

The Future we Want
Discussion Series

**3. Leading the
restoration of nature
as we accelerate
to a net negative
emissions economy**



3. Leading the restoration of nature as we accelerate to a net negative emissions economy

The Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership, (CISL), held the third of its Future We Want Discussions on October 15th, 2020. The focus of this session was on: ‘Leading the restoration of nature as we accelerate to a net negative emissions economy.’



Dr Craig Bennett



Dr Gemma Cranston



Folashade Ambrose



Samata Pattinson



Chris Daly



Dr Andrew Venter

The panel of speakers included: **Dr Craig Bennett**, Chief Executive, The Wildlife Trusts; **Dr Gemma Cranston**, Director, Business and Nature, CISL; **Folashade Ambrose**, Communication, Public Affairs & Sustainable Development Director, Lafarge Africa; **Samata Pattinson**, CEO, Red Carpet Green Dress; and **Chris Daly**, Vice President Sustainability, PepsiCo Europe. The session was chaired by **Dr Andrew Venter**, Director of CISL South Africa

The Role of Nature in Sustainability

The panel discussed whether nature will feature prominently in any business sustainability strategy of the future, and whether business commitments to nature will have a significant impact on the protection and restoration of the planet.

Craig Bennett was first to speak, and was asked how restoring nature will make a difference towards creating a negative emissions position. “We cannot solve the climate emergency unless we solve the ecological emergency and we cannot solve the ecological emergency unless we solve the climate emergency. They are inextricably linked.” He drew the audience to the WWF’s recent ‘Living Planet’ report, documenting how wildlife populations have fallen by 68% globally since the early 1970s. Craig pointed to the huge impacts on soil fertility, pollinators, the ability of forests to capture carbon or to hold soils in place to filter the air. And that COVID-19 too is a warning. He said: “if we continue to fragment nature, particularly in the tropics. If we continue to trade in wildlife parts, then we’re going to see more epidemics around the world.”

Craig said the Wildlife Trust operates more nature reserves across the UK than McDonald’s has restaurants. “But here’s the thing, it’s not enough... scientists estimate we need to be putting around 30% of our land and sea into nature’s recovery by 2030 to have a hope of turning these problems around.” He stressed that, of course, we still need to cut carbon emissions from source, but that, “the role of nature in sucking up carbon will become ever more important. It has not received nearly as much attention today as it needs to.”

When asked about steps required to achieve sustainability for nature, Craig was clear. If you take the example of plastic, it’s not about recycling. It is about stopping the use completely, and stopping the use of fossil fuels that make it and working within environmental limits. He stressed for the need to move from a demand to a supply-led economy: “We need governments to govern. And we need

business to be out there telling governments and being really clear that we need the bold policy frameworks to rewire the economy”, adding, “I have not yet seen business being loud enough and strong enough and vocal enough in calling for governments to be really bold in the interventions they need to make to help solve the biodiversity crisis. So that’s my big call because I think business needs to play catch up on this issue in terms of being really firm with governments.”

Gemma Cranston was next to speak and asked for her opinion on the business case for change. She said by protecting nature, business “can provide long term resilience, the security of supply, enable licence to operate and of course, provide the usual reputational gains.” She said she believes there is a growing momentum in the ‘Business for Nature’ coalition, having now secured signatories with over 600 companies with the combined value of about \$4 trillion; urging governments to bring policies that will reverse the loss of nature by 2030. She acknowledged there are a huge number of commitments and business pledges, “but we need to shift from corporate commitment to corporate action.”

Gemma mentioned a progressive project in East Anglia with Nestlé using landscape measures which directly support nature within their supply chains. However, she added, more generally, “it’s not just about leaving it to the sustainability teams to drive a few isolated projects”, it needs business to “roll that across all their operations supply chains and services.” That we need to look at how we deliver and what are the strategies and operating practices going to look like in real-time. When asked if she thought the introduction of biodiversity disclosure at a corporate reporting level will help drive change, she said there is a real opportunity and waiting to find the perfect benchmarks shouldn’t slow down progress. Business can already prioritise action.

Folashade Ambrose spoke next, and using the example of the construction sector talked about the need for sustainable infrastructure. “It’s imperative that we’re all working purposefully through collaboration and strategic alignment of efforts”, and it’s really about “collective stakeholder responsibility” and the right kind of innovation. Folashade mentioned the value of incentives as well as the role of policy frameworks to design roadmaps to sustainability. It is critical that everyone fully understands what is needed, as well as being accountable. She pointed out that the construction sector contributes to 40% of CO2 emissions globally and that the World Economic Forum highlighted that 60% of the global infrastructure needs are yet to be built. “Clearly, there is a need for buildings to be built, but how they are built is where sustainable construction plays a very fundamental role.” SDGs are critical for linking climate and nature together.

Folashade detailed some of the projects Lafarge is involved in which create incentives for sustainable practice, such as the Wholesome Awards. “It is a significant competition for sustainable development design, created to raise awareness of the importance and roles of all critical stakeholders”, she said, using architects, engineers and more. “And one thing we did from a social standpoint was to really encourage a number of these stakeholders to drive sustainable construction. She later highlighted LaFarge Africa’s commitment to rehabilitating land and restoring ecosystems at their quarries and mines in Nigeria, where projects include biodiversity management programmes and the planting of 400,000 indigenous trees.

Samata Pattinson took the discussion from construction to the fashion industry, articulating the need for a new business model which focuses on decoupling economic growth from natural resource extraction and waste creation. “We really need to look at divesting in growth and investing in supply chain prosperity,” she said. “Suppose you think about global deforestation, for example. In that case, we’re talking about 150 million trees logged each year to create a fabric such as viscose ... and 30% of that is sourced from endangered forests.” She gave another example of intense overgrazing of animals used in the production of cashmere, “and that’s basically degraded Mongolia’s grasslands to the point where they’re slowly turning to desert.” She said production and consumption in the fashion industry has doubled in the past 15 years. And in the next 20 years, we will be using 50% more water and creating 62% more waste if we continue business as usual.

Samata said the new business model means “producing less stuff” and looking after what we have and being more transparent with the consumer on labelling, so they know where the clothes come from and what energy and nature was used to make them. It also means the industry needs to collaborate, rather than compete. “I always say like biodegradable packaging is just an orange peel to nature, living systems have around 4 billion years of R&D on us as humans. We are latecomers to this conversation. So we need to really accelerate this transition from linear to circularity and respect the relationship between impact and dependence in a resource-constrained world.” When asked if she thought there would be a definitive shift in the fashion industry, Somata said there are some promising shoots. She gave the example of Levi’s second-hand initiative to discourage throwaway culture. Part of the industry is now “recognising that there is an economic and business case for circular retail solutions.”

Sitting inside one of the largest multinationals, PepsiCo, **Chris Daly** talked about the challenge ahead for business. “It is absolutely true when we talk about biodiversity, as a company, our learning is happening as we speak”. He said there was ample room for optimism as things are changing, and gave the recent response to plastics as an example. “It needs everybody to come together. So it needs government to provide greater regulation because regulation can provide standards that then people can invest behind.” He said it also needs companies to come together, “not only to work together at a horizontal level within the value chain, but actually at where the profit flows will change in the value chain as we move to new business systems, and therefore work vertically as well.” Chris said he believes companies are beginning to step into a different way of operating, looking beyond a “self-protection approach” to take responsibility. He said of PepsiCo: “What we’re doing in the way we’re talking and thinking about things. It’s a very different conversation than we had five years ago.”

Chris was asked whether PepsiCo’s commitment around biodiversity would be a key driver for change. Chris acknowledged the company is in over 200 countries around the world and that a third of the company’s carbon footprint comes from agriculture, so “we need to look at ways of having more regenerative practices. That itself will have an impact on our overall carbon footprint, and our aim is obviously to have significant reductions over the coming ten years.” He mentioned how the company is moving out of palm oil as a case in point.

Discussions were concluded by sharing the results of an audience poll.

Do you agree with the statements below?

