

# Sustainability push now essential

*The United Nations (UN) Global Compact is an international corporate sustainability initiative pushing for companies to align strategies and operations with universal principles on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption and take actions that advance societal goals.*

*This effort includes corporates in the region via the UN Global Compact Network Caribbean. Randy Graham, chief operations officer of CG United Insurance, who was recently reappointed to the Network Caribbean board, shared in an interview how important it is for the private sector to embrace sustainability.*

## WHAT IS the UN Global Compact Network Caribbean?

The United Nations has their Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which they have been encouraging countries around the world to implement. But what the UN recognises, is that countries alone at the governmental level couldn't get it all done themselves.

They needed the corporate side of business to also get involved directly with the things that they are doing. We can say, for example, that we want to reduce gas emissions, but if every car company continues to sell diesel and gas cars in Barbados, we can't actually get it done. You need the companies to actually do something about it.

So, the UN Global Compact was created to find ways to get companies themselves to move in a direction in line with the SDGs. So they created the Network Caribbean board to influence companies operating in the Caribbean to change their business practices in line with sustainability.

It has an advisory capacity, so it advises the UN representatives across the Caribbean on things like which companies should be involved, what type of references and topics they should be discussing with the entities, and how you get the business owners and the business decisions together in one place.

### What is your assessment of the Network Caribbean's first term and prospects for the second term?

I welcome the opportunity for another term to contribute my regional perspective and operational leadership experience to help expand engagement, strengthen cross country collaboration, and support the continued growth of the network.

Given the private sector's important role in advancing responsible business practices, I believe CG United Insurance has a unique vantage point to promote inclusive economic development. It was a slow start, because whereas many people were aware of the UN SDGs, people found them hard to relate to.



**RANDY GRAHAM, board member of the United Nations Global Compact Network Caribbean. (FP)**

It took a while to get corporate entities to the meetings, to get them to understand what it meant for them individually and as companies, and the first year was a lot about educating the corporate public.

It was about what the goals are, how they can change their own practices. And then after that, it took off, there are a lot more companies that are involved. So it really has taken off since the educational component, but it took a while to educate the corporate public as to how they can bring sustainability into their daily decision making.

### What role do you see private sector playing in moving to a more sustainable outlook?

If we are going to accelerate this change, you need the private sector involved, because the way they assign contracts, who we approve to be our third party vendors, if companies are requiring the third party vendors to have sustainable practices, then the companies will have to change their practices to become sustainable to win the contracts.

So, it's about corporate and capital changing their internal decision making to focus on sustainability, and that will then have a knock on effect on manufacturers, on providers. They will then also have to bring

sustainability into their practices to win contracts, and that's how we're going to accelerate this, we're not just going to say we won't to reduce global warming and walk away and it will happen.

It's not going to happen like that, we are going to have to get the entities' daily operations influenced, and the only way to do that is by changing how we assign contracts, how we spend money, how we make decisions. If there's a sustainability aspect to that decision making, that's how we can get the change all down the line.

### Are you seeing evidence of businesses incorporating sustainable practices into their operations?

Yes, I think the movement has started. Some companies are starting with the low hanging fruit. So it's about not using disposable plastic bottles in the office anymore and giving everybody a water bottle and installing a water station in the office so that they can refill that bottle needed.

Then we have some companies doing beach clean-ups where everyone in the company is coming together to keep the plastics from reaching the ocean. Or decisions about vehicle purchases for the companies where they are moving to purchase electric



vehicles or hybrids as opposed to gas vehicles, to reduce the emissions.

Those things are obvious, and I think the companies have started that in their practices. But now we need folks to move a step further. When you are spending your corporate dollar and you are choosing partners, choose partners who also have sustainability in them, and if they don't have sustainability in them, make sure that you don't win the contracts.

When we get to that, I think that that's where we will start to see more companies get involved in a more meaningful way. Also, customers, employees, and society will demand that companies to make these changes for the better, because it's just one environment that we have to protect.

I wouldn't say that companies will feel pressure, but I think they will be obligated to get involved to ensure that we all protect the environment. So I see that this will become a natural course of business in the future, where decisions that are being made by corporate entities have to reflect sustainability and the need for future sustainability.

### For the insurance industry, how high on the agenda are these sustainability issues?

It was always a direct impact on the insurance industry, because the negative effects of climate change obviously increase hurricane activity in the Caribbean region. So, we always have an, inherent interest in it because we want to reduce that climate change, including extreme heat impact, because we want to reduce the catastrophes in the region.

Insurance companies have always had an inherent interest in sustainability from that aspect. But what we are seeing more now is that the industry is also much interested in it from a protection point of view because what we've seen in Jamaica, Dominica, Grenada, and other places where they have had hurricanes, the destruction has been so severe, it's taken very long for people to rebuild and recover.

So now the interest is to make sure that we are preventing, not just the hurricanes, but if there's an event, we are preventing material damage. We are getting better building codes, we are getting quicker recoveries for economies and for families. So the insurance sector, because we have always been exposed to hurricane damage and catastrophe, we have a natural interest in sustainability.