Kofi Annan  
Seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations; Nobel Peace Laureate

We had gone through a period when people were very suspicious of business people, particularly in the Third World. Many were suspicious and they felt that globalization and the fruits of globalization were not being shared equally or fairly. They tended to blame the multinational corporations. Getting them to deal with each other, and getting people to understand how these corporations can work together with governments and civil society to change economic conditions, was important. I think there is a better atmosphere today than 15 years ago. There is better understanding, and governments and private sectors are working better with each other.

Mary Robinson  
Former President of Ireland; Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

I think for me the most prominent developments would be, first of all, the adoption by the Human Rights Council of the UN Guiding Principle on Business and Human Rights and the way in which that has been implemented with corporations using the guiding principles for the sustainability reports and the national action plans that governments are considering or adopting. Secondly, the Principles for Responsible Investment with their emphasis on environmental, social, and corporate governance, the ESG [environmental, social and governance] issues. I think that in comparison to 2000, there is a sense that corporations must accept the responsibilities as part of their reputational need to respect human rights.

Arnold Schwarzenegger  
Founding Chairman, R20 Regions of Climate Action; 38th Governor of California

The biggest challenges we face today – especially climate change, air pollution and habitat destruction – threaten not just our health and environment, but also our economic well-being. The latest United Nations reports predict that further warming will slow down economic growth, increase poverty, and further erode food security around the world. Trends like these make one thing very clear – time is running out and we can’t wait for anyone else to fix things.

Corporate sustainability initiatives are especially powerful, because they harness innovation to make products and services that help everyone to live more sustainably. That’s why I started the R20, our global environmental group for subnational governments and forward-thinking companies to work together to solve these challenges and build strong economies at the same time. And that’s why I applaud the people, companies, and governments that think differently, refuse to wait, and embrace their amazing power to affect change.

Yolanda Kakabadse  
President, WWF International; Former Minister of Environment, Government of Ecuador
The barriers have been broken. I feel that 15 years ago, there was a lot of suspicion and caution from the corporate sector in working with governments and with the UN and civil society. The creation of this platform has allowed all these sectors to begin a process of trust - and trust at this moment in time in the world is one of the key elements for creating open and positive collaboration for a better future. These 15 years for me have been the beginning of a high level of visibility on the need for corporate sustainability around the world, and much greater alliance between the different sectors of society.

Chad Holliday  
Chairman, Royal Dutch Shell; Former chairman, Bank of America; Former Chairman & CEO, DuPont

Fifteen years ago, most people backed the view that ‘the vast majority of companies won’t do the right thing by themselves, so laws must be enforced anyway and why then should a few companies bother with CSR?’ Today, people are far more divided. [The change] is driven perhaps most of all by the realization that corporate responsibility is not just the right thing to do, it is also a business opportunity. Even investors are getting the message. Probably half of them see the need to act responsibly from a risk management perspective. They want to make certain there are no liabilities. The other half is thinking about opportunities, such as new products.

Huguette Labelle  
Former Chair, Transparency International; Former Chair, Canadian International Development Agency

Annual Reports now are much more complete, they cover more than financials and who’s on the Board. For an increasing number of companies their Reports also include environmental impacts and their mitigation, anti-corruption programs, long term value creation and who their beneficial owners are. This is the type of approach which is more likely to attract long term investors. Some of the large companies are also realizing that if something goes wrong with a supply chain company, they can be dragged into a major reputation and potentially legal issue. This why these companies see that it is to their advantage to be much clearer about their expectations to their supply chain and include them in their training programs.

Bob Collymore  
CEO, Safaricom; Former Governance Director for Africa at Vodafone

Fifteen years ago, companies didn’t really have a sense of their corporate responsibility. Since then, it has begun to actually get into the core of a company’s activities. On a general level, I think companies are seeing that they have a critical and essential role to play. Corporate sustainability is no longer just nice to have, and it’s no longer just a compliance issue. Companies that have taken a more sustainable approach to their business have turned out to be more successful and resilient than those that have not. [emphasis added]

Paula Caballero  
Senior Director, Environment and Natural Resources, World Bank; Former Director for Economic, Social and Environmental Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia; Early architect of a global post-2015 development agenda

The private and financial sectors are demonstrating both a growing recognition of the impacts of natural resource scarcity and degradation, as well as compelling leadership in terms of changing production patterns and advancing sustainable supply chains. Companies from all regions are signing up to a range of commitments and actions, from carbon pricing to the NY Declaration on Forests, and actively seeking to engineer change through coalitions such as the Consumer Goods Forum, and its Tropical Forest
Alliance. In addition to this, there is broad recognition that the SDGs can only be implemented in strong partnership between private and public sectors. The challenge and opportunity for the coming decade is to jointly explore and identify new and innovative ways of doing business that put global development trajectories on sustainable, inclusive and resource-efficient pathways.

**John Ruggie**  
Berthold Beitz Professor in Human Rights and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School; Former UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Business and Human Rights

The whole discourse has changed. You don’t have to defend the corporate sustainability position anymore. You don’t have to persuade people that this is something to be taken seriously. That job is done. Even the *Economist* writes, ‘the question is not whether, but how we go forward on corporate responsibility.’ That, I think, is a big development . . .

If we stand back and look at where the biggest movement is in terms of human rights, it is in two areas. It’s in the area of due diligence in conducting human rights impact assessments and acting on them. Secondly, in the area of companies establishing grievance mechanisms to which people can bring complaints before they escalate into major crisis.

**Michael Ikpoki**  
CEO, MTN Nigeria; Former CEO of MTN Ghana

What we’ve seen in the last 15 years here in Nigeria, is that there are many more corporations, both big and small, building their businesses around accountability, transparency and good corporate governance. This in spite of the environment that we find ourselves, where we feel that corruption is a big issue. Concern about how to uphold these principles has in turn created a lot more encouragement for other companies to come on board.

**Jane Nelson**  
Director, Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; former Vice-President, Citibank, Asia, Europe, Middle East

We’ve gone from CSR [corporate social responsibility] being just about compliance and philanthropy, although these remain important, to CSR being focused on embedding social and environmental risks and opportunities into core business operations, strategies and governance. For leading companies, CSR is now about managing shared risks and creating shared opportunity at the heart of the business rather than a marginal activity. We’ve gone from a very project-based or individual company-based approach to social and environmental risk management to a much broader supply chain and system-based approach. Linked to that has been a growing network approach --or pre-competitive collective action among companies and other actors to address systemic challenges that no single organization can solve alone.

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