



**ABU DHABI**  
SUSTAINABILITY WEEK

# CHARTING A ROAD TO NET ZERO FOR EVERY CITY

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Roundtable - COP28

Hosted by

**MASDAR** 



## Executive Summary

Held during the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week Special Edition at COP28, this roundtable discussion gathered industry experts and stakeholders to address how we can accomplish the critical mission of accelerating net-zero carbon emissions in cities worldwide.

## Key takeaways

- Reducing emissions in urban areas should be a priority given that urban areas have a heavy carbon footprint.
- Innovation in the construction industry offers a key opportunity for impact, considering high emissions from production and transportation.
- Cross-sector collaboration will accelerate progress, particularly sharing knowledge and translating complex carbon-related topics into actionable insights for SMEs.
- The private sector has an opportunity to lead the way by advocating for proactive and agile regulation and investing in cleaner materials and greener technology.



## Decarbonizing cities

The construction sector emerged as a focal point for discussion, given its substantial role in global emissions. Panelists cited impressive figures: with the built environment responsible for up to 40% of worldwide emissions and cities themselves accounting for roughly 70%, including their energy consumption, participants agreed that the potential for impact was clear.

Construction materials such as steel, cement, and glass are not only energy-intensive to produce but also contribute to significant transportation emissions. Indeed, as one contributor highlighted, if steel production was a nation on its own, it would rank as the third-largest emitter of carbon in the world, following only China and the United States.

During the session, participants aimed to build a common understanding of the challenges. Experts shared insights on issues including the need for flexible and agile regulation, addressing labor shortages and the manual skills gap, and enhancing collaboration across the multiple industries represented at the roundtable.

Some immediate practical obstacles were identified. For example, one contributor flagged that in the UK, SMEs represent up to 99% of construction companies, with 95% employing five or fewer staff – opening conversations around the capacity of these firms to innovate and adapt to sustainable practices.

While the challenges identified were complex and wide-ranging, participants took a solutions-oriented view, discussing actionable solutions that could be implemented in the immediate future.

It became clear that collaboration and knowledge sharing will be crucial to fully understand and overcome barriers to net-zero objectives.

Speakers highlighted that improving data sharing could streamline and accelerate efforts, as different teams all over the world are working in silos to solve the same problems.

Sharing successes as well as lessons learned could accelerate progress and gain crucial ground in the fight against climate change.



## Working together to deliver change

The overarching goal was to identify alliances and industry collaborations that could deliver substantial impact within the year.

The discussions underscored the necessity for the private sector to take the lead by setting examples and initiating sustainability-focused practices without waiting for government mandates.

This call for proactive leadership was echoed in the context of smarter regulations and building for longevity, therefore lowering the carbon footprint over an extended lifecycle.

The roundtable also looked at proposals for knowledge platforms for accelerating problem-solving through information sharing.

It also highlighted a pressing need for better lifecycle accounting of carbon costs in building regulations. They highlighted the value of building durable infrastructure, so that investment in low-carbon infrastructure would last over a long-term period, diluting costs over time.

Overall, panelists illuminated the necessity for an industry-wide awakening and commitment to making net-zero cities a reality. The mandate was clear: the time to act is now, through education, innovation, example-setting and collaboration.

While the construction sector is key, the speakers agreed on the need for an integrated effort, spanning all industries involved in shaping the urban landscapes of tomorrow.

## Roundtable Participants

### **Saeed Al Abbar**

CEO, AESG

### **Antoine Ghazal**

CEO, Gulf Countries,  
Saint-Gobain

### **Dileep M.**

Lead – Brand & Global  
Communications, Cropin

### **Mohamed Saleh Alhadhrami**

Regulations, Codes and  
Standards Energy &  
Water Efficiency Section  
Head – Acting, Abu Dhabi  
Department of Energy

### **Hesham Helal**

CEO & Founder, Criteria  
Design Group

### **Misha Mittal**

Senior Manager – City  
Advisory at Expo City Dubai

### **Amira Ayoub**

Head of MENA Programmes,  
World Green Building Council

### **Haithem Ibraheem**

Director of Operations,  
Brookfield Properties

### **Valerie Peyre**

Director of Abu Dhabi  
Sustainability Week (ADSW)

### **Wolfgang Blau**

Managing Partner, Climate  
Hub, HSBC

### **Dr. Paravasthu Ramaswamy Jagannathan**

Senior General Manager  
Sustainability, Sobha Realty

### **Maryam Qassim**

Senior Manager, Sustainable  
Finance and Strategic  
Planning at HSBC

### **Scott Coombes**

Founder and Managing  
Partner, AESG

### **Haisam Jamal**

Co-Founder and CEO,  
Distichain

### **Adam Ridgway**

Founder & CEO, One Moto

### **Mehdi Echchadly**

Senior Manager, Sustainability,  
MENA HSBC

### **Mohammad Jebreel**

VP Sustainability and CSR,  
Aldar Properties

### **Michel de Ruiter**

Founder, GraphenePioneer

### **Richard Fenne**

Director, Regional Executive  
Chair – Middle East, Woods  
Bagot

### **Jonathan Scott Keyes**

Senior Manager – Sustainable  
Finance, HSBC

### **Chris Wan**

Associate Director of  
Sustainability and CSR,  
Masdar City

## Partners

Principal Partner



Roundtable Partner



### About Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week

Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week (ADSW) is a global initiative championed by the UAE and its clean energy powerhouse, Masdar, to accelerate sustainable development and advance economic, social, and environmental progress.

Established in 2008, ADSW provides a global platform for all who have a stake in the future of our planet.

ADSW brings together leaders from across governments, the private sector, and civil society to discuss and engage in bold climate action and innovations that will ensure a sustainable world for future generations.

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### About Masdar

Masdar (Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company) is one of the world's fastest-growing renewable energy companies. As a global clean energy pioneer, Masdar is advancing the development and deployment of solar, wind, geothermal, battery storage and green hydrogen technologies to accelerate the energy transition and help the world meet its net-zero ambitions. Established in 2006, Masdar has developed and invested in projects in over 40 countries with a combined capacity of over 20 gigawatts (GW), providing affordable clean energy access to those who need it most and helping to power a more sustainable future.

Masdar is jointly owned by TAQA, ADNOC, and Mubadala, and is targeting a renewable energy portfolio capacity of 100GW by 2030 while aiming to be a leading producer of green hydrogen by the same year.



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