



UNITED NATIONS
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION



Main findings of the regional preparatory meetings for the global consultations on circular economy

13-20 November 2020

Regional preparatory meetings for the global consultations on circular economy

Main findings



I. Introduction

1. Following a request of the General Conference¹, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) is convening consultations on circular economy for experts from Member States with a view to facilitating exchanges on best practices, and emerging innovations and the promotion and adoption of circular economy principles and practices by industries of Member States.
2. A series of the regional preparatory meetings was held between 13 to 20 November 2020 to allow Member State representatives and other relevant stakeholders, in particular from developing countries, to present their initial views on the topic and identify issues that will shape the debate at the global consultations.
3. This document contains main findings from the regional preparatory meetings, including issues that may further be discussed at the global consultations.

II. Main findings

4. There is a common understanding that a circular economy offers a promising solution to some of the most pressing global challenges. It may facilitate the achievement of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and many Sustainable Development Goals, while advancing the implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.
5. Most of the countries participating in the regional preparatory meetings are either already taking concrete steps towards circularity or considering actions relating to a circular economy. The scale, scope, focus and objectives of circular economy activities vary between countries and regions, depending on national priorities and circumstances, political commitment, availability of financial and other resources, levels of stakeholder awareness and engagement, and support from the international community.

¹ Resolution GC.18/Res.7, paragraph 2 (h).

6. Many countries have initiated or adopted policy, regulatory and legal frameworks incorporating elements of a circular economy. These range from developing national strategies, roadmaps and actions plans on circular economy to mainstreaming circular economy principles into national development plans and environmental policies, and adopting resource efficiency and waste management targets, laws and regulations.

7. While it is commonly recognized that the transition to a circular economy can contribute to meeting the commitments under the Paris Agreement, very few countries mainstreamed circular economy principles into their Nationally Determined Contributions or developed other national strategic and planning documents integrating circularity and climate action.

8. Both private sector firms and public sector organizations are adopting circular economy practices and implementing related projects and programmes, often with the support from international and bilateral partners, focusing mostly on sustainable waste management, biomass, resource efficiency, eco-industrial parks, green procurement, eco-packaging and alternative materials.

9. Some countries see the adoption of circular economy principles and practices as an opportunity to “build back better” in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, since lowering the demand for raw materials and improving the management of supply chains also increase economic resilience and competitiveness.

10. United Nations entities, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and academic institutions facilitate activities relating to the transition to a circular economy in developing countries by offering online learning courses, guidelines and knowledge products; organizing capacity-building and experience sharing workshops; providing platforms and networks for regional and international collaboration; and facilitating access to finance and technology transfer.

11. There is no internationally agreed definition of a circular economy, with many countries using their own interpretations or concepts developed by relevant organizations. This may potentially affect coherent international action, consistent application of guidelines and policies, and synergies between actions of different stakeholders.

12. Some of the barriers to the transition to a circular economy in developing countries include insufficient understanding of potential benefits by key stakeholders; inadequate incentives for the private sector and missing enabling environments for investment; lack of consumer awareness; a gap between respective policies and their implementation on the ground; and insufficient coordination between government agencies dealing with industry, economic, environment, waste and natural resources management issues.

13. Insufficient access to finance remains the main constraint to the transition to a circular economy in developing countries. Notwithstanding the success of numerous ongoing circular economy initiatives, in the absence of dedicated international financial mechanisms and arrangements for technology transfer and capacity-building, support to developing countries in this area is mostly provided through ad hoc projects and activities.



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