



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/CL1.CCS/2023/WG.3/INF.1
1 March 2023
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Regional Consultation on Circular Economy Transition in The Arab Region: Opportunities and Challenges.
Beirut, 3 March, 2023

I. Background

According to Circularity Gap Report and The Global Risk Report 2023, extractive and linear economy are reaching alarming threshold and turn the state of natural resources and biodiversity into major global risks. Thus, the shift to circular economy and regenerative models in agriculture, energy and industry has become an imperative for sustainability, reduction of climate risks, depletion of natural resources and biodiversity loss. Despite the progress noticed in the last decade, circular economy (CE) continues to represent nearly 7 % of total material inputs.¹

Therefore, a transition from linear to circular economy is fundamental for the future of humans and the planet, though it comes at a cost; The benefits of such transition outweigh by far the cost of transition. More and more data are conclusive when comparing the benefit of circularity design compared to sourcing alone in the food sector for different commodities as CE has the potential to generate substantial environmental, food output, and farmer profitability benefits versus business-as-usual².

In the Arab region, the transition to CE is even more critical given the accelerating rates of resource depletion, increasing scarcity, loss in biodiversity and ecosystems health and production of unprecedented levels of waste and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Recently, CE practices are steadily gaining ground in several Arab countries with a growing number of flagship projects in different sectors. Yet, the progress in mainstreaming circular economy principles and practices in policies remains limited and far from being a whole-of-government and a whole-of-society agenda.

In order to understand the key drivers required to speed up the transition to CE in the region, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in collaboration with United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), are organizing a stock-taking regional consultation meeting to assess the potential and current status of CE. The aim is to develop a regional roadmap and priorities needed in capacities (individual and institutional), coherent policies and a functioning governance system to put in place. Aside from technologies, the meeting will explore the role of government agencies, private sector and CSOs engagement for a sustainable transition to circularity with the minimum transaction costs. A session will be dedicated to debate on the role of young professionals in promoting and advancing the transition to circularity in small business.

¹ Global Circularity Gap Report 2023: [https://assets.website-files.com/5e185aa4d27bcf348400ed82/63c6986f0a57abe2fb9180d7_CGR%202023%20-%20Report%20\(1\).pdf](https://assets.website-files.com/5e185aa4d27bcf348400ed82/63c6986f0a57abe2fb9180d7_CGR%202023%20-%20Report%20(1).pdf)

² <https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/resources/food-redesign/overview> and https://emf.thirdlight.com/file/24/ycO8Ejgvc.pr_Onvc9Zryd4xjP/The%20big%20food%20redesign%20study.pdf

II. Objectives

The meeting objectives are:

1. To analyze the current status of CE based on selected policy documents and flagship projects in countries in the Arab Region.
2. Share countries' experience in mainstreaming CE practices and priority needs in institutional coordination, regulatory instruments, finance, governance and capacities in selected sectors (waste management, agriculture, industry, energy.) and their implication on biodiversity and ecosystems health.
3. To discuss available opportunities to enhance and support regional cooperation for a successful transition from linear to circular economy in the Arab region.
4. To develop an outline of a regional road map, setting priorities, framework conditions and the delivery mechanism to engage young entrepreneurs as champions to lead the transition to CE.

III. Organizational issues

A. Participants

The expert group meeting will gather experts, representatives of ministries of environment, (agriculture, water, energy, industry, urban development...) academia, and other UN agencies such as UNIDO. Panelists and speakers from the region will share their insights and experiences on Circular Economy in their countries and their future needs for an incremental and sustained transition to CE in countries and the region.

B. Date and venue

The meeting will be held at the United Nations House in Beirut, Lebanon on Friday, 3rd of March 2023. The meeting will commence at 9:30 am and will be concluded by 13:30. Participants are kindly asked to bring their identification badge and to arrive ahead of time, considering the time needed to pass through security check at the main entrance of the United Nation House. Access to the House is provided through Gibran Khalil Gibran Garden pedestrian entrance. Virtual participation will also be possible through the link to be shared later.

C. Language

The meeting will be conducted in Arabic and English. Interpretation will be available for both languages.

D. Correspondence

Queries related to the meeting should be directed to the following:

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Mr. Hammou Laamrani

Economic Affairs Officer

Climate change and Natural Resources Sustainability Cluster

Beirut, Lebanon

Tel: +961 1 978 825

E-mail: hammou.laamrani@un.org

IV. Agenda

9:30- 9:40	<p>Opening Remarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Reem Nejdawi, Chief, Food and Environment Policies Section, Climate Change and Natural Resource Sustainability Cluster (ESCWA) - Mr. Abdelmenam Mohamed, Regional Coordinator, Science (UNEP)
9:40-10:00	Session 1: Current Status, Challenges and Opportunities of the Circular Economy (CE) in the Arab Region
9:40- 9:50	<p>Mr. Hammou Laamrani, Economic affairs Officer, ESCWA</p> <p>Description:</p> <p>This opening presentation intends to frame the discussions on current status of CE, based on a desk review of selected policy documents and examples of flagship projects in countries. The purpose is a preliminary benchmarking of differential progress in mainstreaming CE practices in key development sectors such as waste management, agriculture, industry, energy and their implication on biodiversity and ecosystems health. Issues related to institutional coordination, capacities and financing the transition to CE will be highlighted.</p>
9:50- 10:00	Discussion
10:00- 11:00	Session 2: Countries experiences in moving from linear to Circular Economy <i>(Moderator: Ms. Nisreen Lahham, Expert, Middle Regional Office, Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), Cairo)</i>
10:00 - 10:45	<p>Panel Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Countries representatives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Luma Abbas Al Mahroos, Acting Director of the Department of Control and Environmental Protection, Supreme Council for Environment, Bahrain (<i>Online</i>) - Ms. Samah Saleh, Director General of Urban Development, Head of Sustainable Development Unit, Ministry of Environment, Egypt - Ms. Loubna El Abed, Chief, Service of Non-Hazardous Waste Recovery, Ministry of Energy transition and sustainable development, Morocco (<i>Online</i>) - Mr. Nawaf Bilasi, Advisor to the Chief Executive Officer of the National Center for Waste Management, Saudi Arabia (<i>Online</i>) - Ms. Lobna Khojaly, Responsible for the United Nations Decade for Ecosystem Restoration, General Directorate of Natural Resources Management, Biodiversity Department, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Sudan <p>Description:</p> <p>While building a regional analysis of the challenges facing the transition to CE and the solutions adopted, the session will be a stock-taking dialogue on countries progress, best practices in technical, institutional coordination, financial incentives and regulatory instruments piloted/ scaled up at country level. The outcome of this session will be an input to the discussion in session 3.</p>

	<p>Guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What capacities are available and what capacity gaps to bridge first for further mainstreaming and scaling up CE practices at national and regional level? - To what extent and how the impacts of CE programmes integrate and monitor the biodiversity and sustainability co-benefits? - What country's experience in engaging private sector, NGOs and CSOs in national efforts to mainstream CE in development policies, strategies, and programmes?
10:45 - 11:00	Discussion
11:00 - 11:15	Coffee Break
11:15- 12:15	Session 3: Road map for promoting CE in the Arab region (<i>Moderator: Mr. Tarek Alkhoury, Regional Coordinator, Climate Change, UNEP</i>)
11:15-12:00	<p>Panel Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Nada Sabra (UNIDO) - Mr. Mahmoud Fathallah (League of Arab States) - Ms. Maha Al Zu'bi (International Water Management Institute) - Ms. Imèn Meliane (The Adaptation Fund Board Secretariat) - Mr. Haitham Elyamany (Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED)) <p>Description:</p> <p>The session will build on regional organizations' experience in mapping opportunities to enhance and support countries' efforts to transit from linear to circular economy. The statements will focus on technical, institutional, governance and policy frameworks needed for the transition.</p> <p>Guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the regional priorities needed for a faster and sustained transition to CE? - What are the priority sectors where a faster progress is taking (or could take) place and how to expand to other sectors? How to move from pilots to national policy? - Are there opportunities for cross-regional collaborative bankable projects to foster the transition to CE through mutual learning and knowledge sharing? - How to facilitate private sector and regional and multilateral development finance institution's engagement in the transition to CE?
12:00- 12:15	Discussion
12:15- 13:30	Session 4: Youth, entrepreneurship, and transition to circularity in the Arab region (<i>Moderator: Mr. Nadim Farajalla, Program Director, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut</i>)

12:15- 13:00	<p>Panel discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Elise Sfeir (Berytech) - Ms. Nada Ghanem (Dooda Solutions) - Ms. Zeinab Elmasre (Garbaliser) - Mr. Jihad Jilwan (LaBrocante) <p>Description</p> <p>The session intends to investigate current experience developed by young entrepreneurs, MSMEs and startups to shift from linear to circular economy. The focus will be (though not limited to) on agriculture and agro-food industry. The purpose is to understand the enablers and drawbacks facing youth initiatives investing in green small business and the pathway to address them.</p> <p>Guiding questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How to make CE a business case in the region based on existing experience and practices? 2. What examples of incentives could engage young entrepreneurs as champions in promoting the transition to circularity practices? 3. How to capitalize on, and disseminate the existing best practices across the region? 4. What makes a circular economy project profitable, bankable and viable?
13:00- 13:15	Discussion
13:15- 13:30	<p>Closing remarks and the way forward:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Reem Nejdawi, Chief, Food and Environment Policies Section, Climate Change and Natural Resource Sustainability Cluster (ESCWA) - Mr. Abdelmenam Mohamed, Regional Coordinator, Science (UNEP)