

Group Chief Executive

I am pleased to report on a good year for Unilever – one in which we continued to grow competitively, consistently and profitably. With a clear growth strategy and an organisational structure to support it, there is growing evidence of improved momentum in our business.

In 2007 underlying sales grew by 5.5% – the third consecutive year of accelerating sales growth. At the same time, we achieved an underlying improvement in our operating margin, despite sharply rising commodity costs. Our growth was broad-based, across all our major regions and categories.

In Europe we achieved growth of nearly 3% – up from 1% the year before. The benefits of all the structural changes we have made in this region over the past three years are now coming through both in terms of growth and underlying margin.

Russia was the star performer – with growth in the high teens – but all our major European businesses grew in 2007.

In the Americas full year growth was 4%. Brazil and Mexico showed an improving performance during the year, while the US grew solidly at 3%.

In Asia Africa we recorded 11% growth. The performance reflects not just the vibrancy of these markets but also the high priority which we place on building our business in this part of the world. Once again, India and China were important contributors to our success.

The picture was equally strong across our categories driven by some great innovations.

Home care had a strong year, fuelled by an excellent performance from our laundry business where the *Dirt is Good* brands strengthened still further on the back of innovations like *Persil Small & Mighty*. We also had great success in household care with innovative new variants of brands like *Cif* and *Domestos*.

Our Foods category also did very well. Our largest brand *Knorr* came close to €4 billion in sales. *Lipton* tea prospered from a series of good innovations and so too did ice cream. Unilever Foodsolutions, our global food service business, also turned in another good performance, confirming the important opportunity that out-of-home consumption offers us.

An endorsement of our strategy

These results are testimony to the fact that our strategy of focusing resources on brands, categories and countries with the highest growth and profit potential is working.

One key area is developing and emerging markets. Over the next few years consumer spending in these markets will overtake developed countries in terms of purchasing power parity. Unilever has an unparalleled footprint in the developing world, as well as an extensive knowledge of local consumers, and a proven ability to deliver health, hygiene and nutrition products which meet the needs of populations which are growing in size, wealth and aspiration.

Personal care – another strategic priority – saw continued strong growth, at nearly 7%. It continues to be our fastest-growing business, with strong global brands like *Dove*, *Pond's*, *Lux* and *Rexona*.

Our Vitality mission – to help people feel good, look good and get more out of life – remains central to our strategy, inspiring products such as a very low-fat variant of *Hellmann's* mayonnaise; *Amaze* snacks, with nutrients to help support the mental development of school-aged children; *Lipton Linea* slimming teas; and the *Dove pro-age* range with benefits for mature women.

Of course, our brands must be constantly refreshed to retain their edge. In 2007, across each of our major categories, growth was driven by a combination of innovation – new products and new mixes – and renovation – the strengthening of existing brands through new variants, new packaging or new marketing.

In 2007 we focused on bigger innovations and rolled them out faster around the world. *Clear*, a shampoo with superior anti-dandruff active delivery technology, was launched simultaneously in several countries, including three of the biggest hair care markets in the world – China, Russia and Brazil. We also achieved a better transfer of mixes across continents and cultures, in some cases creating new markets. For example, we successfully launched our male deodorant brand *Axe* in Japan. After just six months it is the leader in its market.

A leaner, fitter business

During the year we made significant progress in reshaping the organisation to create a leaner, more flexible business structure.

Our One Unilever operating model is being implemented in every major country. We are now taking this a step further with the creation of new multi-country organisations – clusters of neighbouring countries with one central management structure, leveraging regional scale through shared services for functions such as HR, IT and Finance. These changes are all part of our accelerated programme of restructuring announced last summer.

Group Chief Executive continued

We further shaped our portfolio through disposals and acquisitions, including the announced sale of Boursin and Lawry's – brands that offered limited growth potential for Unilever. We also announced agreements to acquire the *Buavita* vitality drinks brand in Indonesia and – only recently – Inmarko, the leading ice cream business in Russia. These transactions accelerate our strategy of building leadership positions in fast-growing markets.

This is the right strategy for Unilever but – like any strategy – it is only as good as the execution. That is why we also continue to build our strengths in critical areas such as consumer marketing and customer development. In both cases our progress was recognised externally. In marketing, we received a clutch of awards at the Cannes International Advertising Festival, with *Dove* and *Axe* achieving three 'Grand Prix' trophies. In customer development, Unilever was named International Supplier of the Year by Tesco for the second year running.

We are also raising our game in research and development (R&D), recognising the crucial role technology can play in the quality of our innovations. Underlining the importance of R&D, we appointed our first Chief Technology Officer, Neal Matheson, in 2007. Neal leads the development of world class capabilities in science and technology and champions excellence in all our innovation activity.

Of course, some changes required difficult decisions. In Europe, the restructuring is leading to significant job losses. But painful as these decisions have been, they are the right ones for the long-term health of the business.

Keeping sustainability at the heart of Unilever

We believe Unilever can only continue to thrive if we conduct our business in a sustainable manner.

Integrating social, economic and environmental considerations therefore sits at the heart of many of our brand strategies. A great demonstration of this was the decision to source all of our tea from sustainable, ethical sources. To support this significant change, we asked the Rainforest Alliance to start auditing our tea suppliers with immediate effect. The aim is to have all *Lipton Yellow Label* and *PG Tips* tea bags sold in Western Europe certified by 2010 and all *Lipton* tea bags sold globally by 2015.

We also set the ambitious target of a further 25% reduction in the business's CO₂ emissions from energy sources used in production by 2012. And we continued to develop our partnerships with key retail customers, sharing our sustainability expertise to support them in achieving their goals. Wal-Mart responded by naming us 2007 Supplier of the Year for Sustainable Engagement.

The year ahead

Notwithstanding some economic uncertainty and the rising costs of many materials, we are confident that Unilever can grow consistently, profitably and competitively in 2008.

The changes we have made in recent years leave Unilever more resilient and better placed than ever before to meet challenges and respond to opportunities. We have a more flexible, dynamic structure, an increasingly powerful brand portfolio, an unparalleled footprint in the developing world and – in 2008 – we have another exciting programme of innovations and new product launches. Furthermore, we operate in sectors less susceptible than others to the effects of an economic downturn: people will always need to eat, wash and clean their homes.

For all these reasons we remain optimistic about the year ahead and confident of making further progress towards our longer-term financial objectives.

On a personal note I would like to thank two members of the Unilever Executive who will leave us in 2008 - Kees van der Graaf and Ralph Kugler. They have been valued colleagues over many years and I thank them for their contribution. Indeed, I would thank the whole of my Executive team, including two great additions during the year, Mike Polk and Jim Lawrence, the latter joining from outside as our new Chief Financial Officer. Thanks also to my colleagues on the Boards, under our new Chairman, Michael Treschow, and especially to every one of our employees around the world for their invaluable contribution to the business's progress in 2007.

Working together, as One Unilever, I am confident that we can look forward to delivering continued success in 2008.

Patrick Cescau

Group Chief Executive