

# ANNUAL CONFERENCE

20 – 21 May 2024  
Almaty, Kazakhstan



## Annual Meeting

Exchanging ideas  
and sharing insights  
on developing and  
mainstreaming SCP



## Grant Projects Meeting

Scaling from SCP  
projects to a circular  
economy transition



## **Acknowledgements**

This Report was prepared on behalf of the EU SWITCH-Asia Policy Support Component (PSC) by Dr. Lunchakorn PRATHUMRATANA and Natrika SIRINAPASPOKIN under the supervision of Dr. Zinaida FADEEVA, Team Leader, SWITCH-Asia Policy Support Component.

## **Disclaimer**

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# INTRODUCTION

Rapid economic growth in Asia has lifted many countries out of poverty, but it has led to increased use of natural resources, growing greenhouse gas emissions, and more waste. Achieving sustainability now requires fundamental changes in business practices and consumption patterns. Circular Economy (CE) and Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) aim to improve environmental performance, stimulate demand for better products, and guide consumers towards informed choices. The European Union is committed to addressing these challenges, and the SWITCH-Asia programme, launched in 2007, has made significant progress in promoting SCP across 42 countries in the region.

The programme consists of two components:

**The Policy Support Component (PSC):** managed by the EU Directorate General International Partnerships (DG INTPA). PSC's activities are implemented by GOPA Worldwide Consultants and NIRAS.

**The Grant Component:** directly managed by the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA).

On 20–21 May 2024, the SWITCH-Asia Policy Support Component organised the 6<sup>th</sup> SWITCH-Asia Annual Meeting at the Royal Tulip Hotel, Almaty, Kazakhstan. This meeting, consisting of the gathering of the Programme Steering Committee (PSC), the Meeting of Grant Projects, and SWITCH-Asia's Annual Conference, was the second hybrid meeting since the launching of the Programme in January 2023. Participants in the event included DG INTPA HQ, EU Delegations, the SWITCH-Asia Policy Support Component, representatives of EU Member States, National Focal Points of countries eligible for the programme, representatives of the SWITCH-Asia Grant Projects, programme stakeholders, and regional and international organisations. This report details the key issues raised during this event.

## AGENDA AND EVENT OBJECTIVES

The Annual Event was planned to combine and align several objectives. It was divided into four distinct parts, which were targeted to meet defined objectives of specific stakeholder groups.

### PART I. SWITCH-Asia Steering Committee Meeting

Hosted by: SWITCH-Asia Policy Support Component

Participants: EU Delegations, National focal points, selected observers

Date and time: 20 May 2024 (morning)

#### Objectives:

- ✔ To present the overall framework of SWITCH-Asia operations and its current stage of implementation, including through ongoing technical advisories (TAs).
- ✔ Discuss synergies and added value, relevance of the Programme to policy dialogues in the region (both nationally and across borders) and the priorities under the European Green Deal.

### PART II. Internal Meeting of EU Delegations (closed-door meeting)

Hosted by: EU SWITCH-Asia Programme Management

Participants: EU Delegations

Date and time: 20 May 2024 (morning)

**Objectives:**

- ✓ Coordination of the SWITCH-Asia Programme, synergies with Multiannual Indicative Programmes, and the Mid-Term Review.

### PART III. Meeting of SWITCH-Asia Grant Projects

Hosted by: EU SWITCH-Asia Policy Support Component

Participants: SWITCH-Asia Policy Support Component (PSC), representatives of the technical advisory projects

Date and time: 20 May 2024 (morning, in parallel to PARTS I and II)

**Objectives:**

- ✓ To discuss strategies that will make the impact of the SWITCH-Asia Grant Projects more profound and lasting.
- ✓ To explore potential avenues of connecting knowledge of grants and policy-making processes, including through linkages with PSC technical advisories.

### PART IV. Annual Conference

Hosted by: EU SWITCH-Asia Policy Support Component

Participants: EU Delegations

Date and time: 20 May 2024 (afternoon)

**Objectives:**

- ✓ Exchange ideas and share insights on developing and mainstreaming SCP and circular economy practices, including through existing regional knowledge hubs, targeted communication efforts, and engagement of key stakeholders.
- ✓ To promote the co-creation of innovative SCP solutions and to strengthen mutual learning between grant projects and policy advisory, optimising the overall effectiveness, reach, and sustainability of SCP initiatives under the PSC umbrella.
- ✓ To offer the stakeholders of the Programme an opportunity to discuss, plan and innovate together towards joint multi-country SCP initiatives in the framework of the PSC.
- ✓ To facilitate development of ideas for future technical assistance from the SWITCH-Asia Policy Support Component (PSC).

# MEETING OF SWITCH-ASIA GRANT PROJECTS



## Introduction and welcome

The session brought together 41 representatives from 33 ongoing grant projects, associated partners, and experts involved in executing ongoing and planned Technical Advisories (TAs) under the Policy Support Component (PSC). Mr. Guy JANAWAY (SWITCH-Asia Programme Manager, DG-INTPA) and Dr. Zinaida FADEEVA (SWITCH-Asia PSC, Team Leader) provided brief welcoming remarks.

The meeting aimed to highlight grant project contributions to circular economy, focusing on efficient use and renewable substitution of natural resources. It sought to improve understanding of best practices for documenting and disseminating project knowledge, and to identify mechanisms for better sharing and utilising this knowledge to support regional and sectoral circular economy transitions. The interactive sessions were moderated with inputs from **Dr. Rene VAN BERKEL**, **Dr. Arab HOBALLAH** (serving as senior experts for the PSC), and **Mr. Hannes MAC NULTY**.

The session was structured into two parts: the identification of relevant circular economy project knowledge, and synergising and using this knowledge. Group discussions were organised around thematic areas related to the grant projects, including buildings and construction, leather, the agrifood sector, plastics, and tourism. The results are summarised below.

- **Buildings/Construction & Leather:** Effective knowledge management necessitates understanding of and co-creating with the audience, but also avoiding making assumptions about their needs. Existing platforms for knowledge sharing should be utilised over creating new, short-lived project-specific websites. Interactive tools like AI chatbots and cost-effective calculators can enhance user engagement. A circular economy taxonomy is essential for standardising concepts across projects.
- **Agrifood Sector:** Learning platforms or apps should be supported, taking into consideration scalability and the contextual differences between and among countries. Emphasis should be placed on methodological learning and behaviour change strategies, and should include discussions about funding.
- **Plastics:** Knowledge sharing should include both successes and failures, and cater to diverse languages and knowledge levels. Collaboration with manufacturers' associations and country-level organisations is crucial for wider dissemination. Comparative studies across countries can provide insights into various implementations and policies. Simplification and translation of documents are both vital for accessibility.
- **Tourism:** Policy-makers' involvement in grant projects is essential to ensure alignment with sustainable development goals. Understanding target groups and final users is crucial, possibly through unconventional platforms and in-person events. Integration of existing platforms is recommended to avoid redundant websites and platform fatigue.

Regarding the cross-sectoral insights, fostering synergy is essential to prevent duplication of efforts. Accessible and user-friendly knowledge products are key. In-person sharing through study trips and events is valuable. Linking solutions to both cost and environmental benefits is important. Ensuring the quality of knowledge uploaded to platforms and simplifying technical jargon were also emphasised.



# ANNUAL CONFERENCE

## Opening Session



**H.E. Mr. Kestutis JANKAUSKAS, Ambassador of the European Union to the Republic of Kazakhstan**, extended a warm welcome and delivered the opening remarks. He emphasised significant themes including the Green Deal, circular economy, and sustainable consumption and production, as well as investments in human capital such as education and healthcare. Mr. JANKAUSKAS discussed energy cooperation between the EU and Kazakhstan, highlighting the shift from coal to renewables and the need for a sustainable energy grid. He also addressed the critical urgency of water resources, focusing on the balance between rice cultivation and water conservation. Furthermore, he underscored the EU's dedication to partnership and cooperation, stressing the sharing of sustainable technologies and environmental standards. He concluded by emphasising the importance of collective action for sustainable development, and urged global cooperation to effectuate meaningful change.

**Mr. Guy JANAWAY, SWITCH-Asia Programme Manager, DG-INTPA**, expressed sincere appreciation for the opportunity to engage with diverse stakeholders, emphasising the importance of witnessing the tangible impacts of projects firsthand. Reflecting on SWITCH Asia's accomplishments, he underscored its significant contributions to shared objectives, citing recent grant visits where collaborative efforts yielded transformative results. Highlighting a notable encounter at the World Circular Economy Forum, Mr. JANAWAY commended a grantee's work on a tanneries project as emblematic of the programme's commitment to sustainability. He expressed optimism on the progress made through technical advisory initiatives and urged continued dedication to shared priorities after the upcoming European Union elections, advocating for persistent commitment to the vital Green Deal agenda.





**Dr. Zinaida FADEEVA, Team Leader of SWITCH-Asia PSC**, welcomed the participants, introduced the SWITCH-Asia programme, and provided an overview of the Annual Conference agenda.

**Dr. Sara GABAI, Communication Expert of SWITCH-Asia PSC**, joined the stage to report on the communication performance of the programme, particularly the performance of knowledge and information sharing developed by grant projects over the course of the year.

## Session 1. SCP Technical Advisories (TAs) in Action: Regional Engagements and Global Ambitions

Dr. FADEEVA briefly introduced the current technical assistances of SWITCH-Asia PSC.

- |                                            |                                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. ASEAN Circular Economy Knowledge Hub    | 7. Mobilising Business Action for Circular Economy in ASEAN                                               |
| 2. Plastics Governance Engagement          | 8. Accelerating the Transition to a Circular Economy through Knowledge Generation, Management and Sharing |
| 3. SCP Finance and Investment              | 9. Building and Construction                                                                              |
| 4. SCP and Climate Change                  |                                                                                                           |
| 5. SCP Policies and Actions in the Pacific |                                                                                                           |
| 6. Green Public Procurement                |                                                                                                           |

The main achievements, challenges and way forward of the TAs were presented by the senior experts before going through the detailed discussion in the Breakouts.



**Mr. Sanjoy SANYAL**, Senior expert for SWITCH-Asia PSC TA on Financing and Investment, highlighted progress from the Jakarta meeting, confirming the conclusion of interim findings in line with past assessments. Communicating the vital role of international development financial institutions like the German Development Bank and the European Investment Bank in driving climate and sustainable consumption production investments is crucial. These institutions utilise four strategic approaches in Asian countries: credit lines, microfinance support, venture capital investments, and supply chain assistance. He suggested utilising the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) programme to assist in crafting tailored climate financing programmes, emphasising the necessity of a climate perspective in all initiatives.



**Mr. Ranga PALLAWALA**, Key Expert of SWITCH-Asia PSC, presented the TA on SCP and Climate change in South Asia. Across five South Asian countries, the TA examined overlaps between SCP characteristics and National Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement, sharing insights with respective nations. The TA identified potential SCP and circular economy aspects aiming to bolster climate ambitions and resilience, aligning with national priorities. This bottom-up approach would ensure that climate actions dovetail with development goals. In global discussions about enhancing climate ambitions, the integration of SCP principles becomes crucial. Collaborative efforts, like SWITCH-Asia TAs, foster knowledge-sharing to support countries in surpassing climate ambitions while promoting sustainable development.

**Dr. Arab HOBALLAH**, Senior expert for SWITCH-Asia PSC TA on SCP Policy and Actions in the Pacific, highlighted a notable difference between the Pacific and Asia that is posing considerable challenges when both regions are regarded collectively. Stakeholders have emphasised the necessity for tailored approaches specific to the Pacific context, urging a departure from preconceived concepts derived from Asian experiences. Collaborating closely with Pacific sub-regional stakeholders, he recognised the significance of incorporating local knowledge and consultation practices to effectively implement SCP initiatives. Moving forward, the TA will prioritise partnerships with key stakeholders to address critical areas such as SCP mainstreaming and food systems, to ensure sustainable development in the region.

**Mr. Sanjay KUMAR**, Senior expert for SWITCH-Asia PSC TA on Green Public Procurement, emphasised that the Elevating Green Public Procurement TA seeks to clarify and enhance GPP. Following in-depth internal and stakeholder discussions, the focus is on raising ambitions, integrating GPP into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and expanding the scale and scope of the programme, including addressing procurement at provincial and local levels and targeting high-impact sectors such as construction. Rapid assessments in four countries have been completed, and insights on Asian GPP experiences published. The next step is to establish a helpdesk to support policymakers and achieve significant impacts for governments.

**Mr. Thomas THOMAS**, Senior Expert for SWITCH-Asia PSC TA on Mobilising Business Action for Circular Economy in ASEAN, shared that the TA began in September 2023. During discussions in Jakarta, key objectives were established: developing a common understanding of the social economy's scope and business case in Asia, achieved through a framework of five guiding principles; compiling business examples and lessons, with 30 cases published online and a target of 50 by next month; and securing commitment for a circular economy, achieved through the ASEAN Business Advisory Council. The ASEAN Circular Economy Business Alliance is set to launch on June 27, 2024.

**Mr. Hannes MAC NULTY**, Junior Expert for SWITCH-Asia PSC TA on Accelerating the Global Transition to a Green and Circular Economy, aims to promote knowledge sharing by the end of the year. The TA will focus on creating a 'universal language' for circular economy terms, thus facilitating communication among stakeholders. Collaborating with knowledge hubs, a standardised circular economy taxonomy is under development to assist with knowledge exchange. Additionally, AI-assisted solutions could streamline knowledge management, ensuring accessibility for policymakers, SMEs, and donors. This initiative aims to maximise existing resources, fostering better results through efficient knowledge utilisation.

**Mr. Florian BERANEK**, Senior Expert for SWITCH-Asia PSC TA on Strengthening SCP and Circularity in the Buildings and Construction sector, emphasised the sector's vast impact on climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss, noting it contributes up to 70% of greenhouse gases. He highlighted the sector's complexity, involving long lifespan products and fast-moving consumer goods. Key insights include buildings consuming 30% of global copper and the \$400 billion paint and coatings market. Collaboration and data collection are crucial for progress, with a focus on making sustainable buildings a reality and a human right.

## Summary report of Breakout sessions

### Breakout 1. Plastics



The session was moderated by Mr. Hun Yang SOON, CEO of the Eco Ideal Consulting Sdn Bhd, and Dr. Thomas LINDHQVIST, professor from Lund University. The objectives of the session were to explore the role of upstream regulations in enhancing downstream actions, gather insights from diverse country experiences to identify existing practices, assess the scalability of these experiences regionally, and facilitate a comprehensive understanding of circular material opportunities, emphasising the interconnectedness of upstream and downstream processes encompassing design, manufacturing, utilisation, and end-of-life management.

Mr. SOON provided an overview of the plastics life cycle, covering primary polymer production, manufacturing, consumption, and waste management strategies such as recycling and extended producer responsibility (EPR). He highlighted the importance of both upstream regulations and downstream activities in tackling plastic pollution. The discussion focused on the interplay between global upstream regulations and local downstream measures, with some advocating for stricter regulations, while others emphasised the effectiveness of downstream actions. Participants examined how upstream regulations could support or hinder downstream efforts, and they shared country-specific experiences.

The session was productive, with a consensus reached on the importance of integrating upstream and downstream approaches to address plastic-related issues effectively. Various insightful examples were shared, underscoring the need for comprehensive solutions. Ultimately, the message emphasised the ongoing significance of addressing the plastic problem collectively, acknowledging our responsibility in its creation. Key takeaways included the need for harmonised policies, transparency, and effective monitoring, emphasising the importance of collaboration between countries in negotiating the Global Plastics Treaty.

### Breakout 2. Elevating GPP



The session was moderated by Ms. Elodie MARIA-SUBE, Key Expert on EU policy development and partnership building, and Dr. Lunchakorn PRATHUMRATANA, Junior Expert on GPP, SWITCH-Asia PSC. Resource persons of the session include Mr. Sanjay KUMAR, Senior GPP Expert of SWITCH-Asia PSC, Mr. Olivier LEONARD, Principal Procurement Specialist, ADB, Uzbekistan, and Ms. Kamila ZHUMAKANNOVA, chief expert of the

Department of Standardisation and Country of Origin of Goods of the Committee for Technical Regulation and Metrology of the Ministry of Trade and Integration, Kazakhstan. The objectives were to inform participants about current GPP trends, gather insights for engaging Ministries of Finance, and explore options for market transformation facilitated by GPP practices.

The discussion centred on two overarching questions regarding Green Public Procurement (GPP). First, it explored how GPP can lead to transformative impacts on societies, emphasising the importance of understanding the country context, training procurement professionals, establishing legal frameworks, and implementing quality standards, as evidenced by the case of Kazakhstan. Participants highlighted the need to move beyond considerations of price and specifications and to convince governments of the competitiveness that sustainability in procurement brings. Second, the debate revolved around the future of GPP, with insights suggesting its integration into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and public financial management (PFM) reforms, alongside the potential role of artificial intelligence (AI) in expediting procurement processes. The adoption of GPP by multilateral development banks was also discussed. As a concluding remark, the session emphasised the evolution towards sustainable and efficient procurement practices, envisioning a future where GPP becomes inherent to procurement processes.

### Breakout 3. SCP-linked NDCs



The session, moderated by Mr. Ranga PALLAWALA, Key Expert of SWITCH-Asia PSC, with facilitators Mr. Victor VALIDO, Project Manager, UNEP-International Resource Panel (IRP), and Ms. Oyunchimeg AMARTUVSHIN, Senior Specialist for Asia Country Portfolio, Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI), aimed to address several objectives. These included identifying the policy challenges and opportunities for countries to integrate SCP and CE principles into their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Additionally, the session sought to leverage global and regional experiences to enhance the integration of SCP into climate ambitions. Furthermore, participants aimed to identify and elaborate on the key elements of a roadmap to effectively integrate SCP principles into NDCs and Long-Term Low-Emission Development Strategies (LT-LEDS).

The discussion was structured into three segments. Initially, the focus was on co-creating an understanding of the linkages between SCP, CE, and climate change. Policy opportunities were explored, with NDCs and LT-LEDS identified as pivotal for integration. Subsequently, challenges such as awareness gaps among policymakers, short-term decision-making horizons, and data availability were acknowledged, alongside opportunities including stakeholder collaboration and finance leveraging. The session underscored the importance of considering both mitigation and adaptation potentials in crafting an effective roadmap for integrating SCP into climate ambitions.

### Breakout 4. Learning from Business Experiences to Scale-up Commitment and Action for Circular Economy

The session was moderated by Ms. Loraine Gatlabayan, Key Expert on SCP Awareness Raising and Regional Partnership Building within the SWITCH-Asia PSC, Mr. Thomas THOMAS, and Dr. Rene VAN BERKEL, Senior Expert for SWITCH-Asia PSC TA on Mobilising Business Action for Circular Economy in ASEAN.

The breakout session explored how to engage businesses in the Circular Economy (CE) transition in Asia-Pacific, focusing on SWITCH-Asia's role in supporting collective action and knowledge management. It reviewed insights from the Technical Advisory (TA) on Business Action for Circular Economy in ASEAN,



highlighting the TA's success in garnering business support and analysing over 20 case studies. Presentations showcased scalable CE practices like sustainable sourcing and waste reduction. Discussions included SWITCH-Asia's potential to catalyse CE initiatives through grants and partnerships.

The objectives were to discuss how CE is being understood and applied through business practices in the region, informing participants of emerging insights on business commitment and action towards CE derived from the Southeast Asian business cases developed through the TA, gathering insights on how policies can support CE business practices, and exploring possible collective action towards business action on CE.



Key messages from the session underscore unanimous support for proposed initiatives, emphasising the need to view circularity in the context of society and the practicality of products. Plans are in place to increase the number of case studies from 8 to 70 by June 2024, with a potential for further growth to 100 pending for Phase 2. Continuity in efforts is assured through ongoing collaboration with the ASEAN Circular Economy Business Alliance. Additionally, the unifying business action for ASEAN and a forthcoming panel discussion serve as pivotal elements in advancing these initiatives.

### **Breakout 5. Circularity in Tourism (with a focus on Food)**



The session, chaired by Ms. Elodie MARIA-SUBE, Key Expert on EU policy development and partnership building, SWITCH-Asia PSC, featured Mr. Maksatbek Damir UULU, Project Manager, PERETO; Mr. Connor BEDARD, Project Manager, SUSTOUR; and Mr. Darragh FINGLETON, Director of Acted Kyrgyzstan, who shared insights on circularity initiatives within the tourism sector, focusing on food-related aspects in particular. Objectives included informing participants about ongoing circularity initiatives in tourism, sharing experiences on sustainable tourism in the Asia-Pacific region, and gathering insights on potential policy measures to enhance circularity in the tourism sector, specifically concerning food.

The discussion on tourism examined the topic of circular economy and tourism, focusing on policy instruments like fiscal incentives to incentivise companies to adopt circular or environmentally friendly approaches. The discussion underscored the multifaceted benefits of embracing circularity in tourism, highlighting its potential not only to yield cost savings, but also enhance brand reputation. Concrete examples, such as the implementation of biodigesters in Laos to mitigate food waste, were presented to illustrate effective circular practices. Additionally, guiding principles were elucidated, advocating for the promotion of local procurement, reduction of plastic usage, and advocacy for plant-based diets to mitigate environmental impact. The significance of portion control in reducing food waste as well as the necessity of addressing packaging concerns were also discussed. Insights were exchanged regarding leveraging tourism as a



platform to promote healthier local food options, a particularly pertinent issue in the Pacific region, which is grappling with excessive consumption of unhealthy food items.

### Breakout 6. Knowledge Hubs and Stakeholder Platforms: Putting Regional Knowledge and Experience to Use for Circular Economy Transition



This session, moderated by **Dr. Rene VAN BERKEL** and **Mr. Hannes MAC NULTY**, experts for SWITCH-Asia on Accelerating the Global Transition to a Green and Circular Economy, aimed to investigate how knowledge platforms can improve the publication and dissemination of circular economy knowledge and experiences to better serve the needs of CE practitioners and decision-makers. First the Technical Advisory (TA) and the importance of developing a common language Framework on Circular Economy principles and ‘knowledge taxonomies’ were presented. The ultimate goal of a taxonomy, defined as a classification scheme in which content is organised into groups or types, typically using a hierarchical approach, is to improve the ability to navigate, retrieve, connect and ultimately better understand the content that it aims at classifying. Insights were drawn from the work of the GGKP (Green Growth Knowledge Platform) and lessons learnt from the ASEAN Circular Economy Business Consultations. There was a general consensus that a circular economy knowledge taxonomy is needed to develop a common circular economy language to make it easier to share, find and understand best-practice knowledge and expertise; boost awareness of the business case for circular economy among practitioners; and improve overall knowledge management practices and harness the power of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in a targeted fashion.

Participants were presented with a series of circular economy business cases, and they then actively engaged in a collaborative activity that highlighted the challenges of classifying circular economy principles, scope, and strategies, among others, making use of a ‘shared and common’ language.

### Breakout 7. Financing and Market Transformation



The session was moderated by Ms. Katherine THODAY, SCP Advisor, Regeneration Supply Chains, and Mr. Sanjoy SANYAL, Senior expert for SWITCH-Asia PSC TA on Financing and Investment. The session aimed to inform participants about recognising climate finance as a catalyst for transitioning towards the circular economy and explaining the prerequisites for making climate finance beneficial for SMEs and grantees. Discussions also centred around the need to establish a robust regulatory and policy framework to facilitate this transition. Tangible actions were provided to empower participants to take steps towards advancing CE

initiatives.

During the session, a notable success story from Central Asia was highlighted, focusing on raising finance for resource efficiency in the agri-food industry. The project team effectively raised awareness among banks about lending opportunities in the sector and educating SMEs on how to access financing. Over a span of several years, more than 10 deals were secured, despite the delays exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This success story resonated with similar initiatives across SWITCH-Asia countries, emphasising the importance of documenting such processes to facilitate future financing endeavours. The intermediary role was highlighted for its importance in bridging financial institutions and grantees, with credit guarantee schemes identified to mitigate the perceived risks of new projects. The session made clear the value of capturing and managing project value to foster public-private collaboration and leverage funding effectively.

## Breakout 8. Building and Construction - Moving the big and small wheels of the Circular Economy

The session was moderated by Mr. Florian BERANEK, Senior Expert for SWITCH-Asia PSC TA on Strengthening SCP and Circularity in the Buildings and Construction sector. The expert introduced a systemic approach to materials, highlighting areas beyond the traditional focus on concrete, steel, and cement. This led to interesting insights for participants, particularly regarding Building Information Modelling (BIM), a system that consolidates all building-related information into one model. The participants examined the diverse materials used in the built environment, enhancing their understanding of the complexity of the sector by exploring life cycles, environmental consequences, social aspects, and the human factor, which demonstrated the importance of the construction sector for the Circular Economy. The discussion underscored the need for a robust regulatory and policy framework, identified roadblocks, and provided practical takeaways for immediate action. Participants worked in groups to document innovations, map environmental and social impacts, identify roadblocks, and compile a list of actionable steps. Key contributors included Ms. Chun XIA, Mr. Suyesh PRAJAPATI, Mr. Quentin MOREAU, Ms. Usha MASEY, and Mr. Yu FU.



### Key Insights

**Broadening material focus:** strong emphasis was placed on exploring alternative materials beyond steel, concrete, and cement. The goal is not only to innovate but also to decarbonise and develop these materials so that they support sustainability. Building Information Modelling (BIM) was highlighted as a crucial tool in this process. BIM consolidates all material information into a comprehensive model, enabling developers to understand and manage the entire life cycle of building materials.

**Resource management and policy innovations:** new approaches are being developed to enhance the management of resources and operations within the supply chain, which are often overlooked yet are critical for sustainability. Innovations are also focusing on giving individuals more control over heating systems.

**Extending building lifespan:** the importance of processes aimed at prolonging the lifespan of buildings, often influenced more by economic factors than physical durability, was highlighted. The lack of comprehensive global data on building lifespans underscores the necessity for additional research and data collection efforts in this domain.

**Integrated urban planning:** holistic urban planning, encompassing green spaces, transportation, and overall city design, was discussed, with a focus on integrating circular economy practices into the built environment, including encouraging sharing spaces and resources to promote sustainability.

**Purpose and necessity of construction:** There was a call for critically examining the need for new construction, especially in urban areas with ample built infrastructure. Emphasis was placed on repurposing and retrofitting existing structures as a sustainable alternative to new buildings.

**Decarbonisation and material evolution:** Prioritising the decarbonisation of materials to minimise the carbon footprint associated with construction was presented, with preference for improving current materials and construction methods over introducing new ones for enhanced sustainability.

**Construction process and quality:** Attention was given to construction processes, emphasising the importance of skilled labour and effective supervision to ensure quality craftsmanship and adherence to standards, particularly concerning bricklaying and other similar types of construction.

The session underscored the importance of a holistic approach to the built environment, emphasising the need for integrated planning, resource management, and extending the lifespan of buildings. Focusing on why buildings are constructed and prioritising human needs over investments can contribute significantly to sustainable and circular building practices.

## Session 2. Regional Priorities

Group work discussions were held according to SWITCH-Asia region: Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia (+Mongolia and China), and the Pacific. The discussion for each region focused on SCP and CE policies and practices, and on each region's SCP and CE regional priorities and possible collective actions. The results of discussion are summarised below.

### Breakout 1. Central Asia



Mr. Florian BERANEK, Senior Expert for SWITCH-Asia PSC TA on Strengthening SCP and Circularity in the Buildings and Construction sector, moderated the session together with Ms. Yelena MUZYKINA, Centre for Postnormal Policy and Futures Studies (CPPFS) Academy of Public Administration under the President of Kazakhstan, and Mr. Didar KARIMSAKOV, Deputy Chairman of the Management Board at International Green Technologies and Investment Projects Center, NJSC. There were 23 participants in the session. The objective of the session was to connect circular economy concepts/activities and discuss opportunities in Central Asia.

The discussion focused on advancing the circular economy beyond a focus on waste management and recycling alone, and emphasised the need for innovative products and services to achieve zero-loss cycles. Participants highlighted the necessity of moving beyond the 10R framework and exploring new approaches such as product-as-a-service models. The discussion focused on two primary sectors: tourism, agriculture and food; and construction and infrastructure, chosen for their significant impact on the environment and their potential for implementing circular economy practices.

Regarding tourism and agrifood, participants from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan shared current CE practices, which are being used as exemplary models for other Central Asian countries. The discussion, led by Ms. MUZYKINA, highlighted the need for deeper research into consumer behaviour and CE practices in the tourism sector. To guide future actions, participants formulated 12 critical questions categorised into assessment, law, and regional cooperation. Participants emphasised the need for stronger collaboration among stakeholders, including business and state associations. The successful model of Tajikistan's business associations was highlighted. Future directions include integrating CE principles into policies, focusing on practical implementation, and promoting awareness and education to ensure widespread adoption.



Mr. KARIMSAKOV shared insights on the construction sector group. Despite a well-developed legal framework in Central Asia, enforcement remains weak. The main proposals include increasing standards for building materials, extending the lifespan of buildings, and investing in education for maintaining infrastructure. Emphasis was placed on disaster risk reduction in seismic regions like Almaty, and scaling up success stories from cities like Astana to improve energy efficiency and implement CE practices.

Overall the session underscored the significance of innovative thinking and strategic policy changes to propel the CE agenda in Central Asia. By addressing identified gaps and fostering regional cooperation, substantial progress can be achieved towards sustainable development in the region.

## Breakout 2. South Asia



Mr. Ranga PALLAWALA, Key Expert of SWITCH-Asia PSC, moderated the session. The objectives of the session were to identify and deliberate on the priorities of SCP and CE policies and practices in South Asia in various sectors, and to identify the priority areas so as to enhance regional level TAs and collaborations. In a focused discussion involving 15 participants from five South Asian countries, key insights were shared about the unique challenges and opportunities within this highly diverse sub-region. Representing a range of economies and geographies, including Low Development Countries (LDCs), high-income nations, islands, and landlocked countries, the participants highlighted the region's ongoing and impending development transitions.

### Key Priorities

The discussion emphasised the urgent need for a green transition.

- **Green Economy and Tourism:** Adopting sustainable practices across various sectors, with a specific focus on transforming tourism.
- **Green Building and Construction:** Promoting energy-efficient, climate-adaptive construction practices.
- **Green Finance and Public Procurement:** Facilitating financial support and prioritising eco-friendly products and services.
- **SCP and Climate Change:** The participants identified SCP and climate change as top priorities, stressing the importance of supporting MSMEs for inclusive growth and efficient resource utilisation.
- **Lifestyle Changes:** Addressing consumer behaviour was deemed crucial, along with policies need to encourage sustainable lifestyles without producing a negative effect on economic growth, underscoring the role of education in this transformation.
- **Infrastructure and Disaster Resilience:** With significant infrastructure development expected, the focus was on climate-resilient construction and material circularity, including recycling e-waste and agricultural waste.

Despite the diversity within the sub-region, there is significant potential for collaborative efforts among the countries. By working together, they can address shared challenges and advance sustainable development goals effectively.



### Breakout 3. Southeast Asia, Mongolia and China



Ms. Elodie MARIA-SUBE, Key Expert on EU policy development and partnership building, along with Mr. Anthony CHIU, SCP Expert of SWITCH-Asia PSC, moderated this session. Ms. MARIA-SUBE summarised the discussion, highlighting that the session aimed to identify sector-specific policy gaps for SCP. This session attracted over 40 participants, making it the most highly attended among the regional breakouts, likely because of the high representation of participants from Southeast Asia.

The discussion centred on various emerging themes within the circular economy, linking in particular tourism to waste management. Participants identified key sectors including food, plastics, construction, and green finance, while introducing new topics like AI, food sovereignty, and strategic autonomy. Emphasis was placed on EU policies, regenerative economy, and agroecology. Participants noted gaps in SWITCH-Asia's work, suggesting more focus on research, innovation, and extended producer responsibility (EPR).

The session highlighted the importance of transitioning from planning to implementing strategies in Southeast Asia, China, and Mongolia, and stressed the need for addressing transboundary issues. Key priority actions included enhancing EPR, establishing green taxonomies, and providing loan guarantees to scale up initiatives. Participants emphasised integrating circular economy themes into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and developing strategic partnerships to bridge the gap between small and large enterprises. Practical examples, such as linking small coffee producers to larger buyers like Starbucks, were discussed. The need for better connections between climate funds and SWITCH-Asia was highlighted, alongside the importance of sharing information on accessing these funds. Participants called for a TA on EU policies and encouraged more subgrants to enhance ground-level impact. Additionally, the concept of an investor risk protection scheme was proposed, with the suggestion that the policy support component of SWITCH-Asia could help implement such schemes. Finally, there was a general call for increased dialogue on consumption patterns to stimulate further progress in the circular economy.

### Breakout 4. The Pacific

Those who attended the online session, led by Ms. Loraine GATLABAYAN and Dr. Arab HOBALLAH, included 10 participants from the EUD for the Pacific, Timor Leste, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea, who engaged in a lively discussion of SCP awareness and regional partnership building.

The session focused on presenting the Pacific Engagement Strategy as part of the TA on mainstreaming SCP in the circular economy within the Pacific region. The strategy aims to enhance knowledge, dialogue, and partnerships to drive SCP and circular economy initiatives as game-changers in the region. Emphasising the unique context of the Pacific region, the strategy reviewed priority sectors such as food, water, tourism, buildings, and climate change, and discussed how SCP and CE could be integrated into policies and actions throughout these areas.

The discussion highlighted the new perspective of SCP in the region, recognising its presence in various policies, but also noting the novelty of systems thinking and cross-cutting issues. Comments from EU delegations underscored the importance of aligning with national strategies and medium-term development

plans, particularly in Papua New Guinea and Timor Leste. The dual affiliation of Timor Leste with the Pacific region and its ASEAN application was noted, reflecting its involvement in GPP initiatives.

Waste management emerged as a critical priority, and the disposal of batteries and solar panels was specifically addressed. The transition to a circular economy was seen as essential, and there is significant potential for collaboration with regional organisations and the EU delegation. The session emphasised the need for SWITCH-Asia to collaborate with regional organisations and EU-funded projects, and upcoming TAs on food systems and enhancing NDCs through SCP were discussed.



The importance of engaging with partners from Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and possibly the US was highlighted. Continuous dialogue with NFPs was deemed crucial to ensure effective collaboration and coordination with stakeholders and ministries. The session concluded with a call for strategic partnerships and ongoing communication to advance SCP and circular economy initiatives in the Pacific.

### Session 3. Thematic Priorities

Three consecutive rapid roundtable discussions were held involving all conference participants to discuss innovation needs and opportunities for unlocking progress towards a low-carbon and resource-efficient economy and associated policy challenges.

#### Roundtable 1. Sustainable Food Systems

The roundtable discussion moderated by Ms. Elodie MARIA-SUBE and Mr. Florian BERANEK focused on various issues within food systems. Ms. MARIA-SUBE presented the results, highlighting three key topics: water availability, consumer behaviour, and post-harvest food waste.

Each group examined drivers, enablers, and opponents for their respective issues. Common drivers included farmers, who can both mitigate and exacerbate problems. Enablers are often involved with policy, regulation, government actions, and innovation, and are areas where SWITCH-Asia can facilitate change. Opponents typically included costs, suggesting the need for financing programmes and research into financial solutions.

Interestingly, social media emerged as driver, enabler, and opponent in consumer behaviour discussions, indicating their significant yet complex role. Additionally, large industries were frequently identified as opponents, along with corruption, highlighting the importance of good governance.

The discussion emphasised the multifaceted nature of food system issues and the critical role of various actors and policies. It concluded with an acknowledgment of the fruitful exchange of ideas.

In summary, the session provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities within food systems, particularly the roles of different stakeholders and the impact of policies and innovation in driving positive change.

## Roundtable 2. Circular Fashion and Lifestyle

The roundtable discussion moderated by Dr. Rene VAN BERKEL and Mr. Anthony CHIU provided significant insights on sustainable lifestyles, particularly in the fashion industry. Dr. VAN BERKEL shared various examples of circular economy innovations in ASEAN, including travel goods manufacturing in Cambodia, plastic packaging for cosmetics in the Philippines, and sustainable materials like lotus stem fibre and biotech-developed fabrics.

The discussion delved into ways to enhance the demand and supply of such innovations, which are currently limited in scale. Participants examined policy measures, market dynamics, lifestyle changes, and the technological advancements necessary for broader adoption. Notable ideas included chemical recycling, rental business models for clothing, and new norms for second-hand and repaired garments.

Breakout sessions generated abundant actionable inputs across three main areas: policy, lifestyle, and technology. Suggestions ranged from promoting new materials such as alternatives to silk and leather to revisiting policies like school uniforms to curb fast fashion among schoolchildren.

The session highlighted the importance of synthesising these inputs for future technical assistance projects in fashion and textiles, potentially involving interested countries taking a lead. The fruitful discussion underscored the need for collaborative efforts to advance sustainable practices in the fashion industry.

## Roundtable 3. Closing the Loop – Circularity of (secondary) materials

Mr. Ranga PALLAWALA moderated the roundtable discussion, and Mr. Hun Yang SOON reported the results. The focus was on evaluating the effectiveness of the circular economy, particularly regarding the reintegration of secondary materials into production chains. The consensus was that more effort is needed, and several key points emerged from the discussions:

- Regulations play a crucial role in facilitating the reuse of secondary materials. Strengthening these regulations can encourage industries to adopt more sustainable practices. There was also significant discussion about setting standards for secondary materials to address acceptance issues.
- Incentivising producers to use secondary materials was another important topic. This could involve reviewing existing policies to provide better incentives for eco-friendly practices. Eco-design also featured prominently, with examples highlighting the importance of product design in recyclability. One example that was discussed referred to a yogurt container made from two different materials, which complicates recycling. Another innovative idea was solidifying shampoo or soap to eliminate the need for containers.
- Social aspects were also emphasised, particularly the integration of the informal sector in recycling processes to ensure the proper treatment of materials and explore upcycling opportunities involving women and youth.

Overall, the discussion underscored the need for enhanced regulations, better incentives, innovative design solutions, and inclusive social strategies to improve the circular economy.

# FINAL CONFERENCE REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Participants were encouraged to share their thoughts on the following four questions, summarised below.

## 1) What did you like about this event?

Appreciation on the high level of expertise presented at the meeting, with esteemed experts, representatives from various countries, and different organisations participating. The opportunity to exchange experiences with countries beyond and within Central Asian nations was particularly valuable. The diversity and comprehensive scope of the discussions, the quality of the speakers invited, and the engaging networking opportunities were commendable. Additionally, the informal and supportive atmosphere facilitated meaningful connections and knowledge sharing.

## 2) What did you learn that was new or surprising?

Several new and surprising insights emerged from the meeting. The evolution of systems and approaches for promoting a circular economy was particularly noteworthy, and especially learning how they can be applied to raise awareness among decision-makers and private entrepreneurs. Participants learned about new technologies and approaches in the building and construction sector, such as Building Information Modelling (BIM), and gained an understanding of how circular economy principles can be integrated into various projects, including those focused on climate change and sustainable food systems. The extent of SWITCH-Asia's work and its impact across regions was also eye-opening.

## 3) What actions will you take with your newly gained insights?

Moving forward, participants plan to incorporate their new knowledge into practical applications, including in education and awareness-raising efforts, developing and implementing specific projects that integrate circular economy principles, and fostering collaborations with other projects and stakeholders. There is also an intention to communicate the new trends and insights to national policymakers, ensuring that these ideas are integrated into national policies and programmes. Furthermore, efforts will be made to reduce food waste and promote sustainability in future events and initiatives.

## 4) Looking into the future, what are your top 3 recommendations for SWITCH-Asia?

To enhance its impact, SWITCH-Asia should lead by example by organising zero-waste green events, selecting more sustainable venues and hotels, reducing food waste, and minimising paper consumption through digital publications. Increased communication about SWITCH-Asia's work and achievements will ensure that more regions and stakeholders are informed about the programme's activities and successes. Facilitating more information-exchange events, both in-person and online, focusing on technical assistance issues and current trends in the circular economy, including sharing new developments and technologies with project implementation teams, and creating more discussion spaces to enhance collaboration and knowledge sharing, will further strengthen SWITCH-Asia's role in promoting sustainable practices and fostering a collaborative environment for addressing global environmental challenges.

Dr. FADEEVA delivered final remarks highlighting the past two days of comprehensive updates on ongoing TAs and extensive discussions on eight key topics at SWITCH-Asia. Feedback indicated strong endorsement and interest from several countries in joining these initiatives, emphasising the importance of detailed planning and adaptability. Deeper regional discussions underscored both challenges and potential solutions, with commitments to continued collaboration. Summarising the three roundtables provided further details for current TAs and inspired new ideas for future projects. Dr. FADEEVA highlighted the SWITCH-Asia community's growing sophistication and maturity, bolstered by partnerships with organisations like GGGI, IRP, ADB, UNIDO, and the World Bank. Personal reflections included learning innovative ways to reduce food waste in Kazakhstan, emphasising the role of regulations. Moving forward, SWITCH-Asia PSC aims to develop



three to four new TAs by July 2024, and to continue advancing the existing ones. SWITCH-Asia is committed to sharing stories and reflections through various channels, and thus fostering community growth. Deepest gratitude goes to the host country, DG-INTPA, EU delegations, national focal points, and all partners for their invaluable support and guidance.

In his concluding remarks, Mr. JANAWAY expressed his appreciation for the insightful sessions he participated in, particularly emphasising the discussions on the Pacific developments, knowledge management, taxonomy, and the intricate nature of food systems. He noted the common issue of sessions running out of time and suggested starting earlier or adding an extra day to accommodate all discussions. He extended gratitude to the SWITCH-Asia and supporting team, GOPA, experts, implementing partners, EU delegations, national focal points, organisations, the EU delegation in Kazakhstan, and His Excellency Mr. Kestutis JANKAUSKAS. Additionally, he acknowledged the enlightening insights shared by Snejana and Mr. JANKAUSKAS, enhancing their understanding of Kazakhstan. Despite bidding farewell due to the conclusion of his contract, Mr. JANAWAY imparted words of encouragement, urging the continuation of the positive momentum generated from the conference for further progress.





# SOCIAL PHOTOS













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