The Next Era of Corporate Disclosure

DIGITAL, RESPONSIBLE, INTERACTIVE

GRI — Empowering Sustainable Decisions

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Michael Meehan on the Value of Sustainability Data

Sustainability data is at the heart of the strategic decision-making processes which can lead us towards a more sustainable economy and world. Over the past decade we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of companies measuring their sustainability performance with thousands of organizations beginning to see the value in monitoring their sustainability impacts.

We are now on the cusp of a new era: the way we capture, analyze and use sustainability data is about to be transformed. We are moving from an era where sustainability information is collected and reported, to an era in which stakeholders –

including the companies themselves – are using this information to learn more about their organizations, their risks and opportunities, and learning to make better decisions.

GRI and partners – business representatives; civil society; academia; labor; public and intergovernmental agencies; and others – have worked together over the last 15 years to establish a global language to gather and publish sustainability data and information. Today, we can see the valuable results of this work: thousands of public sustainability reports, many other related sustainability disclosures, indexes, global and local sustainability goals.

The Next Era

It is now time to take this movement to the next level. We need to unlock the value of sustainability performance data, allowing it to be accessed and shared in a variety of new ways. We have to work together to make this information meaningful and accessible to decision makers everywhere.

GRI created the ''Sustainability and Reporting 2025'' project to promote a global conversation on how to achieve this goal. Together with business executives and experts from diverse fields, we discussed which type of information will be needed to tackle the most critical challenges in the next decade and how data technology should be used to enable this journey. Here we provide the conclusive insights from these discussions.

Unlocking the Power of Sustainability Data

We uncover **new formats** of sustainability reporting and disclosures as technology transports us towards dynamic sustainability data exchange.

We describe the **changing focus** of reporting and disclosures, with greater emphasis on critical global issues – such as climate change, business contributions towards improving quality of life and ecosystems, and business impacts throughout the supply chain.

And we highlight the **changing role of stakeholders** who will make use of almost real-time interactions and access to powerful data analysis through various channels. They will enjoy broader, more comprehensive and critical knowledge of companies, prompting businesses to develop new ways of engaging with their stakeholders.

Our discussions make it clear: sustainability performance data will be pivotal in solving society's key challenges, and the increased value placed on sustainability data has the potential to transform businesses, society and the world as a whole.

The powerful work in unlocking the value of sustainability data has just begun. I invite you to join us on the next stage of this journey and help us shape the future of reporting and sustainability data.

Michael Meehan, *Chief Executive, GRI*

Investigating the Future

Reporting and performance measurement have increased dramatically in the last decade; however, data suggests that the sustainability issues deemed critical for business and society are still not adequately tackled. These issues include climate change, destruction of ecosystems, resources and contamination management, wealth concentration and human rights abuses.

Some believe the value currently attributed to these issues is not yet high enough to warrant the use of sustainability performance data in critical decision-making processes. Others believe it is the current lack of access to sustainability performance and impact information which prevents decision makers using this information to its full potential. Either way, critical decision-making processes are not using sustainability performance data as a basis to drive society towards sustainable business models and consumption patterns.

To advance the global sustainability agenda, we need to ensure the true value of sustainability data is recognized, and made accessible to all. The current use of GRI Standards by thousands of businesses and governments in over 90 countries reflects the global demand for a common reporting language. However, most of the value from sustainability data remains in static formats, waiting to be unlocked.

To investigate the future of sustainability reporting and understand how we can unlock the true value of such data, making it meaningful and accessible to decision makers everywhere, GRI created the "Sustainability and Reporting 2025" project. Together with business executives and experts from diverse fields, we discussed:

?

Which type of information will be needed to tackle the most critical challenges 10 years from now?

?

How should data technology be used to enable this journey?

Throughout 2015, we produced articles, videos and analysis papers based on extensive interviews with 12 business executives and 12 experts from a variety of fields and regions. The outcome: sustainability reporting as we know it will change dramatically by 2025.

We are entering a decade where "responsible investors" and "responsible business" are outdated concepts. In this new era, companies and investors will incorporate critical sustainability information into the very core of their decision-making processes and strategy definition.

Sustainability performance and impact information will be easily available and used by many. This availability of information will make organizations more credible, trusted and successful.

Critical sustainability information for decision makers will focus on the global issues that are set to shape the next decade, such as climate change and population growth, and those mentioned earlier.

The development of data technology will enable access to data and its analysis in unprecedented ways.

The data available to all stakeholders will form the basis for several different types of analysis that will demonstrate company commitments to tackling concrete social and environmental challenges. Company knowledge of critical issues and shared responsibilities with supply chains will be highlighted and the analysis will enable a much clearer understanding of the value creation and destruction related to business activities.
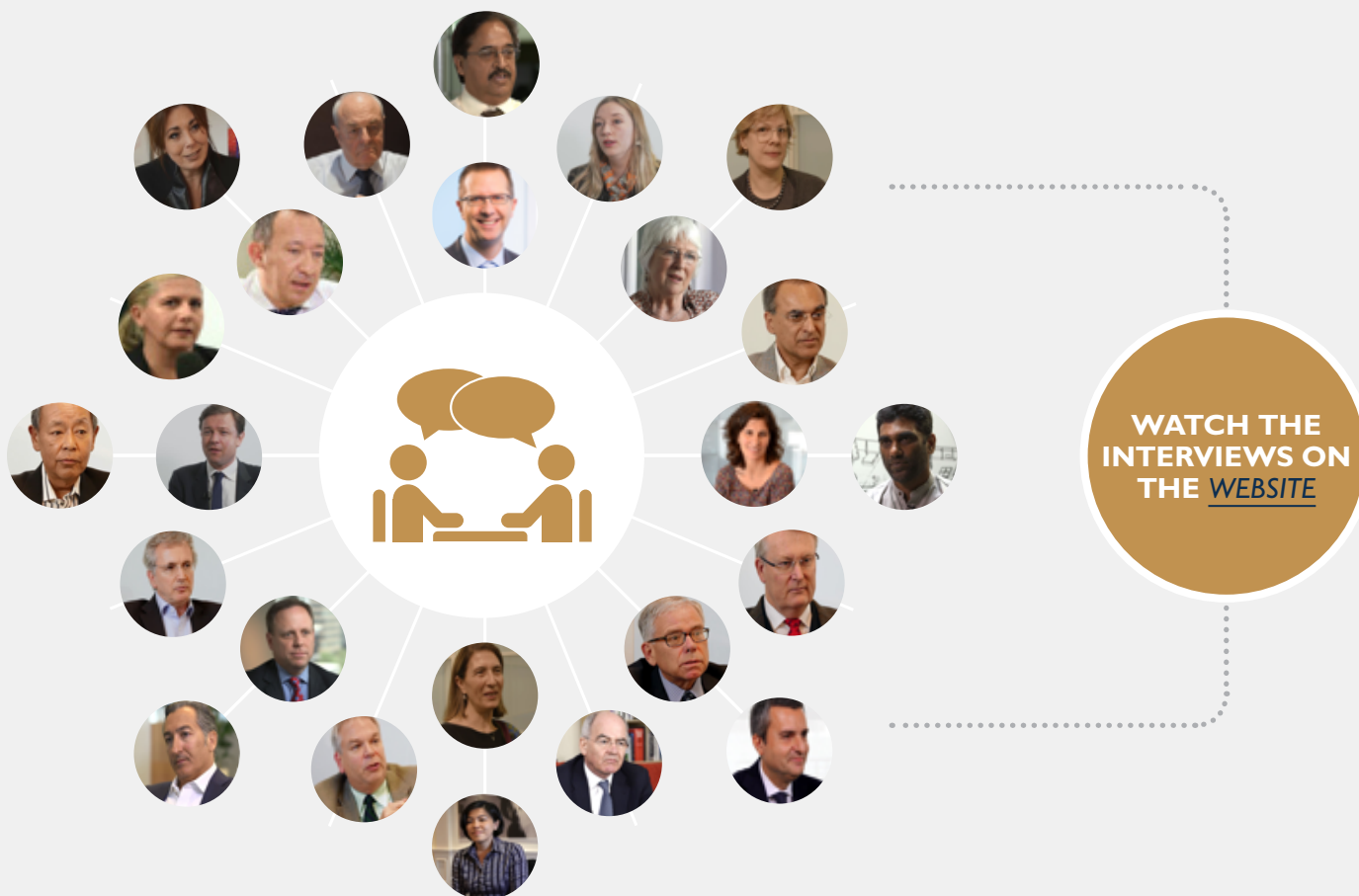
Envisioning Future Disclosure

We asked the question…

What will be the main issues on societal and company agendas – and consequently in their public disclosures – 10 years from now?

We conducted interviews…

To explore this question in depth, we interviewed 24 business executives and experts.

WATCH THE INTERVIEWS ON THE *WEBSITE*

The main findings

The business executives and experts predicted that the key challenges, present in most decision-making processes in the next decade, fall under these categories:

GLOBAL ISSUES

CHALLENGES TO SOCIETY'S DEVELOPMENT

CHALLENGES TO THE ENVIRONMENT

CHALLENGES TO EFFICIENCY

CHALLENGES TO SOCIETY'S GOVERNANCE AND ECONOMIC MODELS

The main findings

GLOBAL ISSUES

CHALLENGES TO THE ENVIRONMENT

CHALLENGES TO SOCIETY'S GOVERNANCE AND ECONOMIC MODELS

CHALLENGES TO SOCIETY'S DEVELOPMENT

CHALLENGES TO EFFICIENCY

World population increase

Climate change

Data technology development

The main findings

GLOBAL ISSUES

CHALLENGES TO SOCIETY'S DEVELOPMENT

CHALLENGES TO THE ENVIRONMENT

CHALLENGES TO SOCIETY'S GOVERNANCE AND ECONOMIC MODELS

CHALLENGES TO EFFICIENCY

Food and water security

Wealth inequality

Human rights protection

Promotion of peace

Conflict management and security

The main findings

GLOBAL ISSUES

CHALLENGES TO SOCIETY'S DEVELOPMENT

CHALLENGES TO SOCIETY'S GOVERNANCE AND ECONOMIC MODELS

CHALLENGES TO THE ENVIRONMENT

CHALLENGES TO EFFICIENCY

Global and regional management of natural resources

Ecosystem protection

Waste and contamination management

The main findings

GLOBAL ISSUES

CHALLENGES TO SOCIETY'S DEVELOPMENT

CHALLENGES TO THE ENVIRONMENT

CHALLENGES TO EFFICIENCY

CHALLENGES TO SOCIETY'S GOVERNANCE AND ECONOMIC MODELS

Efficiency in the production and distribution of goods and services

New models and new technology for energy production and distribution

The main findings

GLOBAL ISSUES

CHALLENGES TO THE ENVIRONMENT

CHALLENGES TO SOCIETY'S DEVELOPMENT

CHALLENGES TO EFFICIENCY

CHALLENGES TO SOCIETY'S GOVERNANCE AND ECONOMIC MODELS

Loss of trust and legitimacy in institutions

Lack of creativity of political leaders, resulting in a new role for business and civil society leaders

A definite need to further develop appropriate governance structures for society to deal with the challenges described previously

Development of a new generation of economic growth and development models

We also asked…

What will this mean for sustainability disclosures in the next decade? What will change?
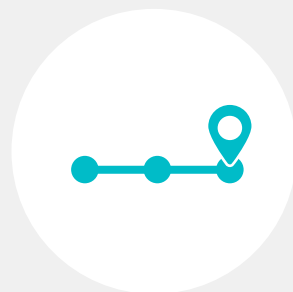
And we concluded…

The main changes in sustainability disclosures in the next decade will be:

1 New format and multiple information sources
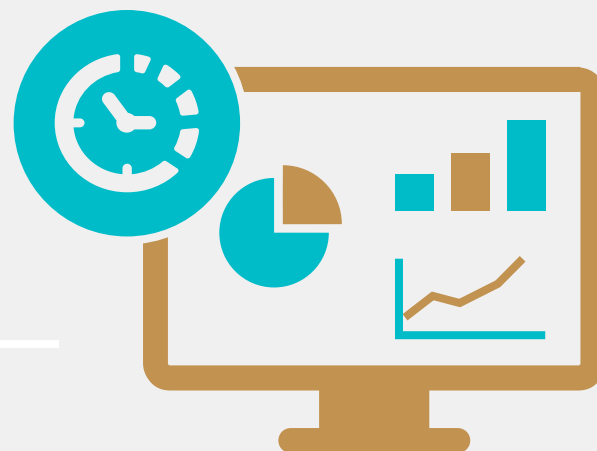
2 New content, new focus

3 New role for stakeholders, empowered by information

New format and multiple information sources

**FROM "ANNUAL REPORTS"...
TO "SUSTAINABILITY DATA
EXCHANGE"**

Reporting or disclosing for shareholders and regulators will be digital and tagged, and done more frequently.

Companies will engage in almost real-time sustainability data exchange, through a variety of dynamic communication channels and sharing platforms. Sustainability data, for example on products, will be available in almost real-time for consumers and the general public. Networks across companies and suppliers will share sustainability data to manage risks and improve performance.

Search engines will enable stakeholders to consume the information in a much more customized way. Powerful software will help companies and stakeholders find correlations between data and check for consistency.

Companies will have less control over information about their performance than they do today. Performance information will be gathered from a variety of different sources, not only from companies' internal systems.

2 New content, new focus

"FOCUS ON CHALLENGES AND THE SUPPLY CHAIN"

ECONOMICAL

ENVIRONMENTAL

LABOR PRACTICES AND DECENT WORK   SOCIETY

HUMAN RIGHTS   PRODUCT RESPONSIBILITY

SOCIAL

ELIMINATING CONTAMINATIONS   ACCESS TO EDUCATION

SUPPLY CHAIN IMPACTS   ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

REGIONAL MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

CONTRIBUTIONS TO CLIMATE CHANGE

ACCESS TO FOOD AND WATER   CIVIL RIGHTS

ECO-SYSTEMS PROTECTION

Companies will be required to disclose information on their overall impacts on society and the world's natural resources.

Sustainability disclosures and related data will provide a clear overview of business contributions to climate change, to eliminate contamination (solid, liquid and gas), to protect ecosystems and to the regional management of natural resources. The data will also reveal contributions to the quality of life – access to food and water, education, health services and civil rights – of all those individuals and communities involved in the business' extended value chain/ operations.

Impacts within the supply chain will also be revealed. Companies will know and disclose information on their partners and their and their partners' impacts within the extended supply chain.

A company's pro-active contribution to society's main challenges will be clear for all, as well as its strategic goals.

3 *New role for stakeholders, empowered by information*

"ALMOST REAL-TIME INTERACTIONS THROUGH VARIOUS CHANNELS"

Stakeholders in general will have access to company performance information from multiple sources. Materiality will be an even more dynamic concept, defined by these interactive and well informed stakeholders.

Stakeholders will interpret sustainability data in a more comprehensive way, allowing them to evaluate company value creation more broadly and effectively.

As a result, company approaches to stakeholder relations will change. New governance structures will have to enable companies to react faster and coherently, in a more interactive way, transforming the way they engage with stakeholders.

Get Involved

The next phase of "Sustainability and Reporting 2025" will explore the following questions, among others:

How do we liberate data from sustainability reports and other disclosures to be used by decision makers and other stakeholders? What is the role of XBRL and are there other innovative ways to do this?

Although sustainability reports are annual, sustainability information has to be used by decision makers in everyday processes. How can we transition from annual to almost real-time disclosures?

How useful would a single "data source" for sustainability-related information be in order to move the sustainability agenda forward? Who should GRI engage with to find this solution, and how?

Upcoming opportunities

GRI is creating a series of events and projects to explore the answers to these questions. The **_5th GRI Global Conference_** is the ideal way to actively participate in the discussion. Here are some of the Conference sessions on the future of reporting that you can attend:
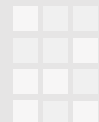
GRI 2016

18 MAY — *"The future of reporting in technology and big data"*

Intelligence and learning from data are crucial components of the next phase of sustainable markets. This session will highlight initiatives such as the new GRI Technology Consortium and thought leadership driving this effort.

CHECK ONLINE →

18 MAY — *"Reporting trends of the future"*

This session is about the international sustainability trends that will transform society and shape the corporate agenda in 2025. Leading-edge companies will be explaining the proactive steps they are taking to address the trends.
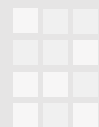
CHECK ONLINE →

19 MAY
"Using sustainability data to enable transformational change"

Hear from global leaders in innovation and technology during this plenary session on how they are using sustainability data to build better companies, better governments, and a better society.

CHECK ONLINE ➔

19 MAY
"The power of sustainability data for decision making"

Expert speakers will showcase ways in which data is being used to drive behavior change, and the impact this is having. The session will conclude with recommendations on how to maximize the potential of sustainability data to inform and empower change.

CHECK ONLINE ➔

In addition to attending the GRI Global Conference in May, keep an eye on the *Sustainability and Reporting 2025 project website* and the *GRI News and Press Center*, or get in touch with us at *reporting2025@globalreporting.org*.

For detailed information on the ''Sustainability and Reporting 2025'' project, see the analysis papers and other materials on the project *website*.

INTERVIEW VIDEOS

CHECK ONLINE →

ANALYSIS PAPERS

Sustainability and Reporting Trends in 2025
– Preparing for the Future –
GRI's Reporting 2025 Project: First Analysis Paper, May 2015

CHECK ONLINE →

Sustainability and Reporting Trends in 2025
Preparing for the future

The Second Analysis Paper of GRI's Reporting 2025 Project, October 2015

CHECK ONLINE →

Contributors

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ABOUT GRI

GRI is an international independent organization that has pioneered corporate sustainability reporting since 1997. GRI helps businesses, governments and other organizations understand and communicate the impact of business on critical sustainability issues such as climate change, human rights, corruption and many others. With thousands of reporters in over 90 countries, GRI provides the world's most trusted and widely used standards on sustainability reporting, enabling organizations and their stakeholders to make better decisions based on information that matters.

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