Locally Led Solutions to Accelerate Circularity within Businesses

The Green Growth Knowledge Partnership (GGKP) and GO4SDGS(link is external) discussed Locally Led Solutions to Accelerate Circularity within Businesses as part of the World Circular Economy Forum (WCEF) 2022(link is external). WATCH THE REPLAY ON YOUTUBE(link is external).

With a viable business case in mind, more and more enterprises consider joining the circular economy but lack support of locally led service providers. This session explored the importance of revitalising regional network of National Cleaner Production Centers (NCPC) to ensure best practice support is available to businesses investing in circularity from the local level.

The meeting started with an opening remark from Asad Naqvi, Head of PAGE and GGKP Secretariat. He shed light on the urgent need to help Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) make the move towards circularity by facilitating access to adapted financial solutions. Asad also reiterated the need to work collectively on a policy level to accelerate the transition to a circular economy and develop tailored solutions for the range of challenges faced in different countries.
The first part of the subsequent panel discussion focused on the role of NCPCs in building a viable and adapted approach to supporting circularity for businesses on local level.

The discussion highlighted the what the realistic reasons for SMEs in the developing countries would be to make the shift towards circularity. For example, Victora Akai highlighted that the lack of a reliable energy infrastructure in some parts of Nigeria has led SMEs to adopt renewable energy sources like solar panels to ensure security of electricity supply. Andrii Vorfolomeiev in turn pointed out that in Ukraine SMEs are often motivated by trade opportunities or the requirements of their existing international clients to improve their circularity performance.

During the overall session, a number of very relevant insights were then provided on how to best support both existing NCPCs lead a more effective country-wide approach on business circularity and help countries without an NCPC or similar organisation to set one up. As a starting point, Alessandra Lepore and Lee-Hendor Ruiters mentioned the necessity to create an ecosystem with key stakeholders, such as academia, financial institutions, NCPCs, etc., to ensure that all aspects of circularity were taken into account and that the most relevant expertise was made available. Taking such an approach on a regional and national level would ensure efficient exchange of best practices and provide a strong basis foundation to build the business case for circularity amongst companies and their supporting national counterparts from policy makers to financial institutions.

Victoria Akai stressed the importance of creating an NCPC in Nigeria for all private sector organisations to be able to access best practice circularity information and support. She also mentioned the important role of organisations like Chamber of Commerce has in advocating for this to happen. Chambers of Commerce being particularly well positioned to support the NCPCs because they are a key access point to not only companies but also government and international organisations.

Andrii Vorfolomeiev described how the NCPC in Ukraine facilitated the implementation of circularity related strategies and methodologies in the country by connecting organisations, tracking relevant data, bridging the communication gap between policymakers and industry, making best practice knowledge available and piloting projects before trying to commercialize circularity solutions. From this experience he highlighted how NCPCs have a key role to play in ensuring a consistency of national circularity efforts over the long term.

The panelists also shared their views on how to best establish partnerships and jointly explore solutions to support the revitalization of NCPC networks in the different regions. The NCPC representatives stressed the instrumental role of their organizations in collecting data, conducting capacity building, and providing technical assistance to SMEs in their transition to circularity. In spite of these particular experiences, all the panelists agreed that many challenges hindering the advancement of circularity remain, such as the shortage of quality data to inform non-

expert stakeholders, the low level of awareness around the benefits of circularity, and the lack of incentives for investing in circularity measures, in particular for SMEs.

The related discussion shed light on some of the example actions required to address such challenges:
• Improve access to best practice knowledge available on national and regional levels. This can be most effectively achieved with the support of international initiatives that enable cross border and project exchange.
• Increase engagement with other institutions (e.g., the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Trade, financial institutions, etc.) in order to share technical knowledge across sectors.
• Development of training programmes to enable financial institutions and other “enabling” organisations to better understand circularity methodologies and reduce risk perceptions.

Session outcomes and next steps:
The session discussion produced several valuable suggestions and ideas, many of which centered around the principle of ensuring that NCPCs and similar organisations were at the core of an “ecosystem” of key stakeholders, both nationally and regionally. Some of the main recommendations extracted from the remarks by the panelists and audience include:
• As the challenges facing both companies and NCPCs around the topic of circularity are very similar in all countries, facilitating practical and continuous exchange of experience and learnings on a regional level is an important foundation to a successful circular economy approach.
• While on one hand a Circular Economy requires a regional dimension and a collation of individual “eco-systems”, it is important to pay attention to the local situation and specific needs of what can be a very diverse range of local stakeholders.

NCPCs can play a key role as aggregators on a national level but to be able to fulfill such a role
much first have a stable and long-term strategy and financing situation.
• There are many options to develop partnerships to capitalize on the pockets of excellence around the world, but to be effective such partnerships must clearly outline the roles of each individual stakeholder and what part they can play in delivering an effective approach on business circularity.
• Eco-innovation supported and applied on a local level will play an important part in bring down the costs for SMEs wanting to implement innovative circularity solutions.
• When considering the development of a new NCPC it would be important to connect it with the work of existing and related government initiatives as well as business associations to ensure it can have both an increased visibility and impact.

Considering the interest surrounding the work of NCPCs and similar organisations, the Green Industry Platform, through its I-GO initiative, will continue to focus on the topic of regional NCPC networks and sustainable corporate supply chain initiatives during 2023.

For more detailed information on the I-GO Community Space and how to join, you can read our Green Forum article here(link is external).

Speakers:

- Asad, Naqvi(link is external)**,** Head of Secretariat, Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE) & Green Growth Knowledge Partnership (GGKP)
- **Hannes Mac Nulty,** (link is external)Manager, GGKP - Green Industry Platform
- **Andrii Vorfolomeiev**(link is external), Director, Resource Efficient and Cleaner Production Centre (Ukraine)
- Lee-Hendor Ruiters(link is external)**,** Manager, Strategy and Innovation, National Cleaner Production Centre South Africa (NCPC-SA)
- **Victoria Akai**(link is external), Director General at Abuja Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Alessandra Lepore,(link is external) Coordinator of the EU SWITCH-Asia Programme, European Commission