

Sustainability

Better World
BT's Social & Environment Report



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 preserving the natural environment and the world's non-renewable resources for future generations.

The successful realisation of sustainable development requires a degree of international consensus and a great deal 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.

BT's approach

This website 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.

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.

CSR 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 framework and the recent introduction of our CSR health check process.

However, sustainability is not just about having the right systems, checks and balances in place. BT aspires to lead by example, and this section is about the practical steps we are taking to raise awareness of and participation in sustainability.

In particular we look at:

- how we have taken a lead in assisting moves towards sustainability through raising awareness and working in partnerships.
- how information and communication technologies can enable sustainable development.

See Also:

- Better World – Business principles
- CSR governance
- 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.

Publications

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 (1999) considers the role of business in a sustainable society.
- Enlightened Values (2002) offers a practical business case for accountability and stakeholder engagement.
- Variety and Values (2000) gives a review of globalisation and its linked effects on cultural and bio-diversity loss.
- Adding Values (2001) provides an insight into why and how to account for a company's economic performance and effects.
- Just Values (2003) asks the question 'what happens when responsible business doesn't pay?' by examining the relationship between the business case for sustainable development and the moral imperative.

Participation

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/lpswich.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 are also members of a number of organisations that attempt to influence public policy on matters connected with corporate social responsibility and sustainable development. Some, but by no means all of these, are business led:

- CSR Europe www.csreurope.org
- Forum for the Future www.forumforthefuture.org.uk
- Green Alliance www.green-alliance.org.uk
- Business for Social Responsibility www.bsr.org

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

In short BT is keen for the government to deliver changes in the current legal and fiscal frameworks that will enable business to survive and flourish from sustainable business practice. More details are provided in the Public policy section of the Better World site.

See also:

- Occasional papers
- Public policy
- 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/lpswich.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.

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, especially through mutual learning and the exchange of ideas.

Particularly relevant in this context would be our:

- support for the UN global compact [[link to Global Compact Site Index](#)]
- 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.

See also:

- BT's Global Compact Index
- 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

By reducing the need for physical goods and transportation, telecommunications technology can help cut energy and resource use – thereby uncoupling economic growth from resource use.

Envisaging the future

As 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).
- polymeric conductors used in place of metals.
- fibre-optical switches and computers. (As glass is derived from a plentiful supply of sand, fibre-optic components could 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.

Assessing the impacts

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, misuse of the internet 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 and has led to a fruitful partnership with WWF in the preparatory stages of the World Summit on the Information Society.

The proof of sustainability is in the practice, and 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.

See also:

- A Question of Balance
- Better World – ‘Hot Topics’
- Better World – Benefits
- Global e-Sustainability Initiative ICT sector report – www.gesi.org
- Global e-Sustainability Initiative input to WSIS – www.gesi.org

