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# Joint Advocacy for Sustainability

## A Primer for Companies and Civil Society

### Introduction

Private sector-led advocacy for positive environmental and social change is becoming a key part of being a sustainable company and shaping sustainable development and a better future for people and the planet. Climate change, nature loss, and inequality are all systemic challenges that call for collective action across sectors and industries, and the reach and influence of brands, value chains, and business relationships make corporate advocacy a powerful, under-leveraged strategy for marshaling action for global sustainability.

To shed light on the opportunities, GlobeScan, a global insights and advisory consultancy, has conducted research with a number of partners such as WWF International and Oxford University's Saïd Business School to establish how companies can best engage in advocacy for sustainability, understand and navigate stakeholder expectations, clarify priorities, co-design credible initiatives, and deliver impact.

Recent developments show the critical part that corporate advocacy can play in global action for sustainability.

Business for Nature, a coalition of 85 partner organizations, for example, was instrumental in advancing the new UN Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) – a Paris Agreement for nature – signed in December, 2022.

More than 400 business and financial institutions from 53 countries supported the Make It Mandatory campaign calling for the inclusion of provisions in the GBF to require all large companies and financial institutions to assess and disclose their risks, impacts, and dependencies on biodiversity by 2030.<sup>1</sup>

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**“At COP15, leading companies stepped up to give courage to policymakers to adopt an ambitious global agreement on nature. This is because they understand that thriving businesses rely on thriving nature. We need system change coupled with strong legislation to transform our economies. Businesses must continue to raise their voices and ensure National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans reflect that high ambition so companies of all sizes can contribute towards a nature-positive future for all.”**

**Eva Zabey, CEO, Business for Nature.**

<sup>1</sup> Business for Nature, Make it Mandatory Campaign, <https://www.businessfornature.org/make-it-mandatory-campaign>

Companies, NGOs, and other partners can make much greater use of advocacy to activate sustainability strategies and programs, leverage their influence, and shift the systems that shape global environmental and social impacts and performance.

Many companies can have more impact through advocacy and engagement efforts that spur action across their value chains than through their own operations. Advocacy also plays a key part in raising the bar and leveling the playing field for making progress on sustainability. Higher standards reward progressive companies for prioritizing sustainability and embedding it in their operations and ways of doing business.

## Research Highlights / Key Learnings

- Advocacy is a powerful tool for advancing sustainability, amplifying impact, and mobilizing collective action.
- Stakeholders from investors to employees want companies to advocate for environmental and social issues.
- Many companies actively advocate for sustainability issues and solutions and plan to do more.
- Companies view multistakeholder initiatives and NGOs/non-profits as the most valuable partners for advocacy initiatives.
- Companies, NGOs, and other partners can strengthen their efforts and impact by striving for common ground and applying other good practices, as well as preparing for likely challenges.
- Advocacy can help to level the playing field for business and reward companies that are committed to advancing a sustainable future.



## Advocacy Opportunities for Companies and NGOs

Going forward, companies, NGOs, and other partners have many opportunities to support and help lead advocacy efforts that will shape the global sustainability agenda, their impacts, and performance. A few of these to watch and consider include:

- Integrated Approaches – experts around the world strongly agree that companies need to take much more integrated approaches to addressing climate change, nature loss, and socio-economic issues.<sup>2</sup>
- Global Biodiversity Framework – activating the new agreement to protect and restore nature signed in December, 2022.<sup>3</sup>
- Global Plastics Treaty – shaping the framework to tackle this global challenge.<sup>4</sup>
- Green Finance and Market-based Approaches – advancing new financing mechanisms and incentives for unlocking the massive investment needed to find and scale solutions to climate change and nature loss.<sup>5</sup>
- Just Transition – ensuring the transition to a sustainable, low-carbon economy supports the Global South and under-represented groups.<sup>6</sup>
- Benefit Sharing, Loss and Damage – compensating developing countries and marginalized populations that are least responsible for but most affected by climate change and nature loss.

<sup>2</sup> GlobeScan Navigating the Nature Agenda shared research program. For report, research overview, and highlights, see: <https://globescan.com/2022/11/15/navigating-the-nature-agenda-insights-for-collective-action-and-leadership/>

<sup>3</sup> Business for Nature, Recommendations to governments on GBF Implementation, <https://www.businessfornature.org/gbf-guidance>

<sup>4</sup> Business Coalition for a Global Plastics Treaty. <https://www.businessforplasticstreaty.org/>

<sup>5</sup> WWF, Green Financial Solutions, [https://wwf.panda.org/discover/our\\_focus/finance/green\\_financial\\_solutions/](https://wwf.panda.org/discover/our_focus/finance/green_financial_solutions/)

<sup>6</sup> An example of a global campaign for a Just Transition is Race to Zero. The goal is to rally non-state actors to halve emissions by 2030. <https://climatechampions.unfccc.int/>





## What Is Corporate Advocacy for Sustainability?

By advocacy for sustainability, we mean efforts by companies, either separately or together with peers, NGOs, and other collaborators to engage policymakers, peers, value chains, and investors to shape issues, policies, and incentives that deliver positive change for people and the planet.

Influencing policy, regulatory changes, and standards is an important aspect of advocacy efforts. Advocacy is also about having a clear point of view on key issues and being vocal in taking a stand for them.

These issues can run the gamut, from programs for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), marginalized groups and land rights, to climate and nature initiatives and addressing humanitarian crises.

The goals of corporate advocacy should align with and help advance a company's commitments to sustainability and contributions to sustainable development. Advocacy for sustainability is ultimately about improving society, creating more opportunities and brighter futures, and shifting the systems that can enable or hold back progress.

## What's In It for Companies?

Research by GlobeScan shows that the tide is shifting in terms of stakeholders' interests and what they expect and accept from companies. From consumers to civil society, stakeholders increasingly want companies to stand up and speak out for people and the planet.

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**“For WWF, joint advocacy with the corporate sector is a strategic approach that can help drive sustainability and system change, and level the playing field for purpose-led companies that want to shape a greener, fairer future for all. But it's critical that advocacy initiatives are credible and transparent, and that companies walk the talk and deliver impact.”**

**Jon Hutton, Chief Conservation Officer, WWF.**



**SEVEN IN TEN PEOPLE** say companies should take a stance and actively support government action on climate change (71%) and the UN SDGs (69%).<sup>7</sup>

Many people are more likely to choose and stay with organizations that prioritize environmental and social sustainability and reflect their values. Smart advocacy can be a valuable tool for recruiting and retaining top talent and building a more diverse, engaged workforce.

<sup>7</sup> GlobeScan Radar survey: <https://globescan.com/2023/01/13/seven-in-ten-people-say-companies-should-advocate-for-climate-sdgs/>



Far from lagging behind, investors are leading the charge on several fronts. The financial sector is a driving force behind efforts to have companies address and publicly report on their climate and nature-related risks through initiatives like the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) and the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD). Industry leaders have recognized the threat that inequality poses to prosperity and the global economy.

Around the world, expert stakeholders across sectors and the public feel national governments, multi-stakeholder initiatives, and private sector companies should be leading efforts to protect and restore nature. More than eight in ten (85%) of 420+ experts from 90 countries view the “lack of government/policy support and incentives” as a significant barrier to making progress on protecting and restoring nature, according to insights from GlobeScan’s Navigating the Nature Agenda.<sup>8</sup>

## Embracing Advocacy for Sustainability

More business leaders see the need and advantages of advocating for environmental, social, and economic issues that affect their company and stakeholders.

GlobeScan has watched this trend emerge and evolve through our research with expert stakeholders around the world. One in two Corporate Affairs leaders feel their companies should take a public position on key issues according to our Global Corporate Affairs Survey with Oxford University’s Saïd Business School. In 2022, one in three Corporate Affairs leaders indicated their company has “a strong appetite for corporate advocacy,” sharply up from one in five a year earlier.

Half of the 57 companies we surveyed with WWF say they engage in “a lot of joint advocacy” for sustainability with multistakeholder initiatives, NGOs, and other partners. Nearly six in ten of these companies plan to increase their level of advocacy in the next 12 to 18 months.



## Issue Areas and Initiatives

Priority issue areas for companies’ advocacy efforts center around pressing, high-profile topics on the sustainability agenda. These include:

- Net zero and climate change
- Nature and natural resources (including biodiversity and water stewardship)
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I)
- Regulatory requirements
- Waste management and the circular economy
- Sustainable products and packaging

<sup>8</sup> GlobeScan Navigating the Nature Agenda shared research program. For report, research overview and highlights, see: <https://globescan.com/2022/11/15/navigating-the-nature-agenda-insights-for-collective-action-and-leadership/>





Business leaders noted several examples of effective initiatives that have been driven by or feature business advocacy for environmental and social sustainability. These include:

- Science-Based Targets
- Business for Nature
- UN Treaty on Plastic Pollution
- Fit for 55 Corporate Leaders Group
- Human Rights Environmental Due Diligence (HREDD)

The Business Coalition for a Global Plastics Treaty has played a key role in advancing a UN Treaty on Plastic Pollution. Convened by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and WWF, the coalition consists of over 80 organizations, including businesses across the plastics value chain, financial institutions, and NGOs. The Coalition's shared vision sees the treaty as the key policy mechanism to reduce plastic production through a circular economy approach as well as prevent and remediate hard-to-abate plastic leakage into the environment. Key factors for the coalition's success to date include: a strong, clear business case; a broad, diverse coalition of leading organizations and credible partners; and a targeted approach focused on a specific policy outcome.

## Other Leading Examples of Corporate Advocacy

Many of the highest-performing companies in GlobeScan and The Sustainability Institute by ERM's annual Sustainability Leaders survey of expert stakeholders make advocacy and collective action a core part of their sustainability strategies and programs.

Ørsted, the Danish renewable energy company, sees advocacy and partnerships as vital parts of its strategy to fully decarbonize its global supply chain by 2040. Ørsted has been an active, vocal leader in using its influence to transform hard-to-transition sectors such as steel. This includes advocating for greater government and regulatory support to create the right signals and grow demand for new low-carbon solutions. Partnering with leading NGOs like The Climate Group has also been a key part of Ørsted's decarbonization strategy.

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**“We need governments to help create the right incentives and stimulate demand. This is a key area and in our own interest as well as our suppliers, so that decarbonized solutions can become the market standard.”**

Ida Krabek, Senior Director and Head of Global Sustainability, Ørsted.



Natura &Co, the Brazilian cosmetics company, approaches advocacy as a key vehicle for protecting nature and advancing sustainable development. Its advocacy efforts include taking a stand on things that matter, joining forces with others, and working towards systems level change. Its marketing function directly petitioned Brazil's Congress to help prevent deforestation in the Amazon Rainforest, which is a key source of ingredients for products and livelihoods for suppliers. In addition, Natura &Co is a founding member of the TNFD and an active leader at UN climate and biodiversity conferences and negotiations.

## Good Practices for Corporate Advocacy

Priority issue areas for companies' advocacy efforts center around pressing, high-profile topics on the sustainability agenda. These include:

- **Solid corporate values and beliefs** – Values can be a strong foundation for advocacy efforts. Companies need to know and live their “why” and where they stand on issues.
- **Ability to listen and respond to a multistakeholder world** – Companies need to engage and understand the diverse universe of stakeholders and viewpoints that shape issue areas.
- **Point of view (POV) and supporting narrative** – Companies need to translate their values and beliefs into clear POVs and narratives to engage and influence target audiences. This includes having a process that ensures agile and quick responses.
- **Internal alignment and fluency** – Sustainability and other corporate functions often speak with different voices and perspectives which can confuse and undermine advocacy efforts. Company leaders and employees need to be fully aligned and fluent in the playbook for the company's position on the issue and related activities.
- **Collaboration** – Working collaboratively within and across sectors is vital to amplify reach and influence. Companies should also clearly communicate and make sure their POV is well known to stakeholders.



“Advocacy is also an essential tool in Unilever’s commitment to ensure that everyone who directly provides goods and services to Unilever will earn at least a living wage or income by 2030. For example, through the Living Wage Supplier Promise, Unilever asks its suppliers to commit to close the gap, work together to address joint challenges, and advocate for a living wage in relevant industry groups. Also, Unilever is leveraging purchasing practices, collaboration, and advocacy with a cross-section of partners to create systemic change to ensure the rights of everyone to a decent standard of living.

We aim to mobilize like-minded companies to close the gap towards living wages and incomes, influence governments to institute and implement living wage and income policies, and to build cross-sector coalitions to drive systems change.”

Rebecca Marmot, Chief Sustainability Officer, Unilever.





## Joint Advocacy and Partnering with NGOs

In our research with WWF, companies listed multistakeholder initiatives and NGOs or non-profits as the most valuable or impactful types of engagement for sustainability advocacy. Valuable benefits of partnering with NGOs include:

- **Expertise, skills, and experience** – NGOs bring deep knowledge and experience in their areas of expertise that companies often do not have internally.
- **Implementation and networks** – Many NGOs have extensive networks of partner organizations, donors, and boots on the ground in local operating contexts to amplify outreach and help implement and manage programs.
- **Trust and credibility** – NGOs are viewed as trusted and impactful actors by expert stakeholders and the general public.

Constructively partnering on advocacy is a two-way street where partners need to understand and respond to each other's goals, motivations, and constraints. We identified several foundations for building strong, effective joint advocacy initiatives between companies and NGOs.

- **Begin on common ground** – It is crucial for all partners to start with a shared goal. While companies and NGOs will not agree on everything, they should acknowledge their differences and focus on a common outcome that serves each party's interests.

- **Co-create the initiative** – NGOs should engage and collaborate from the outset instead of developing initiatives in isolation. This calls for embracing progressive companies as partners and allies rather than adversaries. Co-designing advocacy initiatives helps create a sense of ownership and mutual accountability.
- **Build a strong business case** – Develop an awareness and understanding of each corporate partner's business priorities and capabilities. Be clear and persuasive on how an initiative or campaign delivers business value and impact along the value chain.
- **Keep it simple** – Be crisp and focused with asks of partners. This improves success and accelerates change by helping corporate partners focus their efforts, achieve internal alignment, and move faster with more agility.
- **Prioritize internal culture change** – Internal engagement within companies is key to "walking the talk." Companies and NGOs need to find inspiring ways to engage employees, bring people along, and get the whole organization behind the advocacy initiative.
- **Communicate and build trust** – Stay engaged, be open and transparent, and make sure information about the initiative, progress, and challenges is clearly available, accessible, and understood by partners throughout the collaboration.



## Overcoming Challenges

Advocacy is vital and rewarding but is not without its challenges and risks. To achieve their aims and minimize disruptions, companies and their partners can anticipate and prepare to navigate these.

- **Complexity** – Issues come with many sides and stakeholders. Companies need to understand and be prepared to handle the various dimensions and interests that can affect advocacy efforts. For example, different sectors and geographies can have very different perspectives on how initiatives may relate to equity and Just Transition considerations.
- **Resource and time requirements** – Developing and implementing strategic advocacy efforts can take up considerable human and financial resources. Partners need to be selective about the initiatives they support and commit to investing the effort and resources that are needed for an initiative to succeed.
- **Global and local alignment** – Companies may take strong positions at the global or head office level that are not followed by national or local offices or industry associations, which can undermine initiatives and lead to greenwashing accusations. It is essential to engage both globally and locally for a consistent approach that avoids these risks.
- **Credibility and greenwashing** – Taking a public position often heightens stakeholders' attention. Companies and their partners will want to have their houses in order and be ready to withstand some level of scrutiny or criticism. This includes ensuring that trade associations of which they are members are not engaging in regressive or counter-productive lobbying.



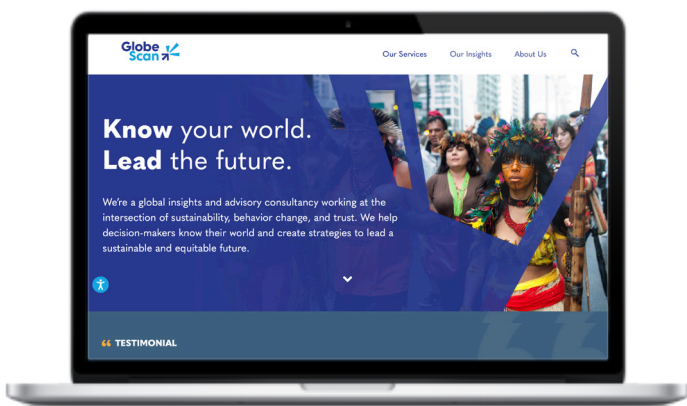
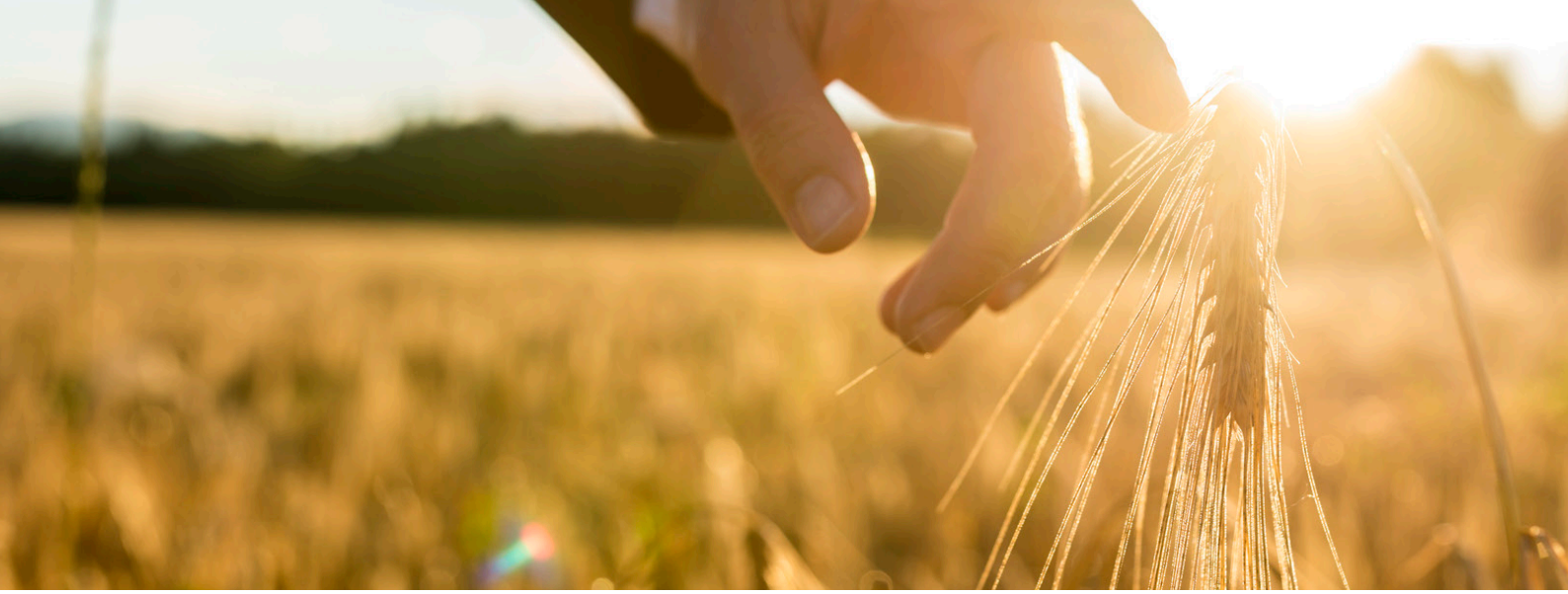
## In Closing

**Corporate advocacy is an essential, powerful part of the sustainability toolkit.**

Stakeholders, including employees, increasingly expect companies to step up and take a stand on the issues that matter to their sustainability commitments, values, and society. Advocacy can help companies and their partners influence and transform the systems that shape their own progress and the course of sustainable development. Multistakeholder initiatives and NGOs are key partners that play vital roles in amplifying influence and impact, de-risking advocacy efforts, and establishing trust and credibility.







## Get in touch

This paper highlights the powerful role of advocacy efforts for sustainability and some of the key ingredients for success and impact. Please reach out to let us know what you are facing and discuss how we might collaborate on compelling initiatives that engage stakeholders and drive change.

Get in touch by sending us an email at [insight@globescan.com](mailto:insight@globescan.com) or [globalpartnerships@wwfint.org](mailto:globalpartnerships@wwfint.org)



## About GlobeScan

GlobeScan is a global insights and advisory consultancy working at the intersection of sustainability, behavior change, and trust. We partner with leading companies, NGOs, and governmental organizations to deliver insights that guide decision-making and build strategies that contribute to a sustainable and equitable future.

Established in 1987, we have offices in Cape Town, Hong Kong, Hyderabad, London, Paris, San Francisco, São Paulo, Singapore, and Toronto. Learn more: [www.globescan.com](http://www.globescan.com)



## About WWF

WWF is an independent conservation organization, with over 30 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the Earth's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

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