

MEADFA: Collaborative advantage key to solving sustainability challenge

The Middle East & Africa Duty Free Association (MEADFA) offered an update on its work to raise awareness and inspire action on key sustainability concerns facing the duty free and travel retail (DF&TR) industry in the region, emphasizing that seeking a collaborative advantage among stakeholders is key to making an impact.

In a session at the MEADFA Conference in Abu Dhabi in November, Munif Mohammed, MEADFA's Sustainability Lead and CEO of Lagardère Travel Retail Middle East, highlighted the accelerating efforts in this area of the MEADFA sub-committee, which is devoted to sustainability.

He explained that MEADFA is taking a leadership position to inspire regenerative business, beyond 'doing no harm', which in turn helps to restore and nourish the environment and enables society to flourish.

"We do believe that the success of our member companies depends on responding positively to the challenges of sustainability of our planet and wellbeing of our society," he said.

He went on to relay the engagement model that MEADFA is utilising to engage with its members.

"At MEADFA we believe we should highlight to our members the need for change in our business, business practices, products and services," he said.

"We should also help catalyse, by promoting interaction within and between stakeholders, including by convening at these forums to work together to try and bring change."



MEADFA Sustainability Lead Munif Mohammed took to the stage at the MEADFA Conference 2024 in Abu Dhabi.



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He underscored how the challenge is simple: finding a way for the industry to work together to achieve the vision.

“Studies that Lagardère and many of our member companies have done show that the majority of the impact is in our extended supply chain,” he said.

“In most cases, 90+% of the carbon footprint is in scope 3, not 1 and 2.

“We also know that employee wellbeing, child labour issues, living wages and social equity are more likely to be an issue in our extended supply chain. Governance issues also are more likely to be in the indirect suppliers.

“We realise these issues and risks cannot be managed by one company. We must find ways to work together, working in collaboration in a non-competitive way. That is what we have to do. The issue is how do we do this.”



Mohammed underscored how individual companies cannot solve the bigger problem, which begs the need for a different approach that is collaborative and more joined-up.

“Today as businesspeople, we all know that we have to compete – this is our bread and butter. We re competitors and we have to find ways of doing things that lock in a competitive advantage for us, in better products or a price advantage so that we can deliver the results our shareholders are looking for. But if we keep doing this we will not solve the sustainability and ESG challenge.”

He stressed to stakeholders how it’s not about moving away from being competitive as businesses, but in finding different ways of working together and a new approach.

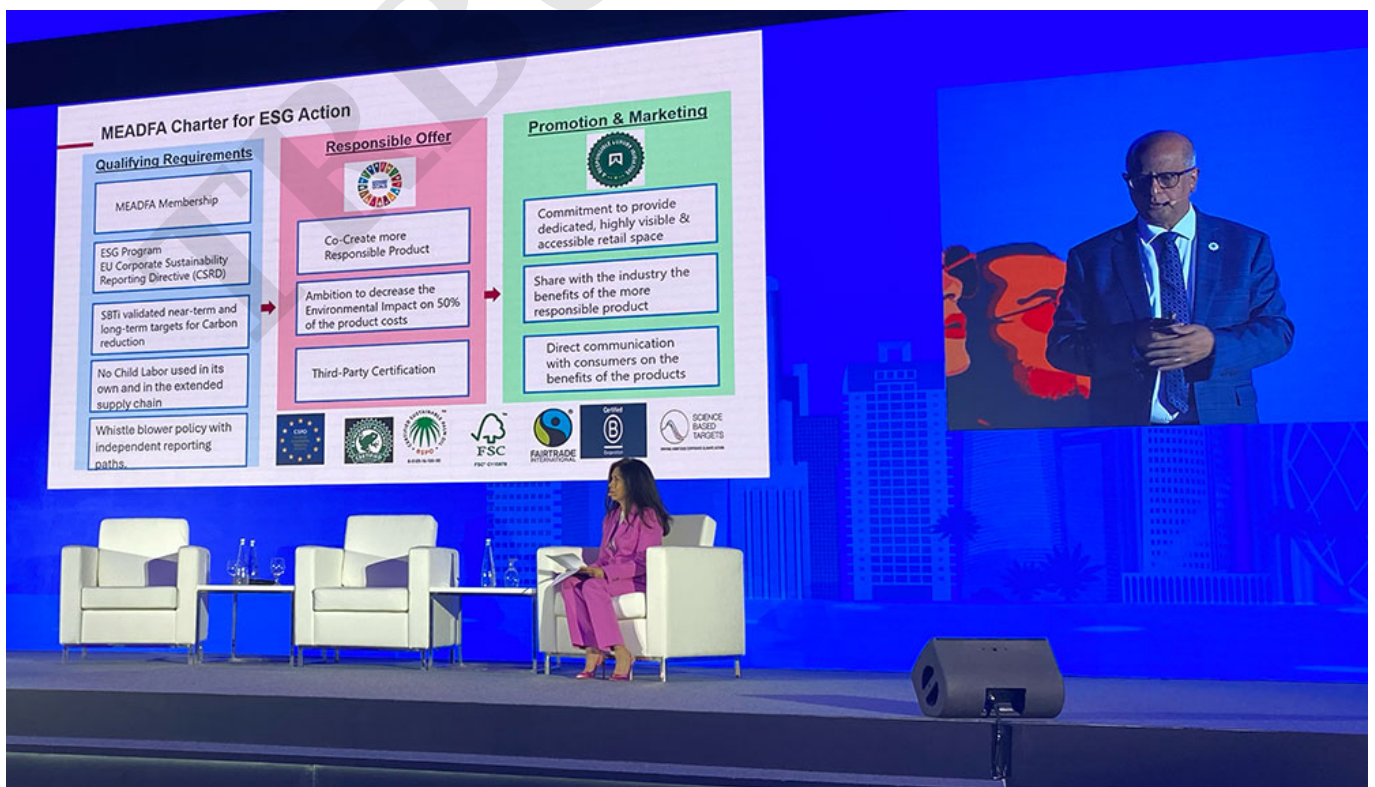
The first step to this is encouraging MEADFA member companies to create a social purpose and common objective to work together on.



“That can help define your strategy, be more engaged with your customers and, of course, we know consumers are increasingly expecting brands to have not just functional benefits but a social purpose too.”

Based on these principles, MEADFA is defining a Charter for ESG Action, and is calling upon all its member companies to work together to help the association to help bring global scale and impact.

Fittingly for the time of year, he drew upon a Formula One analogy in the need for individual drivers to take pitstops for all the experts to work together to help ensure they are in the best form possible.



“We know that is there is a clear imperative for business to change and when it’s directly connected to the

MEADFA: Collaborative advantage key to solving sustainability challenge strategy, the job gets done,” he said.

“This is why it’s important to find the social purpose for the business so we can start to make these changes.”

He referred back to the changes implemented as a result of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which demanded stronger collaboration from stakeholders, from operators forgoing rents to suppliers finding new materials to work with.

“When there is a crisis, there is a way, and we will find a solution and I think that’s where we need to be with sustainability now.”



To support the MEADFA Charter for ESG Action, there are a number of qualifying requirements, including being a MEADFA member, having an ESG programme, having SBTi validated targets for carbon reduction, having basic standards such as no child labour in its own and extended supply chain, and a whistleblower policy in place with independent reporting paths.

“For the next phase, what we are talking about it trying to co-create more responsible products,” he said. “Maybe that’s where you can start to talk about glass for the liquor industry, how can we find a better solution or for the confectionery business, better sourcing of ingredients. So it’s a broader conversation rather than single companies working on single topics. We have to have [a] big motivation, more than just the low-hanging fruit of changing packaging and so on.

“MEADFA will rely on you, particularly the brands, to have third party certification that will give us some comfort that your product you are proposing is more responsible.”



The final part of the equation is stakeholders, particular the retailers of MEDAFA, who will be engaged to promote and market those more responsible products in their global networks with more space and visibility and prominence.

Sharing messages with consumers will be part of this. To aid and elevate communication with regards to this, Mohammed added: MEADFA could provide a forum and advocacy around this topic to engage directly with customers.

One of the most important benefits of the approach, he said, is scale, in giving more responsible brands access to a bigger platform globally, through the network of retailers.

The MEADFA Charter for ESG Action is currently being drafted to be shared with members and signed into action.

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