



UNITED NATIONS
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION



Annotated provisional agenda and guiding questions for the global consultations on circular economy

10 - 12 May 2021



Global consultations on circular economy 10 - 12 May 2021, virtually

Annotated provisional agenda and guiding questions



Introduction

Participants of the global consultations on circular economy wishing to make an intervention at a thematic session are invited to respond to one or several guiding questions for that session as presented below.

Participants may also refer to the main findings of the regional preparatory meetings, the reports of which, together with the compilation of submissions from Member States, are available at <https://www.unido.org/our-focus-safeguarding-environment/global-consultations-circular-economy>.

Session 1: Circular solutions to achieve Sustainable Development Goals and address the climate crisis

The extraction and processing of natural resources causes half of global greenhouse gas emissions and over 90 per cent of biodiversity loss. By addressing root causes of these planetary crises, a circular economy holds much promise to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement's goal of limiting global temperature rise to as close as possible to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial times.

While some countries pioneered the integration of circularity, sustainability and climate neutrality, the level of mainstreaming circular economy principles into Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement or other national strategic and planning documents relating to the SDGs and climate action remains low.

Session 1 will examine how various solutions offered by a circular economy can help tackle some of the most pressing global challenges, boost climate action and accelerate the progress towards implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Guiding questions:

- What do you see as key benefits your country, company or organization can derive from adopting circular economy principles and practices in terms of achieving the SDGs and meeting national climate change priorities?

- What are successful examples of innovation undertaken by pioneers and champions of circular economy at the grassroots level that could inspire and encourage behavioural change towards sustainability?
- How does your country track progress towards the adoption and implementation of circular economy and assess its impacts, particularly with respect to advancing the achievement of sustainable development and national climate change targets? What tools, methodologies and institutional measures has your country adopted to enable this?
- How can we increase ambition in updated Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement by building on synergies between climate action and circular economy principles?

Session 2: Partnerships and initiatives to mobilize circular economy actors

The transition from a linear to a circular economy requires a concerted effort by stakeholders from all sectors. Industries and private sector companies can contribute to the transition by developing competencies in circular design and manufacturing to implement product longevity, reuse and recycling, and serving as trend-setters of innovative circular economy business models. Policymakers can support the transition by promoting the reuse of materials and higher resource productivity by rethinking incentives and providing the right set of policies and access to finance. Civil society plays an important role in mobilizing broad forces to carry out practical actions and influencing governments and businesses to accelerate implementation.

A range of partnerships and initiatives has been established at the global, regional and national levels to unite stakeholders in a joint pursuit of a circular economy. Such partnerships will play a crucial role in strengthening developing countries' capacities to drive forward the shift to a circular economy while ensuring inclusiveness and a just transition. Mechanisms for regional and international cooperation, including North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, are key to developing long-term programmatic approaches, coordinating strategies, policies and frameworks, as well as maximizing knowledge and experience sharing.

Session 2 will explore options for leveraging support from stakeholders at all levels. It will also highlight effective modalities for encouraging public, public-private and multi-stakeholder partnerships and engaging with women and youth to propel circular economy efforts in an inclusive and sustainable manner.

Guiding questions:

- Are there successful examples of introducing circular economy principles and practices in your country, company or organization, including with support of national, multilateral, bilateral and South-South cooperation initiatives and partnerships?
- How can we enhance coordination and collaboration between existing global and regional alliances, coalitions and partnerships on circular economy to maximize cohesion, impact and results?

Session 3: Policy frameworks to enable the transition to a circular economy

While the opportunities arising from the transition to a circular economy are plentiful and diverse, there is also a need to manage and minimize the associated risks. Uneven access to affordable technologies and limited capacities to make effective use of them, especially in developing countries, can lead to an inequitable distribution of benefits. The good intention to preserve the useful life of existing assets may slow down the introduction of advanced technologies that reduce adverse

environmental impacts and bring social and economic benefits. Climate change mitigation measures, including the shift towards renewable energy, may increase the demand for materials used in batteries, solar panels and other devices. Subsidies may create incentives for the overuse of natural resources, undermine recycling options and make linear production more attractive, for example in the case of fossil fuel subsidies. Appropriate support structures are necessary to ensure a just transition of the workforce away from resource- and emission-intensive sectors, through the creation of decent work and quality jobs compatible with circularity.

It is therefore crucial to put in place policies and regulations that support the emergence of a circular economy and create an enabling environment for the private sector to engage in this transition.

Session 3 will explore good practices in designing, adopting and enforcing policy and regulatory frameworks for a circular economy that leaves no one behind.

Guiding questions:

- What are the policy, legislative and governance gaps at the global, regional and national levels that should be closed to facilitate the transition to a circular economy?
- Are there successful examples of creating an enabling environment for investment, introducing market instruments and incentives for the private sector, rolling-out awareness-raising initiatives for consumers or developing other policy and regulatory measures to enable the transition to a circular economy in your country?
- What are the most pressing issues requiring regional and international policy response?

Session 4: Circular economy principles for cohesive action

A major transformational change, such as the shift from a linear to a circular economy, demands active involvement of various segments of society, diverse stakeholders and economic sectors across all countries. This in turn requires public, private and civil society actors to align on a shared vision, an agreed agenda and a common understanding of goals and tasks at hand. A circular economy, despite its multiple potential advantages, does not enjoy the benefit of a common understanding, with more than a hundred definitions being cited in the literature and used by different countries and organizations.

With the proliferation of circularity-related initiatives, programmes, strategies and normative acts around the world, the lack of a commonly accepted definition may result in competitive disadvantages for some countries, create trade issues and slow down technology transfer and the flow of financial resources for circular economy action in developing countries and economies in transition. It may also affect coherent international action, consistent application of guidelines and policies, and synergies between the actions of different stakeholders.

While a one-size-fits-all definition may not be the best way forward, a set of circular economy principles, which are globally accepted and applicable to circumstances of developing countries, could provide a level playing field for all countries and facilitate cohesive action.

Session 4 will deliberate on ways and means to build a consensus and a common understanding of circular economy principles.

Guiding questions:

- What mechanisms, arrangements, partnerships or institutions could be used to build a consensus on a set of principles for circular economy?
- What advocacy and awareness-raising approaches and means could be used to promote a common understanding of a circular economy?

Session 5: Means of implementation to support the shift to a circular economy in developing countries and economies in transition

Capacity limitations and insufficient access to finance remain the main constraints to the shift to a circular economy in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. 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 and economies in transition in this area is still mostly provided through non-aligned ad hoc projects and activities.

Session 5 will deliberate on barriers to the adoption of circular economy principles in developing countries and economies in transition, approaches to overcome these barriers and support required from the international community.

Guiding questions:

- What different funding sources exist to accelerate and scale clean circular economy initiatives in developing countries and economies in transition?
- How to leverage public finance to mitigate risk and accelerate private investments in circular economy solutions in developing countries and economies in transition?
- What programmes, policies and incentives can enhance preparedness of small and medium-sized enterprises in developing countries and economies in transition to develop and adopt technologies, practices and business models relating to a circular economy?
- What are the biggest barriers and capacity gaps faced by least developed countries and small island developing States vis-à-vis the circular economy transition?
- What support can the international community offer to strengthen readiness and capacities of developing countries and economies in transition to advance the transition to a circular economy in an inclusive and just manner?



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