

Momentum of change – perspectives from UN Environment

Ligia Noronha – UN Environment, Helsinki, WCEF2017

That the moment for mainstreaming circularity and changing the operating system for consumption and production is here is evident. There are strong signals and evidence from the science on current and future resource constraints and planetary limits, and growing political and business leadership around the opportunities that circular economies present. There are many success stories and examples based on new technologies and innovations. However these initial successes need to scale up quickly if we are to deliver on the 2030 agenda and the SDGS, so many of which depend on sustainable resource management and reducing current pollution burdens.

My presentation will briefly focus on the following:

- Reiterate **How circularity can contribute to the 2030 Agenda** for sustainable development and enhance the achievement of the SDGS
- Highlight **What UN environment does** in this space
- And begin an exploration on **What more the UN can do** based on what we have heard here

I. **There are 3 key points with regard to the role circularity can play in enhancing the achievement of the SDGS**

1. Circularity in production and consumption can involve multiple **national and local wins**: through the 4 Rs, it can transform the linear model into one of a greater permanence, eliminating waste or converting it into a production factor, saving money, conserving natural resources, reducing emissions and effluents, and creating new jobs and a new competitiveness.
2. It can help deliver on **three overarching global action agendas: decoupling, decarbonizing and detoxifying**. Though this triple contribution it can help achieve many SDGS, but also can, in specific contexts and with the qualified implementing partners, enable a fundamental response to SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. This is by channelling resources to the underserved, reducing pollution induced environmental injustices, and enabling more effective action on climate change creating more resilient livelihoods,

reducing displacement, migration and insecurity and thus contributing to peace and climate justice.

3. **It necessitates or incentivizes new multi stakeholder partnerships going beyond just political leadership.** . Whether these are around innovation, technology, finance, implementation or within the supply chain, partnerships will be fundamental to the transition to a circular economy. And thus our collective action responds directly to SDG 17.

II. UN Environment's engagement with supporting circularity in economies is organized around:

- ***Strengthening the scientific evidence on the need for resource and environmental decoupling:*** with the International Resource Panel, the Green Growth Knowledge Platform and the Life Cycle Initiative;
- ***Aligning various initiatives and partnerships that we host to power change.*** UN Environment hosts the secretariats of many initiatives strategic to creating and sustaining the momentum of change. While important in themselves to create the evidence, the drivers, the enablers and building blocks for this change, they are now being aligned to power and support a global movement to transition to Circular and inclusive green economies, through emerging strategic partnerships with other UN agencies, member states, the EU, the World Economic Forum, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, the Resource Efficient & Cleaner Production Network of centers around the world, and a growing engagement with the G-7 and the G-20 processes.
- ***These initiatives operate*** through advocacy, facilitating knowledge and experience sharing, building capacity, redirecting finance and investments. We work in the following key sectors: MOBILITY, FOOD, TOURISM, BUILDINGS AND CONSTRUCTION, CHEMICALS, and ENERGY. Through influencing system level enablers: consumer information, lifestyles and education, public policy, finance, and public procurement
- ***We have a focus on cities as aggregators,*** supporting both a vertical and horizontal integration for building resource efficient and liveable cities and supporting infrastructure and public policy that can drive behavior change

III. What more should the UN do based on what we have heard here

1. Use the convening power of the UN more to coalesce the critical mass of key actors and collaborators to raise ambition and scale to address needs .
2. Be attentive that circularity in economies does not result in leaving some behind or creating two worlds of the first hand and the second hand consumer, but rather support a more egalitarian and responsible consumption.
3. Help bring together the closely related strands of green economy, green growth, sustainable consumption and production, resource efficiency and circular economy. There is some fragmentation of these communities of practice in line with different vocabularies – yet they all work to essentially the same end. We have worked most on Green economy. Sustainable consumption and production, and clean energy, but are in a very good position to help draw the strands together to scale up action quickly.
4. Ensure attention to economic and social transitions and winners and loser as was discussed yesterday in the case of the garments industry and the impacts on local manufacturing or re-use and recycling textiles.
5. Offer our networks of implementation partners on the ground – in PAGE, the 10YFP, RECPnet and our Finance Initiative (*regional roundtables*) to also lend their support to the transition to a circular economy.
6. Ensure attention to the trade implications of a possible reorganization of the global supply chains into a more localization of the same. These create jobs locally, but may make vulnerable those whose economies have grown on the back of commodity exports and participation in global value chains.
7. Attend to the Implications to health of recycled and reused materials e.g. pollutants in existing materials that may enter reverse production cycles, dumping of products in countries for reuse

However, we can only do this in the company of, and with collaboration from many if not all of you in this room. The task of transitioning to a circular economy is so immense, with so many facets and interested stake holders, that we need the broadest public-private partnership of unprecedented scale to achieve it. I very much welcome this WCEF, which I am sure will already make a major contribution to pulling these strands and actors together, to make substantive and faster progress towards a circular economy.

Finally and importantly Ladies and gentlemen, let me thank Sitra and the government of Finland again for this wonderful forum and wish all of us a fruitful forward journey into circular economies.

Thank you