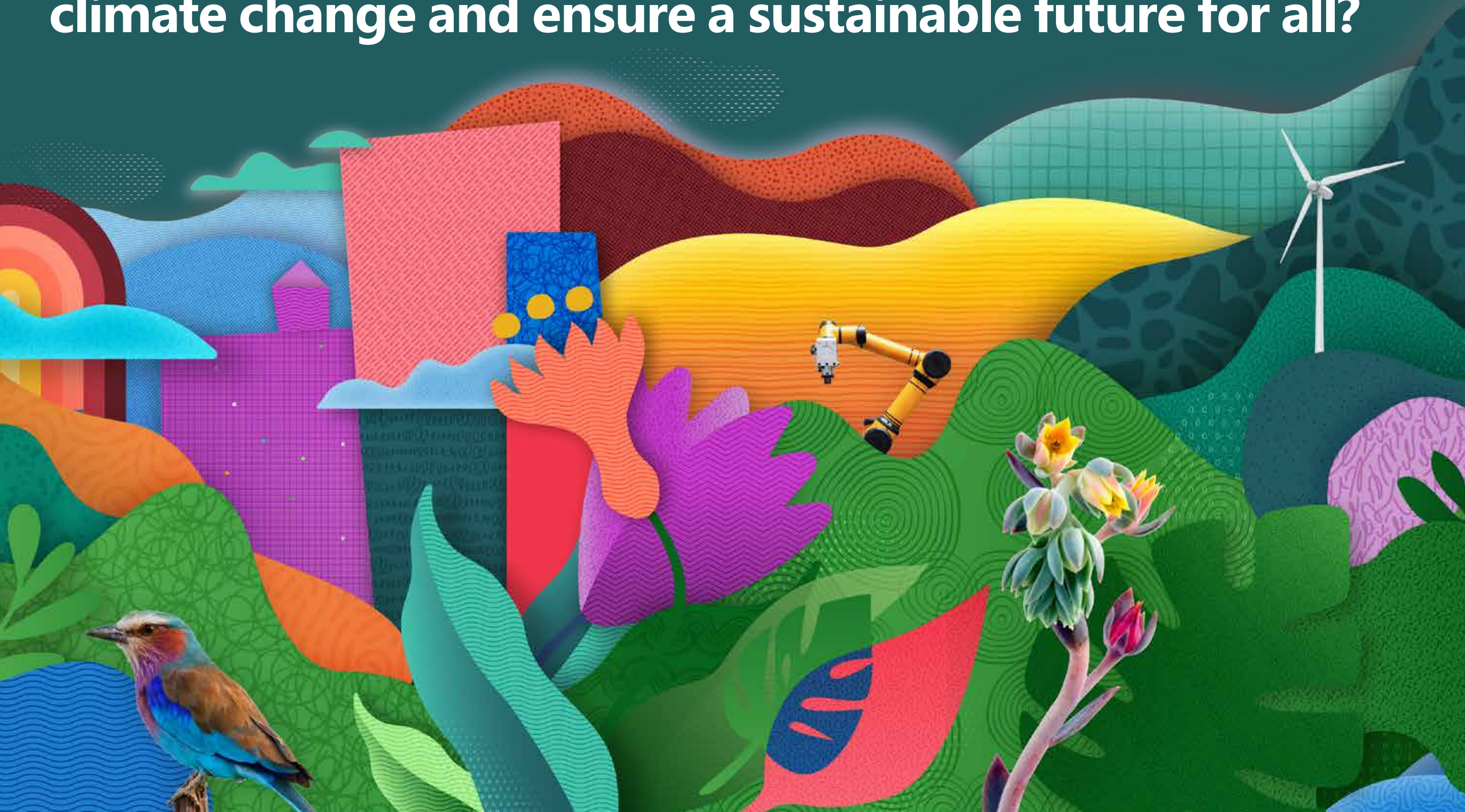




The Middle East & Africa Forum
for Sustainability Leaders

Special Report

Pathways to COP28: What role does the Middle East & Africa (MEA) play in accelerating solutions that combat climate change and ensure a sustainable future for all?



Participants

- Asma Rouabhia, MENA Regional Manager at UN Foundation & SDG 7 Youth Constituency, Regional Manager at Girl Up
- Haya Aseer, Youth Representative at the Global Council on SDG13 & Senior Executive Lead at Arab Youth Center
- Hazem Nabih, Regional Technology Officer, Middle East and Africa, Microsoft
- Ibrahim Al-Zu’bi, Senior Vice President, Sustainability & Climate, ADNOC
- Mira Aljallaf, Co-Chair, COP28 Student Energy Summit
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Source: All content in this Special Report has been exclusively harvested from The Middle East & Africa Forum for Sustainability Leaders Virtual Roundtable, which took place on March 16th. Gulf Intelligence is the knowledge partner and facilitator for The Middle East & Africa Forum for Sustainability Leaders.



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Chapter 1

Executive Introduction



Pathways to COP28: What role does the Middle East & Africa (MEA) play in accelerating solutions that combat climate change and ensure a sustainable future for all?

With six months until the doors to COP28 in Dubai open this November, the spotlight is on how energy and technology stakeholders can unite their expertise to truly move the needle towards Net Zero. We cannot underestimate the momentous nature of what will be the second COP in MEA in just two years – for the first time ever.

As we engage in the biggest challenge of the century, technology will be pivotal to enabling the intellectual and innovative power of societies, businesses, and governments in MEA to come to the fore. Rich with potential, the region can both accelerate solutions for its own 1.6bn people and share knowledge and resources with others around the globe.

In this Special Report, we highlight the fundamental stepping stones to success that were shared by esteemed speakers during Microsoft's exclusive Middle East & Africa Forum for Sustainability Leaders Virtual Roundtable on March 16th. As the "rubber hits the road" in the lead up to COP28, sustaining the momentum of positive disruption while boosting transparency and understanding tops the increasingly long list of priorities.

All eyes are on how this unique combination of skills, experience, and vision in two of the world's most influential markets – energy and technology – can start answering the big questions in the global trilemma: meet energy security, meet environmental targets, and sustain economic prosperity.

Disclaimer: The quotes highlighted in this Special Report are not verbatim. Any further use of this material must cite Microsoft and the event in full.

A new way of thinking

Sherif Tawfik

Chief Sustainability Commercial Officer – Central & Southeast Europe, Middle East & Africa, Microsoft

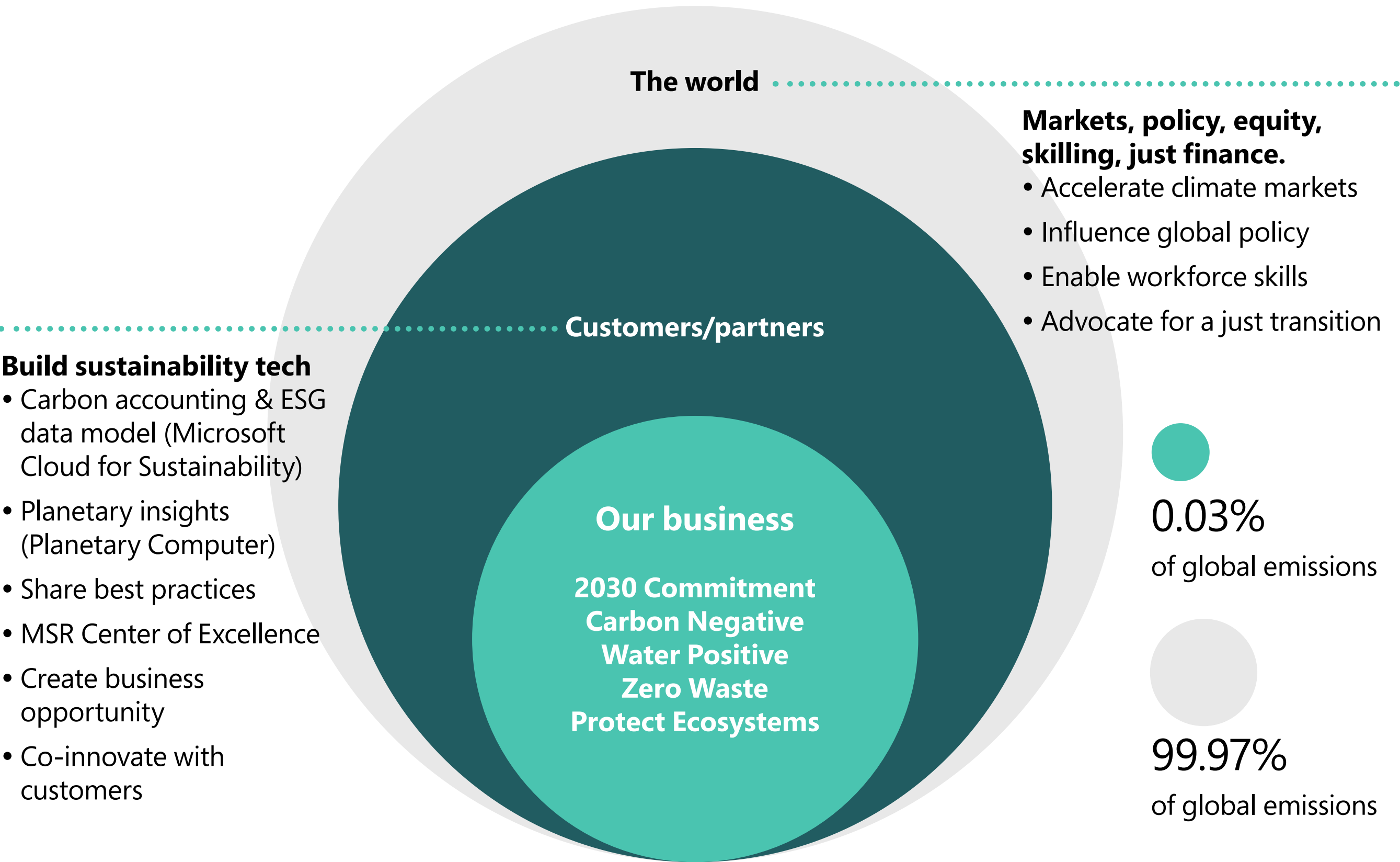


Our dear planet is hitting a threshold. Once it has passed a certain point, it will be very hard to reverse the damage and return to what we know as normal. Climate change is center stage of the challenge, but there are many other areas we must also examine – the integrity of biodiversity, the supply of fresh water, and rethinking the non-biodegradable plastics that we keep producing, to name just a few areas.

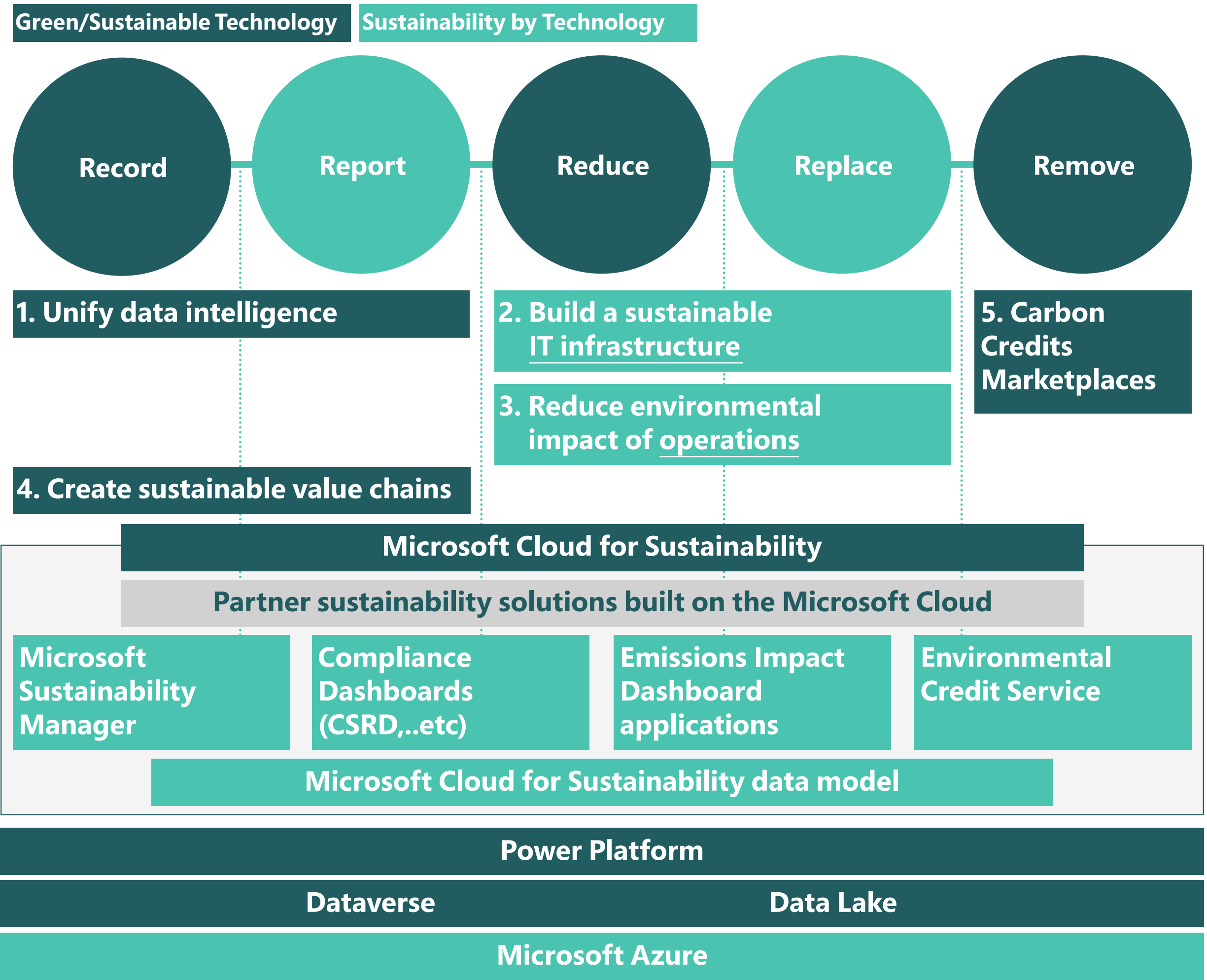
Changing this course is not a linear process. It will happen in many phases over a multi-year horizon, powered by governments and companies. But we can also make many decisions as individuals that truly help. China is one of the highest emitting countries on earth, however its CO₂ footprint per capita is actually half that of the US, at seven tons of CO₂ emissions versus 15 tons of CO₂ emissions. Comparatively, the global average is 4.5 tons of CO₂ emissions. Unfortunately, the Middle East has the highest CO₂ emissions per capita by far, at up to 21 – versus less than one ton of CO₂ emissions per capita in Africa. Clearly, we each have a role to play in accelerating solutions that combat climate change and keep us on track for Net Zero – ensuring a sustainable future for all.

How Microsoft thinks about sustainability

Set and deliver big, bold commitments. Help the rest of world do the same. Drive global collective action.



Microsoft Cloud for Sustainability Solution Areas



Multi-horizon sustainability transformation journey



Build a robust digital foundation and evolve over time.

Digital enablers are necessary to solve sustainability challenges and realize opportunities for organizations.

Incremental

Do what you do today – better.
Optimize core business functions and improve existing processes.

Innovative

Do what you do today – differently.
Innovate your business while reducing impacts to enhance market position.

Transformative

Do everything differently and create shared value.
Propel your organization into new markets, new mindsets, and new business models. Seize the commercial opportunities of a sustainable future.

Chapter 2

Balancing Act



Balancing Act: How can Middle Eastern energy companies deliver on Net Zero ambitions while helping safeguard global energy security?

- H.E. Eng Yousif Al Ali, CEO, Etihad Water & Electricity (EWE)
- Ibrahim Al-Zu'bi, Senior Vice President, Sustainability & Climate, ADNOC
- Zafar Samadov, Programme Officer Partnerships, IRENA
- Mira Aljallaf, Co-Chair, COP28 Student Energy Summit

Host: Mohamed Hasan, Industry Director, Energy & Sustainability, Middle East, Africa & Turkey, Microsoft

Profit was historically the North Star for the energy sector, but the global trilemma has dramatically changed this trajectory – especially amid the Russia-Ukraine war and the ripple effect of COVID-19. The need to support energy security, meet environmental targets, and spur economic stability essentially translates into the three Ps: people, planet, and profit. Crucially, the journey to Net Zero cannot be sacrificed for energy security nor vice versa. Despite the conflicting needs within this complex new ecosystem, they are essentially one and the same. Therein lies the pivotal journey of futureproofing global stability – with energy at its core.

On one hand, energy stakeholders need to magnify their current efforts. This includes collaborating with international organizations, governments, and academia on solutions to the trilemma, while sharing a positive message of change with consumers. On the other hand, energy stakeholders must rapidly elevate the norm of how they



“Reducing emissions to address climate change is the biggest single challenge of this century. It requires collective and inclusive action and major technological breakthroughs.”

Ibrahim Al-Zu'bi, Senior Vice President, Sustainability & Climate, ADNOC



“The UAE took a strategic decision to target Net Zero by the year 2050 – a more difficult and diverse target. Before, the focus was only on the electricity side. This new holistic goal covers many different sectors.”

H.E. Eng Yousif Al Ali, CEO, Etihad Water & Electricity (EWE)

think and work when it comes to standardization, consistency, and innovation. The trilemma calls for a comprehensive and balanced model, i.e., the two hands must come together. Ensuring today's energy experts delicately walk the tightrope of the trilemma is absolutely critical. Failing to manage the transition effectively will spark erratic commodity prices, electricity blackouts, general instability, and much more.

The election of H.E. Dr. Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber as the President-Designate of COP28 is a unique opportunity for the oil and gas industry to take a leadership position in the global energy transition while maintaining energy security. He described COP28 as the “COP of Action” – much-needed to bolster momentum up to November when the second COP in MEA will be held in less than two years. This regional focus is impactful at a time when developing nations are pushing for more support at the global climate table, reaffirming the message of “nobody will be left behind” in the biggest challenge our species has ever faced.

Two roads, same direction

Elevating environmental ambition and increasing energy production are not mutually exclusive, but they must be done differently. For example, fossil fuels remain central to global stability and must not be demonized. Equally, the way such operations are managed must urgently change to vastly reduce the carbon intensity (CI) of production. The same applies to rapidly rethinking the impact of biodiversity and water use in industry. Five barrels of water are used for just one barrel of oil, for example¹ – clearly a unsustainable ratio, ethically and environmentally. Many of the world's leading energy companies are stepping forward, including in the Middle East.

State-owned Saudi Aramco, the world's biggest oil company, supports the Kingdom's goal to be Net Zero by 2060 and has launched a \$1.5bn Sustainability Fund, amidst many other groundbreaking environmental initiatives. Simultaneously, the OPEC giant raised its production target to approximately 12mn b/d – potentially the second highest level worldwide.²

Voice of youth We are here. Engage us.

The Student Energy Summit is the largest youth-led energy summit happening this November and we are very excited that it is happening at the same time as COP28, enabling us as youth to really engage. One key element to helping energy companies have a strong transition is to really involve youth, as well as local communities. Generally, we see many energy and industrial companies investing multi-billion dollar deals in renewable energies and research and development (R&D) for new technologies. This is good progress, but we think more can also be done to link with local communities. We all benefit because local communities are home to young people and they are the future of the world. Youth has put a lot of pressure on the older generation to really focus on the energy transition, because we want a cleaner environment – and we can see that happening in the UAE.

Mira Aljallaf, Co-Chair, COP28 Student Energy Summit





“We already have solutions, so we need to work on implementation and actions on the ground. Every country is different, so they must find a way to balance their national priorities with short-term and long-term goals. This is why the global stocktake at COP28 is so important.”

Zafar Samadov, Programme Officer Partnerships, IRENA

The UAE has a similar narrative, as the first in the region to commit to Net Zero by 2050 at the same time as its state-owned ADNOC announced plans to reach 5mn b/d of oil production by 2025, not 2030. This duality is supported by the \$15bn earmarked by the energy giant to advance an array of projects across its diversified value chain up to 2030, including both fossil fuels and renewables. Also consider within this dynamic that the UAE, the third largest producer within OPEC, has three of the largest and lowest-cost solar power plants in the world. Plus, both the UAE’s oil barrels and its environmental vision stretch worldwide; Abu Dhabi-based Masdar is the largest wind power operator in the UK, for example.

Turning the dial on innovation

The severity of climate change means there is too little time to drip feed innovations to the market, so pushing new technological and digital barriers must become the norm. This includes leveraging existing innovations while spearheading new ideas, which is especially decisive in supporting the economic and social security of energy-centric economies in MEA. For example, streamlining the economics and implementation of CCS programs is vital to achieving Net Zero. ADNOC is aiming to reach 5mn tons per



annum of carbon capture capacity by 2030, rising from today’s annual 800,000 tons, for one. The same importance is applied to exploring nature-based solutions, such as the 100mn mangroves that the UAE has pledged to plant to expand its carbon sinks (while significantly supporting biodiversity). The country is already home to 60mn mangroves that form forests, but the additional 100mn plants will mean the UAE’s mangrove forests will cover 483 square kilometers and sequester nearly 115,000 tons of CO₂ per year, which is equivalent to saving the fuel of 2.6bn miles driven in a car – similar to the distance to Jupiter.³

Sources: ¹ CNBC; ² S&P Global; ³ Gulf Intelligence.



“Embracing digitalization is a key strategy to automate the process. There is no sustainability without digital transformation, because you can’t track or reduce what you can’t measure.”

Mohamed Hasan, Industry Director, Energy & Sustainability, Middle East, Africa & Turkey, Microsoft



5x

The world must accelerate its rate of decarbonization five-fold to have a chance of reaching 1.5 degrees by 2050.¹

-50%

This means halving global emissions within just seven years – a journey the world is off track from achieving.²

12%

was the share renewables had in primary energy in 2019, which is expected to rise to 35-64% by 2050.³

98mn b/d

of global oil demand in 2019 is forecast to slide to between 21-73mn b/d in 2050.⁴

#1

Electricity will be the world’s largest energy source in 2050.⁵

1bn

people currently do not have access to electricity or have an unreliable supply.⁶ Energy stakeholders and their partners need to both plug existing gaps and bolster future volumes.

16

years ago, ADNOC started exploring renewables⁷ – critical to its futureproofing capabilities today.

2022

saw the launch of the Alliance for Industry Decarbonization, which aims to accelerate Net Zero ambitions – a valuable example of corporate collaboration.

Sources: ¹Microsoft; ²Speaker; ³BP Outlook; ⁴BP Outlook; ⁵BP Outlook; ⁶World Health Organization (WHO); ⁷Speaker; ⁸Speaker.

Chapter 3

Green Technology



Green Technology: How to accelerate the adoption of new technology to achieve the triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit?

- Yasser Alobaidan, Chairman, Jawraa
- Oliver Kraft, Executive Vice President - Sustainable Communities, Siemens
- Haya Aseer, Youth Representative SDG13 at World Government Summit & Senior Project Lead at Arab Youth Center

Host: Hazem Nabih, Regional Technology Officer, Middle East and Africa, Microsoft

Without doubt, a greener, healthier, and more prosperous future – one which supports the three Ps – would be impossible without existing and new technologies. However, the wave of tech options today actually risks slowing some stakeholders’ efforts; more choice, more indecision. This catch-22 is exacerbated by the financial and geopolitical challenges worldwide. However, overcoming this hurdle is very achievable with three measures: simplification, standardization, and collaboration. United, these create a complementary triangle to accelerate the technological adoption urgently needed to fix the world’s energy trilemma.

A rise in the selection of technologies versus a growing shortage of skills means that the vast majority of technological solutions –



“Massive developments in technology are being rolled out nearly every day. This causes significant pressure on organizations to adapt very quickly, which means they must retain and develop skill sets so they can keep adopting these new tools...all the while operating in a difficult and uncertain financial world.”

Hazem Nabih, Regional Technology Officer, Middle East and Africa, Microsoft



Voice of youth We are an intellectual goldmine.

Storytelling is an integral part of ensuring the effective creation and adoption of climate technologies. We must capitalize on these tools, as well as the education and upskilling surrounding them. This is what the youth want, but I also want to highlight what young people can provide. Approximately 620mn young people between the ages of 15-24 are unemployed, or not in an educational program.¹ That in itself points to a goldmine that we must collectively capture. For example, my friend started flying drones at 20 years old. Today, he provides a one-stop shop for companies to fly drones, employing more than 100 young people. This illustrates how supporting people, planet, and profit may not only require the creation of new jobs, but also investing more in entrepreneurs.

Bridging the gap between industry and academia must also be addressed. In the run up to COP28, we are trying to connect the dots. We are not experts when it comes to R&D and technology – the private sector is. We are not experts in education – academia is. But we are trying to create this platform where we understand industry’s needs and how academia can help.

Haya Aseer
Youth Representative SDG13 at World Government Summit & Senior Project Lead at Arab Youth Center

Source: ¹ UNICEF





“Technology provides transparency, which is crucial. It not only improves companies’ adaptation to green energy, but it also lowers costs.”

Yasser Alobaidan, Chairman, Jawraa

both existing and in R&D – must be easy-to-digest for the average employee. Inevitably, some will require niche understanding and expertise, but these must be kept to a minimum.

Simultaneously, governments and companies must significantly enhance the degree of upskilling available to the general workforce, so that tools like artificial intelligence (AI) and big data are quickly understood and adopted into day-to-day operations. That is not to say the general workforce must be digitally fluent, but they must have a grasp of basic digital tools to avoid these instruments of progress becoming roadblocks. This is especially true as a huge load of the journey to Net Zero must be borne by the private sector; approximately 70% of the annual investments in clean energy of \$4trn up to 2030, by one estimate.¹ This requires measures stretching from building retrofits, installations of electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure, robotic maintenance, and many others.²

Same, but different

Standardization is very important for accessibility and replicability, which are two key features missing in several fundamental areas of



sustainability, such as parts of ESG and carbon pricing. For instance, popular estimates state that there are more than 1,000 variations worldwide to measure and track various parts of the ESG spectrum. For countries new to ESG within MEA, such opacity causes delays, confusion, and dents confidence. Using technologies to pin down and facilitate common frameworks within these markets – all of which stakeholders will inevitably have to adopt – makes good business and climate sense.

Case study

A new alliance: Tech and trees

Typically, the cost to plant a mature tree in Saudi Arabia is \$80-\$100. However, by using technology to boost transparency, we were able to remove the middlemen within the ecosystem and lower the cost per tree to approximately \$26 – a 75% price reduction in some cases. We also want to add value, so the platform is connected to the tax authority in Saudi Arabia. When an individual donates a certain amount of trees, they receive a corporate social responsibility (CSR) certificate and that amount is removed from their tax bracket.

Yasser Alobaidan, Chairman, Jawraa



“Visibility via technology helps create awareness and vitally, empowers people to make smart decisions on a day-by-day basis.”

Oliver Kraft, Executive Vice President – Sustainable Communities, Siemens

The next step is creating tailored approaches within overarching and standardized frameworks, for every country and company’s needs are different. Socio-economic demographics, climate forecasts, and budgets all differ, plus geopolitical dynamics continue to shift across the globe. Accordingly, inserting measures to account for nuances within a broader, easy-to-digest framework is important.

Some companies, like technology providers, bring people together from different boards and departments to engage in “ingenious discovery workshops”, one speaker described. Such gatherings aim to identify the pain points, such as in the theoretical construction of a smart city. This starts with a standardized set of certain technologies which is then built upon to make it specific to the city or area. For example, the actual implementation of a smart city in US versus a smart

city in Morocco would be custom designed to support each city’s different needs, i.e., taking into account population size, digital access, climate norms, political influences, and so on.

Clarity amidst the noise

Digitalization carries a plethora of benefits, but new options can make it difficult for companies to choose the right tool for them – especially true for those in MENA without much digital exposure yet. Collaboration is essential to hedging against such confusion, such as with others in the industry and with technology providers. Every dollar spent on green tech brings a return of \$2-\$10, so investing time in collaborative efforts to devise the right digital pathway for a company truly pays off – financially and reputationally.

Sources: ¹ International Energy Agency (IEA); ² IEA.

\$137bn

market for AI worldwide in 2022, which is expected to post a 37.3% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) by 2030.¹

21.6%

CAGR is anticipated from 2022-2030 in the global green technology and sustainability market, reaching \$417bn in seven years.²

\$6bn

has been invested in climate tech by 12 Middle Eastern countries since 2013. Of this total, \$1.6bn was invested in the first half of 2022 alone.³

\$165bn

was the total volume of climate-tech capital finance in 2021. This describes new equity financing raised by companies in the climate-tech space, either from public markets or private investors.⁴

\$2bn

was saved by ADNOC from 2015-2020 by leveraging advanced technologies and digitalization to enhance drilling efficiencies and optimize operations.⁵

Sources: ¹ Grand View Research; ² Precedence Research; ³ PwC; ⁴ BloombergNEF (BNEF); ⁵ ADNOC.

Chapter 4

Cultivating Talent



Cultivating Talent: How can organizations incorporate human capital to execute environmental commitments?

- Dr. Steve Griffiths, Senior Vice President, Research and Development, Khalifa University
- Vijay Bains, Group Head of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG), Emirates NBD Bank
- Asma Rouabhia, MENA Regional Manager at UN Foundation & SDG 7 Youth Constituency, Regional Manager at Girl Up

Host: Sherif Tawfik, Chief Sustainability Commercial Officer – Central & Southeast Europe, Middle East & Africa, Microsoft

The green skills gap is the 800-pound gorilla in the room. The three Ps will fail without hearts and minds, yet the shortage in upskilling and reskilling remains largely untackled. The good news is that MEA benefits from a plethora of potential, both within the student community and its existing workforce. Plus, more companies are starting to create space for Chief Sustainability Officers and Sustainability Directors, all of which opens the door for more green-oriented talent to join the company and thrive.

There is a mammoth opportunity to invest in harvesting youth development in the region, helping prepare the future generation for climate leadership. Supporting future professionals to acquire new skills has been a priority action for more and more companies in MEA, such as Microsoft's launch of the Middle East and Africa Sustainability School. Democratizing knowledge of sustainability is critical, especially when it is developing nations that will be most affected by the changing climate and tend to have a less fluid



access to funds. Part of the school's program includes running bootcamps for partners and suppliers, as well as enhancing teachers and students' knowledge, and supporting the spirit of start-ups, amongst other efforts.



"Green jobs grew at an annual rate of 8% over the last six years and we expect this growth rate to double or even triple in the coming years, yet the talent pool only grew by around 6%."

Sherif Tawfik, Chief Sustainability Commercial Officer – Central & Southeast Europe, Middle East & Africa, Microsoft



Voice of youth

We want a two-way street.

There has recently been a strong emphasis on certifications from organizations hiring new employees within the Arab region as part of the broader push to upskill. Equally, it is really important for organizations to focus on incentivizing the youth who join their organizations by offering them a very compelling employment package, which includes the opportunity to do training, certifications, and online courses. Enabling them to keep pace with global trends is crucial, especially those related to climate and sustainability.

Girls and women remain underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), which are all areas of expertise that feed directly into careers in sustainability and energy. We encourage them to explore STEM and pursue education in these fields by connecting them with inspiring females and having bootcamps in person, online, or hybrid. This offers a great chance for girls from a very young age, even from thirteen years old, to know more about these crucial topics and become energy engineers and sustainability practitioners. The early empowerment of girls is essential.

Asma Rouabhia
MENA Regional Manager at UN Foundation & SDG 7 Youth Constituency, Regional Manager at Girl Up





“I’m a big advocate of crosscutting themes in educational programs at any university, including sustainability and digitalization. We now also talk more about geopolitical awareness. These are all the big things impacting how organizations interact.”

Dr. Steve Griffiths, Senior Vice President, Research and Development, Khalifa University

Diverse learning

The pace of change under the umbrella of Net Zero is so rapid that some study courses would benefit from being far shorter. Those studying ESG, for example, can gain more usefulness by studying in short but regular segments, for the market is ever evolving. Studying via video, even those just a few minutes long, enables learners to integrate education into their busy lives, ensures their knowledge is as timely as possible, and broadens the net as the “classroom” can be accessed almost anywhere on the planet. This benefits students, knowledge partners, universities, and of course, industry, for the talent pipeline is as up to date as possible with market dynamics.

Importantly, all learning must increasingly incorporate tech and digital knowledge – both are paramount to the rise of sustainability. All workers, regardless of age and experience, must be able to organize and analyze data to some degree. It will be very difficult to flourish in the world of sustainability without these skills.



Merging global themes in education and the workplace must also be a priority. Crosscutting themes in educational programs – i.e., sustainability, digitalization, and finance – enables workers to automatically think of all the domino effects of an idea as they work together, rather than it being an afterthought. It is not necessarily about pigeon holing career paths to become a data scientist versus water specialist, but more so about how they interlink and finding complementary capabilities and solutions.

Let’s talk

It is very important that the boardroom takes ownership and this sense of support for upskilling and training, as part of ESG, filters down through companies. This includes establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) so all parties know it is a permanent part of the corporate and cultural structure. One speaker shared his company had started approximately 20 initiatives in support of ESG across the company, which quickly grew to 60 when the team realized that other ESG-related initiatives were already running. Opening the conversation on ESG and taking relatively simple steps created a near-immediate springboard for human capital development. Another speaker from a bank said they are working on educating teams on the “ESG alphabet soup”, which includes understanding Scope 1, Scope 2, and Scope 3. Bankers typically resist sharing information, but those embracing this paradigm shift are seeing the benefits, the speaker said. Already, 17,000 staff, from the retail bankers to the investment bankers to the company’s board, are invested in learning more.



“Excitingly, sustainability is now fully in boardrooms. Especially with COP28 in Dubai in just a matter of months, talent cultivation is utterly core to the way the bank operates.”

Vijay Bains, Group Head of ESG, Emirates NBD Bank

Leveraging locality

Some climate risk models in Europe and North America benefit from swathes of useful data, yet such intel is not always applicable to the unique needs and climate trends in MEA. Accordingly, having a data bank that is more nuanced to each country/region within

MEA would significantly improve the accuracy of forecasts and the overall maturity of understanding. This gap in the market offers regional companies a major commercial opportunity, which will also create more jobs for the youth and support the existing workforce.

38.2mn

worldwide employment in renewable energy in 2030 is expected under an ambitious energy transition scenario with front-loaded investments.¹

139mn

jobs in the energy sector could be reached by 2030, including more than 74mn in energy efficiency, EVs, power systems/flexibility, and hydrogen.²

4.3mn

jobs were held in the market for solar photovoltaic (PV) in 2021, the fastest-growing sector. This accounted for more than a third of the total renewable energy workforce.³

33mn+

new jobs need to be created by 2030 in MENA by 2030, if the world’s largest unemployment hot spot is to be substantially improved.⁴

60%

of undergraduates in the UAE are women and many are in the STEM space.⁵

71%

of the youth population have to go outside formal education to acquire the skills for the jobs they want.⁶

2050

will see half of the countries in MENA experience population increases of at least 50% on 2015 levels.⁷ Stakeholders must ensure this rise is leveraged as an environmental opportunity, not a burden.

Sources: ¹ IRENA; ² IRENA; ³ IRENA; ⁴ UN; ⁵ The National; ⁶ Deloitte; ⁷ UNICEF



