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THE SUSTAINABILITY EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2025

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A Celebration of Sustainability in the UAE

The inaugural Sustainability Excellence Awards 2025 celebrated leading organisations and individuals advancing sustainability

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Chief Guest Message

The Sustainability Excellence Awards 2025 by Gulf News and BeingShe was a remarkable celebration of achievement, leadership and ambition at a time when the UAE's sustainability journey had reached a defining moment. The event brought together organisations that had embraced sustainability as a strategic priority and actually embedded it deeply into their operational models, organisational cultures and long-term visions. Their work demonstrated that the UAE's transformation toward a greener, more resilient future was well underway and accelerating.

The ceremony highlighted how sustainability has evolved in the UAE from isolated initiatives into a unified national movement supported by government, private sector, civil society, academia and the youth. This collective momentum reflects the country's commitment to its Net Zero by 2050 pathway, circular economy ambitions, climate action priorities and broader development vision. It has become clear that sustainability excellence is no longer aspirational—it has become a defining feature of national progress.

As someone who has been actively involved in shaping the UAE's sustainability landscape for more than three decades — whether through raising awareness and driving community engagement under EEG, advancing corporate responsibility and ESG culture under the Arabia CSR Network, or bringing in laws and legislations to support sustainable urban development and strengthening green building practices under the Emirates Green Building Council — I found the evening particularly meaningful. Platforms such as the Sustainability Excellence Awards play a vital role in reinforcing national progress by shining a light on organisations that are pioneering.

Having overseen the Arabia CSR & Sustainability Awards for over 18 years, I had witnessed first-hand how recognition frameworks could elevate standards, foster transparency and inspire new levels of innovation. This event added to that collective ecosystem of excellence by honouring leaders across diverse sectors for their measurable impact and clear alignment with the UAE's sustainable development agenda.

The atmosphere of the evening was one of pride, purpose and shared responsibility. It reminded us that sustainability in the UAE has always been driven by partnership — between government and business, between institutions and individuals and between today's leaders and the generations that would inherit the future we are building.

I extend my warmest congratulations to all winners and finalists. Your dedication has strengthened the UAE's sustainability foundations and inspired new possibilities for the years ahead. Together, we will continue shaping a future defined by resilience, responsibility and unwavering commitment to environmental stewardship.

Dr. Habiba Al Marashi

Co-Founder & Chairperson – Emirates Environmental Group

President & CEO – Arabia CSR Network

Co-Founder, Vice Chair & Treasurer – Emirates Green Building Council

SETTING THE STANDARD FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



The first-ever Sustainability Excellence Awards 2025, hosted by Gulf News in collaboration with BeingShe, celebrated 19 organisations and individuals redefining sustainability leadership in the UAE

The inaugural Sustainability Excellence Awards 2025, hosted by Gulf News and BeingShe, took place last night at the SEE Institute, The Sustainable City in Dubai, setting a new benchmark for the UAE's growing sustainability movement. The event brought together leaders from across industries to recognise and celebrate the remarkable con-

tributions of 19 organisations and individuals driving sustainable change in the nation.

In a world increasingly focused on environmental responsibility, the Sustainability Excellence Awards shone a spotlight on those pushing the boundaries of innovation. The winners, chosen from over 100 nominations, exemplify leadership in sectors as diverse as

construction, retail, healthcare, finance, technology, free zones, and agriculture. Their achievements underscore the UAE's commitment to integrating sustainability into its national strategy and transforming industries to meet future challenges.

Chief Guest Dr Habiba Al Marashi, Co-Founder and Chairperson of the Emirates Environmental

The winners, chosen from over 100 nominations, exemplify leadership in diverse sectors

Group, opened the ceremony with a powerful reminder of how far the UAE has come in its sustainability journey.

"I have witnessed, first-hand, the evolution of sustainability from a niche concern to a national mandate. I have seen laws being enacted, regulations taking shape, and strong buy-in from the private sector," she said. Reflecting on the

UAE's national strategies, from the roadmap to Net Zero 2050 to Centennial 2071, she added, "Sustainability is not optional. It is our pathway to long-term prosperity and global leadership."

She urged organisations to lead with conviction, not compliance, noting that responsibility-driven action is what ultimately becomes legacy.



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Sustainability is not optional. It is our pathway to long-term prosperity and global leadership.”

Dr Habiba Al Marashi, Co-Founder and Chairperson of the Emirates Environmental Group

In his welcome address, Vijay Vaghela, CEO of Gulf News, highlighted the importance of recognising organisations that are leading environmental transformation.

“We are here in the UAE to celebrate sustainability, leadership, and the organisations shaping a better future for all of us and, importantly, for the next generation,” he said. He emphasised that the UAE’s sustainability agenda is backed by strong national policies and long-term commitment.

He added, “The future depends on the choices we make today. Every action matters. We should all be inspired by the leadership and the talent being recognised this evening. Sustainability is an ongoing journey that requires constant commitment, transparency and innovation.”

Aparna Bajpai, Founder of BeingShe and co-host of the awards, spoke about why platforms like this are essential to accelerating

sustainability momentum across the region. “Sustainability is no longer a side conversation. It is a strategic priority. More than 70 percent of companies in the GCC now include sustainability in their core business strategy, yet less than 25 percent receive visibility for their efforts,” she said.

Pointing to the gap the awards aim to bridge, she added, “Tonight is not simply an award ceremony. Tonight is the launch of a movement, a movement that says the future of business in this region will be sustainable, responsible, innovative, and deeply human.”

She emphasised that visibility inspires replication, builds trust and accelerates impact across industries.

The event’s title sponsor, Karma Developers, reaffirmed its commitment to sustainability through a message delivered by its Founder and Chairman, Captain Pradeep Singh. Casting back to his years

as a ship captain, he spoke about his close connection with nature and the urgency of environmental action.

“The damage we’ve done to the environment in the last fifty years is more than what was done in the previous five thousand,” he said. Singh urged people to begin with simple, daily choices — switching off lights, reducing energy use and educating the next generation. “We owe a responsibility to future generations. If we don’t act now, there may not be a stable future for them,” he added.

He praised the UAE’s leadership for investing heavily in sustainability and emphasised that the responsibility now rests with individuals and the private sector to carry the momentum forward.

The evening featured performances curated by Artist Related Group, eco-friendly floral arrange-



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Vijay Vaghela, CEO of Gulf News



WINNERS OF THE SUSTAINABILITY EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2025

- **Sustainable Digital Innovator:** Schneider Electric
- **Sustainable Building Material Manufacturer of the Year:** DesertBoard
- **Best Free Zone for Startups & SMEs:** Dubai South Business Hub Free Zone
- **Eco-Efficient Manufacturer of the Year:** Emirates Global Aluminium
- **Green Construction Leadership Award:** FujSeng Construction LLC
- **Healthcare Sustainability Leader of the Year:** Burjeel Hospital Abu Dhabi
- **Energy Efficiency Leader of the Year:** No Sweat Solar Solutions
- **Sustainable Production and Export Excellence Award:** Highland Agro Foods Pvt Ltd.
- **Sustainable Retail Champion in Jewellery:** Fyne Jewellery
- **The Gulf News Editor's Choice Award - The Sustainable Developer of the Year:** Karma Developers
- **Sustainable Landscaping & Agriculture Pioneer:** Zeoplant
- **Green Essence Award in Fragrance and Cosmetics:** Dubai Avenue by Shaikh Mohammed Saeed Group
- **Sustainable Retail Brand of the Year:** Xpressions Style
- **Regenerative Agriculture Initiative of the Year:** Bin Dasmal Group
- **Metal Recycling Excellence Award:** RKG International FZC
- **Best Upcoming Sustainable Consultancy:** Audrey Macaluso Fages
- **Excellence in Sustainability Advisory:** Dr Tamil Selvan Ramadoss
- **Impact Leader of the Year:** Sahul Hameed Syed Ibrahim



Sustainability is no longer a side conversation. It is a strategic priority.”

Aparna Bajpai, Founder of BeingShe

ments by Flowerista, and custom trophies crafted by Beetamax. A highlight was Catherine Nunez's live sand-art performance, *The Sands of Change*, depicting the UAE's evolution from desert heritage to a future shaped by climate ambition and innovation.

The Sustainability Excellence Awards 2025 not only honoured outstanding contributors but also accentuated the UAE's commitment to leading sustainable development through public-private collaboration. The ceremony reinforced that environmental progress in the UAE is driven by ambition, collective responsibility and organisations that choose to lead from the front.

Gulf News and BeingShe

launched their first-ever Sustainability Excellence Awards 2025 in October.

The awards were established to celebrate organisations driving innovation and leadership in sustainability across sectors such as construction, healthcare, free zones, transport, fashion, tourism, technology, and finance, reflecting the UAE's growing commitment to a greener and more resilient future.

As the UAE continued to align with global sustainability goals and prepare for the next phase of its national sustainability agenda, the Sustainability Excellence Awards served as a timely recognition of organisations shaping a sustainable business culture across industries. ■



We owe a responsibility to future generations. If we don't act now, there may not be a stable future for them.”

Captain Pradeep Singh, Founder and Chairman, Karma Developers

JURY POWERING THE AWARDS

The jury panel brought a wealth of experience and diverse perspectives



● From left to right: Vijay Vaghela of Gulf News; Dr. Fadi Al Faris, Chief Executive Officer of SEE Environment; Chief Guest Dr. Habiba Al Marashi; Fatma Alhantoubi, Director of the Environmental Research and Legislation Department at the Fujairah Environment Authority and Director of the Sustainability Committee at the Fujairah Cultural Association; Aparna Bajpai of BeingShe; and Dr. Mohamed Al Breiki, Executive Director of Sustainable Development at Masdar City

The inaugural Sustainability Excellence Awards 2025, organised by Gulf News in collaboration with BeingShe, were evaluated by a distinguished jury comprising respected sustainability leaders from government, industry, and environmental innovation.

Together, the panel brought a wealth of experience and diverse perspectives, ensuring a rigorous and balanced assessment of submissions aligned with the UAE's national sustainability agenda. The jury reviewed initiatives spanning construction, healthcare, transport, tourism, technology, finance, and other critical sectors that play a central role in advancing long-term environmental, social, and economic resilience.

The panel included Fatma Alhantoubi, Director of the Environmental Research and Legislation Department at the Fujairah Environment Authority and Director of the Sustainability Committee at the Fujairah Cultural Association;

“Initiatives such as the Sustainability Excellence Awards 2025 are essential to accelerating the UAE's sustainability vision.”

Fatma Alhantoubi, Jury member

Dr. Mohamed Al Breiki, Executive Director of Sustainable Development at Masdar City; Ahmed Samir Elbermbali, Sustainability Director for the Middle East, Caspian Sea, and Africa at Bureau Veritas; and Dr. Fadi Al Faris, Chief Executive Officer of SEE Environment. Each juror, along with the

Gulf News and BeingShe teams, contributed deep sectoral insight, ranging from policy development and regulatory oversight to practical implementation of sustainability strategies and international ESG benchmarking.

“Initiatives such as the Sustainability Excellence Awards 2025 are essential to accelerating the UAE's sustainability vision because they inspire meaningful innovation and highlight solutions capable of real impact,” said Fatma.

“By celebrating outstanding achievements, we encourage institutions to adopt more ambitious practices and strengthen a culture of responsibility. Such platforms also broaden awareness across sectors, making sustainability a shared commitment and a driving force for national progress,” said Fatma.

Dr. Mohamed Al Breiki, Executive Director of Sustainable Development at Masdar City, added further depth to the jury through his extensive expertise in sustainable urban ecosystems, net-zero

development, climate-resilient infrastructure, and smart city innovation. His participation reinforced the awards' emphasis on future-ready, scalable solutions that can be replicated across cities and industries to deliver measurable impact. Collectively, the jury reflected a holistic approach to sustainability evaluation, combining strengths in environmental governance, research-driven frameworks, sustainable urban development, and global ESG standards. This diversity ensured that shortlisted initiatives were assessed not only on innovation, but also on practicality, long-term value, and alignment with national and global sustainability goals.

The Sustainability Excellence Awards 2025 took place on 10 December 2025 at the SEE Institute, The Sustainability City, Dubai, bringing together leaders, innovators, and changemakers committed to shaping a more sustainable future for the UAE and the wider region. ■

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF REAL ESTATE IN A 2040-FOCUSED UAE

Karma Developers aims to champion quality-led, sustainable growth in UAE real estate



● The Karma team after winning the Gulf News Editor's Choice Award as the Best Sustainable Developer of the Year

As the UAE advances toward its 2040 Urban Master Plan, the real estate sector is entering a more deliberate and mature phase of growth — one defined not by scale alone, but by quality, sustainability, and human wellbeing. The next era of development will be shaped by three defining trends: environmentally responsible design, community-centric planning, and long-term resilience.

At Karma Developers, these shifts are not new considerations — they have long informed our strategic direction. As an established, design-led developer in Dubai's affordable-luxury segment, Karma has positioned itself to lead in this new era by embedding sustainability and wellness at the core of every development decision, rather than treating them as add-ons.

Responding to Demand

Buyer and investor expectations have evolved significantly. Today's homeowners — particularly younger families and long-term residents — are seeking developments that reduce operational costs, enhance daily living, and retain value over time. In re-

sponse, Karma Developers is prioritising projects that integrate LEED-aligned planning, energy-efficient systems, and smart-living technologies across its portfolio.

Our current developments — Trinity in Arjan, Milos in Dubai Land, Antalya in Dubai Sports City, and Olivia in Dubai Investments Park — reflect this philosophy through climate-responsive design, efficient layouts, and technology-enabled living. Looking ahead, Karma is preparing to launch a lush, green-themed gated community in DIP, alongside a commercial development in Liwan, both designed to advance environmental responsibility while meeting market demand for functionality and long-term value.

Defining the Next Decade

Over the next decade, sustainable development in the UAE will move beyond energy efficiency alone. The focus will shift toward holistic sustainability, encompassing social well-being, walkability, access to green spaces, and community cohesion. Developments will be evaluated not just by architectural appeal, but by how they support healthier lifestyles and lower environmental

impact over their entire lifecycle.

Karma Developers anticipates this shift by prioritising durable materials, low-maintenance design, efficient water systems, and intelligent building management — choices that reduce long-term costs for residents while supporting national sustainability goals.

Aligning with the UAE 2040 Vision

The UAE 2040 vision places people at the centre of urban development, emphasising connected neighbourhoods, wellness-oriented living, and balanced land use. Karma integrates these priorities through walkable layouts, thoughtfully planned amenities, and activated green spaces that encourage interaction and improve quality of life.

Our approach to community building is intentional: developments are designed to foster belonging, reduce reliance on excessive travel, and support everyday wellness — physically, socially, and environmentally. This alignment ensures that Karma's projects remain relevant, resilient, and desirable well into the future.

Advancing Sustainability

Sustainability leadership can-

not exist in isolation. Industry collaboration — whether through award initiatives, knowledge-sharing platforms, or strategic alliances — plays a critical role in raising standards across the sector. Such initiatives help normalise best practices, celebrate meaningful innovation, and encourage responsible competition.

By supporting sustainability-focused platforms, Karma Developers reinforces its belief that progress accelerates when leadership is shared. Collaboration enables developers, policymakers, and industry stakeholders to collectively advance the UAE's vision of future-ready urban environments.

Looking Ahead

As Dubai and the wider UAE continue their journey toward 2040, the real estate sector will increasingly reward developers who think long-term — those who design not just for today's market, but for generations to come. Karma Developers remain committed to this path: delivering communities that balance design excellence, environmental responsibility, and human well-being — setting a benchmark for sustainable development in the UAE's next chapter. ■

Sustainable Digital Innovator: Schneider Electric

TURNING OUTCOMES INTO MEASURABLE IMPACT

Schneider Electric on how data-driven action is accelerating decarbonisation in the UAE

● **What inspired your organisation to focus on sustainability?**

Our focus on sustainability in Schneider Electric's Advisory Services is deeply rooted in our corporate purpose: to bridge progress and sustainability for all. We believe that confronting today's unprecedented global challenges — especially climate change — is not only an environmental imperative, but a business necessity.

Energy production and consumption account for approximately 80 per cent of global carbon emissions, creating an urgent need to cut emissions in half by 2030 to secure a liveable future. At the same time, global megatrends such as rapid decarbonisation, digitalisation, and electrification are reshaping markets and requiring a fundamental rethink of the energy system to make it smarter, more resilient, and more efficient.

Our mission is driven by a commitment to being an "Energy Technology Partner" that leverages innovation to help customers, communities, and the planet thrive by bridging the gap between progress and sustainability. We were inspired by the clear need to help businesses move beyond aspiration and turn sustainability from a compliance requirement into a tangible opportunity. We believe the shift to an all-electric, all-digital world is the fastest path to decarbonisation. Our role is to empower organisations with the right technology and strategy to make that transition seamlessly, efficiently, and profitably.

● **Which achievement in your sustainability journey are you most proud of?**

We are most proud of the measurable, real-world impact we deliver to our clients globally and, critically, here in the UAE.

Since 2018, Schneider Electric has enabled customers worldwide to save and avoid 679 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions through our services and software. These outcomes demonstrate how digital innovation and data-driven decision-making can translate sustainability ambition into measurable results. Locally, our



● Farrukh Shad, SVP, Head of Sustainability, Asia Pacific, India, Middle East & Africa of Schneider Electric, receiving the award from Chief Guest Dr. Habiba Al Marashi, along with Captain Pradeep Singh of Karma Developers, Vijay Vaghela of Gulf News, and Aparna Bajpai from BeingShe

recognition for Digital Innovation for Resource Advisor stands out as a key milestone, validating our long-term commitment to the region. We are particularly proud of our partnerships with several leading UAE-based ADQ companies, which are using Resource Advisor alongside our consulting services to unify energy, carbon, and ESG data into a single source of truth.

These collaborations are directly driving measurable reductions in energy consumption and emissions, positioning our partners as regional sustainability leaders while supporting the UAE Net Zero 2050 Strategy. In addition, during COP28 in Dubai, our team played an active role in advancing dialogue and announcing progress across supply chain decarbonisation, the semiconductor industry through the flagship Catalyze program, and new renewable energy initiatives.

● **What was the biggest challenge you faced, and how did you overcome it?**

One of the biggest challenges we encounter in the corporate sustainability landscape is the "Ambition-to-Impact Gap." While many organisations set ambitious net-zero targets, they often struggle to create a clear, financially viable roadmap for implementation.

Our research shows that around 90 per cent of Fortune 500 compa-

nies are not on track to meet their sustainability goals, highlighting the scale and complexity of this challenge. To address it, we act as an end-to-end sustainability advisor, integrating strategic planning with digital execution.

We do not just help clients define goals; we operationalise them. This includes leveraging digital platforms such as Resource Advisor to manage complex data and introducing innovative financial models like Energy as a Service (EaaS). These approaches help overcome traditional capital expenditure constraints and accelerate the deployment of critical decarbonisation projects, bridging the gap between strategy and execution.

● **How do you measure the impact of your sustainability initiatives?**

Measurement must be transparent, rigorous, and grounded in auditable data. Our methodology is built around our flagship digital platform, EcoStruxure™ Resource Advisor.

The platform enables organisations to gather, standardise, and analyse energy, carbon, and ESG data, creating a single source of truth. It processes more than one million customer invoices each month, allowing clients to track progress in real time against key metrics such as CO₂ saved and avoided, real-

time resource optimisation across diverse portfolios, and alignment with global frameworks and national sustainability goals.

● **What advice would you give to others striving for sustainability excellence?**

Our advice is simple: move from ambition to action. Be proactive and act swiftly in ways that inspire commitment, not just compliance. For example, UAE Federal Decree-Law No. (11) of 2024 requires all entities to measure, report, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by May 2026, transforming the Net Zero 2050 ambition into a binding operational requirement.

To lead in this journey, organisations should first embrace digital innovation. The complexity of decarbonisation demands robust digital tools and AI-driven insights — because you cannot manage what you cannot measure.

Second, cultivate commitment at every level. Sustainability requires leadership support and collaboration across the entire organisation, from the boardroom to the factory floor.

Finally, be bold and adaptive. Set clear, measurable goals, but remain open to new technologies, financing models, and partnerships that can accelerate progress. Sustainability leadership is built one milestone at a time. ■

Sustainable Building Material Manufacturer of the Year: DesertBoard

REIMAGINING CONSTRUCTION WITH UPCYCLED PALM FRONDS

DesertBoard uses upcycled palm fronds to transform a tradition into low-carbon building material

● What inspired your organisation to focus on sustainability?

At DesertBoard, sustainability is not simply a corporate objective. It is part of our identity. Our inspiration comes from the palm tree, which has been central to life, culture, and survival in the region for generations. Historically, nearly every part of the palm was used for food, shelter, tools, and rituals, yet one element was consistently overlooked: the fronds.

For decades, discarded palm fronds were either burned or sent to landfills, releasing methane and CO₂ into the atmosphere and creating an environmental problem hidden in plain sight. This practice continues today. Palm raw material in the UAE is still largely buried or burned, both of which are environmentally damaging and unsustainable.

What makes our PSB wooden boards particularly meaningful is their deep cultural connection to the UAE. Date palms are woven into the country's identity, providing shade, food, building materials, and social value. This connection was strongly championed by the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founding father of the UAE, who encouraged palm cultivation through incentives in the 1970s and led conservation and cloning programmes in Al Ain.

With millions of date palms across the UAE, the raw material supply is abundant and renewable. The contradiction of having such a valuable natural resource with no meaningful reuse sparked the idea that ultimately became DesertBoard. Inspired by Sheikh Zayed's vision, we set out to rethink what building materials could be, rooted in regional heritage while designed for a global sustainability future.

● Which achievement in your sustainability journey are you most proud of?

The achievement we are most proud of is the development of a proprietary building board made entirely from upcycled palm fronds. After years of research



● Kamal Farah, Director of DesertBoard, with Chief Guest Dr. Habiba Al Marashi, Captain Pradeep Singh of Karma Developers, Vijay Vaghela of Gulf News, and Aparna Bajpai of BeingShe

and development, DesertBoard became the first to successfully convert this agricultural byproduct into a high-performance, construction-grade product suitable for large-scale use.

Historically, palm fronds were discarded or burned, contributing to emissions and environmental degradation. By transforming this overlooked waste stream into a valuable building material, we have shown that sustainability can deliver both environmental and commercial impact. It demonstrates that alternative materials can meet, and in many cases exceed, the performance standards required for modern construction.

Our PSB wooden board is not only sustainable but technically robust and commercially viable at scale. It has passed rigorous strength, shear, and fire-resistance testing and meets the UAE, Saudi Arabian, European, and American standards for structural and interior applications. Its lightweight yet high-strength properties also make it suitable for modular and prefabricated construction. What truly sets PSB apart is its alignment with Scope 3 emissions reduc-

tion, one of the most challenging benchmarks in corporate sustainability. Very few construction materials globally meet this standard, particularly in regions with limited access to sustainable forests. The product's environmental performance has also been formally recognised through Dubai's Al Sa'fat Green Building Evaluation System and local fire-resistance certification, reinforcing our belief that sustainability and performance must go hand in hand.

● What was the biggest challenge you faced, and how did you overcome it?

The greatest challenge was the absence of any existing technology. There was no manufacturing system capable of producing boards from this type of raw material because no one had attempted it before.

To overcome this, we developed our own proprietary manufacturing process, enabling us to engineer a reliable and scalable solution from the ground up. This required extensive testing, refinement, and long-term investment, but it allowed us to maintain

full control over quality and performance.

Equally important was market education. Introducing a new material into a conservative industry requires confidence from architects, developers, and contractors. We focused on transparency, performance data, and independent certification to demonstrate that PSB is not simply a sustainable alternative, but a high-performing construction material in its own right.

● What advice would you give to others striving for sustainability excellence?

Innovation is essential. Real progress comes from challenging established methods and committing to long-term solutions. Sustainability is not achieved through shortcuts. It requires vision, persistence, and the courage to think differently.

My advice is to look beyond incremental improvements and focus on transformative ideas. The next major sustainability breakthroughs will come from those willing to question industry norms and commit to meaningful, lasting change. ■

Best Free Zone for Startups & SMEs: Dubai South Business Hub Free Zone

REDEFINING THE SME JOURNEY THROUGH SPEED AND SCALE

Dubai South Business Hub Free Zone is building a fully digital, SME-first ecosystem

● What core vision drives your free zone's commitment to supporting SMEs, and how does this differentiate you from traditional free zone models?

The core vision of Dubai South Business Hub Free Zone is to create an environment where SMEs can start, operate and scale with ease. Our approach is built on simplicity, accessibility and customer centricity. We designed our ecosystem around the needs of small and medium businesses, ensuring that every step of their journey is clear, fast and supported.

While many free zones focus on sector specific models or large scale operations, our vision places SMEs at the centre. We understand that entrepreneurs value speed, transparency and practical support, so our digital platform allows them to set up from anywhere with minimal paperwork. This is paired with a service model that focuses on long term relationships, not just licence issuance. Our aim is to give every business the right foundation to grow, supported by an ecosystem that removes friction and encourages progress.

● What single achievement best demonstrates your impact on SME growth, scalability or long term sustainability?

One of our most meaningful achievements has been building a fully digital and seamless business setup journey that empowers SMEs from day one. This has not only reduced traditional barriers to entry but also helped businesses launch faster and operate more efficiently.

The ability for entrepreneurs to complete their entire setup process online, choose multiple activities under one licence and access dedicated support has played a major role in their scalability. Many SMEs that started with a single activity have successfully expanded their operations within our free zone because the process remains flexible and simple at every stage. This achievement reflects our commitment to creating a supportive and future ready platform for continuous growth.



● Hassna Fadel, COO, Dubai South Business Hub Free Zone, receives the Best Free Zone for Startups & SMEs award from Captain Pradeep Singh, Founder and Chairman, Karma Developers, in the presence of Saska Macnab, Client Experience Manager, Christy El Khoury, Project Coordinator, Dr Habiba Al Marashi, Co-Founder and Chairperson, Emirates Environmental Group, Aparna Bajpai, Founder, BeingShe, and Vijay Vaghela, CEO, Gulf News

● What was the most significant opportunity in enhancing the SME journey, and how did you address it through policy, pricing or process innovation?

An important opportunity was to further simplify the business setup journey by giving SMEs complete clarity and confidence before they begin. We focused on designing an experience that is transparent, intuitive and fast, allowing entrepreneurs to make informed decisions from the outset.

Our digital platform brings this to life through tools such as a Cost Calculator that provides clear upfront estimates and a Name Check feature that allows instant validation of company names. Free consultations are also available, enabling customers to connect with our specialists and choose the right setup with ease.

To support businesses at different stages, we introduced flexible financial options including an easy payment plan and pay as you grow model. These options allow SMEs to start with a manageable investment and scale naturally as their business grows. Alongside this, our team remains available 24/7, ensuring continuous guidance and smooth experience so SMEs can

focus on building their business with confidence.

● How do you measure success in enabling SMEs beyond licence issuance, including indicators such as business continuity, expansion and ecosystem contribution?

For us, success goes far beyond issuing a license. We measure our impact through real signs of business progress, such as growth in licensed activities, workspace upgrades and how actively SMEs engage with our ecosystem.

Business continuity is also important. We observe how companies develop after their first year, and when SMEs continue to hire, trade and scale, it shows that they are growing in a supportive environment.

Our Beyond Hub value added services strengthen this support. Through one platform, SMEs can access essential services including banking, insurance, marketing, logistics and workspace providers. These services are available to both local and global entrepreneurs, allowing them to manage their journey from anywhere in the world. This saves time, reduces challenges and helps them focus on running and expanding their business. By

connecting simple processes with a strong service network, we aim to support SMEs that contribute to Dubai's wider economy.

● What are the key success factors for free zone success?

Free zone success is built on creating a simple, clear and supportive environment for businesses. When customers understand the process, costs and requirements from the start, they can focus on building and growing their business with confidence.

A strong digital platform plays an important role by allowing entrepreneurs to set up and manage their business from anywhere in the world, while maintaining speed, flexibility and transparency. This is most effective when combined with flexible policies and pricing that support businesses at different stages of growth. Equally important is continuous customer support. Being accessible, responsive and solutions focused helps build trust and long term relationships. Finally, a connected ecosystem that brings essential business services together in one place enables smoother operations and sustainable growth, ensuring businesses feel supported throughout their journey. ■

Green Construction Leadership Award: FujSeng Construction LLC

ALIGNING WITH UAE'S 2050 NET ZERO VISION

FujSeng is driving sustainable, low-carbon construction practices

● What has inspired our organisation to focus on sustainability?

FujSeng's focus on sustainability is inspired by the visionary leadership of the UAE, whose strong commitment to environmental stewardship and long-term national resilience sets a clear direction for businesses. The leadership's proactive initiatives and enthusiasm to protect the planet for future generations motivate us to align our operations with the UAE Net Zero 2050 goals. As a construction company employing approximately 2,500 professionals across civil and MEP works, aluminium façade, steel, and facilities management, we recognise our responsibility and capacity to reduce carbon emissions. By adopting efficient construction practices, optimising resource use, and integrating sustainable technologies, we can create measurable impact. We are proud to contribute toward achieving the UAE's 2050 objectives and to play a meaningful role in building a sustainable future for generations to come.

● Which achievement in your sustainability journey are you most proud of?

The sustainability achievement we are most proud of is the successful optimisation of HVAC performance in one of our key projects. Despite high energy consumption, the installed systems failed to maintain required comfort conditions and resulted in excessive relative humidity, causing mold formation and damage to valuable assets such as paintings and leather furniture.

Our team conducted a detailed technical assessment, identified the root causes related to system design and control strategies, and implemented targeted corrective measures. As a result, indoor comfort and humidity levels were fully restored in line with international standards. More importantly, the optimised solution reduced overall power consumption by approximately 40 per cent. This achievement reflects our commitment to



● Anjum Beg Navan, Managing Director of FujSeng Construction LLC with Chief Guest Dr. Habiba Al Marashi, Captain Pradeep Singh of Karma Developers, Vijay Vaghela of Gulf News, and Aparna Bajpai of BeingShe

data-driven analysis, operational efficiency, asset protection, and delivering sustainable, high-performance built environments.

● What was the biggest challenge you faced and how did you overcome it?

The biggest challenge we faced was managing multiple constraints simultaneously, including intense pressure from client representatives, timely availability of critical materials, uninterrupted site access, and approval of our commercial proposal.

We overcame these challenges through a systematic, structured approach based on robust project management and engineering controls. This included conducting detailed technical assessments, developing a phased execution plan, and performing risk and constraint analysis to prioritise critical activities. We implemented proactive stakeholder coordination, value engineering to optimise cost and scope, and a clearly defined method statement aligned with site conditions. Additionally, procurement scheduling, alternative material evaluations, and controlled access planning ensured continuity

of work. This integrated approach enabled effective decision-making, minimised disruptions, and ensured successful project delivery within agreed timelines and performance requirements.

● How do you measure the impact of your sustainability initiatives?

We measure the impact of our sustainability initiatives through a structured, data-driven performance framework. Key performance indicators are defined for energy efficiency, carbon reduction, water use, waste diversion, and indoor environmental quality. Baseline data is established and compared with post-implementation performance using energy meters, BMS data, and utility records. In civil construction, we track material optimisation, use of low-carbon concrete, and reduction of construction waste. For aluminium and façade works, we measure thermal performance, recycled content, and façade airtightness to reduce cooling loads. Performance audits, benchmarking, and lifecycle cost analysis validate results, ensure continuous improvement, and confirm align-

ment with the UAE Net Zero 2050 sustainability objectives.

● What advice would you give to others striving for sustainability excellence?

Organisations striving for sustainability excellence should begin with a clear strategy aligned with national and international sustainability goals. Establish measurable targets supported by data-driven KPIs and integrate sustainability into design, procurement, and execution phases. Early-stage technical analysis, value engineering, and lifecycle assessments are essential to optimise energy, materials, and operational performance.

Engage stakeholders across all levels, from leadership to site teams, through training and accountability frameworks. Adopt innovative technologies, efficient construction methods, and sustainable materials to reduce environmental impact without compromising quality. Continuous monitoring, audits, and performance benchmarking should be used to drive improvement. Most importantly, view sustainability as a long-term business enabler that enhances resilience, efficiency, and value for future generations. ■

Sustainable Production and Export Excellence Award: Highland Agro Foods Pvt Ltd

BUILDING A FUTURE IN HARMONY WITH NATURE

Highland Agro Food is driving responsible aquaculture and resilient growth

● What inspired your organisation to focus on sustainability?

Highland Agro Food's sustainability focus stems from the inherent nature of the seafood industry, which depends directly on environmental health, responsible aquaculture, and long-term resource availability. From the beginning, we recognised that our growth would be meaningful only if it aligned with ecological balance, ethical sourcing, and efficient resource utilisation. Operating in a sector that works closely with farming communities, we also saw an opportunity to positively influence farming practices and supply-chain standards by partnering exclusively with certified farms. Furthermore, as an export-oriented company, we understood that future competitiveness would depend on meeting the evolving sustainability expectations of global markets. Rather than treating sustainability as a compliance requirement, we adopted it as a core business principle to strengthen our resilience, quality standards, and long-term value creation.

● Which achievement in your sustainability journey are you most proud of?

One of our most meaningful achievements is the transition toward renewable and circular practices within our processing operations. The integration of solar energy and the commissioning of our biogas plant have significantly reduced our reliance on conventional power sources while enabling responsible waste management. These initiatives have helped us lower emissions, repurpose organic waste, and operate more efficiently without compromising production reliability. We are equally proud of sourcing shrimp only from BAP and ASC-certified farms, which ensures responsible aquaculture, full traceability, and better alignment with global environmental and social standards. Internally, creating opportunities for women, who form nearly 70 per cent of our workforce has strengthened our belief that sustainability extends beyond



● Anil Nandan, Group Executive Director of H.A.F Overseas Trading LLC, A Highland Group Entity with Chief Guest Dr. Habiba Al Marashi, Captain Pradeep Singh of Karma Developers, Vijay Vaghela of Gulf News, and Aparna Bajpai of BeingShe

the environment to people and communities. These achievements demonstrate steady, practical progress rather than isolated initiatives, reinforcing sustainability as a daily discipline in our business.

● What was the biggest challenge you faced and how did you overcome it?

Our biggest challenge was balancing rapid operational scaling with the need to integrate sustainability systems from the ground up. Implementing renewable energy, establishing certified sourcing frameworks, and adopting responsible waste-management practices required significant planning, investment, and workforce alignment. Another challenge was ensuring that our supply-chain partners met the same expectations we set for ourselves. To address this, we focused on capacity building, regular audits, and close collaboration with farm operators and vendors. Internally, we invested in training, standardised workflows, and technology upgrades so that sustainability measures became embedded in our daily

operations rather than treated as separate projects. Over time, this allowed us to maintain production efficiency while steadily improving our environmental performance and compliance readiness.

● How do you measure the impact of your sustainability initiatives?

We evaluate impact through a combination of operational metrics, certification frameworks, and external audit requirements. For environmental performance, we track reductions in energy consumption, the share of renewable power usage, biogas generation, water utilisation, and waste-management efficiency. Traceability and ethical sourcing are measured through compliance with BAP, ASC, BRC, FSSC 22000, and other international standards that require continuous monitoring and annual audits. Workforce-related impact such as women's participation, safety outcomes, and training hours is also closely measured to ensure that people remain a central focus of our sustainability journey. These metrics help us as-

sess progress, identify gaps, and direct future investments toward areas where measurable improvements can be achieved.

● What advice would you give to others striving for sustainability excellence?

Sustainability excellence is best achieved through consistency rather than large one-time initiatives. Companies should begin by focusing on areas they can directly influence such as energy efficiency, responsible sourcing, waste reduction, and workforce development. Adopting recognised international standards helps create structure, discipline, and accountability. Equally important is ensuring that sustainability is integrated into daily operations rather than treated as a separate department or activity. Collaboration with suppliers, employees, and communities strengthens long-term outcomes, as sustainability depends on collective participation. Finally, transparent measurement and gradual improvement create credibility and make the journey both practical and achievable. ■

**Gulf News Editor's Choice Award
Sustainable Developer of the Year - Karma Developers**

SUSTAINABILITY EMBEDDED IN EVERY DESIGN DECISION

Karma Developers on responsible design, affordability and future-ready communities

● What inspired your organisation to focus on sustainability?

Sustainability at Karma Developers did not begin as a market response — it began as a leadership conviction. From the outset, our founders believed that real estate carries a long-term responsibility: the buildings we create shape how people live, consume resources, and interact with their environment for decades. In a region growing as rapidly as the UAE, this responsibility becomes even more pronounced.

Our inspiration comes from a simple principle: if development is inevitable, it must be responsible. Sustainability was therefore embedded into our design philosophy early on — not as a feature to be added later, but as a foundation guiding planning, architecture, and execution. This ethos aligns with the UAE's broader vision for future-ready, resilient, and people-centric cities.

● Which achievement in your sustainability journey are you most proud of?

Rather than pointing to a single building or certification, we are most proud of having institutionalised sustainability across our development process. Every Karma project today follows LEED-aligned planning, integrating climate-responsive design, efficient building envelopes, smart-living technologies, and resource-conscious material choices.

This consistency is our greatest achievement. Whether it is a mid-market apartment or a larger master-planned community, sustainability is not optional — it is standard. Our developments are designed to reduce long-term energy and water consumption, lower operating costs for residents, and remain relevant as environmental expectations evolve.

● What was the biggest challenge you faced and how did you overcome it?

The most persistent challenge has been balancing sustainability with affordability. In emerging markets, there is a misconception that sustainable design inevitably

increases cost. We chose to confront this assumption directly. By focusing on design efficiency, smart planning, and lifecycle value, we demonstrated that sustainability can reduce costs over time rather than inflate them.

Strategic material selection, optimised layouts, and energy-efficient systems allow us to deliver environmentally responsible homes without pricing out end users. Sustainability, when approached intelligently, becomes an enabler — not a constraint.

● How do you measure the impact of your sustainability initiatives?

At Karma Developers, impact is measured across three dimensions: environmental perfor-

mance, operational efficiency, and resident well-being. We assess energy and water efficiency through building systems, track reductions in maintenance and lifecycle costs, and evaluate how design choices influence everyday living.

Beyond technical metrics, resident experience is a key indicator. Lower utility expenses, improved thermal comfort, access to green spaces, and healthier community environments are tangible outcomes that reflect the success of our sustainability approach.

True impact is felt not just in numbers, but in how people live within our developments.

● What advice would you give to others striving for sustainability excellence?

Start early, think long-term, and design with intent. Sustainability cannot be retrofitted successfully — it must be embedded from the first sketch.

Developers should move beyond compliance and view sustainability as a strategic advantage that builds trust, resilience, and long-term value.

Equally important is collaboration. Industry progress accelerates when knowledge is shared and standards are elevated collectively. In the UAE, the opportunity to build future-ready cities is real and immediate.

Those who embrace sustainability not as an obligation, but as a responsibility, will define the next generation of urban development. ■



● Dr Habiba Al Marashi, Co-Founder and Chairperson, Emirates Environmental Group, presents the Gulf News Editor's Choice Award as the Sustainable Developer of the Year to SN Saxena, Founder and Managing Director, Karma Developers, in the presence of Captain Pradeep Singh, Founder and Chairman, Karma Developers, Navneet Mandhani, Founder and CEO, Karma Developers, Aparna Bajpai, Founder, BeingShe, and Vijay Vaghela, CEO, Gulf News

Best Upcoming Sustainable Consultancy: Audrey Macaluso Fages

EMERALD ADVISORY TARGETS SME DECARBONISATION

Firm aims to reduce carbon footprints, manage climate risk, and support small businesses

Emerald Advisory's mission is to address a systemic risk to the UAE green transition, by carbon foot-printing and decarbonising Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs) at scale.

SMEs in the UAE are a foundational engine of productivity – they are agile, resourceful, hard-working, and sustaining so many communities at home and beyond UAE borders. But they are also exposed to rapidly evolving global markets, demanding greener products and solutions.

Current solutions do not work for them, so they risk losing relevance, which eventually will lead to growing inequalities and communities left behind. This is touching too many lives and a creative, powerful source of economic growth. Coming from a modest hardworking upbringing, and with my capacity and experience, I can relate and feel a responsibility to support their transition. They deserve to be part of the success story. My mission is to awaken all SMEs in the UAE to 2 fundamental truths about sustainability.

My proudest achievement is the integration of climate risk and sustainability into renewable energy assets development and operations. Success meant that we were able to create alignment and sustained performance between investment case, project design, and asset operations.

Our assets were exposed to climate risk and business interruption losses, which we reduced drastically through adapting the design specifications to build more resilient for upcoming assets, implement drastic risk mitigations and disaster preparedness measures to minimise losses and accelerate recovery, and adapted our risk transfer strategies. Cross-departments collaboration across the assets life-cycle proved essential to enable a significant enhancement to the development, construction, and operational pipeline valuation. Everybody won then, and for the long run.

I had to face so many challenges



in my professional career. It would not be a true representation of who I am to describe just one – I choose every new project because it's a challenge. That is because I love to learn and grow, and also because my strength lies into solving complex problems, which I think I can say that in all humility after so many years. If I had to mention the most difficult generally, I would say looking inwards hard enough when you hit a wall and accept the failures for the invaluable learnings they offer, so you can grow to the next level.

Firstly, one can only demonstrate success with appropriate, baselined indicators. That being said, a sustainability initiative needs to be intimately tight to your business strategy. Otherwise you are missing the point of adapting your business to sustainable models, and rather than identifying where value can be created, you are just wasting time, money and efforts without the ability to really nail how, and to which extends, it supports your business.

“

SMEs in the UAE are a foundational engine of productivity – they are agile, resourceful, hard-working, and sustaining so many communities at home and beyond UAE borders. But they are also exposed to rapidly evolving global markets, demanding greener products and solutions

I reckon a few important things can be done for one to strive for sustainability excellence.

First, broaden your horizons across all fields of sustainability to understand the systemic aspects and be able to design initiatives as systems that percolate through, rather than landing on an isolated topic.

Second, ensure alignment with the business strategy and identify opportunities for sustainable products, solutions, or investments.

Thirdly, always keep yourself abreast of technology – from traditional SaaS solutions to AI-enabled, forward-looking tools. Sustainability, like many other practices, is enabled by technology, so don't miss the train that has already left the station.

Share, discuss, debate, advocate, inform, train. Information is key and, unfortunately, still cruelly missing.

- The writer Audrey Macaluso Faso is the Founder of Emerald Advisory.

Sustainable Landscaping & Agriculture Pioneer: Zeoplant

DELIVERING PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO WATER SCARCITY

Zeoplant's soil-enhancement technology delivers effective, long-term irrigation-water reductions

What inspired your organisation to focus on sustainability?

Our commitment to sustainability began more than twenty years ago, when the UAE announced unprecedented plans for large-scale urban, tourism and green-infrastructure developments. As early as 2002, it was clear that achieving these ambitions in a desert environment — defined by sandy soils, extreme temperatures and limited freshwater resources — would require innovative, long-lasting water-saving solutions. When we discovered our natural mineral soil-enhancement technology, scientifically refined to retain water in the root zone, we immediately understood its potential. It offered a durable, all-natural solution capable of reducing irrigation requirements while supporting healthier, more resilient landscapes. Sustainability became our purpose not because it was fashionable, but because the region's future depended on delivering practical, measurable solutions to water scarcity.

Which achievement in your sustainability journey are you most proud of?

We are most proud of being formally recognised by major UAE government institutions—particularly in Abu Dhabi — as the only soil-enhancement technology verified to deliver effective, long-term irrigation-water reductions across public landscapes. Our work spans high-profile locations such as Dubai Harbour and strategic government assets including the new Abu Dhabi International Airport. Across these and many other sites, we have achieved sustained water-reduction results ranging from 45 per cent to 55 per cent. These long-term savings have an exceptionally positive environmental impact while also delivering substantial financial benefits across the entire water-production cycle — from desalination and pumping to power consumption and final distribution. This is why we always emphasise: every litre counts, every day. Equally important is our expanding success in retrofitting



● Ralf Stahl, Managing Partner, Zeoplant with Captain Pradeep Singh of Karma Developers, Chief Guest Dr. Habiba Al Marashi, Vijay Vaghela of Gulf News, and Aparna Bajpai of BeingShe

established developments, where organisations such as JA Resorts are proactively implementing large-scale water-reduction strategies. Their commitment demonstrates how mature landscapes can meaningfully contribute to the UAE's sustainability vision while achieving immediate, measurable operational savings.

What was the biggest challenge you faced, and how did you overcome it?

In the early years, one of our greatest challenges was market perception. Many clients — developers, consultants and government entities — questioned why they should invest in a water-saving technology when irrigation water was often supplied at low or no cost.

We overcame this through education, long-term data transparency and field-proven results. Instead of selling a concept, we demonstrated actual outcomes: significant reductions in irrigation volumes, decreased pump electricity consumption, improved soil water-holding capacity, and healthier, more resilient plant growth. As

water tariffs evolved and sustainability became a national priority, adoption increased rapidly. Today, our technology is viewed not as an optional enhancement, but as an essential component of long-term water security and responsible asset management.

How do you measure the impact of your sustainability initiatives?

Impact measurement is at the core of our operations. Following installation, our team collaborates with client representatives to adjust irrigation schedules — typically reducing programmed irrigation by 50 per cent immediately, with ongoing optimisation throughout the year. We track and document:

- Monthly water consumption (m³)
- Irrigation runtime reductions
- Electricity savings at pump stations
- Seasonal and annual irrigation efficiency gains
- Overall plant health and root development
- Greater fertilizer efficiency through reduced nutrient loss
- Improved pesticide performance

due to stable soil moisture

- Reduced salt accumulation in the root zone
- Lower risk of groundwater contamination due to decreased leaching

This comprehensive monitoring approach captures both environmental and agronomic benefits.

What advice would you give to others striving for sustainability excellence?

Sustainability requires persistence, transparency and a commitment to long-term outcomes. If you know your solution delivers genuine value, stay committed — even when the market is slow to adapt. Educate stakeholders, document your results, and consistently demonstrate real-world impact. The UAE is leading global sustainability efforts, and those who contribute measurable environmental value will always find support. Above all, sustainability excellence is achieved through proven performance — not promises. Stay focused on data, resilience and long-term impact, because every litre truly counts, every day. ■

Energy Efficiency Leader of the Year: No Sweat Solar Solutions

BUILDING SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH EFFICIENCY AND INNOVATION

No Sweat Solar Solutions turned cost savings and smart systems into measurable impact

● Can you share the story behind your organisation's sustainability journey?

Seven years ago, our organisation was founded on a simple belief: sustainability should not be a luxury or a trend, but a practical, everyday solution. From the beginning, we understood that true sustainability is not about doing one thing well, but about building systems that save costs, reduce environmental impact and improve efficiency at the same time. Today, NSM Solutions operates through three verticals — No Sweat Maintenance, No Sweat Solar Solutions and NSM Robotics — each addressing sustainability from a different angle. Sustainability is about giving back to society, nature and future generations by doing more with less energy, water and waste.

● What motivated you to prioritise sustainable practices, and how has your approach evolved?

My motivation came from seeing how inefficiency quietly drains both resources and money. Early on, I realised most sustainability challenges are not technical, but operational. Poor maintenance, energy waste and short-term decisions increase costs while accelerating environmental impact. We began by focusing on measurable efficiency, reducing energy consumption, extending asset life and lowering operating costs through smarter maintenance. As our impact grew, we expanded into solar solutions, helping clients offset grid energy and cut emissions. Today, robotics and automation further reduce water use, errors and resource intensity, delivering scalable sustainability.

● What impact have your initiatives had on the environment, community and business?

Our initiatives have delivered measurable results. Environmental-



● Sweta Bhatt, Managing Director, No Sweat Solar Solutions with Aparna Bajpai of BeingShe, Captain Pradeep Singh of Karma Developers, Vijay Vaghela of Gulf News, and Dr. Habiba Al Marashi

ly, optimised maintenance has helped clients reduce energy use by 15 to 30 per cent and extend asset life by up to 25 per cent, while solar solutions offset between 60 and 100 per cent of grid electricity, depending on roof space. For communities, our solar-powered, self-charging robots clean roads and public spaces,

while we upskill technicians in renewable energy and automation, creating safer, long-term roles. From a business perspective, sustainability has cut operating costs by more than 20 per cent, improved efficiency and strengthened client retention, proving it drives both impact and resilience. ■

Sustainable Retail Champion in Jewellery: Fyne Jewellery

REDEFINING LUXURY THROUGH CONSCIOUS DESIGN

UAE's first lab-grown diamond brand puts sustainability at the heart of fine jewellery



● Yara Nehme, Head of Sales, Fyne Jewellery with Aparna Bajpai of BeingShe, Captain Pradeep Singh of Karma Developers, Dr. Habiba Al Marashi and Vijay Vaghela of Gulf News

● Can you share the story behind your organisation's sustainability journey?

Fyne was founded in 2019 with a clear intention: to redefine fine jewellery in the region through conscious luxury. As the first lab-grown diamond jewellery brand in

the UAE, our sustainability journey began by challenging long-standing norms in an industry known for its environmental impact, lack of transparency and resource-heavy practices. From day one, we chose to do things differently, prioritising transparent sourcing, lab-grown

diamonds and 18k solid gold crafted to last. Rather than contributing to extractive systems that no longer serve today's consumer or the planet, Fyne was built around the idea that modern luxury can be both beautiful and responsible.

● What motivated you to prioritise sustainable practices, and how has your approach evolved over time?

My motivation came from a simple conviction: luxury should not cost the earth. As a third-generation diamondaire, I witnessed the industry's evolution first-hand and recognised the need for a modern alternative aligned with the values of women today. Over time, Fyne's commitment has deepened beyond materials alone. We adopted carbon-neutral shipping, partnered with responsible manufacturers and launched community-focused initiatives such as our "Fyne for Gaza" campaign

with Dubai Cares. What began as a product-led mission has evolved into a holistic sustainability ethos embedded across our operations, storytelling and customer experience.

● What impact have your initiatives had on the environment, community and your business?

Environmentally, our choices reduce our footprint. Lab-grown diamonds minimise land disruption, water usage and carbon emissions compared to mined alternatives. We carbon-offset all shipments, plant a tree with every order and refine our packaging to reduce waste while preserving a premium feel. For our community, partnerships and giving initiatives allow customers to participate in meaningful impact. From a business perspective, sustainability has strengthened trust, loyalty and brand relevance, proving that conscious luxury resonates with today's consumer. ■

Healthcare Sustainability Leader of the Year: Burjeel Hospital Abu Dhabi

HEALING WITH RESPONSIBILITY

Burjeel Hospital on embedding environmental care into healthcare excellence

● Can you share the story behind your organisation's sustainability journey?

Burjeel Hospital's journey has been guided by a simple belief: true healing cares for both people and the planet that sustains them. From the outset, the hospital was envisioned as a future-ready institution aligned with Abu Dhabi's ambition to build one of the most advanced and responsible healthcare systems in the region. As the organisation grew in scale and complexity, so did its responsibility toward the environment, the community, and future generations. Sustainability did not begin as a standalone initiative. It evolved naturally from a focus on efficiency, quality, and accountability in healthcare delivery. Over time, this translated into structured efforts across energy, water, waste management, and digital transformation. Today, it is embedded into operations, decision-making, and performance measurement, aligned with frameworks such as the De-

partment of Health's Emerald Sustainability Index and the UAE's Net Zero 2050 vision.

● What motivated you to prioritise these practices, and how has your approach evolved?

The motivation came from recognising the scale at which hospitals operate. Healthcare facilities run continuously, consume significant resources, and generate complex waste streams. Responsible resource management was identified as a way to enhance patient care, improve operational efficiency, and strengthen long-term resilience.

Initial efforts focused on practical interventions such as energy efficiency and waste segregation. Over time, these evolved into a comprehensive ESG framework supported by leadership oversight, measurable targets, and regular reporting. Sustainability is now integrated into governance, procurement, digital systems, and workforce training, with leadership driving progress.



● Anand Ramanathan, Director – Quality, Burjeel Hospital Abu Dhabi with Dr. Habiba Al Marashi, Captain Pradeep Singh of Karma Developers, Vijay Vaghela of Gulf News, and Aparna Bajpai of BeingShe

● What tangible impact have these initiatives delivered?

Burjeel Hospital has reduced resource consumption through LED lighting, energy-efficient chillers, sensor-based water systems, and hybrid vehicles. A shift from plastic to paper bags eliminated more than 1.4 million plastic bags, while improved waste management reduced nearly 49,000 kilograms of waste in one year. Community initiatives, includ-

ing mangrove planting and extensive staff training, have strengthened engagement and environmental awareness. From a business perspective, digital transformation through advanced EMR and HR platforms has reduced paper use, improved accuracy, and enhanced patient safety — demonstrating that responsible practices and healthcare excellence can progress together. ■

Eco-Efficient Manufacturer of the Year: Emirates Global Aluminium

SETTING THE BENCHMARK

EGA is embedding climate leadership and long-term value into heavy industry



● The Emirates Global Aluminium (EGA) team with Chief Guest Dr. Habiba Al Marashi, Captain Pradeep Singh of Karma Developers, Vijay Vaghela of Gulf News, and Aparna Bajpai of BeingShe

At Emirates Global Aluminium (EGA), sustainability is not an afterthought to the business — it is integral to how aluminium is made for a modern, sustainable world. Operating in one of the

most energy-intensive industries, EGA has long recognised that its responsibility extends beyond production volumes to the lasting impact it creates for people, communities, and the planet. This

belief has shaped a sustainability journey grounded in innovation, accountability, and long-term value creation.

EGA's commitment to sustainability has evolved alongside global and national ambitions. Inspired by the UAE Net Zero 2050 strategic initiative and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the company has moved beyond traditional environmental management to embed sustainability into strategy, governance, and daily operations.

From aligning with the Aluminium Stewardship Initiative's globally recognised standards to committing to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, EGA's approach reflects a clear understanding that industrial leadership today must also be climate leadership.

The impact of this journey is tangible. EGA has expanded the production of low-carbon aluminium, including Celestial solar aluminium, while investing heavily in recy-

cling to support a circular economy where aluminium can be continually reused.

Landmark initiatives such as the development of manufactured soil from bauxite residue demonstrate how long-standing industrial challenges can be transformed into opportunities for innovation. Across its operations, EGA continues to protect biodiversity, manage resources responsibly, and strengthen environmental resilience.

Beyond the environment, sustainability at EGA is about people and shared prosperity. The company invests in local communities through education, healthcare, and skills development, while creating meaningful employment and contributing significantly to economic growth in the countries where it operates. For EGA, sustainability is also a business advantage — strengthening customer partnerships, enabling access to new markets, and future-proofing the company for a rapidly changing world. ■

Green Essence Award in Fragrance and Cosmetics: Dubai Avenue by Shaikh Mohammed Saeed Group

EMBEDDING PURPOSE-DRIVEN GROWTH INTO LUXURY

CEO Muhammad Ali Saeed Shaikh on values-driven growth and long-term impact

● **Can you share the story behind your organisation's sustainability journey?**

Our sustainability journey is rooted in a clear belief that luxury must be responsible. As a heritage fragrance group, we understood early on that long-term success depends on respecting nature, people and resources.

With Dubai Avenue, sustainability was integrated from the very beginning, not as a trend but as a value-driven commitment aligned with craftsmanship and innovation. We believe responsible luxury is essential to building brands that endure.

● **What motivated you to prioritise sustainable practices, and how has your approach evolved over time?**

Our motivation came from a strong sense of environmental responsibility and the need to cre-

ate lasting value for future generations. Over time, our efforts evolved from isolated initiatives into a structured and integrated approach across sourcing, packaging, production and operations.

We began focusing on responsibly sourced ingredients, reducing material usage, introducing recyclable packaging and improving energy efficiency. Today, sustainability is embedded in how we design, produce and grow our brands, guiding both strategy and execution.

● **What tangible impact have your sustainability initiatives had on the environment, community and your business?**

Our initiatives have helped reduce waste, optimise resources and minimise our environmental impact across operations. We actively support ethical sourcing and responsible partnerships that ben-



● Muhammad Ali Saeed Shaikh, CEO of Shaikh Mohammed Saeed Group and his son, with chief guest Dr. Habiba Al Marashi, Captain Pradeep Singh of Karma Developers, Vijay Vaghela of Gulf News, and Aparna Bajpai of BeingShe

efit communities throughout our value chain. From a business perspective, sustainability has strengthened consumer trust, improved operational efficiency and enhanced our credibility in global markets. Recognition from Gulf

News further reinforces our commitment to responsible growth. As I often say: For us, sustainability is not a destination; it is a responsibility that shapes how we create, how we grow and how we contribute to the world. ■

Sustainable Retail Brand of the Year: Xpressions Style

MEASURABLE CHANGES TO REDUCE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The firm is focused on aligning business growth with the UAE's sustainability vision



● Rakesh Ramakrishnan, Marketing Director, Xpressions Style receiving the award from Mark Thompson, Editor-in-Chief of Gulf News; Dr. Mohamed Al Breiki, Executive Director of Sustainable Development at Masdar City; and Nagarajan Suranthiran, CEO of Beetamax

● **Can you share the story behind your organisation's sustainability journey?**

Our sustainability journey began with the understanding that retail businesses must operate responsibly, especially in a forward-thinking market like the UAE. As we grew, we focused on making practical, measurable changes across our operations to reduce environmental impact and align with the nation's sustainability vision.

● **What motivated you to prioritise sustainable practices, and how has your approach evolved over time?**

The UAE government's strong focus on sustainability and the long-term vision of its leadership have been key inspirations. We are continuously working to reduce plastic usage, minimise paper printing, adopt digital bill-

ing, optimise energy use and leverage technology to improve efficiency and reduce waste across our stores and operations.

● **What tangible impact have your sustainability initiatives had on the environment, community and your business?**

These initiatives have helped lower plastic and paper consumption, improve resource efficiency and create greater awareness among employees and customers. From a business perspective, sustainability has supported cost optimisation, operational efficiency and long-term, responsible growth. We do not claim to have achieved everything yet; this is just the beginning, and we are committed to continuously improving and becoming a more responsible organisation. ■

Metal Recycling Excellence Award: RKG International FZC

RESPONSIBLE METAL RECYCLING

Dubai-based RKG International FZC embeds ESG principles across global operations

● Can you share the story behind your organisation's sustainability journey?

Founded in 1979, RKG International FZC has grown from a modest one-man operation into a premier global recycling company headquartered in Dubai. As a family-owned enterprise, RKG has long been guided by strong Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) principles, placing sustainability at the core of its operations. Today, the company operates the UAE's only fully integrated recycling facility, employing more than 250 people across three state-of-the-art yards equipped with advanced shredders, shearing machines and a dedicated fleet of trucks. RKG processes more than 50,000 metric tonnes of ferrous and non-ferrous metals each month in the UAE and 25,000 metric tonnes globally, handling around one million metric tonnes annually across 33 countries.

● What motivated you to prioritise sustainable practices?

tise sustainable practices?

RKG's motivation stems from a foundational belief in environmental responsibility and the importance of resource recovery. From the outset, the company recognised that responsible metal recycling is essential to conserving natural resources, reducing environmental harm and supporting a circular economy. As global awareness of climate change and resource scarcity grew, RKG expanded its operations into a comprehensive ESG-driven framework focused on efficiency, ethical practices and strong worker welfare. Continuous investment in advanced technology, energy-efficient machinery and improved recovery systems has ensured sustainability is embedded in every business decision.

● What tangible impact have your sustainability initiatives had on the environment, community and your business?

RKG's initiatives deliver measurable impact across all three areas. Environmentally, its processes divert



● Dr Rajesh Kumar Agarwal, Executive Director RKG International FZC and his wife with Dr. Mohamed Al Breiki, Executive Director of Sustainable Development at Masdar City; Mark Thompson of Gulf News and Nagarajan Suranthiran, CEO of Beetamax

large volumes of metal from landfills, reduce emissions, conserve raw materials and lower energy use in manufacturing. For the community, a strong focus on health, safety and continuous training enhances work-

force wellbeing and performance. From a business perspective, robust ESG practices, ISO 9001:2015 compliance and consistently high-quality output strengthen global trust, reinforce the company's reputation and support long-term growth. ■

Excellence in Sustainability Advisory: Dr Tamil Selvan Ramadoss

CHAMPIONING SUSTAINABILITY ACROSS INDUSTRIES

Dr. Tamil Selvan Ramadoss on ESG-driven growth, eco-innovation, and circular economy



● Dr. Tamil Selvan Ramadoss, Group Finance and Business Transformation Officer and International Triple-Helix Model Expert, along with the Gulf News senior leadership team: Santu Dev, Director – Commercial; Tina Bhaktha, Director – Events and Special Features; and David George, Director – Creative Content & Design

● Can you share your sustainability journey?

Sustainability is a core part of our entity's vision and mission, where corporate objectives are aligned not only with profits but also with ESG-

related goals. Across diversified sectors, we focus on initiatives that deliver measurable environmental and social impact, from developing eco-friendly concretes to biodegradable personal care materials. Digital

transformation, including IoT and digital twins, supports sustainability practices and enables real-time ESG reporting, ensuring that responsible practices are embedded into operational decisions.

● What motivated you to prioritise sustainable practices?

Over my 25-year career with international organisations — including Ford Motors, Citi, Deutsche Bank, Dubai Maritime City Authority, and large private enterprises — the spirit of sustainability has guided my work. My early experience at Dubai Maritime City Authority in 2009, working on ballast water treatment and integrated waste management, helped mitigate marine invasive species and protect ecosystems. In the private sector, I have led initiatives in biodegradable products, precision water management in agriculture, and green materials in construction, energy, and personal

care, embedding environmental responsibility into business processes.

● What tangible impact have your sustainability initiatives had on the environment, community, and business?

The initiatives I have led have delivered measurable environmental benefits, including protection of marine species, water conservation through AI-enabled precision farming, and reduced soil impact through eco-friendly concretes and plasma-material blocks. They also support sustainable community development and responsible business growth by placing people and the planet at the forefront. Beyond operations, I advise entrepreneurs and boards on circular and regenerative economic principles, helping organisations generate responsible profits while advancing sustainability. Through this approach, businesses are able to innovate confidently. ■

Celebrating *Leaders of Change*

Industry leaders, innovators and changemakers gathered at The Sustainable City, Dubai, for the inaugural Sustainability Excellence Awards 2025. Hosted by Gulf News in collaboration with BeingShe, the evening celebrated organisations and individuals shaping a more responsible future for the UAE. From inspiring speeches to standout moments on stage, the awards marked a milestone in recognising leadership, innovation and collective commitment to long-term impact.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE NIGHT



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