



BIC Sustainability 101 Guides

BIC Sustainability 101 Guides are a series of short, introductory level, papers on sustainability topics of interest to BIC Members.

If there is a topic you would like to see as a BIC Sustainability 101 Guide, please contact info@bic.org.uk

Guide 1 - The What and Why of Sustainability

What is sustainability?

The most often quoted definition comes from the UN World Commission on Environment and Development: “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” This entails recognising and acting upon the interdependencies between the economy, the environment and society to ensure longevity on a global scale.

What does this mean for an organisation in the twenty first century? Basically, it means looking at how an organisation functions at the moment and making changes to its working practices, processes, and procurement in line with the definition above. This extends both to the sustainability of the organisation itself, in addition to the wider impact of the organisation on everyone else's capacity to sustain their own needs. One of the key ways organisations may look to integrate sustainability is to implement principles of the circular economy. The European Union (EU) defines a circular economy as one that is a model of production and consumption, which involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing, and recycling existing materials and products as long as possible. In this way, the life cycle of products is extended, ensuring economic growth in a sustainable manner.

This is one reason why the UN created the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs). There are 17 goals which cover a range of issues that need to be addressed urgently from hunger, poverty, inequality, and climate change by 2030. It is up to an organisation as to which goals it feels it can make a difference in, as not all of them are going to be applicable to that organisation. As an example, [BIC's Green Supply Chain Work Plan](#) is aligned to 7 of the goals: 4 Quality Education, 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, 12 Responsible Consumption and Production, 13 Climate Action, 15 Life on Land, 17 Partnerships for the Goals. These are the areas in which BIC feels it can make a difference.

Why is it important?

Sustainability is important for preserving our planet and natural resources like water and air. Building a sustainable future and cultivating sustainable ways of living will reduce pollution and protect habitats of plants and animals, necessary for the survival of life on earth.

For an organisation in the broadest sense, sustainability refers to the ability to maintain or support a process continuously over time. In business and policy contexts, sustainability seeks to prevent the depletion of natural or physical resources, so that they will remain available for the long term. An example for the book industry could be the increased risk of wild fires destroying forests resulting in supply issues in the paper industry. Another part of this is social sustainability which covers such things as health, safety, diversity, wellness, human rights, equitable labour practices, empowerment, philanthropy. The ethical obligation to act on sustainability is increasingly projected through commercial pressure from stakeholders across the value chain, ever-evolving regulatory requirements and the values of those working within each organisation such that sustainability is now a necessary consideration for any organisation to identify opportunities and mitigate risks.



What is climate change?

Climate change as defined by the [United Nations](#) (UN) refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. Such shifts can be natural, due to changes in the sun's activity or large volcanic eruptions. But since the 1800s, [human activities have been the main driver of climate change](#), primarily due to the burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas. When burnt these fossil fuels build up in the atmosphere trapping the sun's heat and stopping it from escaping from the Earth, resulting in raised temperatures.

The main greenhouse gases that are causing climate change include carbon dioxide and methane. These come from using fossil fuels for driving a car or coal for heating a building, for example. Clearing land and cutting down forests can also release carbon dioxide. Agriculture, oil, and gas operations are major sources of methane emissions. Energy, industry, transport, buildings, agriculture, and other land uses are among the [main sectors](#) releasing greenhouse gases linked to the global value chain for other goods and services. It should be noted that we as individuals with our daily lives contribute to the release of greenhouse gases as well.

Why do we need to act on it?

Basically, we cannot maintain our Earth's ecosystems or continue to function as we do if more sustainable choices are not made. Science has made it clear that we must limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. We are currently at 1.1°C and are on track for 2.7°C according to the UNDP's Emissions Gap Report 2021 by 2030. Every fraction of a degree matters. Wildfires, heavy flooding, intense heat, drought, and storms are becoming more frequent and devastating. Every bit of warming we avoid will reduce the climate risks we face. We need to keep global warming to 1.5°C to have a fighting chance of having a habitable and thriving planet for all of us. To do this we need to act now to mitigate the severity of these changes as every positive step will help no matter how small. This should be in conjunction with larger aims such as moving to renewable energy sources and reduce our reliance on fossil fuels until we can eliminate fossil fuel use. Any delays will result in increased costs down the line as we will have a bigger problem to solve.

Why do you want to address sustainability?

With all the talk about sustainability in the media the topic is on the minds of people across the world. For some it is more important than others, but it is a burning issue that needs to be addressed in an organisation. It has been found that sustainability helps businesses retain employees by creating a positive and fulfilling work environment. This can be achieved through initiatives such as green office practices, eco-friendly policies, and socially responsible actions.

Depending upon the size and type of an organisation there can also be regulatory requirements that they have to act upon, such as reporting on environmental performance and the management practices in place. This creates a need to develop a policy so an organisation can measure and address its impact on sustainability to meet these regulations, alongside responding to the current and anticipated needs of its stakeholders throughout its supply chain. It is recognised that organisations will face constraints be they financial and/or employee time and availability to act on this topic.

It should be noted that for all organisations the most important thing is to start doing something no matter how small. This can be built upon as momentum grows with the passage of time. The next guide in this series expands upon this topic - Guide 2: How to Start Your Sustainability Journey.

For all organisations it is about doing the right thing to protect the planet for future generations.

Directory of information

[UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs)

[BIC's Green Supply Chain Work Plan](#)

Climate change as defined by the [United Nations](#)



Glossary

Acronym	Full name	Description	Further notes
	1.5°C	Science has made it clear that we must limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. We are currently at 1.1°C and are on track for 2.7°C according to the UNDP's Emissions Gap Report 2021 by 2030. Every fraction of a degree matters. Wildfires, heavy flooding, intense heat, drought, and storms are becoming more frequent and devastating. Every bit of warming we avoid will reduce the climate risks we face. We need to keep global warming to 1.5°C to have a fighting chance of having a habitable and a thriving planet for all of us.	Net-Zero Jargon Buster - a guide to common terms - Science Based Targets
	Carbon neutral	Although often used interchangeably with 'net-zero', the two are not the same. In general, when organisations claim carbon neutrality, they are counterbalancing CO2 emissions with carbon offsets without necessarily having reduced emissions by an amount consistent with reaching net-zero at the global or sector level. This may conceal the need for deeper emissions reductions that are in line with what the science requires for the world to keep global warming to 1.5°C. Carbon neutrality claims also do not necessarily cover non-CO2 GHGs.	Net-Zero Jargon Buster - a guide to common terms - Science Based Targets
	CarbonNeutral®	CarbonNeutral® mark indicates you have followed The CarbonNeutral Protocol, which is the global standard, managed for over 20 years, to deliver clear, credible, and transparent carbon neutral programs.	https://www.climateimpact.com/business-solutions/carbon-offsetting/
	Climate change adaptation	Policies and measures which make societies and organisations more resilient to the impacts of climate change such as flooding and heatwaves.	List of Sustainability Definitions - CDP
	Climate change mitigation	Policies and measures which aim to reduce greenhouse gases from organisations and governments with the intention of lessening the global impacts of climate change, such as reducing the amount and intensity of fossil fuel burning. This could also be done with offsetting although not a common use of the term in this case.	List of Sustainability Definitions - CDP
	Carbon footprint	A carbon footprint is the total amount of greenhouse gases (including carbon dioxide and methane) that are generated by our actions.	The Nature Conservancy

Acronym	Full name	Description	Further notes
GHGs	Greenhouse gases	Gases that absorb and trap heat (i.e. infrared radiation) from the Sun in the Earth's atmosphere. Includes the following gases that are covered by the UNFCCC/Kyoto Protocol: carbon dioxide (CO ₂), methane (CH ₄), nitrous oxide (N ₂ O), hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs), sulphur hexafluoride (SF ₆) and nitrogen trifluoride (NF ₃). These gases are the direct cause of climate change. The term "GHGs" is often used interchangeably with "all UNFCCC/Kyoto GHGs," and these gases must be covered by targets set under the Net-Zero Standard. Water vapor is also a GHG but is not covered by the UNFCCC/Kyoto Protocol or GHG emissions targets because concentrations of this gas are self-limited by the atmosphere and thus not a direct cause of global warming. It should be noted that some GHG are naturally occurring such as CO ₂ . Carbon dioxide is also released naturally/without human intervention however it not accurate to say it is causing the current levels of climate change.	Net-Zero Jargon Buster - a guide to common terms - Science Based Targets
	Greenwashing	The practice of falsely promoting an organisation's environmental efforts, or spending more resources to promote the organisation as green than are spent to engage in environmentally sound practices	List of Sustainability Definitions - CDP
	Net-zero	A state of balance between anthropogenic emissions and anthropogenic removals. In most cases, it is important to specify either net-zero CO ₂ emissions or net-zero GHG emissions, which also includes non-CO ₂ GHGs. Net-zero GHG emissions must be achieved at the global level to stabilise temperature increase, and targets set using the Net-Zero Standard must cover all UNFCCC/Kyoto GHG emissions. The SBTi's Net-Zero Standard outlines what companies need to do to enable the global economy to achieve net-zero. The Standard makes clear that for corporate net-zero targets in line with keeping global warming to 1.5°C require rapid and deep emission reductions. Organisations must take action to halve their emissions by around 2030. Likewise, long-term deep emissions cuts of at least 90% before 2050 are crucial for net-zero targets to align with science.	Net-Zero Jargon Buster - a guide to common terms - Science Based Targets
	Paris Agreement	A legally binding international treaty on climate change, adopted at COP21 in Paris in 2015. Its goal is to limit global warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels.	List of Sustainability Definitions - CDP
	Scope 1	Direct GHG emissions occurring from sources that are owned or controlled by the organisation, for example, emissions from combustion in owned or controlled boilers, furnaces, vehicles, etc. or emissions from chemical production in owned or controlled process equipment.	Net-Zero Jargon Buster - a guide to common terms - Science Based Targets