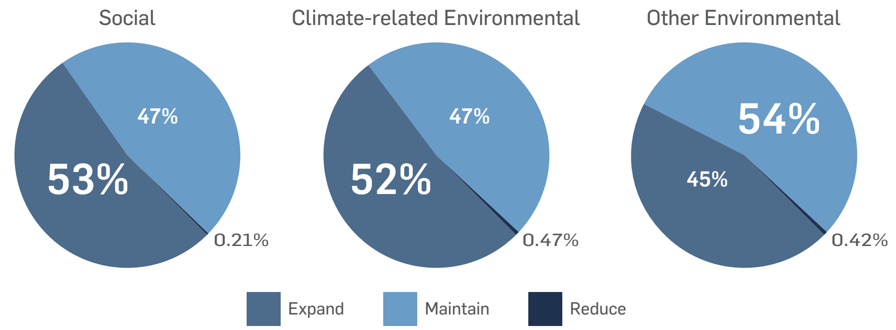
Survey question: In which, if any, of the following areas do you think the private sector can drive progress for the next 25 years?

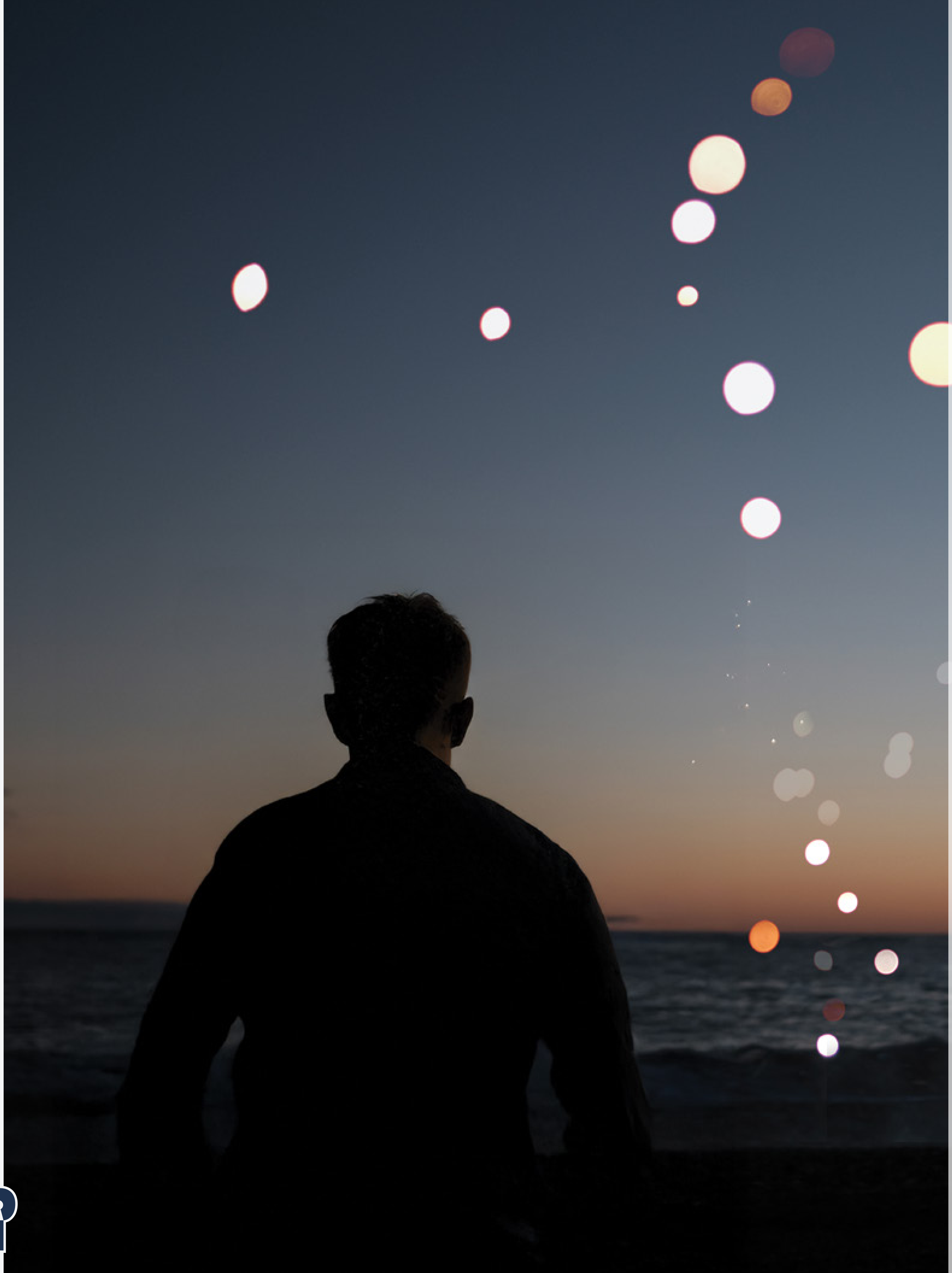
Wisdom for the next generation of CEOs
About half of CEOs think growing their sustainability efforts is the smart move



Survey question: How would you advise your successor to continue to drive sustainability progress through business leadership?

CEO commitments for the future





The Future We Lead

The path ahead is not predetermined—it is shaped by the decisions we make today. An overwhelming 96 per cent of CEOs urge their successors to anchor company vision and culture in sustainability and proactively identify and mitigate threats to long-term resilience.

96%

of CEOs urge their successors to ground their company vision and culture in sustainability

Today, CEOs are redefining what leadership means in an era of converging crises and accelerating change.

This report has shown that the necessary tools, insights and partnerships are within reach. Success depends on the will to act—boldly, credibly, consistently and together.

The next era of leadership will not be measured by quarterly returns alone, but by the legacy we leave behind: a world that is inclusive, resilient and regenerative.

The future is not something we inherit.
It is something we create.

> ***It is not enough to simply be a businessperson. You have to be an activist and sustainable leader who can influence future generations.***
>
> *Farah Mazid (Saddha),*
> *CEO of Baldha Group*

> ***The world is trying to adopt AI, and unless you are a leading company, it is hard to know where to begin. Start small with the first steps.***
>
> *James Thornton,*
> *CEO of Intrepid Travel*

> ***Sustainability is a fight and it involves a lot of resilience, so sometimes it's important to speak less and do more to show you are truly passionate.***
>
> *Solange Ribeiro,*
> *Vice President of Neoenergia and*
> *Vice Chair of the United Nations*
> *Global Compact Advisory Board*

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About the United Nations Global Compact

The ambition of the UN Global Compact is to accelerate and scale the global collective impact of business by upholding the Ten Principles and delivering the SDGs through accountable companies and ecosystems that enable change. With more than 20,000 participating companies, 5 Regional Hubs, 64 Country Networks covering 85 countries and 9 Country Managers establishing Networks in 16 other countries, the UN Global Compact is the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative—One Global Compact uniting business for a better world. For more information, follow @globalcompact on social media and visit our website at unglobalcompact.org.

About Accenture

Accenture is a leading global professional services company that helps the world's leading businesses, governments and other organizations build their digital core, optimize their operations, accelerate revenue growth and enhance citizen services—creating tangible value at speed and scale. We are a talent- and innovation-led company with approximately 791,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries. Technology is at the core of change today, and we are one of the world's leaders in helping drive that change with strong ecosystem relationships. We combine our strength in technology and leadership in cloud, data and AI with unmatched industry experience, functional expertise and global delivery capability. Our broad range of services, solutions and assets across Strategy and Consulting, Technology, Operations, Industry X and Song, together with our culture of shared success and commitment to creating 360° value, enable us to help our clients reinvent and build trusted, lasting relationships. We measure our success by the 360° value we create for our clients, each other, our shareholders, partners and communities. Visit us at accenture.com.

About this study

The CEO Study Program, developed by the UN Global Compact in collaboration with Accenture, is one of the largest global studies of CEO sentiment on sustainability. Through a quantitative assessment of nearly 2,000 CEOs and 35 in-depth one-to-one interviews with CEOs, chairpersons and presidents of UN Global Compact companies, this research coalesces perspectives to analyze key developments and emerging trends in sustainability. The CEO Study report is an extensive review of the advancing corporate sustainability movement aimed at accelerating progress for the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Acronyms

AI – Artificial intelligence
CDP – Carbon Disclosure Project
CEO – Chief Executive Officer
CFO – Chief Financial Officer
COVID – Coronavirus disease
CSO – Chief Sustainability Officer
EBITA – Earnings before interest, taxes and amortization
EPA – Environmental Protection Agency
ESG – Environmental, social and governance
EU – European Union
FDI – Foreign direct investment
Gen AI – Generative AI
GDP – Gross domestic product
GHG – Greenhouse gas
GRI – Global Reporting Initiative
HRDD – Human Rights Due Diligence
ILO – International Labour Organization
IPCC – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
ISSB – International Sustainability Standards Board
KPI – Key performance indicator
LCOE – Levelized cost of energy
NGO – Non-governmental organization
OEM – Original equipment manufacturer
PRI – Principles for Responsible Investment
PRME – Principles for Responsible Management Education
SBTi – Science Based Targets initiative
SDG – Sustainable Development Goals
TCFD – Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures
TWh – Terawatt-hours
UN – United Nations
UNEP FI – United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative
US – United States
ZB – Zettabyte

Disclaimer

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The Ten Principles of the United Nations Global Compact

Human Rights

1. Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and
2. make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.

Labour

3. Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
4. the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour;
5. the effective abolition of child labour; and
6. the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

Environment

7. Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;
8. undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility; and
9. encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.

Anti-Corruption

10. Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.

The Ten Principles of the United Nations Global Compact are derived from: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Labour Organization's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and the United Nations Convention Against Corruption.

> *Be honest about your situation, where you are and what is required. This is the only way we will be able to preserve the planet for future generations to enjoy.*
>
> Simon Baloyi,
> President and CEO of Sasol

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