

The Middle East & Africa Forum for Sustainability Leaders

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Understanding each market is vital for an effective sustainability strategy

A sustainability strategy can only stay on paper and in people's computers if it's not executed the right way. It only makes sense when we operationalize the strategy by localizing it and tailoring it to our region. When it comes to our region of Africa and the Middle East, public policy and governments are in very different phases of evolution around sustainability policies. In PepsiCo Positive (Pep+), we have three different pillars: positive agriculture, positive value chain including our water, climate & packaging goals, and positive choices. As we develop and implement our programs under these pillars, each market is at a different level of maturity. These goals are highly ambitious, but then we break it down and look at what needs to be done year-over-year by market, so we can put the right resources and efforts behind it.

For example, including recycled content in our plastic packaging is a goal set by PepsiCo globally but when it came to the Middle East region, we had to first work on advocacy with government to allow the use of food-grade recycled plastic in packaging, then develop the supply network, and create a consumer proposition. That's how we have launched recycled PET bottles in Kuwait, Qatar and Saudi Arabia in our brands and we plan to expand to other markets in the region. We continue to drive PET collection programs by partnering with municipalities, collection partners and recyclers to build a circular economy value chain and localize our recycled plastic sourcing.

Building a corporate sustainability strategy

Start with the end in mind. Always have a broader understanding of where you want the company's vision on sustainability to be, how those goals are interlinked with the business and what would be your science-based target based on your environmental footprint. Next, ensure that sustainability gets the right sponsorship from the top of the organization, and have peer-to-peer dialogues with all the functional leaders across the business units to embed sustainability in the way of doing business. Another important point is to have a cross-functional sustainability team, as you cannot drive sustainability forward in silos. At PepsiCo, in our regional sustainability team, we have a direct group of five senior experts, and then we have a collaborative cross-functional team with passionate members from different departments that work on bringing our sustainability strategic vision to life in their functions.

Top three skill sets for Chief Sustainability Officers

First of all, you have to be a strategic business leader. Second is you need to bring in a lot of passion. Passion without substance does not go anywhere. It's important to build from that passion for sustainability by upskilling and educating yourself with core sustainability technical expertise and emerging trends and technologies available to drive the right programs. Third is this whole transformational experience. Many of our businesses today need to step change from where they are to become more sustainable in their end-to-end value chain. If you have transformational experience from the past, that often helps in bringing that wholistic thinking on what needs to step change and how a sustainability mindset gets built across the organization through the right interventions. Those are the major skill sets. It's a little bit of technical, a lot of transformation, but always long-term strategic thinking.

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