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What is Alternative Bank Switzerland and what does it do?

Alternative Bank Switzerland (ABS) has consistently focused on social and ecological sustainability since its foundation in 1990 and is a pioneer of value-based banking in Switzerland. It aims to further the common good and to protect people and nature through its business activities. Its focus is not on maximising profits, but on ethical principles. These apply to all the business areas of the bank and comprise exclusion criteria for areas in which ABS does not wish to invest. The bank has also defined meaningful projects, which are business areas that ABS wants to strengthen on account of their positive impact on society and the environment. ABS is also committed to transparency, for example by publishing information on all the loans granted.

ABS is a founding member of the Global Alliance for Banking on Values (GABV) and, represented by Chairman of the Executive Board Martin Rohner, is a Board member of the network. To mark its 30th anniversary year, in 2020 ABS will host the Annual Meeting of the GABV.

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What is the «Global Alliance for Banking on Values» and what does it do?

The Global Alliance for Banking on Values (GABV) is an independent international network of financial institutions committed to bringing about positive change in the financial sector. Their common goal is to establish a transparent financial economy that supports economic, social and ecological sustainability, thereby defending the interests of people and the planet. The GABV was created in 2009 shortly after the financial crisis.

The GABV promotes networking and exchange between its 60 member banks and 16 partner organisations. The network brings together individual stakeholders to further value-based banking as part of a global movement. It supports cooperation between the member banks, provides know-how and implements shared projects.

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What does «Banking on Values» mean and what does it achieve?

«Banking on Values» (value-based banking) places sustainability at the heart of the business model by seeking a balance between the well-being of people, the environment and economic success thanks to the «triple-bottom-line approach». Value-based banks are generally committed to a clearly defined set of values. Based on these values, they choose which projects and companies to finance and which to exclude because they are harmful to people and the environment.

Banks that are committed to value-based banking position themselves as being at the service of the real economy, and are anchored in local networks. They attach great

importance to providing their customers with long-term assistance and to gaining a holistic understanding of their business activities and the associated risks.

An equally long-term horizon is considered in terms of the bank's resilience. The goal is to be self-supporting in order to be able to withstand external crises.

As value-based banking is a strong advocate of transparency in the financial sector, it also enables customers to take effective control and make informed choices.

A deeper insight into the potential of value-based banking is provided by the [thesis paper «10 reasons to care about banking on values»](#), written by Marcos Eguiguren, Executive Director of the Global Alliance for Banking on Values (GABV), on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the GABV.

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What are ABS and WWF Switzerland aiming to achieve with the conference? What is it about?

The joint conference with WWF Switzerland is aimed in particular at Swiss banks. Together we are looking for specific solutions to mobilise the financial sector in favour of climate protection and to make the Swiss financial centre more environmentally friendly. The first part of the conference, the Future Lab, is designed for developing appropriate ideas. In the second part, these ideas will be examined in more depth and analysed for the first time.

Thanks to this conference, we would like to encourage banks to participate in the [Partnership for Carbon Accounting Financials \(PCAF\)](#). This climate protection initiative, launched by the [Global Alliance for Banking on Values \(GABV\)](#), pursues the mission of ensuring that the global financial sector is genuinely aligned with the Paris Climate Convention. Since its creation, numerous banks outside the circle of the GABV have also joined the initiative, including the major international bank ABN Amro.

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Why do ABS and WWF act as joint organizers of the conference?

The aim of the summit is to contribute to a climate-friendly Swiss financial centre. This is a common concern of ABS and WWF Switzerland. They have therefore joined forces for this event.

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Who are the guests at the ABS-WWF Conference?

The keynote speeches will be given by **Margaret Kuhlow**, Practice Leader Finance, WWF International, **Otto Scharmer**, Senior Lecturer MIT Management Sloan School / Co-Founder of Presencing Institute and **Sandrine Dixson-Declève**, Co-President Club of Rome.

Discussions on the podium will take place between **Jörg Gasser**, CEO SwissBanking; **Margaret Kuhlou**, Practice Leader Finance, WWF International; **Oliviero Reusser**, representative of young Swiss climate activists, **Tamara Vrooman**, CEO Vancity Credit Union; **Fritz Zurbrügg**, Vice Chairman of the Governing Board of the Swiss National Bank

The event will be hosted by journalist and presenter **Karin Frei**.

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What are the benefits of the ABS-WWF Conference? What very specific results are you hoping to achieve? How will they be checked?

Our hope is that the ABS-WWF Conference will mobilise local players in the financial sector in favour of climate protection. The aim is to develop specific ideas for measures to be taken. In addition, networking should facilitate future cooperation and dialogue.

We also want to encourage banks to participate in the [Partnership for Carbon Accounting Financials \(PCAF\)](#). This climate protection initiative, launched by the [Global Alliance for Banking on Values](#), pursues the mission of ensuring that the global financial sector is genuinely aligned with the Paris Climate Convention. Joining forces in this initiative will then also offer points of reference for ensuring continued dialogue and commitment in the future.

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Why is sustainable banking such a hot topic?

More and more people understand that the climate crisis has long since become reality, and are calling for fast, effective and comprehensive climate protection. Protests by young climate activists have inspired and awakened people all over the world. Whether or not the transition to a climate-friendly society is successful depends to a great extent on the financial sector. At the same time, it is a major economic sector in Switzerland and gives this small country the role of a global player with a huge impact.

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What are the challenges facing sustainable banking?

Even sustainable banking takes place within the current financial system and within the same regulatory framework. It is true that the global movement for value-based banking and the associated demand are experiencing significant growth. Nevertheless, a critical mass to bring about systemic change has not yet been reached. It is crucial for large and systemically important banks to follow suit.

Another challenge is that the investment universe of value-based banks is relatively small, as often only a few companies meet the ethical standards of these banks. At ABS, for example, the investment universe consists of around 200 companies. Risk management in the investment area is much more demanding in such a small investment universe.

From a global perspective, there is currently more money available than can be invested sustainably. Consequently, it is not only the banks that need to take action, but stakeholders in general, who must assume their responsibility in order to give a genuine boost to value-based banking and business. This includes politicians, the regulator, the economy, civil society, science and of course each and every individual.

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Is it really necessary to fly in keynote speakers and panellists for short appearances?

In order for the conference to have the desired effect outside the ranks of banks which are already sustainable, it is necessary for reputed experts to provide input and participate in discussions. This is the only way in which we can generate relevant ideas and interest in participation and reporting. Moreover, the impact of keynote speakers and panellists is not limited to their appearances. Informal channels for exchanging information and networking, and potential interaction with the media, are just as important.

Apart from this, the keynote speakers and panellists face the [same dilemma as all other participants](#).

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What is the purpose of the Annual Meeting of the Global Alliance for Banking on Values?

The Annual Meeting of the [Global Alliance for Banking on Values](#) (GABV) represents an opportunity for sharing in-depth information and transferring knowledge and experience between the network's member banks. These meetings are a platform for launching or driving forward joint projects and working on solutions to urgent global problems. Annual Meetings allow the international movement for value-based banking to grow and gain visibility.

The Annual Meetings also have an impact on the local players in the financial sector and the general public in the respective host country, thereby offering a real opportunity to exert influence. To reinforce this effect, a [joint conference with WWF Switzerland](#) will be held in 2020.

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Who attends the Annual Meeting?

The [Annual Meeting](#) is attended by the CEOs, directors and other senior executives of the 60 member banks and 16 partner organisations of the [Global Alliance for Banking on Values](#) (GABV).

During the 2020 Annual Meeting in Bern, there will also be a [joint conference with WWF Switzerland](#). In addition to the 150 or so participants from the ranks of the GABV, 250

representatives of Swiss banks, politics, authorities, NGOs, science and young climate activists will also join in.

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What topics are discussed at the Annual Meeting?

Each Annual Meeting of the [Global Alliance for Banking on Values \(GABV\)](#) is dedicated to a specific topic. In 2020, the meeting, like the [ABS-WWF Conference](#), will focus on the climate crisis. The theme for the whole week is «Every Degree Matters – Mobilising Finance for People and Planet». The central question is what a climate-friendly financial sector might look like.

The Annual Meeting comprises the Board meeting, a CEO forum and a Board of Directors forum as well as the GABV General Meeting. Other working groups will meet in parallel, for example in the area of Human Development or Supporting Partners. The goal for 2020 is to adopt the new strategy: «Strengthen, Expand, Lead». Ideas will be developed on how to increase cooperation between members. Another topic will be the importance of new technologies for value-based banking. In addition, Alternative Bank Switzerland, as host of the 2020 Annual Meeting, is inviting its international guests to take part in [«learning journeys»](#) to get to know some of the bank's corporate clients and experience how value-based banking works in Switzerland.

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What is the significance of the Annual Meeting and the conference with the WWF for...

...ABS?

For ABS, the conference with the WWF in particular offers opportunities for extensive networking in the local financial sector in order to mobilise its stakeholders in favour of sustainable banking in Switzerland. ABS itself would like to gain new perspectives by exchanging ideas with a wide range of participants from the worlds of science, politics, NGOs and young climate activists. In addition, ABS would like to learn more about the challenges facing other banks with regard to a sustainable business model, and to work with them to find solutions. The overall objective is that the event should contribute to overcoming the climate emergency.

ABS is one of the pioneers of value-based banking in Switzerland. As such, even 30 years after its foundation, it would like to position itself in this role and, above all, encourage others to do the same by showing, together with the other GABV member banks, that globally-compatible, economically-successful banking is possible in a wide variety of local contexts.

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...the international financial world?

The 60 member banks and 16 strategic partners of the [Global Alliance for Banking on Values \(GABV\)](#) come from over 40 countries on six continents. The [GABV Annual Meeting](#) and the conference with the WWF exert an influence on numerous local contexts and on the respective representatives of the financial world beyond the GABV.

The global movement for [value-based banking](#) gains strength and visibility from its Annual Meetings. The GABV started out in 2009 with 11 founding members, including Alternative Bank Switzerland. In the ten years of its existence, the number of members has multiplied by five, and the assets under management have grown from 12 billion in the foundation year to around 200 billion today.

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...the Swiss financial centre?

For the Swiss financial centre, this is an opportunity to engage in dialogue with successful sustainable banks. The aim is to develop specific ideas for jointly shaping the Swiss financial centre in a climate-friendly manner, and hence for establishing sustainable business models. The representatives of the key players around the Swiss banking centre should feel inspired and motivated to put their ideas into practice.

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Why are bankers flown in from all over the world? Doesn't that conflict with climate protection?

As member banks of the Global Alliance for Banking on Values (GABV), we face a constant dilemma: we are convinced that personal meetings like the one in Bern in 2020 are needed so that we can work together to find solutions to urgent global problems such as the climate crisis, by motivating and inspiring one another. The international movement for value-based banking can grow and become stronger thanks to meetings of this kind.

At the same time, they cause high CO₂ emissions due to air travel. In the case of the conference in Bern, the aim is to make the event climate neutral.

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What are you doing to minimise the ecological footprint of the event?

Arrival: all participants are asked in the invitation to travel by train if possible (e.g. within Europe). Any flights will be offset by participants or by Alternative Bank Switzerland (ABS).

Mobility at the event location: all events are held centrally at a single location. All hotels, restaurants and other meeting points are within walking distance of the event venue. The excursions («learning journeys») to visit ABS corporate clients take place in Bern or within a one-hour journey by public transport.

Catering: lunch and evening meals are generally vegetarian. Meat is only served on request. Wherever possible, products are sourced regionally and are organic. No more than 5% of the products used come from overseas.

Waste avoidance: water is served in refillable glass bottles. To reduce paper consumption, most information is provided digitally.

Compensation of CO₂ emissions: the CO₂ emissions produced by the event will be offset by the Myclimate Foundation.

The Annual Meeting and the ABS-WWF Conference have been certified by [Myclimate](#) as a climate-neutral event.

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Why does the event take place at Hotel Bellevue Palace?

The [Hotel Bellevue Palace](#) is the only hotel in the centre of Bern that meets the logistical requirements of the Annual Meeting and the ABS-WWF Conference and is not privately owned, e.g. by major banks. It has belonged to the Swiss state since a donation by the National Bank in 1994. Consequently, any money paid to the hotel will not go to private companies, but will ultimately benefit the public sector.

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What does it cost to host the Annual Meeting and ABS-WWF Conference? How is this financed?

The Annual Meeting of the Global Alliance for Banking on Values (GABV) and the joint conference with the WWF together cost around CHF 377,000. Alternative Bank Switzerland, as the host bank, will contribute CHF 200,000 of this amount. The GABV member banks will pay around CHF 102,000. CHF 66,000 will be covered by support contributions from sponsors. The sponsors are the [Federal Office for the Environment](#), the [Freie Gemeinschaftsbank](#), [Grant Thornton](#), [Etica SGR](#) and [WWF Switzerland](#). ABS and the GABV each share 50% of the risk for the uncovered residual amount.

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