



Rethinking Agri-food Systems through Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency: Barriers, Innovations and Learnings

Date: Wednesday 8th June 2022
Time: 14.00 - 16:00 hours (ICT)

CONTEXT

The circular economy is a \$4.5 trillion opportunity.¹ It presents huge potential for global economic growth and will also accelerate society towards a sustainable future. In the agri-food sector, there is an increasing interest from agri-food businesses in Asian countries to capture this opportunity by adopting circular economy principles into their practices, innovating solutions, and integrating them into the value chain. The concept of circular agriculture is gaining momentum and it strengthens the sustainability objectives and circularity in the agri-food sector. Eradicating waste and resource inefficiencies by applying “circular models of business” may lead to enormous benefits, including increased growth, innovation and competitive advantage, cost reduction, reduced energy consumption and CO₂ emissions, increased supply chain and resource security.

Mobilising this opportunity will remain a challenge until many more agri-food value chain actors switch to a “circular mindset”. Exploring how to embrace resource efficiency and the circularity of economies within the agri-food sector through the agroecological value chain approach, access to investment, disruptive technology, and commercial partnerships will leverage solutions to scale-up circular practices leading to significant benefits for the sector. Moreover, the circular economy is a new way of looking at relationships between markets, customers, and natural resources, and solutions towards food traceability, transparency, integration, and eventually,

sustainability. It concerns the whole value chain – from agricultural production to processing and to, eventually, consuming. It builds upon three key strategies – a) switch of input resource towards less harmful and/or renewable, continuous circulation of the resources within consumption and production systems, and resource efficiency.

Rethinking Agri-food Systems through Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency: Barriers, Innovations and Learnings

Leveraging the importance and opportunity for circular economy in the agri-food system, SWITCH-Asia SCP Facility together with key partners will host the Webinar: “Rethinking Agri-food Systems through Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency: Barriers, Innovations and Learnings” which will bring together stakeholders and practitioners across the agri-food value chain, SWITCH-Asia grant projects, development and financial organisations, and political actors to reflect on barriers, innovations, experiences and learning encountered on the pathway to render the agri-food sector more circular and resource efficient. Implementing the circular economy will help leverage innovative new business models and disruptive technologies, which are enablers to transform the linear economic model. Education and behaviour change, public policy and markets are also important complimentary approaches towards the successful implementation of the circular economy.

¹ Lacy, Peter; Rutqvist, Jakob (2015): Waste to Wealth – The Circular Economy Advantage, New York/London: Palgrave Macmillan.

OBJECTIVES

The webinar will showcase innovative approaches and impacts of SWITCH-Asia grant projects and circular business models and technologies that help address resource inefficiencies in the agri-food chains. The panel session will facilitate information exchange among agri-food chain actors on business opportunities, trends, and approaches to address issues of circularity in agri-food systems, and to promote investment into new business models and disruptive technologies for the transition towards a more circular economy in the agri-food sector.

Global trends: challenges and opportunities, possible areas for cross-learning and cooperation

The growing attention paid by policy makers, non-governmental organisations and scholars has prompted agri-food companies to incorporate sustainability, and in particular the circular economy approach, into their corporate strategies. On the consumption side, food security, health concerns, climate change, and sustainability that are leading towards reduction of resources used and environmental footprints are increasingly shaping individual consumption choices, or diets, and becoming important themes at a policy and social level.

Enabling policy environment. In recent years, increasing number of governments have started implementing policies and strategies to meet this objective. For instance, the EU Farm to Fork strategy and the UN Food system summit in 2021, where many countries adopted Sustainable National Food System pathways. Nevertheless, stronger efforts are needed to significantly improve the sustainability of materials management and the circularity of economies across the world.²

Green investment trend, emerging technologies and innovations. The Agrifood industry is being increasingly eyed by entrepreneurs and investors. A crop of new, promising technologies that have the potential to

reshape agriculture is emerging. Investors are showing greater interest in the Agrifood industry and its startups. The amount of money pouring into Agrifood tech has increased more than sixfold since 2012: from \$3 billion to almost \$18 billion, according to [AgFunder](#).

The digitalization of agri-food supply chains, and innovative business models. Digitalisation enables food supply chains to be highly integrated, effective, and responsive to consumer demands and regulatory requirements. It also facilitates development of short supply chain. In addition, innovative business models are emerging in the agri-food sector to fulfil the existing gap towards closed-loop food supply chains.

Growing demands for sustainable agri-food products. The climate crisis and COVID-19 pandemic offer countries an opportunity to build recovery plans that will reverse current trends and change our consumption and production patterns towards a more sustainable future. Consumers spent a total of €8.2 billion environmentally friendly products in 2020, an increase of 7% compared to 2019. The share of sustainable products in total food spending increased by 2% in that year.³

Circular economy and agroecology approach. The circular economy attempts to reduce consumption of resources by promoting a more efficient use of materials and energy through re-use and recycling of waste. Agroecology aims to close cycles at a maximum geographical scale, such as that of agriculture and livestock farming. Utilisation of renewable resources, maximising the efficient use of resources and maximum possible reuse of waste, all of which leads to an improvement in the emissions balance by the agro-food system as a whole. "Agroecology and Circular economy" serves to highlight the importance of employing renewable and circular resources in the future of agriculture and food production.

GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are good practices, circular business solutions and approaches with the biggest potential to facilitate development of circular economy systems in the agri-food sector? What can various stakeholders do to scale up these practices or approaches?
2. Where do the points in the agri-food value chain (primary production, processing, logistics, consumption, utilisation of secondary materials) present the most opportunities for efficiently implementing circular practices to improve the overall environmental performance and resource efficiencies? What are the critical factors allowing to seize these opportunities?
3. What are the emerging trends (such as enabling policy, green investment, technologies and innovations, the digitalisation of agri-food supply chains, and innovative business models, growing demands for sustainable agri-food products, etc.) that have been captured and regarded as enablers in the presented cases?
4. In the presented cases, what are the circular strategies (resource efficiency, resource circularity, resource switch, etc.), the innovation elements (business model, product materials & technologies, consumption patterns, etc.), the life cycle stages (materials, design, production & distribution, use, end of life, etc.) that have been adopted or addressed, and most critical factors for transition towards circular economy?

2 (<https://www.oecd.org/environment/improving-resource-efficiency-and-the-circularity-of-economies-for-a-greener-world-1b38a38f-en.htm>)
3 Annual Sustainable Food Monitor of Wageningen University & Research.

PARTNERS IN THE SESSION

- European Commission;
- The Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE);
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (TBC)
- 10YFP agri-food programme (TBC)

PROPOSED ATTENDEES OF THE MEETING

Project Managers of Country EU Delegations (EUDs), National Focal Points (NFPs) within Ministries in partner countries, SWITCH-Asia Grant projects, Agri-food businesses, Agri-food/ Circular business entrepreneurs, NGOs, Academia, Financial Institutions and Practitioners within the value chain.

PROGRAMME

14:00 – 14:05	Welcome Remarks
14:05 – 14:25	Session I: Catalyzing the transition towards circular economy at scale in the agri-food system.
14:25 – 14:55	Session II: Circular economy strategies in the agri-food sector
14:55 – 15:25	Session III: Showcase of circular business models and technologies in the agri-food sector
15:25 – 15:55	Session IV: The enablers for circular economy and resources efficiency in the Agri-food system
15:55 – 16:00	Wrap up and closing remarks
