

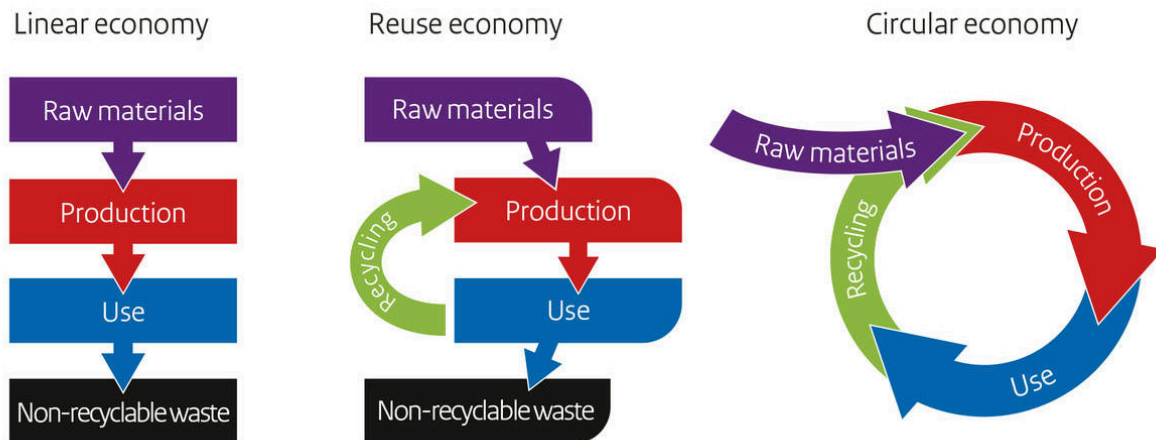
Towards a Circular Economy:

A Workshop for Parliamentarians and Parliamentary Staff of Trinidad and Tobago

Increased efforts to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change require the support and contribution of all stakeholders, including parliaments. Not only can they positively contribute to the climate agenda through their functions of lawmaking, representation, oversight, and budget approval, but parliaments can also reduce the environmental footprint of their institutions. Leading by example, parliaments can contribute to overall national emission reduction targets by adopting strategies to lower their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and improve the overall sustainability of their activities.

What is Circular Economy?

The **circular economy** system is hailed as an essential component in tackling global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, waste, and pollution, with the promise of sustainable economic growth in the long-term. This system is **designed to be regenerative and aims to gradually decouple economic growth from the consumption of non-renewable resources by optimizing processes and advocating for the “reduce, reuse, repair, revalue, recover and recycle” (in this hierarchical order) approach.** This reduces environmental and economic input costs associated with resource use, as well as decreases the generation of waste and pollution.



The current **linear economy** system follows the traditional “**take-make-dispose**” process whereby raw materials are obtained/extracted, then undergo processing to become products for consumers until they are discarded as waste. The environmental degradation from extractive processes and the pollution that is generated throughout the linear economy system also has negative impacts on **human health and biodiversity which the region relies on for trade, jobs, ancillary services, food security, and tourism.** For example, according to the [UNEP draft report](#), “the Caribbean Sea is regarded as the second most plastic-contaminated space after the Mediterranean Sea.”

Circular economy goes beyond recycling and waste management as these are processes that occur at the product’s end of life-cycle. Given that 95% of global plastic packaging is intended for single-use and only 5% of which is recovered from recycling ([World Economic Forum, 2016](#)). Recycling is a necessary component in a sustainable production system but we cannot rely on it to address the sheer magnitude of waste we produce and our unsustainable extractive practices as a global population. Therefore we need to integrate circular economy practices at the start of the life cycle, by reducing the use of raw materials.



Circular Economy in Practice

In recognition that “reduce” is the first step of the circular approach mentioned above and the fact that most Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS) may not manufacture all their finished goods, countries can place control measures to target imports and procurement practices that do not adhere to the circular economy model. **Trinidad and Tobago is one of 27 countries and territories of the Caribbean region that are taking steps towards a circular economy by implementing legislative control over the use of single-use plastics evidenced by its commitment to ban the importation of Styrofoam™ for use in the food and beverage industry** ([Phillips, Thornes & Roopnarine, 2020](#)).

The circular economy approach combined with a Sustainable Development Goal lens can be integrated in other sectors of the economy besides the manufacturing and extractive industries, such as the tourism and agricultural industries. **The tourism industry presents various opportunities to promote circularity** as it relies on a multitude of resources and asset chains, such as land (destinations), buildings (construction materials), furniture, textiles, vehicles, fossil fuels, food, as well as human labour ([World Tourism Organization, 2020](#)). The sector can improve largely how they source, use, and consume products, materials and resources, and how they support and enable product, material and resource recovery at the end-of-use ([CE360 Alliance, 2020](#)). Moreover, It can aim to provide decent and clean work to individuals. It can also help change the perspective from travel destinations being marketed as commodities to be exploited to assets of natural and social resources to be optimised for longevity and sustainability.

In **the agricultural sector**, precision agriculture techniques, backed up by crop specific temporal and spatial data, can be used to optimize the primary production phase in efforts to reduce input of resources such as water, promote crop yield, re-use of organic waste, and improve value creation ([Food and Agriculture Organization, 2021](#)).

Parliament's Role

Parliaments have a key role in supporting the advancement and integration of circular economic models within their countries through their legislative, oversight, and budgetary functions, to ensure the wellbeing of their constituencies, and generations to come by respecting the [planetary boundaries](#).

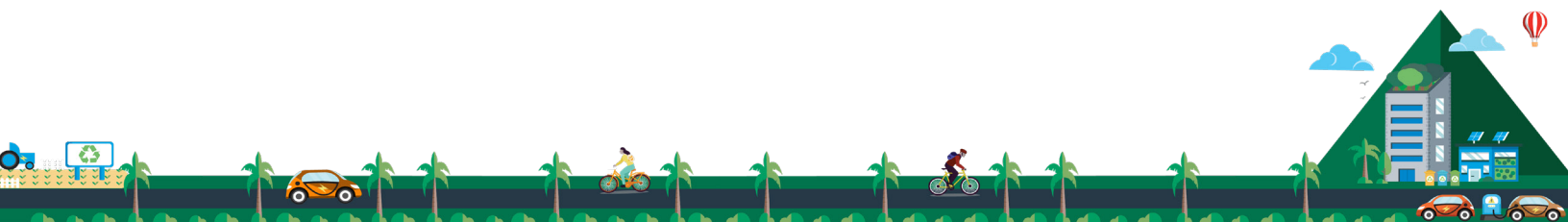
One of the most prominent obstacles is the lack of legal support or specific guidelines for this economic system's implementation. Parliaments can therefore work with national and local authorities to put circular economy on the public agenda by developing a circular economy roadmap and promote its importance in mitigating the effects of climate change, improving the health of the public and the natural environment, and its relevance in the context of postCOVID-19 economic recovery plans. Parliaments can adopt legislation needed to finance the transition to circular economic models by providing tax and fiscal incentives, as well as financial stimulus to industries that adopt circular economy practices, including by assuming responsibility for their products beyond the point of sale, encouraging industrial symbiosis (the waste or by-product of an industry becomes a resource for the other) and by promoting innovative mechanisms to facilitate access to multilateral funds or private capital intended to finance sustainable ventures.



Circular Economy Benefits and Opportunities

A circular economy does not only aim to address environmental issues, it also creates opportunities and positive impacts across various industries and sectors. The many benefits to environmental, social, and economic well being, include the following:

- ✔ Circular economy is a framework that can be used to address the interconnected nature of economies and view economic activity through a system-wide approach
- ✔ Improves process inefficiencies
- ✔ Reduces the use of finite resources
- ✔ Shifts value from raw materials to human labour which creates more job opportunities
- ✔ Reduces the reliance on importation of resources
- ✔ Helps fight climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions
- ✔ Protection of human health by reducing pollution and environmental degradation
- ✔ Maintains and restores the integrity of biodiversity which can in turn help tourism
- ✔ Promotes science and innovation to improve our current industries and sectors
- ✔ Looks towards long term economic productivity
- ✔ Supports a just transition that provides clean jobs and alleviates social inequalities



Resources

- [Declaration](#) signed during the 17th ParlAmericas Plenary Assembly titled [Towards a Circular Economy](#)
- Ellen MacArthur Foundation, [The Circular Economy in Detail](#).
- Platform for Accelerating the Circular Economy, [The Circularity Gap Report 2020](#), 2020.
- Chatham House, [The circular economy in Latin America and the Caribbean](#), 2020.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, [Gender-specific consumption patterns, behavioural insights, and circular economy](#), 2020.
- Government of Canada, [Ocean Plastics Charter](#).
- UNEP, "Global Environment Outlook 6", [Circular Economy](#). p. 439-450, 2019.
- Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, EKLA, and Centro de Innovación y Economía Circular, [Circular Economy and Public Policies](#), 2019.

