



Sustainability

Better World – Our Commitment to Society

Sustainability

The concept of sustainable development has increasingly come to represent a new kind of world – a world in which economic growth delivers a more just and inclusive society, at the same time as protecting our natural heritage.

This website, which we've called Better World, is BT's triple bottom line sustainability report. In it we identify and quantify our social, economic and environmental impacts and set forward-looking targets.

This section looks particularly at

- how we approach the management of sustainable development within BT,
- how we have taken a lead in assisting moves towards sustainability,
- how information and communication technologies can act as an enabling technology for sustainable development.

Links:

- [Managing sustainable development in BT](#)
- [Sustainability leadership](#)
- [ICT and sustainable development](#)

Managing sustainable development in BT

Within BT we tend to use the term corporate social responsibility (CSR) more than sustainable development. This is because we identify CSR as the voluntary actions a company can take to contribute towards the wider societal goal of sustainable development.

Whichever term is used it requires a co-ordinated approach to managing social, economic and environmental issues right across the company.

This is covered in more detail in the section on business principles, specifically the description of our CSR governance system.

Better World Links:

- [Business Principles](#)
- [CSR governance system](#)

Sustainability Leadership

The successful realisation of sustainable development requires a degree of international consensus and a lot of multi-institutional support.

We would argue that no individual country, business or any other organisation can become sustainable on its own – although it can become more sustainable than it was, and it can make a valuable contribution to making the world a more sustainable place.

We aspire to lead by example, not only in addressing our own impacts, but also by raising awareness and by working with others through partnerships for action.

Links:

- Raising Awareness
- Partnerships

Raising Awareness

As well as addressing its own direct impacts, a company can also make a real difference by raising awareness, stimulating dialogue and responding to consultations on sustainable development and corporate social responsibility.

We produce a series of occasional papers designed to address some of the complex inter-relationships between companies and the societies in which they operate. They aim to raise the debate rather than an attempt to give definitive answers:

- Changing Values considers the role of business in a sustainable society
- Enlightened Values offers a practical business case for accountability and stakeholder engagement
- Variety and Values gives a review of globalisation and its linked effects on cultural and bio-diversity loss
- Adding Values provides an insight into why and how to account for a company's economic performance and effects.

In 2000 we hosted a CEO forum at the World Telecommunications Congress that led to the signing of a communiqué on sustainable development amongst our biggest suppliers.

We also led the Impact on Society Task Force that produced *Winning with Integrity* (www.business-impact.org) and hosted the 2000 ETNO environmental conference (<http://www.etno.belbone.be/site/ipswich/ipswich.htm>)

We are often invited to participate in UK government, European Union, research consortia, business associations and NGO dialogue sessions on the role of business in sustainable development, and we sponsor selected events and conferences.

We also respond to formal consultations such as the UK government sustainability strategy and the EU green paper on CSR.

Better World Links:

- Occasional Papers
- Public policy

See also:

- WTC CEO communiqué
<http://www.groupbt.com/corporateinformation/regulatory/regulatoryinformation/europeancommissiondocuments/corporatesocialresponsibility/index.htm>
- *Winning with Integrity* www.business-impact.org
- 2000 ETNO environmental conference
<http://www.etno.belbone.be/site/ipswich/ipswich.htm>
- BT response to EU Green Paper on CSR
<http://www.groupbt.com/corporateinformation/regulatory/regulatoryinformation/europeancommissiondocuments/corporatesocialresponsibility/index.htm>

Partnerships

We often work with external partners in the delivery of BT branded projects and programmes. These are identified throughout the Better world site.

We also receive many invitations to participate as a partner in activities co-ordinated by external agencies. It's impossible to become involved in everything so we select those where we have both something to offer and something to gain – either through mutual learning and exchange of ideas, or through brand association.

Particularly relevant in this context would be our:

- support for the UN global compact
- partnership in Digital Futures
- direct support to the Global Reporting Initiative

Many issues around sustainable development are best tackled at an industry level, and to this end we collaborate with our competitors and our suppliers.

For example, we:

- chair the Global e-Sustainability Initiative
- are a signatory of the ETNO Environmental Charter

Better World Links:

- BT's Global Compact Submission

See also:

- Digital Futures www.digitalfutures.org.uk
- Global Reporting Initiative www.globalreporting.org
- Global e-Sustainability Initiative www.gesi.org
- ETNO Charter <http://www.etno.be/>

ICT and Sustainable Development

Our services can help cut energy and resource use through transport substitution and dematerialisation of physical products – thereby decoupling economic growth from resource use. Peter Johnston of the Information Society Directorate of the European Commission has said “advanced telecommunications services are one of the few achievements of our ‘consumer society’ that could be accessible to, and used by every person on earth without exceeding sustainable limits on resource-use and environmental impact”.

In such a scenario we would envisage networks powered by energy derived from renewable sources, equipment and cables made from non-oil derived plastics (probably coming from agricultural products) and polymeric conductors used in place of metals. As glass is derived from a plentiful supply of sand, fibre optics are likely to survive in a sustainable future and all-optical switches and computers could further reduce the need for metals and traditional semiconductor materials.

Our services also have the capacity to enable a more productive and inclusive society in which people experience improved democratic participation, more efficient provision of health and education services, and unlimited access to each other and to knowledge.

Of course all these benefits will not always be automatically forthcoming, and information and communication technologies are not without their downsides.

Our original analysis of these matters A Question of Balance still contains some useful perspectives as do our special Hot Topics that are included as part of this site. These cover issues such as the digital divide, quality of life and the environmental impacts of e-business.

We were also closely involved in the Global e-Sustainability Initiative ICT sector report prepared for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. This contains a number of helpful recommendations to ICT companies and governments.

Additionally, we want to demonstrate the sustainability potential of our own products and services through their application inside BT. You will find an analysis of the sustainability benefits of BT’s own use of teleworking, conferencing and other ICT technologies in the Benefits section of the Better World site.

Better World Links:

- [A Question of Balance](#)
- [Hot Topics](#)
- [Benefits](#)

See also:

- [Global e-Sustainability Initiative ICT sector report \(www.gesi.org\)](http://www.gesi.org)