

**Submission:** The 2014 UFI Sustainable Development Award competition

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We are a green conscious convention centre.



## **Best Measurement Tool for Effective Results: Global Reporting Initiative's (GRI) 3.1 Framework used at the Cape Town International Convention Centre.**

### **1. The Cape Town International Convention Centre's road to sustainability reporting**

#### **1.1. Introduction**

The CTICC was established with the aim of delivering a world-class international convention centre in Cape Town that would provide meeting, convention and exhibition services and facilities for local and international organisations and their guests. The CTICC head office and its events and conferencing premises are based in Cape Town, South Africa. It services clients and guests from South Africa, Africa and around the world.

Through innovation and creating unique customer experiences, the CTICC aspires to change the world of conferences and events. To this end, innovation and experiences are the metaphorical bricks and mortar from which the business is built. By ensuring that these form the cornerstones of the CTICC, it positions itself to achieve ever-higher levels of performance and success and realise its vision to become the best long-haul international convention centre by 2020. This however cannot be achieved without a strategic and purposeful commitment to sustainability on all levels.

#### **1.2. The scope of GRI in the realm of sustainability reporting**

Many companies have committed to improving their triple-bottom line sustainability commitments, but reporting on this is still a relatively new topic. This being said, the CTICC believes that the Global Reporting Initiative's framework is the most effective tool to ensure sustainable results.

The Global Reporting Initiative is an international body based in Amsterdam, who create and maintain frameworks for sustainability reporting using multi-stakeholder dialogues. The resultant framework is based on material indicators which need to be disclosed and reported year-on-year. Adherence to GRI standards therefore ensures that there are tangible measurements and benchmarks from which companies can improve their sustainability commitments continually. Transparency is a key element to GRI reporting, which fosters disclosing of information and best practises around sustainability resulting in industry benchmarks and trends.

The value of GRI standards come from enabling companies to create benchmarks which align with their value system. This results in more tangible commitments and responsibility for company values.

The transparency and materiality which are fostered through the framework lend themselves to Integrated Reporting, which is the practise of including corporate social responsibility and environmental impacts with a business's annual financial reports. It reflects the idea of "integrated thinking": taking into account that a business needs to grapple with both environmental and social sustainability in relation to economic sustainability, and realise the value of this integration for its stakeholders.

Integrated Reporting was named a growing trend in the corporate sustainability space in both the GreenBiz "State of Green Business 2013" report and the Ernst and Young "Six growing trends in corporate sustainability 2013". The process and framework of GRI has not only enabled the CTICC to produce their first Integrated Annual Report, but it has similarly provided a framework for expressing their integrated thinking and commitment to triple-bottom-line sustainability.



### 1.3. How the CTICC took the decision to report using GRI Standard

The CTICC has always been committed to triple bottom line sustainability. Following this commitment, the centre took the decision to start to report on their sustainability commitments in 2010. Various tools were researched in order to facilitate this. After thorough research, it was decided that the Global Reporting Initiative was the most appropriate tool to use, as it was internationally recognised and trusted form of sustainability reporting, despite not being used by other meeting and convention venues.

The advantage of using GRI was the ease at which the framework enabled benchmarking progress and monitoring in various areas. To this end, the GRI formed a complementary tool to facilitate the CTICC's commitments around sustainability in a practical way.

### 1.4. Action plan to GRI reporting

Once the decision to use the GRI 3.1 framework for reporting, the already existent Nurture Our World (NOW) team decided to draw up an action plan. In a meeting which was held in 2010, the GRI framework of indicators was looked at and specific targets were set, along with action plans for carrying them out. Summarised, this formed the *NOW action plan*, which came into effect at the beginning of 2011.

The plan not only set the goals of sustainability on paper, but also stipulated which departmental head would be responsible for which indicator(s). Monthly report back sessions were held in which departments fed information back to the NOW team on the various challenges/successes with meeting their targets. Once the departments started to become more adept at capturing data and meeting their targets, these monthly reviews were changed to quarterly reviews.

For the past three years the CTICC has been measuring and publicly reporting its sustainability activities using the GRI framework. In 2013, this culminated in the CTICC's first Integrated Report, using the Global Reporting Initiative's (GRI) G3.1 reporting standard, for which it scored a B+ ranking.

In order to meet the deliverables of the NOW action plan, there were various spin-off effects, such as upping waste and water management and monitoring, organic waste separation, and energy efficiency (detailed outline below).

## 2. GRI Reporting Standard – a great measurement tool for effective results

### 2.1. Description of GRI 3.1 Reporting Guidelines

As mentioned above, the Global Reporting Initiative provides a standard for sustainability reporting in order to create reports which are comparable, trustworthy and address the needs of all stakeholders. As such, its guidelines give a framework for how to report and what to report on. Developed by over 1000 different stakeholders from industry, civil society, academic and financial sectors, the guidelines are universally accepted and well-recognised.

The GRI framework is based on *principles* and *standard disclosures*. Principles guide the defining of the report's content (materiality, completeness, stakeholder inclusiveness and sustainability context) and quality (accuracy, timeliness, comparability, reliability, clarity and balance). Organisations seeking to use the framework similarly need set boundaries for the report – and justify the setting of these boundaries.



Standard disclosures form the framework for sustainability report content. Standard disclosures consist of Profile disclosures (disclosures that set the context for understanding

organisational performance), disclosures on the management approach and performance indicators (which are sustainability-related).

Strategy and profile of the organisation, Management approaches, and performance indicators are all standard disclosures on the GRI system. Over and above these, performance indicators exist for various categories including environmental performance, economic and social performance, and labour practices. In the disclosures of management approach (DMA), the GRI framework requires disclosure on Economic, environmental, human resource and product responsibility management.

Different levels of application are possible when following through with a GRI report, from C to A+. On the G3 standard, an A+ level includes reporting on all indicators (or explaining why these are not disclosed), as well as disclosure on management approach and various profile disclosures.

The way in which the GRI framework is structured enables companies to set goals and measure progress over time, as they would report on the same indicators each year (or grow their amount of indicators, if upping their application level). This creates a framework and incentive for managing sustainability within the entire organisation, including energy efficiency, waste management, corporate social investment and other aspects of sustainability. Similarly, stakeholders are provided with a clearer idea of an organisation's impact over time. Overall, the framework provides consistency within industries as well as globally for sustainability reporting and enables comparability within organisations over time or with competitors within a given year.

## **2.2. Adaptations of organisational and monitoring aspects at the CTICC in order to adhere to GRI**

In order to effectively apply the framework of GRI 3.1, the CTICC implemented various organisational and monitoring aspects. Because of stringent accounting measures, most of the economic organisational and monitoring aspects were already existent according to industry standards.

In terms of Environmental management, the CTICC places priority on progressively implementing best practice environmental management in terms of efficiency, waste and water minimisation, and these priorities became systemised with the adoption of the GRI framework.

For example, the Building Management System (BMS) assists in the measuring and monitoring of electricity consumption- these figures were recorded daily, with monthly and quarterly reports being drawn off the system for reference. The centre's operational and maintenance team were also sent to energy saving workshops and green building training, the result of which was a review of energy sub-metering within the building.

Water management was a significant need area for monitoring, and the implication of GRI reporting resulted in water sub-meters being installed which help to monitor water usage.

In order to gain even more accurate statistics around waste management, a waste bar-coding system was introduced in order to record accurately the amounts of disposable, recyclable and organic waste on a daily basis.

Carbon footprint management was also brought to the forefront, with the fuel consumption, flights and electricity being monitored with the objective of reducing each year.



In terms of Human Resource management, new training and policies were benchmarked as important for sustainability reporting.

Corporate Social Responsibility similarly received better systemisation with each department being responsible for reporting on their activities per quarter. Better recording of CSR initiatives resulted in a more comprehensive overview of the CTICC's social sustainability strategy and ways to benchmark its progress in this area.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Objectives of using GRI from 2012 – present

The CTICC continually strives to take into account triple bottom line sustainability in all of its activities. This involves placing equal importance on environmental and social considerations as well as economic sustainability and growth. As such, sustainability is a core essence of all the work that the CTICC carries out. It is therefore imperative, in order to maintain this high standard, to benchmark and report on this progress.

GRI Framework 3.1 was chosen in order to facilitate the CTICC's path from "acting sustainably" to actually "being sustainable". Over the past three years, GRI 3.1 assisted in reaching and continuing this goal in a highly effective way. The CTICC is continually reviewing its GRI commitments and hopes to steadily improve on its GRI commitments.

#### 3.2. Results of using GRI from 2012 – present

In 2013, the CTICC produced its first Integrated Annual Report, using the Global Reporting Initiative's (GRI) G3.1 reporting standard, for which it scored a B+ ranking. The centre has become the first convention centre in the world to produce an integrated annual report which is aligned to the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) framework. The report has been externally assured against comprehensive stringent criteria that meet the highest standards for international organisational reporting.

In addition to becoming the first convention centre to report on its sustainability measures in the GRI format, various operational spin-offs have occurred due to the stringency of the reporting framework. Since the introduction of GRI reporting at the CTICC, many measures towards effective measuring of energy, waste, water-usage, and procurement have been introduced, which have resulted in continual improvements and better data around the centre's sustainability choices. The framework of GRI has given the CTICC a way of benchmarking improvements around sustainability issues.

Since starting, CTICC has improved its application standard from a B to a B+ level. This indicates that CTICC has become better in its reporting on sustainability, which is reflected in the creation of an integrated annual report. In addition to this, however, the CTICC has seen significant improvements in its water and energy usage, as well as waste management as a result of championing the cause of sustainability and recording indicators relevant to GRI. Below illustrates a few areas which have been affected by the framework:

Energy reductions have been the first significant improvement. The installation of a new building management system has proven to be highly effective in terms of energy management. This, coupled with energy retrofits, installation of a new boiler and cleaning of air-conditioning coils has resulted in steady electricity consumption savings. Over the past five years energy consumption annual savings amounted to an average of 12.84%. Sub-metering has also been implemented as a valuable education and monitoring tool at the CTICC. Sub-metering can be used to monitor and manage energy supply to the building.



The CTICC has similarly achieved great results of its water management over the past years. Through retrofitting, initiatives in the kitchen and bathrooms, as well as the installation of an on-site water bottling plant at the CTICC, the centre has achieved a 32% reduction in water usage over the past 3 years. Water meters which will help to further monitor and manage water have been installed, which feed into the Building Management System.

Due to GRI reporting, the CTICC has improved the recording of its corporate social responsibility activities, as well as made a plan to review its CSR strategy. The organisation supports four community partners in Cape Town and surrounding areas, as well as employee community connections. In addition, the centre gives organisational support as needed (for example, donating left over exhibition materials to organisations in need of materials, which in turn reduces waste to landfill).

Procurement has also been an area which has received attention due to the GRI reporting. The CTICC has retained its commitment to eco-procurement and there is an ongoing plan to improve and increase eco-procurement measures at the CTICC.

### **3.3. Quality Assurance measures implemented**

In 2013, the Integrated Annual Report obtained limited assurance over the self-declaration application level in terms of GRI reporting guideline 3.1 as a B+. Deloitte & Touche carried out limited assurance in accordance with the International Standards on Assurance Engagements 3000: Assurance Engagements Other than Audits or Reviews of Historical Financial information (ISAE 3000) and confirmed CTICCs GRI self-declaration of an application level B+ as per the GRI Guidelines.

### **3.4. Publication of the results**

The CTICC has a sustainability section on its website, which publishes its sustainability commitment and policy. Since 2012 this has included the sustainability report, as well as the Integrated Annual Report in 2013.

The Integrated Annual Report is a public document and is available from the CTICC website in PDF or interactive format. In order to view the annual report, click here: <http://www.cticc.co.za/iar/>

## **4. Conclusion**

Whilst many organisations commit to sustainability, the amount of those being accountable for those commitments is fewer. This could be due to the fact that whilst stringent economic reporting guidelines and measures have been in place for a long time, the realm of sustainability reporting is relatively new territory. The CTICC, being serious about its commitment to triple-bottom-line sustainability and incorporating the values of innovation and excellence in all of its activities, decided to adopt the GRI standard for sustainability reporting in order to be accountable for its commitment.

The adoption of GRI has not only allowed the CTICC's stakeholders to receive accurate, transparent and relevant sustainability data through their reports, it has proven to be an extremely effective tool for measuring and benchmarking results around sustainability. As the first convention centre to produce an Integrated Annual Report according to these guidelines, the hope is that in time the entire industry will see the value of transparent and accurate sustainability reporting. This will allow better measuring, recording and benchmarking of sustainability commitments, making the industry itself more sustainable, and accountable for being so.

