



FINAL EVALUATION
CIRCULAR ECONOMY AFRICA
2017-2022

28.11.22

1. INTRODUCTION

Africa is a massive continent with an urgent need to meet sustainable development goals. Already faced with diverse waste and pollution concerns, this continent is also exposed to the aggravating constraints of resource availability and planetary boundaries. With its fast-growing population projected to double by 2050, two in every five children in the world will be born here, Africa needs a different development model, one that creates prosperity without wasteful production and pollution.

In practice, Africans are already applying some of the circularity principles. Many products have a long lifetime, achieved by skilfully repairing and repurposing. This circular approach is more a result of necessity than virtue, however, and is associated with poverty. The ambition of prosperity is still clearly reflected in a desire to consume new products and own more.

In Europe, the concept of a circular economy is on the rise, with a growing knowledge base, good practice examples, and insights. This programme's work aimed to share these learnings and to inspire interested stakeholders in African countries, so that they may create their own circular economy story. The programme was not designed as a comprehensive approach but rather as a learning journey based on emerging opportunities.

OBJECTIVES

- drive actions towards a circular economy for plastics with less waste in Africa
- provide higher education in circular economy for African academics and tomorrow's business elite
- support the integration of circularity in the entrepreneurship sector
- dispense knowledge on circular economy opportunities in Africa with a city-based focus

BUDGET ENGAGED

CHF 2,85 mn

THE PARTNERSHIP



2. PROGRESS AND ACTIVITIES

The portfolio of projects was mainly built on existing MAVA relationships and tested concepts from other Outcome Action Plans. Through this transfer of experience from Europe to Africa, we sought to inspire and support those who were interested in advancing circular economy concepts and actions. We did not aim for quick project outputs but for the creation of local capacity and ownership that would produce long-term impact.

We supported organisations, networks, and initiatives that could be effective disseminators and catalysts by becoming leading examples, sources of knowledge or expertise, and an inspiration for others. The Plastic Pact approach was tested and promoted in three distinct African regions and circular economy (CE) approaches were made available to entrepreneurs and tested with innovation programmes in 4 countries.

STRATEGY 1: PROVIDE HIGHER EDUCATION IN CIRCULAR ECONOMY FOR AFRICAN ACADEMICS AND TOMORROW'S BUSINESS ELITE

A collaborative partnership with the [Ellen MacArthur Foundation](#) (EMF) provided the [African Leadership University](#) (ALU) with support to build its CE training capacity for students and youth. This helped establish ALU as a leading CE knowledge player on the continent. Our activities included:

- building CE teaching capacity and curriculum at ALU and delivering CE training and teaching to all ALU students and youths through the [Africa Teen Webinar on CE](#);
- providing [seed capital for students to launch CE startups](#);
- building CE research capacity at ALU and delivering research done by students and staff;
- Including ALU as a member of EMF's network who provided them with the relevant introductions and engagement through the wider EMF's programme.

STRATEGY 2: DISPENSE KNOWLEDGE ON CIRCULAR ECONOMY OPPORTUNITIES IN AFRICA WITH A CITY-BASED FOCUS

This strategy involved extending knowledge of CE opportunities and exploring key questions for accelerating CE in Africa. [Chatham House](#), the [Local Governments for Sustainability – ICLEI](#), and EMF focused on highlighting the potential for CE in a selection of key economic sectors across the continent and pinpointing existing CE practices. Our activities included:

- collaborating with the University of Lagos to develop a [collection of African CE insights](#) in key economic sectors – [Automotives](#), [Built environment](#), [Electronics and e-waste](#), [Fashion and textiles](#), [Finance](#), [Food and agriculture](#), [Plastics](#), and [Policy](#);
- sharing these insights widely through social media campaigns, partners' channels and networks, key African events (the African Food month, the Africa Rise Festival etc.), and the ICLEI city network;
- developing and conducting a training programme for local government officers from 13 cities.

STRATEGY 3: SUPPORT THE INTEGRATION OF CIRCULARITY IN THE ENTREPRENEURSHIP SECTOR

For CE to work, business models and products must be designed very differently from the outset. Thus, [Impact Hub](#) (IH) supported the integration of CE as a design principle in incubation & acceleration programmes to expose African entrepreneurs to CE thinking and support them with sufficient knowledge on how to apply it to their business. Our activities included:

- creating and testing a [comprehensive CE toolkit for entrepreneurs](#) encompassing methodologies, tools, case studies, and best practice;
- delivering masterclasses on CE for managers of incubation and acceleration programmes;
- developing and implementing CE incubation and acceleration programs in Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Rwanda and Senegal;
- facilitating monthly communities of practice to share experience and best practice.

STRATEGY 4: DRIVE ACTIONS TOWARDS A CIRCULAR ECONOMY FOR PLASTICS WITH LESS WASTE IN AFRICA

We kick-started national intersectoral collaborations on plastic - otherwise known as [Plastic Pacts](#) - by bringing together businesses from across the entire plastics value chain (brands, retailers, manufacturers, producers, recyclers, etc.) with governments, local authorities, and NGOs in distinct regional contexts (Senegal, Kenya, and Morocco – although Morocco had to be abandoned after phase 1 because no local organisation could be identified to lead a pact), and accelerating the [South African Plastics Pact - SAPP](#). These pacts set national targets to move away from problematic packaging and single use and move towards waste reduction and reuse systems by 2025. Our activities included:

- establishing in Kenya and Senegal a collaboration of key local actors and participants for each country respectively via [Sustainable Inclusive Business - SIB-K](#) and [Dalberg/Haské conseil](#);
- establishing in Kenya a mechanism to drive action towards the agreed targets and set up an effective approach to transparently track and report progress over time;
- transferring GreenCape's learnings from South African Plastic Pact to other plastic initiatives;
- building local capacity via [WRAP](#) and EMF to develop and drive pact, track, and report progress over time;
- prototyping reuse examples, increasing knowledge on life cycle assessment and reuse potential, and developing training and methods to integrate the informal sector in South Africa, with GreenCape;
- engaging SA policymakers on issues relating to plastic pollution and a circular economy for plastics (educational briefings, site visits, exchanges with other African countries) with [The International Conservation Caucus Foundation – The ICCF Group](#).

3. ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACTS

Overall, the projects have been delivering satisfying results, given the programme's explorative character, the comparatively short time span for implementation, and the fact that half of the implementation time was overshadowed by COVID. Success therefore must be understood as proof of concept, important learnings, and the creation of structures and processes that can deliver long-term impact and replication.

Over the implementation period, the CE has become an increasingly recognised economic model on the African continent. Partners contributed to this increased understanding with newly generated insights, communications, and engagements. This in turn allowed partners to strengthen their position as resourceful stakeholders in this space. This is evidenced by most partners playing a role in shaping and delivering the first African World CE Forum in December 2022.

Thanks to an excellent transfer of knowledge and experience from WRAP and the South African Plastics Pact, there is now a new [Plastic Pact in Kenya](#) that will further demonstrate the feasibility of cross sectorial collaboration on plastic in the African context. We hope that more countries will follow the path of Kenya and South Africa, thanks to these pacts sharing their experience and its benefits for the national economy.

In Senegal, taking into account targets defined and business commitments, it was jointly decided not to launch a Plastics Pact as per EMF's definition. A voluntary agreement called [TAARAL - The Alliance for Advancing Recycling, Awareness and Livelihoods in Plastics](#) - was developed and might be launched in 2023. Despite the incentive to match financial commitments made by companies one to one, only very few companies have engaged with concrete actions so far.

ALU has wholeheartedly adopted CE thinking and is becoming a leading university on this topic. With ALU's target to train 3 million leaders by 2035, we know that the workforce and leading positions in the years to come will have been exposed to CE. We hope that other African universities will regard ALU as an example to follow.

City officials have gained better and more local understanding of CE solutions. [The African Circular Cities Initiative](#) has assisted the formation of communities of practice, sharing learning, experience, and support.

Several African Impact Hubs are now established as circularity enablers in their local ecosystem. They have tools at their disposal that both early-stage and more established entrepreneurs and Business Support Organisations (BSOs) can rely on as they learn about and apply CE principles. Being principles based, they will continue to be useful for many years as they are enriched with local case studies and updated learnings.

KEY INSIGHTS

All partners involved in this portfolio of projects met virtually in November 2022 to share their insights after supporting CE in Africa for 3 years. Our conversation provided the following points:

1. CE is becoming a buzzword. This is an opportunity but also a risk - without tangible change, it could become just another new word for a hollow concept with little or no credibility.
2. People tend to equate CE with recycling because they have only seen examples of recycling.
3. Policy framework and political engagement is especially important in emerging economies because politicians tend to have more power and there is a lack of consumer pressure on businesses and industries in Africa.
4. Stakeholders may find it hard to see the economic case for CE. They need help seeing potential benefits, but these benefits may well be different in Africa than they are in Europe, so the African context needs further examination.
5. Good examples need to be highlighted - often the public is unaware of all the good efforts and positive results that are already happening.
6. Communication channels to politicians and policymakers are less developed and need to be built up. Just like the public, policymakers are often unaware of good things happening on the ground.
7. Evidence for CE is very focused on South Africa - this evidence base needs to be broadened to other countries and regions along with critical feedback systems for evaluating CE knowledge to ensure continuous improvement.
8. More than ever, inclusivity is crucial - across countries, languages, and stakeholders. The informal sector is a key stakeholder for transitioning to CE and should be empowered and included in discussions.
9. Communities of practice are a good tool for building and sharing understanding and driving the move towards more rapid implementation.
10. There is good collaboration already going on, and that provides a sound base for the establishment of partnerships. With an African CE story providing a shared, common vision, these collaborations will better align their actions and increase impacts.

KEY IMPACTS

1. Local government officers from 13 cities now have a better understanding of circular economy and how to think about implementation in their specific city context.
2. The South African Plastic Pact (SAPP) developed reuse models with the prototyping of refill stations in three cities. SAPP members gained better understanding of [the life cycle impact of reuse systems](#), allowing for the development of policy recommendations. The SAPP took the lead on testing and learning more about involving the informal sector in waste management, crucial issue for cities.
3. The formation of the voluntary nonpartisan conservation forum (caucus) of South African legislators - South African Legislators for the Environment - has been officialised. Increased understanding of CE amongst the SA Members of Parliament has inspired them to take action, both in their legislative capacity and in their constituencies.
4. The Kenya Plastics Pact (KPP) now has 21 members and 18 supporters. A [Roadmap to 2030](#) with targets and a list of problematic and unnecessary plastic items has been published. A collaboration for sharing experience is well established between KPP and SAPP.



Refill stations for household liquids tested in South Africa.

KEY IMPACTS

4. The Embedding Circularity toolkit is now available in [English](#), [French](#), [Spanish](#), and [Portuguese](#) to help entrepreneurs and BSOs integrate CE principles. An online curriculum currently under development will improve the learning experience and reach entrepreneurs outside cities.
5. 93% of entrepreneurs trained by Impact Hubs feel that they have sufficient knowledge on how to apply CE principles to their business. Those who applied CE principles saw the median revenue of their ventures double, going from US\$ 5,000 to US\$ 12,000.
6. CE principles were infused in ALU's academic teaching (a circular systems course is now mandatory for all students), [research \(13 papers published\)](#), and student activities (support to launch a CE start-up was provided to more than 60 students), dramatically increasing ALU's influence and leadership in this agenda. ALU is now the first university to become a strategic partner of the African Circular Economy Alliance. Encouragingly, the Rwandan government partnered with them to realise their Circular Economy National Action Plan - one of the highlights being to develop and embed a mandatory CE module in the curricula of Rwandan primary and secondary schools and universities.
7. More than 2,450 people registered for the 7-week learning programme '[Inside the Circular Economy: Africa](#)', and more than 2,000 youths registered for the Africa Teens Webinar series in 2022.



African Impact Hubs met in Kigali to share their experience on integrating the circular economy into their incubation & acceleration programmes

4. WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT

INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

The South African and Kenyan Plastics Pacts will continue operating and reporting in pursuit of the defined targets while continuously recruiting new members. Their expertise and networks will be of relevance for businesses as they implement the growing Extended Producer Responsibilities regulations. CE has become a central theme for ALU and will continue to be taught and practiced to all students across its campuses, supported by a strong organisational relationship between ALU and EMF. ICLEI will continue to encourage its members to understand and implement CE. The IH network has made CE a central approach towards achieving its SDG mission. They will expand the methodology tested to larger enterprises and SMEs, facilitate access to finance for circular enterprises, and build circular value chains and ecosystems in selected locations and industries.

THE BROADER PERSPECTIVE

Beyond the individual projects, the partners came together to pool their learnings and insights to define the most important issues going forward. Three areas were identified to accelerate CE implementation in Africa:

1. Pan-African Vision

CE needs to be applied across Africa with local challenges and opportunities in mind. Job creation in the formal and informal sectors is a vital opportunity that must be seized while waste management is currently a major challenge for African cities. If we fail at this, we risk losing interest and momentum in CE at a crucial moment of population growth and urban development.

2. Massive capacity building effort

We need a much broader base of people in different positions with a good understanding of the principles of an African CE to align and combine their efforts. The projects supported helped empower initial key knowledge stakeholders and provided good examples and tools from which the capacity building effort can now multiply to reach dozens of universities, hundreds of entrepreneurs, SMEs, corporations, and the most relevant ministries and local authorities.

3. Scaled CE implementation and financing

As more people in the private and public sectors understand CE, it will be possible to build more ambitious CE implementation projects with adequate financing mechanisms. This will be particularly relevant for cities.

“I was amazed at all the ideas and opportunities presented by cities seeking circular economy solutions that are relevant and applicable to African cities.”

Joduku Guya, Professional Officer: Urban Systems Unit,
ICLEI Africa

“When Impact Hubs supported businesses in becoming more circular in their operations and the development of their products, we found that revenue increased by an average of 170%.”

Tapiwa Nyandoro, Africa Region Partnerships Lead at
Impact Hub Network

HERE ARE SOME OF THE KEY PEOPLE WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THIS WORK.

