

Strategic and Programmatic Guidance for UN Country Teams Implementing a Circular Economy

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About me

- Swedish citizen, based in Tokyo for 20 years
- Worked on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP), Resource Efficiency, Waste Management, and Circular Economy (CE) across Asia for 15 years – Policy analysis, capacity strengthening, and policy advisory

Current roles:

- Policy Lead at Hot or Cool Institute gGmbH, Berlin
 - Research on low-carbon lifestyles and related policies, focus on Europe
- Independent Consultant
 - Policy analysis and advisory on SCP and CE, focus on SE Asia
 - Projects for UNEP, UNESCAP, GIZ, EU, ADB, World Bank, and others
 - Currently establishing an ASEAN Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, based in Bangkok
- Lecturer at Toyo University, responsible for a course on Environmental Issues in Asia
- Regular briefings on news from sustainability science and international environmental policy for a group of Japanese corporations

Nine suggestions (1/3)

- Be clear about what CE can realistically deliver
 - CE often “oversold” by enthusiastic proponents, risk for disappointment
 - A polarised field – either oversold or rejected as a technocratic approach without transformative potential
 - Not a substitute for sustainability
 - CE does not enable ever-increasing consumption – need to recognise ecological limits and planetary boundaries
- Admit that high-income countries have still only taken minor steps towards realising CE
 - Despite efforts to promote CE, rich countries have much higher per-capita material footprints than low- and middle-income countries – we don’t have the solutions
 - No-one has the “magic sauce” for a transition to CE, lots of good ideas exist but there is a huge need for experimenting and piloting
 - Insisting on evidence-based policies is not very fruitful – policy innovation

Nine suggestions (2/3)

- Build capacity to assess the sustainability potential of different circular solutions
 - Circular ≠ sustainable, ex. downcycling
 - Training in life-cycle thinking and systems thinking is essential
- Don't get stuck with recycling – one of the least desirable CE approaches
 - Remind people repeatedly on the need to see the larger picture and to consider upstream changes to products and business models
- Recognise the value of traditional circular practices
 - Practices like Reuse, Repair, and Repurposing are common in low-income countries – need support, can be upgraded e.g. through ICT
 - Build on what exists, show that CE is not a “foreign concept”

Nine suggestions (3/3)

- Take a broad Circular Society approach
 - Circularity is not only about products and companies – great potential for community-based and informal circular practices
- Target low-hanging fruits
 - Waste biomass and nutrient recovery have great potential in many places
- Recognise the need for “creative destruction”
 - Shifting to a circular society requires phasing out many incumbent linear business models and practices – fierce resistance to be expected
 - Policies needed to tilt the playing field in favour of sustainable circular practices
- Be pragmatic when working with governments
 - Make sure to work with multiple agencies/ministries
 - Support civil servants that want to drive meaningful change regardless of their formal title and responsibilities

Thanks for your attention!

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