

Rethinking the norm in the built environment

Hanife Ymer, head of sustainability at JLL (Middle East and Africa) joined the Tétris Design and Build South Africa team at the 2021 GBCSA Green Building Convention in Cape Town in November to give a talk on 'How sustainability is the now, not the later'. These are her thoughts.

This year's COP26 – the United Nations Climate Change Conference – saw negotiators in Glasgow thrash out ideas on how to rein in catastrophic levels of global warming. Despite the Paris Agreement adopted at COP21 in 2015 that set a goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, on the current trajectory, the UN is predicting a rise of 2.7 degrees above pre-industrial levels before the end of the century, which will have detrimental impacts.

However, it's not all bad. There is so much to celebrate since Paris:

- 40% of global financial assets have committed to financing \$130tn of climate change solutions driven by Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero.
- \$100tn in financial assets and 300 companies are aligned in terms of commitment to net zero emissions by 2050.
- Central banks are implementing climate stress testing which will require lenders to report on a common set of climate risk metrics, including the volume of greenhouse gas emissions they finance.
- We are seeing more mandatory requirements around the built environment and the way cities are designed.
- There is increasing legislation around organisational reporting on sustainability and ESGs - environment, social and (corporate) governance.

There is still a way to go though, so what now? How can we implement sustainability into our lives, as individuals and as organisations? The key is to realise that we don't need to make massive changes; just taking small steps can help contribute to decreasing our collective carbon footprint. We also don't need to choose between becoming sustainable and the financial costs of doing so.



Hanife Ymer, head of sustainability at JLL (Middle East and Africa)

Retrofitting legacy buildings

One of the solutions being looked at globally is retrofitting legacy buildings to improve their efficiency and emit less carbon. This is a critical step towards a net-zero carbon future as old buildings are responsible for a large portion of the world's energy consumption. By reusing the buildings that we already have and incorporating sustainable office fit outs, we can make them work harder and more cost-effectively. The Share Action group in London, a non-profit that aims to improve corporate behaviour, claims that for every existing building, 5% of stock will need to be retrofitted annually to ensure net zero operational and embodied carbon by 2050. This is no small feat, but it is possible, and investors are in a unique position to ensure this transition.

Sustainability in the built environment, however, is about so much more than going green and addressing climate change. It encompasses employee wellbeing, social responsibility, and diverse hiring policies, and today's companies are putting more focus on incorporating these ESG principles into their company culture.



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1 Dec 2021



Solutions are multi-dimensional

Going forward, we will hopefully see much more collaboration. We can't do this in silos as the solutions are multi-dimensional; there needs to be a sharing of knowledge, of intellectual property, technology and ideas. I'd like to see the traditional become the untraditional, to see everything turned on its head. Already, buildings are morphing into vertical farms in cities across the globe, and we need more of this. I think human beings have an innate ability in dire moments to respond in innovative and effective ways. I love what David Attenborough said in his speech at COP26: "Is this how our story is due to end – a tale of the smartest species doomed by that all too human characteristic of failing to see the bigger picture in pursuit of short-term goals?" I don't believe so. I think we are at the point where can we call this our 'break out year' for sustainability.

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