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TRADITIONALLY, ECONOMIC IMPERATIVES USED TO PREVAIL FOR INDUSTRY OR TRADE ASSOCIATIONS. HOWEVER, FOR THE PAST TWO DECADES, THE AWARENESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY OF ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS CHANGED DRAMATICALLY, DIRECTLY AFFECTING THE WAY BUSINESS IS DONE AND SOCIETY IS IMPACTED.

TEXT LUC MAENE - ES&E PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL FERTILIZER ASSOCIATION

The **Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992** marked a turning point by placing the environment at the centre of global concerns. In Rio, the international community adopted **Agenda 21**. It is the founding document, a call for action, to address the human impact on the earth's ecosystems at the local, national and global levels. The **Johannesburg Summit in 2002** was the

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE RESPONSIBILITY OF INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

subsequent milestone in the development of the international sustainable development agenda. During this **World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)**, international leaders agreed on quantifiable targets and concrete steps to implement Agenda 21. While Rio focused mostly on the environment, Johannesburg emphasized on the importance of societal concerns, placing the human being directly in connection with its natural and economic environment. These important meetings forged the now common term of 'sustainable development' and the three pillars that buttress the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD): social, environmental and economic.

The global reflection on environmental concerns has kept rising all over the world. However, population growth keeps putting stress on natural resources. Some people wonder how long the earth will manage to maintain itself. It should now be clear to all of us that business as usual is no longer a valid option. Any business activity is concerned by sustainable development imperatives and should address all three pillars.

It is our role as business associations to take the lead in sustainable development and to show the way to the companies we represent in becoming 'greener'. All business actors need to improve and become not only environmentally-conscious but also environmentally-friendly. We ought to keep in mind that adopting a voluntary approach is more favourable for us than having to abide by tight regulations.

In the fertilizer industry, we strive to integrate the notion of sustainable development in all aspects of business. As the industry's international association, IFA just launched a new product stewardship programme, which aims at improving every step of the product lifecycle. In addition, we believe that becoming greener is not only about production but also about services. On the production side, we are working towards improving resource efficiency, reducing emissions, minimizing the carbon footprint, and preserving soils and water.

With regard to services, a trade association can also make decisive strides towards becoming more conscious of the environment by, for example, reducing international travel, compensating for travel-related carbon emissions, using new technologies to improve remote communications, reducing office-related emissions (lighting, heating, insulation, waste reduction, paper recycling, increased use of recyclable materials, environmentally-friendly cleaning products). Any small initiative should be supported. Scale does matter, but what matters most is changing our behaviour as members of the workforce and as citizens in general.

Associations have a responsibility to 'walk the talk' by creating awareness, supporting innovative initiatives, developing and disseminating guiding principles, and showing examples. We now live in a new era: the Green New Deal.

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