



PlanetGoals

*Capacity Building Course
for Professionals*

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MODULE 3: SUSTAINABILITY IN FOOTBALL-RELATED ENTITIES

Welcome to this learning session on Sustainability in Football. In this programme, we will explore how football organisations can integrate sustainable practices into their operations to reduce their environmental impact and in doing so become leaders in the area.

By the end of this session, you will have an understanding of key sustainability areas and practical steps to implement within your organisation.

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN FOOTBALL?

It is estimated that the global football industry produces more than 30 million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually, roughly the equivalent of the total emissions generated by Denmark. According to the European Union, the average European football match generates 0.8 kg of waste per spectator, which corresponds to an average of 4.2 tonnes of waste per match.

In 2023 the four professional divisions of English football saw 34 million people attend matches. This suggests the scale of carbon emissions as people travelled to matches - but also the opportunity; if football can reduce its impact, we are in turn able to affect large numbers of people and influence other industries.

Many activities involved in professional sport rely on the use of precious and limited commodities belonging to the earth's eco-system. This might be the travel needed to get to match, or the water that is used to maintain training pitches, or the electricity that we use to power stadiums, and the packaging around food and drink that is consumed in stadiums.

There are numerous ways in which football can be seen to be taking a profligate approach to the climate: by being slow to address impact, through unnecessary travel and increased development, new stadiums, new tournaments, and the inconvenient scheduling of matches.

Environmental sustainability in sports contexts refers to the practices and initiatives aimed at minimising the negative environmental impacts of sporting activities, events, and infrastructure.

It involves integrating eco-friendly measures to reduce carbon footprints, manage resources efficiently, promote long-term ecological balance, and ensure future viability.

Guided by the need to save natural resources and to minimise damaging carbon impact the key areas to address include waste reduction, water conservation, sustainable transportation, energy and production and the use of eco-friendly materials. This applies to the day to day running of organisations, our offices and headquarters, training centres, stadiums and team and fan travel.

The impact can also be felt through more structural issues in football - the way that we organise matches and structure competitions at all levels. More international competitions mean more matches which means a larger carbon footprint. The timing of matches is also significant; timed wrongly games can result in non-sustainable travel, people travelling by car rather than public transport.

WHY SHOULD FOOTBALL ORGANISATIONS DEVELOP AN ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY APPROACH?

Sustainability applies to every aspect of the operations and business of football and involves integrating measures that reduce our carbon footprint, manage resources efficiently and promote ecological balance within our industry.

In working on the climate crisis, we have the opportunity to engage players, supporters, sponsors, media and others to whom we can give a lead in understanding their own environmental impact and how to reduce it.

Alongside the need to reduce impact, football can bring about cost savings and enhance reputation and brand. Supporters, consumers and the media are very interested in how football is responding to the global climate crisis. In the age of cause marketing and ethical alignment, sponsors will be more attracted to football organizations that are putting in the hard yards required to be on a journey to net zero.

And as our examples will show clubs and football associations that are effectively reducing impact are being seen as leaders in the field.

Another emerging factor is the increasing pressure to do more from regulators, through requirements set down by governments and others. Being ahead of the game helps us to avoid such pressures.

In summary, we act on environmental sustainability to reduce our environmental footprint, to initiate long-term cost savings and ensure future viability, to enhance our reputation and engage with supporters, the media and wider society, to ensure current and future regulatory compliance, to give leadership in our own sector and beyond, and to support broader global social goals.

ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY AND POLICY ON SUSTAINABILITY

To effectively implement sustainability, it should be embedded into the core strategy of your organization. This starts with developing a clear sustainability policy.

A good policy should include your vision, mission, and objectives related to sustainability. Many clubs and organizations have successfully aligned their sustainability goals with their overall objectives. This alignment helps ensure that sustainability becomes part of daily operations rather than an afterthought.

To help you understand the field you can familiarize yourself with the key sustainability frameworks and standards. Those relating to football will be mentioned later in this training.

As with all strategies it is common to understand and prioritize the most important sustainability challenges for your business and stakeholders. In sustainability a common way to do this is to develop a materiality analysis. This can be achieved by developing a chart or grid that lists which sustainability topics are most relevant to your organization. This will also be a crucial feature of your sustainability action plan to be covered in a later section.

Align your sustainability and organizational goals. Every element of your organizational strategy and action should have an element of sustainability, discuss this with internal colleagues. As part of your strategy you will be talking to all relevant stakeholders, including your colleagues and external partners such as supporters, sponsors, suppliers, and relevant local authorities.

Setting targets and performance indicators for action by the organization which also align with the goals of a member of the senior leadership team and/ or CEO is important to ensure action is mainstreamed internally.

A couple of tasks for you to think about. Task one: Does your club already have a sustainability policy? If not, what would be the first steps in creating one? Brainstorm for a few minutes.

Task two: After this session conduct a materiality analysis to determine which sustainability topics are most relevant to your organization. Review the results of the materiality analysis to define the scope of your strategy.

DEFINITIONS OF KEY AREAS IN ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

There are a number of definitions that are relevant to the field, they will become a key part of the language of your work. The concepts and your understanding of them will become more complex and detailed as you progress on your sustainability journey .

Three of the key concepts are:

Carbon footprint: The total amount of greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide, that an organization emits directly or indirectly.

Resource conservation: The practice of managing resources such as water, energy, and raw materials to avoid waste and ensure availability for future generations.

Sustainable sourcing: Procuring goods and services in a way that considers their environmental and social impact.

The Planet Goals project has produced a handbook of terms as part of this training. Use this as a reference, share with colleagues and add to with more concepts and ideas as you develop your work.

IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN EVENT MANAGEMENT AND FACILITY MANAGEMENT

We can identify two key aspects of football where we should look to integrate an environmental sustainability approach: the events we hold - from hosting matches to the management of big events – and the management of facilities that support those matches.

Your materiality analysis will inform you about many of the areas that you prioritize.

For events these priorities may be:

Waste reduction strategies: The high impact approach here is to ban single-use plastics and alongside this measure implement recycling programs for everything else. The plethora of advice and experts on waste reduction means this is a tried and tested area for you to implement.

Energy efficiency: This has two elements, that of developing usage and equipment solutions such as using LED lighting, and other energy-efficient technologies, and using renewable energy sources - of which there are a fast-growing number of suppliers in every market. These actions are at the core of some of the best practice examples of sustainability in sport.

Sustainable sourcing: This action touches on the consumption of football supporters and the opportunity to develop eco-friendly merchandise, with a wider range of food and beverage options, and associate packaging involved.

Transport and logistics: Promoting public transport, bike-friendly venues, and low-emission travel options should accompany an approach that also looks at the timing and numbers of matches to allow for the use of sustainable transport.

In facility management the issues are more structural and concern the design and construction of stadiums.

This means adhering to green building standards, using cutting-edge sustainable materials, and drawing on new resource materials to minimize environmental impact.

Construction: The construction development of stadia and other venues contributes to emissions and uses valuable resources that need to be considered

Water management issues include rainwater harvesting, greywater systems, and efficient irrigation for pitches.

Use of solar panels, energy storage systems, and smart building technologies are part of the energy management measures most used to conserve and use natural resources

Resource conservation and maintenance: Refers to the need for routine audits, efficient heating/cooling systems, and sustainable landscaping to maintain a sustainable football facility. In short, a green facility requires maintenance to keep peak performance.

CARBON FOOTPRINT AND LIFE CYCLE

As you move towards developing action to reduce your carbon footprint there are a few key principles to understand and implement that help to measure, assess and act.

There is now a methodology to calculate the carbon footprint of events, travel, and facility use, these resources help you to understand the scale of your impact. Many of the most sustainable organizations in football set the ambitious target of zero emissions and develop a road map to achieve it.

A life cycle analysis is a methodology that evaluates the environmental impact of a product, service, or system over its entire life cycle. It is known as a "cradle-to-grave" analysis. This can be critical to know what the future impact is as part of your calculations and targets to reduce carbon.

Once the measurement activities have been actioned, carbon reduction and carbon offsetting initiatives come into play. In the past carbon offset measures have taken the form of reforestation projects, investment in green technologies, etc. The expertise and debates around offsets are developing fast and different approaches are taking hold, keeping up to speed with these developments.

Are you tracking your carbon footprint? What challenges have you faced in understanding it and reducing it?

SUPPLY CHAIN AND SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT

Sustainable procurement means sourcing products and services that have minimal negative environmental and social impacts. Football organisations rely on a complex supply chain, from stadium developers to tech suppliers, to merchandise producers. When engaging with suppliers, do your due diligence by asking questions about their sustainability approach, specifically,

Their environmental impact: Do they use renewable materials or energy? Do they follow fair trade and ethical practices?

Product life cycles: Are their products recyclable or made from sustainable materials?

Supplier commitment: How committed are parts of your supply chain to reducing their carbon emissions? It may be helpful to produce your own green procurement guidelines to help suppliers understand your rationale.

Engaging with suppliers to raise issues of concern and to improve their sustainability practices enhances your organization's environmental footprint but also supports sustainable industries.

Question: How can you engage your current suppliers to adopt more sustainable practices?

CASE STUDIES AND BEST PRACTICES IN SUSTAINABLE FOOTBALL

Let's look at some case studies of football organizations that have made progress in sustainability.

The bar is set high by Forest Green Rovers, a club in England, has been called the world's greenest football club. Rovers use 100% renewable energy, rainwater nourishes pitches, they provide plant-based food options to supporters and players, and their stadium is made of sustainable materials.

FC Barcelona's Espai Barça project holds a BREEAM certification for sustainable building design, in addition the club has made progress in energy efficiency through the use of LED lighting and renewable energy sources. Barcelona have set out a public commitment to reducing energy consumption, water use, and waste production across its facilities. <https://espaibarca.fcbarcelona.com/en>

Bundesliga Club, VfL Wolfsburg is a leader in sustainability. They have joined initiatives such as the UN's 'Race to Zero' to achieve net-zero emissions by 2025. Among the sustainability measures they have implemented are LED stadium lighting and electric vehicle charging stations. Uniquely they collaborate with startups to track and reduce carbon <https://www.vfl-wolfsburg.de/en/newsdetails/news-detail/detail/news/sixth-sustainability-report-published>.

In 2023, the English Football Association launched its Playing for the Future strategy, which focuses on reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2040. This includes investments in sustainable infrastructure, including eco-friendly pitches, and efforts to reduce energy consumption at its venues, including Wembley Stadium.

The Europa Park Stadium, the home of SC Freiburg in Germany, has a solar power plant on the roof of the stadium. The 2.4-megawatt system is one of the world's largest solar roofs in a stadium and generates enough electricity to power the stadium, making it energy neutral.

What lessons can we learn from these case studies? How could similar practices be implemented in your organization?

DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Developing a sustainability plan follows the development of an overarching sustainability strategy and policy.

The plan should be an ongoing process to be seen as a roadmap.

Any successful strategy in football will require Board level buy-in and agreement amongst the senior executive team. This gives your strategy impetus and helps to define responsibility for action.

A baseline assessment, or materiality analysis, of where you are now and what is relevant to your organisation

The setting of clear sustainability goals and targets, such as reducing energy use by 20% or switching to 100% recyclable materials, net zero targets, etc.

Engaging stakeholders such supporters, players, sponsors, internal colleagues and Board members, and suppliers in your sustainability journey. Use an internal cross-departmental working group if necessary to support implementation.

Continuous improvement through monitoring progress through KPIs and adapting your strategy as needed as you move through your achievements.

Publicise and reward: Transparency is important in the field of sustainability, so be open about your plans, targets and methodologies. It will be regarded as progressive and creditworthy. At the same time do not be shy about celebrating your successes when you reach milestones and targets. Internal rewards to be acknowledged and celebrated by the whole organisation play an important motivational role.